CONSTRUCTING DIGITAL ‘SAFE’ SPACE:
NAVIGATING TENSIONS IN TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST
ORGANIZING ONLINE

by

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For the changemakers of World Pulse
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ABSTRACT

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Despite decades of advocacy, women still struggle to gain access to public spaces, in particular to spaces of power such as formal governance and decision-making processes, economic sites, and media institutions. Globalization has enabled the emergence of transnational feminist organizing in response to these exclusions, yet scholars have largely not attended to the spaces within which transnational feminist organizing takes place and the implications of those spaces. These spaces matter as they have the potential to both disrupt and reproduce existing power relations and exclusions. This study identified digital space as a site of transnational feminist organizing and explored how digital ‘safe’ counter-spaces are communicatively constructed and their potentials and limitations for organizing across difference. As an engaged feminist project, this study also had an action goal of creating safer and more inclusive counter-spaces for women to gain a voice and organize collectively. Specifically, this project aimed to contribute to the transformation of such spaces to further enable women’s mobilizing and organizing for social change. In this study, I adopted a critical transnational feminist lens and drew on scholarship in the areas of transnational feminist organizing, space, and tension. In line with this study’s engaged feminist approach, I conducted what I termed a digital feminist participatory action research (D+FPAR) project involving a collaborative partnership with the digitally based transnational
feminist network, World Pulse. Data collection involved multiple qualitative and participatory online methods.

Findings from this study illuminated the ways digital counter-space is discursively and materially constructed as ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive,’ how these constructions produce contradictions, and how both community and staff members respond to these contradictions. First, the digital space was communicatively constituted as safe and inclusive through particular material-discursive practices, through members’ talk and interaction enabled by the affordances of the digital space, and through interrelations with overlapping digital and physical spaces. Second, contradictions were produced when these material-discursive practices took on different meanings or made difference visible for members based on their identities, locations, or experiences, leaving members feeling simultaneously safe/unsafe and included/excluded. Third, community and staff members enacted a variety of strategies in response to these contradictions that limited and/or enhanced the potentials for organizing across difference and contributed to the ongoing construction of the digital space.

This study advances scholarship on space, transnational feminist organizing, and tension. In defining and interrogating digital space, this project contributes to theorizing the communicative construction of space, how it interrelates and is embedded with the material, and the ways digital spaces (re)produce and challenge power relations. More specifically, this project contributes to understandings of how materiality intra-acts with discourse in the construction of space to shape possibilities for organizing and produce contradictions, revealing the ways ‘safe’ counter-spaces are in a constant state of becoming (un)safe. Methodologically, this project contributes to scholarship by
introducing D+FPAR, providing tools for collaborative analysis, and expanding reflexive praxis. Additionally, this study also provides practical strategies, co-constructed with participants, for individuals and organizations seeking to design ‘safe’ digital spaces for voice, participation, and collective action.
This preface is meant to provide a guide to readers of this dissertation. The production of a text such as a dissertation involves particular choices that carry meaning. As Richardson (2000) argues, “No textual staging is ever innocent” (p. 960). Through this preface, I aim to explain the choices I made in the writing of this dissertation and to make such choices transparent. In this dissertation, I utilize crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000) in an effort to produce a deeper, more reflexive qualitative text. In this preface, I first briefly describe crystallization as a mode of ensuring quality in qualitative research. Then, I preview strategies for representing principles that were central to the research project – (a) reflexivity and (b) participation.

Crystallization

Originally proposed by Richardson (2000) and further developed by Ellingson (2009), crystallization involves combining both multiple types of analysis and multiple genres of representation within one project, either within one text or a series of texts, with the goal of providing a “deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Crystallization is in part a response to triangulation, an effort through two or more data sources, methods, or theoretical frameworks to produce more ‘credible’ conclusions that more closely approximate truth (Tracy, 2010). Rather than the “rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object” of a triangle, the metaphor of a crystal instead recognizes and problematizes the presence of multiple and partial truths (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). This partiality is celebrated rather than being seen as a limitation. As Richardson (2000) describes, “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities
and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions” (p. 934). Principles of crystallization include (1) deep, thick descriptions of complex interpretations of a phenomenon, (2) the inclusion of multiple ways of producing knowledge, (3) utilization of more than one genre or medium of representation, (4) reflexivity around the researcher and her role in the research process and in the process of representation, and (5) embracement of knowledge as “situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10).

Crystallization as a methodological practice is in line with the engaged feminist position of this dissertation project, which will be discussed further in Chapter 1. Crystallization, in its critique of knowledge, implicitly and explicitly incorporates critical stances, including feminist perspectives. Ellingson (2009) argues that crystallization’s roots are deeply embedded in the work of feminists who have sought to disrupt taken-for-granted methodological traditions that distinguish between science and art, objective and subjective, reason and emotion, and masculine and feminine in ways that privileged the former at the expense of the latter. Crystallization also allows for critique and for offering alternative ways of knowing as well as for contributing to theory and practice. It can provide openings for marginalized voices and, in its inclusion of genres of representation beyond the (social) scientific, has the potential to serve communities outside of the academy (Ellingson, 2009). Collaborative forms of research, like the participatory methods utilized in this project, in particular are encouraged under crystallization, as they provide openings for participants to be involved in or produce one or more of the genres for the project (Ellingson, 2009).
Representational Strategies

In the writing of this dissertation, I adopt two primary strategies both to represent epistemological and methodological principles that were central to this project and to crystallize the text by offering multiple genres of representation (for a discussion of other aspects of crystallization incorporated into this project, see Chapter 3). In this section, I provide a brief overview of these strategies as they relate to reflexivity and participation.

Reflexivity: Interludes

Reflexivity is central to the epistemological and methodological approaches utilized in this project. Reflexivity is a means to acknowledge the ways that research is not a reporting of “facts” but rather involves interpretations actively constructed by the researcher, participants, and the relationships between them and therefore should be critically interrogated (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). This project incorporates reflexivity as an ongoing process that requires active interrogation of the research process and outcomes by the researcher, participants, and in dialogue with one another.

Many scholars have “actively struggled” with how to both do reflexivity and represent it in their work (Norander & Harter, 2012, p. 82; Norander, 2017). Similarly, I have grappled with how to incorporate reflexivity productively into this research process as well as with how to navigate its representation. Strategies for practicing reflexivity are discussed further in Chapter 3.

In an effort to document and represent my ongoing critical interrogation throughout the research and writing process, each chapter includes a section on
reflexivity. These sections vary in length and focus. I borrow from Ellingson (2009) when I refer to these sections as “Interludes,” offering an interruptive narrative about the research and writing process in an effort to provide additional context and reflection on the project. These sections are meant to interrogate my position as the researcher, to make the invisible practices of the research process visible, and to encourage readers to question the constructedness of the text.

**Participation: Pull-out Boxes**

Participation was also central to the research process represented within this text. I adopt an engaged feminist approach to scholarship that aims to create knowledge that responds to and seeks to transform social problems and that seeks to do research in collaboration with those whom it affects (see Chapter 1). Specifically, this research endeavor involved what I term a digital feminist participatory action research project, involving multiple online qualitative and participatory methods. Feminist participatory research affirms that participants are capable of analysis and reflection and aims to democratize knowledge production by conducting research in partnership with participants (also referred to as collaborators or co-researchers) (Maguire, 1987).

This project involved collaboration with the staff and community members of a digitally based transnational feminist organization called World Pulse, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. How to represent this collaboration in the writing of a dissertation document became one of the representational challenges of this text. In particular, participants played a central role in later phases of the project in interpreting the findings of this study, and I sought to bring their analysis to the fore.
In an effort to highlight the reflections and interpretations of participants, I have made use of pull-out boxes in Chapters 4 and 5. These boxes are placed alongside the analysis that I have written and provide related responses from participants in their own words that build upon the analysis or further interrogate their experiences. In addition to being in line with the participatory values of this project, these are meant to encourage readers to consider how participants’ accounts both illuminate and complicate the written analysis, providing new or additional insights.

In sum, these strategies provide a means to disrupt the traditional dissertation text and to make visible central aspects of the research process. In doing so, they provide means to crystallize the text – an effort to produce more reflexive and complex understandings of the topic under study.

**Interlude: Locating the Researcher**

I enter this project from the position of a white, (lower) middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied cisgender woman¹ who is a U.S. citizen and situated in the academy. As an engaged feminist communication scholar, part of contextualizing this study and engaging in critical self-reflection around issues of power and privilege requires attending to my own social locations and how these might shape my understandings and relationships with participants. Yet, I struggle with talking about myself in the text in ways that do not further privilege my own voice. In this Interlude, I attempt to unpack aspects of my social location that feel (at present) salient in the construction of the project and my resulting response.

---

¹ Cisgender refers to individuals whose gender identity is in agreement with the sex they were assigned at birth. Cisgender is the corresponding term to transgender. Therefore, as a cisgender woman, I identify as a woman and was assigned female at birth.
I recognize that while this study takes place within digital spaces, my identities materialize to participants in a variety of ways. First, I am searchable. People can easily find my website, Twitter account, and other places where I am either active or have been discussed. Having to do this reflection was helpful in considering the material traces of my identities. I Googled myself and found places where I needed to update my information to reflect my current status, degree and research. Second, my profile on World Pulse may be people’s first access point. Elements like my photo and description provide indicators of my researcher position, as well as my social location, to participants. Third, my identities are made visible in the language I use, my signature line and other ways that I communicate that are specific to my social location, including my class, educational background and nation.

My own socioeconomic background is complicated and shifting. I know what it was like to be on food stamps as the child of a single mother. I have memories of hand-me-down clothes from cousins. I have a distinctive memory of crying when questioned on a log of what I had eaten in each food group in a high school health class. The teacher chastised me for not eating enough fresh fruits. We were between paychecks. We did not have a lot of food options, but we had enough to eat. I was embarrassed and defensive. I worked every summer from the time I was able. However, particularly through my father, I had access to a middle to upper middle class lifestyle, spending summers at a cabin with a boat. Though I worked throughout college, I was supported by my parents and able to attend a private liberal arts college through scholarships, loans and their support. As a journalist (and then married to one) and a graduate student, I know about credit card debt and the inability to save. Yet, I have not been in want or unable to pay my bills. From
travelling internationally, I have seen poverty and hunger and know that my socioeconomic circumstances – those that allow me to regularly purchase Starbucks without having to worry significantly about my finances – is one of significant privilege.

I also have regular, consistent access to the Internet on multiple devices. While the Internet at my home can be irregular at times, I can easily travel by car to access free Internet at numerous locations. I can access the Internet through data plans on my mobile device and do so often without consideration of the cost or without thought to the advantages of such a position. I am overly reliant and often take for granted that I will have Internet access, growing agitated when for some reason I do not. Yet, I work with collaborators who struggle with Internet access and our connections are regularly fraught, with frequent dropped calls or connections. When conducting field research in Ghana, I have gone without access for multiple days due to infrastructure issues, including during the course of this study. I have experienced being without Internet or electricity, but always with the knowledge that it was a temporary state. In terms of my own relationship to web use, I had training on computers from elementary school onward, having had a home computer with a stable Internet connection since middle school. I have engaged in online journalism professionally, but also blogged and participated on social media personally.

As a U.S. citizen, I also move between borders with security in my ability to re-enter my own country. My skin color and citizenship status allow me relatively free movement across borders. I am less likely to be searched or questioned than my non-citizen and brown or black skinned friends and colleagues. I only speak English and
generally operate on the (problematic) assumption that I will be able to communicate with others.

In the same way that those who engage in transnational feminist organizing experience tension in building solidarity and alliances across multiple lines of difference, I often struggle with the power and privileges afforded to me by my social locations as well as my role as a “researcher” who is supposed to be in an “expert” position to represent and speak for others, especially in conducting research on and with women from diverse social locations. Should I even be conducting this research? What does it mean to do so? This is particularly the case in working with women who have different levels of Internet access, speak languages other than English, and have different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Such questions have often led to feelings of paralysis in the research process.

I come to an engaged feminist position in part in response to these feelings of paralysis and concern about the ways that exercising my position within the research process replicates existing uneven power relations. Rather than conducting research on and assuming the position of expert, engaged feminist scholarship provides a means to conduct research with others in ways that disrupt power hierarchies, more closely attend to and honor different voices within the research process, and (co)produce knowledge that may be more useful and transformative for those involved. This position is also in line with Rowe’s (2005) arguments for moving from a politics of location (e.g., Rich, 1986) toward a politics of relation. Rowe (2005) argues:

> Interrogating the politics of our belonging is something that anyone can do and all of us should do, regardless of the degree to which we are privileged. Good critical/feminist theory emerges from placing ourselves in community with visions of social justice. Placing ourselves there with a certain openness and the
intention of being transformed. When we place ourselves with people aware of their oppression, we begin to see how we are implicated, to wrangle with the connections between privilege and oppression, not as abstract concepts but as constituting “our” lives. As we engage in differential belonging and the consciousness that arises from it, women of privilege can build a more radical feminist vision through their belonging in communities of difference. (p. 35) This position is not a panacea. There is still the potential to reproduce inequalities.

Stacey (1988) argues that perhaps the appearance of greater equality with participants may mask “a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation” (p. 22). Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process on my own and with others provides a means to continually (re)evaluate the ways power and privilege are operating in the research process and who benefits in an effort to move toward more transformative scholarship. My own social location then does not have be a point of paralysis. In fact, Ellingson (2009) and others have argued that scholars should not give up on research that involves working with and to represent others, but rather should exercise care, humility, and reflexivity in doing so and when possible to do so in conversation and collaboration with those whom you are representing. This project reflects an attempt to do so.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

We believe that when women are heard and connected, they transform the world for the better. But until now, there has never been a central forum for women around the world and the organizations that support them to connect, collaborate, and leverage their collective voice. With Internet and mobile technology, we have the opportunity to unite and solve today’s most pressing issues at a scale never before imagined in history.

– World Pulse

Project Rationale

Despite four decades of advocacy following the United Nation’s declaration of 1975 as the International Women’s Year, significant progress still needs to be made on a variety of issues to achieve the lofty goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment. While differences exist based on social location, women worldwide still face persistent employment gaps and a lack of recognition of their unpaid labor, lack of access to reproductive health care, and a variety of forms of gender-based violence and harassment (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015; World Bank, 2014). Women still struggle to gain productive access to public spaces, in particular spaces of global and local power such as formal governance structures, economic sites, and media institutions (World Bank, 2014). As a result, their problems and solutions are often not accounted for within decision-making processes or within public and political discourses (e.g., policy and campaign discourses). The importance of women’s participation in these spaces and processes is underscored by the recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Goals, which include

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2 Social location is a term adopted within feminist scholarship and elsewhere to refer to the ways that individuals’ “experience and understanding is shaped by their location in a hierarchically structured system of power relations: by the material conditions of their lives, by the relations of production and reproduction that structure their social interactions, and by the conceptual resources they have to represent and interpret these relations” (Wylie, 2004, p. 343, emphasis added). Thus, social location encompasses a person’s social categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation, but also her or his social roles, relationships, and experiences.
ensuring “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” as a key target for achieving gender quality and empowerment for all girls and women worldwide (UN, 2015).

At the same time, the current state of globalization has created “unprecedented opportunities” for women and other marginalized groups to organize in response to their exclusion from spaces of power and decision-making (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015, p. 31). Globalization is defined as “a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken on an increasingly global or transnational form” (Moghadam, 2005, p. 35). While transnational feminists have been highly critical of the inequalities perpetuated by globalization processes, they have also actively responded in various ways, by organizing, advocating, and offering alternatives. Scholars have traced the upsurge in transnational feminist organizing since the 1990s “when deepening globalization and new communications and information technologies enabled feminists to connect readily with and interrogate their localities and cross-border relations” (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015, p. 4). In addition, transnational opportunity structures like the United Nations have created openings for activists to come together around shared concerns.

Transnational feminist networks (TFNs) are primary examples of the ways women have organized politically across local and global contexts and across differences of race, sexuality, class, nation, and ability around shared interests or concerns. TFNs act by “coordinat[ing] efforts to assist disempowered citizens to manage, resist, and transform tensions associated with top-down globalization” (Stohr, 2015, p. 5). These
networks can provide rich insight into participatory practices and efforts to organize for social change across spaces and scales. Indeed, these organizations have actively worked to construct “resistant feminist counter-spaces” (Dempsey, Parker, & Krone, 2011, p. 202). Counter-spaces, as referenced here, refer to spaces created or claimed by marginalized groups that serve as ‘safe’ spaces within which they can speak freely without external threats, cultivate collective identity and solidarity, and organize to challenge dominant power structures (Collins, 2000; Fraser, 1992; Kenney, 2001).

Despite the cross-border nature of these efforts to organize across multiple spaces and scales, Masson (2010) notes that theorizing of the transnational has been largely “a-spatial” and space and place have been invoked in primarily descriptive manners. Space as used here refers to the materially and discursively produced sites in which objects, bodies, and/or structures are situated (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Fayard, 2012; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994; Wilhoit, 2016). The spaces of transnational feminist organizing are significant in that they have the potential to both reproduce and disrupt existing power relations and long-standing exclusions (Masson, 2010). Space and the spatial (e.g., spatial control) then merit further critical attention.

Scholars and activists are increasingly recognizing the role of digital spaces for collective organizing and for transnational feminist activism specifically. The Internet, Moghadam (2013) argues, has become a “principal site for the formation of political and cultural communities and for the meeting and linking of movement networks” (p. 209). However, to date, scholars have primarily focused on how TFNs have discursively constructed their collective identities and inter-network relationships through the Internet (e.g., D’Enbeau, 2011; Ferree, 2007; Pudrovksa & Ferree, 2004). They have also
privileged those TFNs that meet in offline spaces and those face-to-face gatherings as the locations of transnational feminist organizing. Research then has minimally attended to the possibilities of transnational organizing in and through digital spaces. As formal TFNs that focus on face-to-face meetings at international conferences become less active or shutdown as a result of declining memberships and funding (Moghadam, 2015), TFNs that locate the digital as their primary space of organizing provide a theoretically and practically important site for (engaged) communication scholarship. Closer examination of digital spaces as sites for transnational feminist organizing is especially important given increasing threats of harassment and abuse within digital spaces, especially targeted at marginalized groups (Jane, 2014; Nakamura, 2015), raising questions about the possibilities of ‘safe’ digital counter-spaces.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, this study aims to understand how digital counter-spaces for transnational feminist organizing are communicatively constructed and the potentials and limitations of these spaces for organizing across difference\(^3\) to achieve social change goals. In so doing, this project also has a second goal of creating safer and more inclusive counter-spaces for women\(^4\) to gain a voice and organize collectively. Specifically, this project aims to contribute to the transformation of such spaces to further enable women’s mobilizing and organizing for social change. It does so through an engaged feminist project involving a collaborative partnership with a digitally based TFN, World Pulse.\(^5\) The following sections I first detail the study’s

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\(^3\) Organizing across difference in the context of transnational feminist organizing is a recognition of the intersecting social locations as well as different positions and values of women and the need in collectively mobilizing to build solidarities in spite of and/or because of those differences.

\(^4\) In this dissertation the terms “women” and “woman” are used with recognition of the diverse experiences and social locations of women and with knowledge that such terms are contested.

\(^5\) World Pulse has agreed to be named in this dissertation and future publications.
metatheoretical position, then identify the theoretical significance of this study, and lastly provide an outline for this dissertation.

**Toward an Engaged and Feminist Position**

Inspired by Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered*, researchers across disciplines have recognized a turn toward engaged scholarship in response to pressing social problems (Dempsey & Barge, 2014). Engaged scholarship refers to “a diffuse field of logics, practices, and projects brought together by a concern with fostering participative modes of inquiry that meaningfully address practical concerns” (Dempsey & Barge, 2014, p. 667). Within communication, this growing interest has been demonstrated through the recent publication of several special issues and edited volumes dedicated to applied and engaged work (Barge, Simpson, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Carragee & Frey, 2016; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Frey & Cissna, 2009; Harter, Dutta & Cole, 2009; Houston & Manning, 2015; Simpson & Shockley-Zalabak, 2005). Most recently, scholars have recognized the nexus of engaged and feminist scholarship, with a 2015 special issue in *Women & Language* dedicated to the topic. In that special issue, Putnam and Dempsey (2015) argue that engaged scholarship’s goals are in close alignment with feminist ideologies and practices. Further, Buzzanell (2016) argues that through their commitment to action feminists have been “forerunners” to engaged scholarship (p. 697). In the following sections, I outline the key characteristics of both engaged and feminist scholarship and address how the two might speak to each other to promote the *engaged feminist approach* to scholarship adopted by this study.
Engaged Communication Scholarship

Engaged scholarship provides one response to an ongoing demand for more practical academic work. Engaged scholarship emphasizes forming collaborative and reflexive relationships between academics and stakeholders to co-produce knowledge (Shockley-Zalabak, Barge, Lewis, & Simpson, 2017; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Putnam and Dempsey (2015) identify five “faces” of engaged communication scholarship, including (1) applied communication research, (2) collaborative learning research, (3) activism and social justice research, (4) practical theory, and (5) public scholarship. Each of these “faces” shares two primary characteristics.

First, engaged scholarship is motivated by and seeks to address practical concerns (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Engaged scholars then participate in the pursuit of solutions to problems of consequence throughout the research process, with the aim of producing knowledge that both informs and impacts the problems at hand (Dempsey & Barge, 2014). To date, engaged communication scholars have focused on a wide range of issues including health (Peterson, 2010), environmental justice (Chen, Milstein, Anguiano Sandoval, & Knudsen, 2012), LGBT activism (Young, 2015), homelessness (Houston & Weisz, 2015; Peterson, Antony, & Thomas, 2012), and political violence prevention (Connaughton et al., forthcoming; Linabary, Krishna, & Connaughton, 2017), among others.

Second, engaged scholarship operates on the assumption that research conducted in partnership with practitioners and/or stakeholders will produce better and more robust scholarship as well as have greater relevancy to those whom it serves (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Simpson & Seibold, 2008). Therefore, it demands more than just
translating scholarship for practitioners or applying theory to “real-world” problems (Barge, Simpson, Shockley-Zalabak, 2008). More specifically, engaged scholarship seeks to “democratize” the research process, using a range of participatory and collaborative approaches to facilitate the co-production of knowledge (Dempsey & Barge, 2014, p. 668). In this sense, engaged scholarship represents a movement away from a model of transferring knowledge to practitioners toward an approach that actively seeks the transformation of the researcher/researched relationship and society.

**Feminist Scholarship**

While various types and definitions of feminism exist (see Ashcraft, 2014; Buzzanell, 1994; Dougherty & Harris, 2017), feminism is generally based on an assumption that a system of sexist/gendered oppression exists and needs to be transformed (hooks, 2000). Developed across a range of (inter)disciplinary areas including communication, feminist approaches to scholarship, while similarly diverse, tend to share five common principles and practices. First, a focus on sex/gender is central to feminist scholarship (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Maguire, 2001; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Reid & Frisby, 2008). Feminist scholars direct attention to the ways sexed/gendered oppression is constructed and maintained within everyday experiences as well as larger socio-cultural structures (Maguire, 2001). Within feminist communication scholarship, gender is “constituted, socially negotiated, and manifest in discourses and materialities (i.e., messages, interactions, structures, policies, practices and space)” (Buzzanell, 2016, p. 698). Yet, feminists attend to more than just gender. Feminist scholars recognize the necessity of interrogating intersecting and interlocking systems of
gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Combahee River Collective, 1983).

Second, feminist scholarship draws on and privileges traditionally marginalized voices within the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Reid & Frisby, 2008). Recognizing that women and other marginalized groups have often been excluded from knowledge production, feminist scholarship attempts to create a space for neglected, misrepresented, or silenced voices to be heard (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Maguire, 2001). Feminist scholarship is predominately based on theoretical traditions that argue knowledge is socially situated and that marginalized standpoints and experiences may have distinct and important contributions for scholarship and practice (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004).

Third, feminist scholarship is inherently alert to the power dynamics in the research process, seeking to disrupt the power inequalities between the researcher and the researched (Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Maguire, 2001). Participatory methods (e.g., focus group discussions, workshops, member reflections, etc.) are one of the ways feminist scholars have attempted to honor voice and balance the power dynamics in the research process (Reid & Frisby, 2008).

Fourth, recognizing the persistence of these inequalities as well as their own positionality, feminist scholars engage in reflexive practices to interrogate and evaluate the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Hill, Bond, Mulvey & Terenzio, 2000; Reid & Frisby, 2008). Reflexivity involves continuous consideration of how power is operating within the research process (Ramazangolu & Holland, 2002). Reflexivity is more than an acknowledgement of one’s position but is a constant interrogation of power.
and how it is being negotiated in the research process (D’Enbeau, Munz, Wilson, & Dutta, 2013). It involves more than just reflection (“thinking about”) on the process. Reflexivity is a “continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness” (Callaway, 1992, p. 33). Reflexive processes, which researchers and participants can engage in, are considered to contribute to the development of a critical consciousness and, in doing so, to individual and collective empowerment (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Finlay, 2002)

Lastly, feminist scholarship, given its activist roots in the women’s movements, emphasizes social transformation as the end goal (Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Hill et al., 2000). Feminist scholarship then is marked by a political commitment to “producing knowledge useful in opposing the many varieties of gender injustice” and other forms of oppression (Jaggar, 2014, p. ix). Feminist theory offers both a critique of systems of power as well as an impetus toward creating new understandings and transformative social change (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). Definitions of feminism go beyond acknowledging the existence of oppression to arguing explicitly for social change. Buzzanell (2016) argues that a feminist scholarship requires “subscribing to and committing to a call to action” (p. 697). Ideally then, feminist scholarship should move beyond analysis to the point of action.

**Building Connections and Broadening Impacts**

Based on these principles and practices, engaged and feminist scholarships speak in concert with one another in important ways. Both feminist and engaged scholarship adopt the goal of creating knowledge with the potential for transformation of social and practical problems, attempting to have an impact beyond the academy. Second, engaged and feminist scholarship also both emphasize a need to disrupt the traditional
researcher/researched relationship by seeking actively to reduce power inequalities and engage in *more* democratic research processes. At the same time, each tradition has important offerings for the other to both deepen and broaden their potential impacts.

Engaged scholarship primarily brings to feminist research an action orientation that can help feminists deliver on their claims to contribute to social change (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Reid & Frisby, 2008). Despite an aim of social transformation, scholars do not often make the leap from criticism to activism. Engaged scholarship’s approach, and specifically its adoption of participatory and action methodologies, can help with “offsetting claims that some feminist theories have become so esoteric, jargonistic and elitist” that they are not relevant or useful (Frisby et al., 2009, p. 14). Additionally, engaged scholars’ attention to issues of consequence to those with whom they collaborate can further contribute to feminist aims by helping scholars focus in on issues of most immediate relevance to the communities with whom they work.

One of feminist scholarship’s key challenges to engaged scholars, on the other hand, is to be more attentive to those at the margins, and in particular to be more critically aware of issues of sex/gender as they intersect with other axes of oppression in their projects. Feminist scholars who have critiqued the work emerging from participatory and action methodologies have pointed out the failures of this line of research to include women and other marginalized groups, recognize their voices and strategies for action, or think critically about gender oppression and heterosexism in particular (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Maguire, 2001). In the communication field, much of the writing on engaged scholarship has privileged engagement with *practitioners* as opposed to stakeholders and those at the margins who are impacted by organizational
processes and outcomes. Some scholars have also critiqued engaged communication research for reproducing inequalities (Carragee & Frey, 2016). Carragee and Frey (2016) argue that “considerable engaged communication research comforts those who are comfortable and further afflicts those who are afflicted” (p. 3980). In line with the activist and social justice “face” of engagement within communication scholarship (Putnam & Dempsey, 2015), feminist scholarship would challenge engaged scholars to adopt more inclusive, representative, and bottom-up approaches to participation in the research process. In addition, feminist scholarship, which has a long tradition of attending to voice, interrogating power dynamics, and adopting reflexive practices, can also offer various theoretical and methodological tools to help engaged scholars achieve their aims.

Taken together, an engaged and feminist scholarship then has promise as means for academics and their collaborators to make meaningful contributions on issues of social concern. In adopting an engaged feminist position, this study aims to promote a research process that more effectively attends to power dynamics, actively pursues social change, and reflexively engages stakeholders from the margins to the center. In doing so, this study responds to Dempsey and Barge’s (2014) call for “an articulation of robust models and practices” of engaged scholarship in action (p. 682).

By adopting this approach, this study takes several steps to bridge engaged and feminist research. First, this study adopts critical transnational feminism as a theoretical and analytical lens in an effort to actively interrogate uneven power relations (see Chapter 2 for further explanation). Critical transnational feminist praxis also recognizes the importance of being grounded in activist struggles (Swarr & Nagar, 2010). As a result, feminist researchers have encouraged collaboration with organizations and
activists engaged in transnational spaces, which they argue provides fertile ground for developing transformative knowledge (Bickham Mendez & Wolf, 2012). In this way, critical transnational feminism is in line with the goals of engaged feminist scholarship.

Second, I draw methodologically on feminist approaches to participatory action research (e.g., Frisby & Creese, 2011; Frisby et al., 2009; Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Maguire, 1987, 2001; Reid & Frisby, 2008). In doing so, this study responds to calls by Harding (2015) to adopt participatory action research as a strategy for rejecting positivistic assumptions about researchers achieving an impartial “view from nowhere.” (p. 167) Harding (2015) argues that participatory action research (PAR) “offers good directions for knowledge seekers who strategically position their agendas to produce sciences and philosophies of science that simultaneously advance the reliability of research and also provide valuable information and experience for oppressed communities” (p. 167). In line with these commitments, I established a collaborative relationship with a digitally based TFN, World Pulse. This project has been informed by and developed with the organization’s staff and online community members. This study then seeks to directly address the specific needs of an existing TFN and its members as well as a larger issue of practical concern – creating spaces for women to gain a voice and organize to achieve social change goals. The project responds to evaluation needs of World Pulse and aims to contribute to the development of strategies (including resources, trainings, tools, etc.) that further facilitate community members’ engagement in collective action. Insights from this study also include recommendations for other individuals and organizations working to cultivate digital spaces for voice, participation, and organizing for social change.
Lastly, this project incorporates reflexivity at all stages of the research process. Bickham Mendez and Wolf (2012) argue that “designing and implementing globalized feminist research must involve a strategic awareness of the contradictions and problems embedded in research relationships that are constituted within transnational social spaces, as they are molded and shaped by shifting hegemonic and intersecting power structures” (p. 643). This project incorporates reflexivity practices reflexivity in a variety of ways, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Theoretical Significance**

In its aims to understand the potentials and limitations of digital space for transnational feminist organizing, this study has several theoretical contributions. First, this study contributes to transnational feminist theorizing, particularly of digital space as a tension-filled site for organizing across differences. In doing so, it responds to calls for transnational feminisms within communication as a means to respond both to criticisms that organizational communication scholarship has been U.S. centric and attend to the ways power relations are (re)produced through globalization (Ashcraft, 2014; Dougherty & Harris, 2017; Munshi, Broadfoot & Hall, 2017). Ashcraft (2014) argues that “post/neocolonial and transnational feminisms are sorely needed in our field” during a time when, she argues, feminist communication theorizing has stagnated (p. 145). More specifically, theorizing and interrogating the ‘transnational’ is considered to be a central concern for feminist scholarship today (Hegde, 2006). Scholars across disciplines have often employed the term in various ways, making it important to critically examine how it is being used and to what ends (Conway, 2008). This is particularly relevant in the context of TFNs (Moghadam, 2005). These organizations provide important insights into the
ways feminist activists have organized politically on global and local scales as well as developed their own organizational forms (Moghadam, 2000). Yet, the locations of this transnational feminist organizing carry political implications, with the potential for reproducing and/or challenging existing power relations and long-standing exclusions. Such spaces, which attempt to be inclusive of diverse individuals from various social locations, are necessarily tension-filled (D’Enbeau, 2011; Dempsey et al., 2011), requiring attention to how such tensions are navigated in practice. Dempsey et al. (2011) argue that the “tension-filled process of organizing across socio-spatial differences remains undertheorized and unexplained as a transformative process” (p. 128). As previously discussed, digital spaces have been minimally explored as locations for transnational feminist organizing. This study builds on current scholarship and also extends the existing literature by examining the potentials of digital space as a site for transnational feminist organizing as well as the tensions inherent in such spaces.

Second, this study contributes to theorizations of space. Within the field of communication, scholars are only recently beginning to consider space and its implications, leading Fairhurst and Putnam (2014) to conclude that space and place are “profoundly undertheorized” (p. 286). In attempting to more explicitly define and interrogate digital space, this study contributes to understandings of the communicative construction of space, how it interrelates and is embedded with the material, and the ways

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6 Scholars have argued that space and place are similar yet distinct terms. Place is considered to refer to lived space – space that has been made meaningful through experience (Cresswell, 2015; Wilhoit, 2016). Space itself then is more abstract, ‘objective’ space. These terms will be further defined in Chapter 2.

7 The space produced in and through the Internet has been referred to using various terms, most prominently cyberspace, virtual space, and digital space. This dissertation will primarily adopt the term “digital space,” though it will on occasion invoke the popular culture term “cyberspace.” “Virtual space” has often been used synonymously with Virtual Reality and tends to be used to represent the unreal and/or immaterial. My use of the term “digital space” represents a deliberate attempt to materialize this space by recognizing that it is created space that includes technological features (e.g., data, codes, software, hardware) as well as social structures (e.g., power, culture, embodied subjects).
digital spaces (re)produce and/or challenge existing power relations. Warf and Arias (2009) identify the rise of cyberspace as contributing to increased interest in issues of space and place across academic fields. Some argue “spatial relations are being radically transformed” by the Internet (Kitchin, 1998, p. 386). Shifting understandings of space/place in the context of the digital and virtual demand further scholarly attention and definition (Wilhoit, 2015, 2017). Understanding the digital space of the Internet in particular has increasing importance, particularly for communication scholarship. Communication scholars are investigating how people communicate in cyberspace to build and maintain relationships, exchange health information, create and broadcast news and opinions, and engage in activism. Yet, current communication scholarship tends to favor metaphors of the Internet that privilege either discourse (e.g., as a virtual public sphere) or relationships (e.g., as networks and online communities). These conceptualizations often neglect the materiality of the Internet (e.g., hardware, software, and code) as well as the environments within which it is embedded and socially constructed. The Internet then is more than a tool, but serves as a new meeting space where people converse, fall in love, do business, and organize for social change, and it deserves to be investigated as such. As such, digital space holds important implications for identity, community, power, and organizing both online and off.

Third, this project also problematizes digital space by considering the different spatial configurations of power. My project interrogates the ways that digital space (re)produces power at the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation. Such a project identifies both the potentials and constraints of digital space for transforming existing inequalities and for creating spaces for voice, participation, and
organizing for social change. This project then responds to Daniels’ (2009) call that feminist scholars need to “engage the Internet as a discursive space and a site of political struggle” (p. 118), but also pushes further by recognizing the Internet as a material-discursive construction.

Specifically, this study offers an interrogation of both the potentials and constraints of digital space for the creation of “safe” counter-spaces for women and other marginalized groups. Many have touted the Internet as a space for marginalized individuals to gain a voice, connect with similar others, and organize for social change. As a result, the Internet is argued to provide a “safe” space for marginalized groups, and scholars have documented their efforts to create and claim their own spaces online, including those for variously positioned women (Karolak, 2015; Nouraie-Simone, 2014; Shade, 2002; Stephan, 2013; Workman & Coleman, 2014), racial and ethnic groups (Nouraie-Simone, 2014; Stephan, 2013), immigrants (Mitra, 2005), people with disabilities (Cole, Nolan, Seko, Mancuso, & Ospina, 2011), and LGBTQ individuals (Bryson, 2004). These scholars, among others, have documented efforts by cultural groups to create communities for that purpose. In doing so, the idea of “safe” space online is often invoked in passing, uncritically assumed, and un(der)interrogated. Safe spaces online have important value – providing places from which to form collective identities and engage in activism at various levels from the local to the global (Stephan, 2013). However, critical reflection is needed on the constraints of such spaces.

Assumptions that a particular space is safe can carry serious and long-lasting consequences. Communities that are assumed to be safe may be lax about taking protective measures to guard and support members against violence and harassment both
internally and externally. Consequences can include driving individuals from that community, creating internal divisions and fractured relationships, and in some causing physical and/or emotional harm (Cole et al., 2011). This study then provides an avenue to engage in this reflection with a digital space that strives to be a “safe” space for women and their allies and to identify strategies to navigate the tensions embedded in efforts to create such spaces.

**Outline of Study**

In summary, this study identifies digital space as a site of transnational feminist organizing and aims to understand how digital ‘safe’ counter-spaces are constructed and the tensions they produce. It does so in response to a need for productive counter-spaces in which women can gain a voice and organize collectively in response to their exclusions from spaces of power and decision-making. This project works with members of an existing digital counter-space dedicated to transnational feminist organizing to identify ways to construct safer and more transformative spaces to further enable women’s mobilization for social change.

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 2, I detail this study’s theoretical and analytical lens of critical transnational feminism; review existing academic literature on transnational feminist organizing, space and tension; and identify the gaps in the literature that this study addresses. Following this review, I propose research questions for the present study. In Chapter 3, I describe the study’s digital feminist participatory action research approach, outline the methods of inquiry utilized to work collaboratively with participants to answer the study’s research questions, and provide further details about the study’s context. In Chapters 4 and 5, I
present the findings of the study. Chapter 4 focuses on constructing safety, looking at how the digital counter-space is constructed as ‘safe’, how that construction produces contradictions, and how both community and staff members respond to those contradictions. In a similar vein, Chapter 5 focuses on constructing inclusion, examining the ways the digital counter-space is constructed as ‘inclusive,’ how that also produces contradictions, and how members respond. In Chapter 6, I summarize the study’s findings and discuss the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of this project. I then outline the limitations of the study as well as highlight directions for future research.

**Interlude: Navigating Dual Roles**

My relationship with World Pulse has oscillated between that of a researcher and a consultant over the past five years. In these different roles, I have developed a deeper understanding of the organization and its digital space. I have also built relationships with staff members who know and have used my work. This project both emerges from and builds upon this constantly shifting relationship. I have also occupied both roles during the two-year timeframe of this dissertation project. While a more specific timeline of this relationship is included in Chapter 3, in this Interlude I reflect on these different roles and the relationship between consulting and engaged scholarship.

As a researcher, my role has involved seeking a deeper understanding of the organization, particularly of members’ experiences. I have initiated this research at various time points, situating World Pulse within the broader nonprofit and transnational feminist organizing spaces.
As a consultant, my role has been to fulfill direct needs of the organization and provide deliverables that have aided the organization in developing its theory of change (TOC) and more recently its monitoring and evaluation processes. This work has been both paid and pro-bono. In this role, I have interacted regularly with staff as part of an ongoing feedback loop.

However, these roles are not always clear cut. While I have tried in conversations with staff and community members to make clear when I am wearing different “hats” (i.e., “Today I am wearing my consultant hat”), I recognize that I am not able to fully separate the work that I do and the understandings I glean, nor necessarily should I. These roles inform one another — I draw on understandings from my research that shape my recommendations as a consultant. Additionally, in my role as a consultant, I have identified needs of the organization and been able to respond to those needs in the design of future research. I have tried to be transparent in describing my relationships to those within and outside the organization.

As an engaged scholar, continuing these roles seemed as though it would be in line with further building and maintaining my collaborative relationship with the organization. When I was approached between Phase 2 and Phase 3 of this research project (see Chapter 3) to consult again, I reflected on how the organization had expressed a need that I was able to address. As an engaged scholar, it made sense to respond to the needs of my collaborative partner, to the extent I was able to do so. The request also came in large part because of the nature of our ongoing relationship and my level of understanding of the organization. The line between engaged scholarship and consulting then is murky — both could be responding to a social or practical need and
could involve collaborating with those affected depending on the nature of and approach to the consultation. In fact, when I discussed this new request with mentors and colleagues, one mentor asked, “Aren’t you already consulting for them in a way?”

As an engaged feminist scholar, I am encouraged to reflect on issues of power and ethics and considerations about reciprocity and who benefits as I operate in each of these roles. For example, when receiving this latest request, I reflected on what it meant that they asked me – as white woman situated within a university in the United States – to do so. Did this reflect the nature of our relationship? Did the fact that they asked me and not someone else say something about the lens in which they were viewing who is able to do this work and how ‘expertise’ is constructed? I also had discussions with others about what it meant to be compensated for work as a consultant. When the line between engaged scholar and consultant is murky, what work should be paid? What is the relationship between “participation” and “labor”? How does compensation change the power dynamics of the relationship? Should one even accept funding from an organization when that money could go a long way toward supporting those whom they serve? These are questions without easy answers.

In these ways, I see the two roles as enmeshed and mutually shaping, requiring ongoing reflexivity and transparency about how I interact within these roles and what the implications of doing so.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This project focuses on understanding how digital “safe” counter-spaces for transnational feminist organizing are constructed in order to move toward creating more transformative spaces. In this chapter, I establish the study’s theoretical lens, detail the existing literature that informs this work, and identify the gaps that this current project aims to address. First, I outline the critical transnational feminist perspective on which this study is grounded. I also describe transnational feminist organizing as the phenomenon under study, examining where scholars have located this organizing and its political implications. Second, I review various conceptualizations of digital space and build a definition of digital space as a site for organizing and activism. Third, I interrogate the connection between space and power and describe efforts by marginalized groups to create “safe” counter-spaces. Fourth, I problematize these spaces by exploring the tensions and paradoxes inherent in feminist organizing and in efforts to create “safe” counter-space. Finally, I advance the research questions for the present study.

Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism is both the theoretical and analytical lens on which this study relies as well as the context of this study. Critical transnational feminism represents a theoretical tradition within feminist scholarship that lends itself to the study of organizing across difference. As previously indicated, transnational feminist organizing provides a theoretically and practically important site for scholarship. Transnational feminist organizing serves as the site and focus of this study. This section will first outline a critical transnational feminist perspective, then discuss the processes and
practices of transnational feminist organizing, and lastly interrogate the sites where transnational feminist organizing has been located within the existing literature.

**Critical Transnational Feminism as Theoretical and Analytical Lens**

Critical transnational feminism provides this study’s primary theoretical and analytical lens. Critical transnational feminism is a set of interdisciplinary theories and activist practices that emerged in the 1990s in the confluence of work by Black feminists in the United States, “Third World” feminists, postcolonial scholars, and activists operating in international spheres like the United Nations. A critical transnational feminist lens is (1) intersectional in closely attending to the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation structure social relations (Collins, 2000; Crensahw, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Parker, 2014; Swarr & Nagar, 2010); (2) reflexive in interrogating and contextualizing uneven power relations, complexities, and contradictions in women’s lived experiences (Dempsey, 2011; Norander & Harter, 2011; Swarr & Nagar, 2010); and (3) grounded in activist struggles to build feminist alliances across differences, while avoiding homogenizing claims of a universal sisterhood (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Mohanty, 2003).

First, transnational feminism is inherently intersectional (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crensahw, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Swarr & Nagar, 2010), rejecting essentialist assumptions of a “global sisterhood” based on a shared experience of oppression. Global feminisms have assumed a universal sisterhood based on a shared experience of gendered oppression (e.g., Morgan, 1984). Such assumptions have been routinely criticized for erasing the differences, histories, and power relations among women and for serving as a stand-in for the interests of white
Western women (Mohanty, 2003). Transnational feminism is formulated in response to critiques of global and Western feminisms. It represents an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of ideas of a global sisterhood by attending to differences among women. Specifically, transnational feminism is committed to an intersectional approach to scholarship and activism, which involves closely attending to the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation shape relations across spaces, places, and identities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Nagar & Swarr, 2010). Intersectionality, an analytical tool derived from the work of primarily Black feminist scholars in the United States, rejects additive approaches to difference and instead provides the grounds to interrogate the ways in which various oppressions interact to shape and codetermine the lived experiences of women of color in particular (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). In understanding how these interlocking power relations are organized, intersectionality “requires attention to every-day interactions as well as to political-economic systems such as neoliberalism and their variations globally” (Buzzanell, 2016, p. 698), leading to the second component of this study’s critical transnational feminist lens.

Second, transnational feminism is reflexive in recognizing and responding to unequal relations within and across nations (Dempsey, 2011; Norander & Harter, 2011; Swarr & Nagar, 2010). Transnational feminism is also distinct from international feminisms, which still fixate on discrete nations and emphasize comparisons between

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8 For a lack of better terminology, I intermittently use the terms Global North/Western and Global South/Third World in this paper to refer to the socio-historical and economic divisions between more privileged nations and those that have traditionally been marginalized. This is not without recognizing that these political designations quickly become problematic and often replicate or oversimplify power relations between the “West” and the “rest” (Mohanty, 2003).
nations as opposed to a “conscious crossing of national boundaries and a superseding of nationalistic orientations” (Moghadam, 2005, p. 83). The “transnational” in transnational feminism is not fixed in scale or scope (e.g., global) but is socially and materially constructed and constantly (re)produced at the intersections of multiple scales as well as relations in and across nations (Conway, 2008). Transnational feminisms then are a set of understandings and practices that involve “shifting the unit of analysis from local, regional and national culture to relations and processes across cultures” (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, p. xix). This shift requires critical attention to the flows and materialization of power globally. Specifically, transnational feminists are called to “attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination” (Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 5). Scholars like Mohanty (2013) have also drawn increasing attention to the ways the global hegemony of neoliberalism – discourses of individualization and privatization – risks depoliticizing and undercutting transnational feminist efforts to organize collectively. As a result, transnational feminist scholars are critical of the ways that power relations are (re)produced through globalization as well as through feminists’ own efforts to organize and theorize transnationally.

Lastly, critical transnational feminism is grounded in activism. Global processes have created new opportunities for cross-national and transnational feminist struggles and research around them (Bickham Mendez & Wolf, 2012). Transnational feminism represents an ongoing struggle to build political alliances across difference and across multiple spaces and scales (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Dempsey, 2011; Mendoza,
Following Mohanty (2003), transnational feminists focus on the struggle to form “strategic coalitions” not based on assumed ahistorical biological and social commonalities but based on oppositional political identities (p. 18). As a result, scholars have called for a critical transnational feminist praxis that weaves together theory and practice (Swarr & Nagar, 2010). To this end, transnational feminist scholarship interested in feminist organizing across difference has focused both on activism of feminists across national borders but also the circulation of feminist discourses internationally that become mobilized in various ways at local levels (e.g., Conway, 2008; Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Parker, 2014).

Critical transnational feminism represents an emerging site for theorizing in communication scholarship. Over especially the past 25 years, communication scholars within organizational communication have come to recognize the value of feminist theories and scholarship (e.g., Ashcraft, 2014; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Buzzanell, 1994, 2000; Calas & Smircich, 1996; Dougherty & Harris, 2017). Specifically, feminist communication theorizing has provided important contributions to the field, including building understandings of how gender is socially constructed and constitutive of organizing and intersects with other identities, interrogating the ways power and resistance are (re)produced in organizational contexts, and exploring the emergence of alternative forms of organizing, among others (Ashcraft, 2014; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). These scholars have relied on diverse feminisms within communication scholarship, particularly on liberal, cultural, standpoint, and postmodern feminisms (Ashcraft, 2014). However, scholars have argued that a transnational feminism in particular could inform and enhance feminist communication studies and help
organizational communication scholars move beyond a focus on the nation-state and beyond U.S.-centric topics and contexts (Ashcraft, 2014; Dare, 2007; Dempsey, 2011; Dougherty & Harris, 2017; Hegde, 1998). Recent scholarship has pushed for attention to transnational and postcolonial feminisms as a means to make our theorizing more intersectional and more attentive to relations of difference (Ashcraft, 2014; Dempsey, 2011; Norander & Harter, 2011). The transnational feminist perspective also responds to a need to recognize that gender has always manifested globally and to recognize the implications of globalization and its asymmetrical relations for patriarchal processes (Shome, 2006). To date, a few scholars have taken up the call. Scholars have offered transnational feminist analyses of work (D’Enbeau, Villamil, & Helens-Hart, 2015) and motherhood (Shome, 2011), and have begun to examine transnational feminist organizing as a site of study (Dempsey et al., 2011; D’Enbeau, 2011; Stohr, 2015). Transnational feminist organizing is thought to provide a “particularly illuminating example of the purposive attempt to organize across multiple differences” (Dempsey, 2011, p. 69), providing a rich context for further work.

**Transnational Feminist Organizing**

One of the more visible forms of transnational feminist praxis has been the formation of transnational feminist networks (TFNs; Moghadam, 2000, 2005, 2013). D’Enbeau (2011) argues, “TFNs present unique sites of study to contribute to positive organizational efforts in this context of globalization” (p. 79). TFNs are defined as formal and informal organizing structures that unite women from three or more countries around a shared set of concerns or common goals (Moghadam, 2005). Prominent examples in the literature include the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association, Association for Women’s
Rights in Development (AWID), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Association for Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR), Network Women in Development Europe (WIDE), and the Women’s Learning Partnership for Peace, Development, and Rights (WLP), among countless others (Moghadam, 2005, 2013). TFNs have collaborated and mobilized to engage in information and resource exchanges, analysis and advocacy, and/or direct action in the form of demonstrations and demands on a wide range of issues including women’s rights, poverty and economics, health and reproductive rights, and peace and conflict (Moghadam, 2005, 2013). Members of TFNs also participate in intergovernmental political arenas, including meetings of the United Nations and World Social Forum (Moghadam, 2005). While these organizations have tended to be loose networks that avoid hierarchy and bureaucracy, they do still vary in their forms (Moghadam, 2005, 2013). Some have become more professionalized, with offices, paid staff, and more formal membership structures (Moghadam, 2012, 2013). Others represent community-based organizations or individual activists who have formed partnerships with others regionally or with NGOs, academic institutions, and/or other organizations (Batliwala, 2002; Desai, 2005).

In examining TFNs, some scholars have sought to distinguish between the women’s movement and feminist activism, defining the former by the constituency being organized and the latter by its goals to initiate social change to systems of gendered oppression (Ferree, 2006; Moghadam, 2013). While in some settings, activists view the term “feminism” with suspicion as Western or elitist, Moghadam (2005, 2013) and others identify networks and organizations as feminist if their goals and/or practices reflect feminist values, whether or not they adopt the label (Ferree, 2006; Sperling, Ferree, &
Risman, 2001). As a result, Sperling et al. (2001) define “feminist action” as “that in which the participants explicitly place value on challenging gender hierarchy and changing women’s social status” (p. 1158).

Organizing transnationally is not necessarily a new phenomenon, and feminist forms are similar to other political change organizations such as transnational advocacy networks, transnational social movements, and global civil society organizations (Ferree, 2006; Moghadam, 2005). Yet, some have argued that feminist and women’s advocacy groups were among the first to form transnational networks and have been some of the most effective (Desai, 2007; Ferree, 2006; Sperling et al., 2001). Women have long been mobilizing across borders, with some contemporary international women’s organizations emerging in the context of suffragist, abolitionist, and anticolonial movements as early as the mid to late 19th century (Desai, 2009; Moghadam, 2013; Tripp, 2006). The more recent emergence and proliferation of TFNs has often been directly linked to the UN’s Decade for Women (1975-1985), and more specifically the world conferences that took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995 (Desai, 2009), as well as subsequent follow-ups to Beijing in 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. The UN conferences, which also included associated regional and sub-regional conferences in preparation for the international conferences, created openings for networking and establishing common goals with other women’s groups (Adams, 2006). These conferences, as will be discussed later, provided fertile ground for activists across borders to form formal and informal networks around issues of interest.

Several other factors have enabled the formation of contemporary TFNs. In particular, faster and cheaper international transportation forms – particularly airfares –
have allowed for more frequent travel across borders and outside geographic regions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Additionally, new information and communication technologies including the Internet, mobile phones, and to some extent radio and television, have sped up information flows and allowed for more frequent and sustained contact among actors throughout the world (Ferree, 2006; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Moghadam, 2012). These factors contribute to the abilities of activists globally to transcend borders and to create new spaces in which to engage in dialogue and organize across difference or social change.

**Locating Transnational Feminist Organizing**

In attending to difference, transnational feminism is inherently interested in issues of and tensions around space, place, and scale (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010; Massey, 1994; Parker, 2014). Transnational feminist scholarship has necessarily attended to the implications of “uneven relations” between various spaces and geographic scales (Shome, 2006). In terms of scales, discourses often center around constructions of the “local” and the “global.” Transnational feminist scholars have argued that the global/local binaries are problematic in that they are assumed to be mutually exclusive and stable categories when in fact they are permeable (Grewal & Kalplan, 1994). This false binary then sets up a privileging of the global while also failing to recognize the multiplicity of scales and localities (Grewal & Kalplan, 1994). The “local” and the “global” cannot be easily defined by a specific physical geography but rather are socially constructed in relation to one another through discursive and material practices (Conway, 2008; Mohanty, 2003). Who and what “counts” as local vs. global discursively and materially
constructs power relations that must be attended to within attempts to organize transnationally.

Spaces and scales then are never neutral but are intimately tied to power and social control. Space can be claimed, appropriated, conquered, and contested (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010). Such claiming is wrapped up in a history of Western colonialism that continues to permeate discussions of any attempt to “claim” or “create” space for variously positioned others. Power is also centered in spaces such as urban and international centers, at the sites of international policymaking, and the West/First World (Dempsey et al., 2011). Meanwhile, other spaces (e.g., rural communities, local organizations, and the Global South) have been historically positioned as marginal (Nagar & Lawson, 2002). This has implications for who stands to benefit from inclusion in particular spaces.

Transnational feminist organizing, which occurs at the intersections of various spaces, places, and scales, must hold these issues in tension and constantly negotiate issues of privilege and exclusion (Dare, 2008). Transnational work occurs at the “borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 2012), a liminal third space between cultures. Anzaldúa (2012), who developed the concept of borderlands in the context of her lived experience on the U.S.-Mexico border, argues that borderlands are “physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Preface, para. 1). In the context of transnational feminist organizing, such hybrid spaces emerge at the intersections of the local/global
and First/Third World, as well as at the intersections of specific countries and cultural contexts.

TFNs have taken different approaches to navigating such socio-spatial differences. Dempsey et al. (2011) note the ways that TFNs have constructed regional, international, and translocal spatial imaginaries that reflect the different scales in which they attempt to operate. Regionally located TFNs may draw on a common historical and political experience within a bounded geographic region (Dempsey et al., 2011). Internationally situated TFNs may target global policymaking and transnational political infrastructures (e.g., the UN). Translocal TFNs reflect a hybrid between the local and the global in attempts to focus on local scales of action while remaining linked to the regional and global (Dempsey et al., 2011).

While Dempsey et al. (2011) provide important insights into the ways TFNs have constructed their positions within different geographic and political scales, this work does not yet attend to the specific spaces and places of transnational feminist organizing. Locating the transnational, which inherently involves working at the in-between of cultures, geographies, and histories, can be a fraught process. Yet, as Alexander and Mohanty (2010) have argued, location matters when it comes to solidarity in transnational feminist contexts. In particular, where researchers have located transnational feminist organizing has implications for what spaces and bodies are privileged in these processes as well as for what and who are made invisible. As a result, scholars have called for more “geographically sensitive” approaches to transnational feminist inquiry, arguing for more attention to the spaces and scales and their consequences for social change efforts (Masson, 2010, p. 36; Masson & Dufour, 2010).
With that in mind, the following sections seek to make space visible within transnational feminist organizing by describing the various spaces in which the existing literature has located transnational feminist organizing – sites of international conferences, public spaces in various local contexts, and digital spaces constructed by and for TFNs – and the potentials and constraints of these spaces.

**International conferences**

The preeminent and most oft-cited spaces for transnational feminist organizing have been the sites of international conferences. As Conway (2008) notes, international conferences should not be conflated with transnational feminist networks per se, but they are the sites at which much of this networking takes place. In this case, transnational feminist organizing occurs in the meeting rooms, lobbies, hallways, and hotel rooms in various physical locations throughout the world. Among them, scholars have consistently highlighted the world conferences for women sponsored by the United Nations as key to transnational feminist organizing (Dare, 2007; Desai, 2009; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Moghadam, 2005, 2013; Naples, 2002; Tripp, 2006). Such conferences created a shared space for women from around the world – from various races, cultures, classes, and occupations – to meet face to face on a regular basis both formally and informally around these meetings (Dare, 2007). These spaces have promoted women’s participation in transnational political spheres, legitimized women as political actors and their issues, and facilitated alliance building (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Naples, 2002). The conferences have also been known for producing conflicts and dialogue among activists that have challenged the dominance of Western women in framing the international women’s agenda. In particular, scholars point to the early conferences as being contentious,
particularly between women in the Global South who were interested in an agenda that included development, nationalism, and colonialism and women from the Global North who were focused for the most part only on issues of gender and sexuality (Desai, 2009; Tripp, 2006). The 1985 conference in Nairobi is considered by many to be a turning point in these discussions, when attendees began making alliances and reaching consensus on some key issues of concern (Moghadam, 2013; Tripp, 2006). A common agenda was formalized in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Moghadam, 2013). These UN-associated conferences do not just happen on an international scale but also regionally and sub-regionally in preparation, providing spaces for transnational feminist organizing at a variety of scales (Adams, 2006).

In addition, international conferences of other activist movements have also been identified as key spaces of transnational feminist activism, with particular attention within scholarship to the World Social Forum (WSF; Conway, 2007, 2012; Desai, 2005, 2007, 2009). These forums, which are part of the global justice movement, have been held every year since 2001 and are spaces in which actors from multiple movements converge (Conway, 2007). Conway (2007) argues that transnational feminisms have been a significant constituting force for this forum. Yet, despite their presence, feminist activists have struggled for voice, representation, and visibility (Conway, 2007; Desai, 2005). In response to a lack of attention to feminist issues at the conference as well as a lack of women in all roles from committees to speakers, women’s groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa met informally in 2003 to discuss the creation of the “Feminist Dialogues” (Desai, 2005, 2007, 2009; Conway, 2012). Subsequently, the Indian National Network of Autonomous Women’s Groups hosted a forum prior to WSF in Mumbai to
build knowledge and relationships and identify common strategies (Conway, 2007, 2012). As they have continued to be organized by a collective of TFNs, the Feminist Dialogues have become counter-spaces within and alongside WSF in which feminist networks have explored and debated issues of North-South inequalities as well as differences around issues of reproductive rights, violence against women, religion and religious fundamentalism, and economic justice, among other issues (Conway, 2007). Conway (2007) argues that there is evidence of “feminists finding each other in and around the WSF, of seizing the space provided by the WSF to mount activities for themselves and wider publics, and of encountering other movements and other feminisms” (p. 61).

The Feminist Dialogues is only one such example in the literature on transnational feminism that speaks to the creation of counter-spaces at international conferences that provide a context for activists to engage issues of difference and develop oppositional politics and strategies (Dempsey et al., 2011). Dempsey et al. (2011) provide the example of an alternative meeting set up at the 2004 Assembly of the Parliament of the World’s Religions in response to the lack of visibility and respect for women during the assembly and the generally patriarchal tone of the meetings. From these meetings, a committee formed to provide a set of recommendations to petition for change in representation and a focus on gender inequality. Dempsey et al. (2011) argue that counter-spaces become sites in which “socio-spatial differences can be more openly expressed, negotiated, and strategically acted upon” (p. 214). Other sites of transnational feminist lobbying have included the UN Conference on Human Rights (1993), International Conference on

Lastly, transnational feminist networks have self-organized their own conferences, planning meetings, forums, and workshops as means to periodically bring various actors together face to face to connect, share resources, and settle on specific strategies, such as drafting shared statements or action plans (Dare, 2008; Erickson & Faria, 2011; Moghadam, 2005; Sperling et al., 2001). Sperling et al. (2001) argue in the context of interactions between American and Russian feminist activists, conferences and seminars have been key spaces for activists to meet and exchange informational and material resources. Some of these conferences are regular occurrences, with groups like WIDE and AWMR hosting their own annual conferences or general assemblies (Moghadam, 2005). For example, Dare (2008) studied “local” and “global” discourses surrounding the triennial transnational forum hosted by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). Others are one-time or triggering events. A conference in Juba, South Sudan, became a strategy for organizing across difference for The South Sudan Women’s Empowerment Network (SSWEN) (Erickson & Faria, 2011). Around the theme of “Weaving Together,” organizers purposefully attempted to include representatives from different classes and sectors as well as women from all the regions in the South (Erickson & Faria, 2011).

These spaces and the spatial practices of international conferences both enable and constrain organizing across difference. While international conferences may privilege the “global” scale, they also continue to find ways to disrupt potential geographical dominance and to fuel local and regional activism. One tactic has involved consistently
moving conference locations to different regions. This movement has aided in the development of local and regional feminist organizing (Adams, 2006), with activists coalescing when a particular international conference enters their region. Adams (2006) documented how the UN’s 1975 Mexico City conference sparked regional women’s activism and the formation of new organizations and networks in Latin America, as did the 1980 Copenhagen conference for Europe, and the 1985 Nairobi conference for Africa.

However, the physical sites of these international conferences can further position them as elitist and exclusionary. Some international conferences are held at high-end convention centers and luxurious hotels that both restrict who can access such spaces as well as the participation of those who are able to attend. This can provide a point of tension. Dare (2008) notes attending the AWID forum in Bangkok, Thailand, and feeling “destabilized by attending this ‘revolutionary’ forum and interacting with a diverse range of women within the single-most luxurious hotel I have ever been” (p. 17). While the expense of international travel has to some extent been reduced, the ability to travel to and attend international conferences does not come without cost. This can create and/or reinforce inequalities between those who can acquire funds to attend conferences and to support their organizations and those who cannot (Basu, 2000). Such spaces privilege educated, middle class activists over other activists (Basu, 2000; Desai, 2005). This “transnational activist class” often includes professionals, government officials, journalists, and academics (Desai, 2009). As a result, these activists, and particularly women’s groups in the Global North, have typically taken the lead (Naples, 2002). While some groups, particularly those in the North, have sponsored or funded women who may not have the resources to attend (Moghadm, 2005; Sperling et al., 2001), this can fuel
dependency, create competition among networks for resources from Northern foundations, governments and transnational political entities, and therefore further reproduce existing inequalities and power relations (Naples, 2002; Sperling et al., 2001).

**Public spaces**

Transnational feminism has also been located in public spaces, in particular in the streets. A prominent example in the literature is the World March of Women (Conway, 2008, 2012; Moghadam, 2013). The March, introduced by Quebec feminists in the 1990s to protest poverty, has since become a mobilization force across scales and contexts (Conway, 2012). The March involves coordinated marches and rallies on streets around the world. The first global World March of Women 2000 involved more than six thousand organizations from 159 countries and territories (Moghadam, 2013). The second global initiative involved a relay of a collectively constructed vision – the Women’s Global Charter for Humanity – that started in March 2005 in Brazil and ended in October 2005 in Burkina Faso, having been to 53 countries and territories (Conway, 2008). These grassroots mobilizations have been on the streets of cities and communities across the world. Such efforts are coordinated translocally by autonomous local and regional groups (Conway, 2008). The March has also gained momentum around international bodies, as the Quebec feminists proposed the idea of a world march at the UN’s fourth World Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995 (Conway, 2008). The March has also been a key force on the international stage by sending delegations to conferences like WSF, where the March held massive street demonstrations and used lavender flags and T-shirts for visibility (Conway, 2008). It has also become a presence in spaces of social protest, including anti-G8 and anti-Iraq war protests, and at conferences (Conway, 2012). The
March emphasizes the claiming of public spaces through mass mobilization as well as efforts to enhance and disrupt through drumming, chanting, and other theatrics (Conway, 2007).

Public spaces as sites of transnational feminist organizing are minimally addressed in the literature outside of the World March of Women. Such translocal attempts to mobilize can provide opportunities for women to act without requiring significant funds to travel, therefore making these spaces more accessible, unless it is associated with an international conference or event. The reduced cost can make these spaces more accessible than the conference center. Yet, this mobilization often occurs alongside or in relation to international conferences, replicating some of the same concerns of the conferences themselves in terms of inclusions and exclusions. International meetings have been the spaces in which the March has been organized and coordinated (Conway, 2008). In addition, the construction of “grassroots” and “local” in the context of the March has not received sufficient attention within the literature. Their meanings are assumed without attention to the way they are constructed. Therefore, it is unclear whether the localization of the March still takes place in urban centers, which further privilege the inclusion of activists of a particular social location. In addition, certain public spaces carry increased physical risk, particularly in contexts where mass mobilization brings increased police or military presence. These spaces also require a level of mobility and access that may not be granted to all women based on disability, traditional gender norms and family status, racialization, or socioeconomic status.
Digital space

Scholars are increasingly recognizing digital spaces as sites for transnational feminist activism. TFNs are utilizing websites, listservs, and email alerts, among other mechanisms, to communicate with their own members and with other networks (Moghadam, 2005). Email listservs have been popular outlets for transnational feminist engagement (Moghadam, 2005). Stephan (2013) documented how AWSA United’s listserv provided a means for Arab feminists to share information, network with other Arab feminists and activists throughout the world, express their opinions, and receive and respond to calls for action. Similarly, SSWEN was first convened as an electronic listserv before actors began meeting offline (Erickson & Faria, 2011).

Several studies have examined how TFNs construct and establish their alliances virtually through linking to one another online (Ferree, 2007; Ferree & Pudrovksa, 2006; Pudrovksa & Ferree, 2004). For example, Pudrovksa and Ferree (2004) found that European-based TFNs like the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) associated primarily with intra-regional organizations and networks, while U.S-based TFNs were more likely to be associated with TFNs from the Global South. Additionally, the websites of TFNs are argued to be the places in which organizational identity work takes place. Some of this identity work can be seen in the self-presentations of TFNs’ collective identities, particularly in their discursive choices around whether or not they adopt the terms feminism, gender, and/or women (Ferree & Pudrovksa, 2006). In exploring how one TFN negotiated its online identity construction, D’Enbeau (2011) found that AWID used its website to project its embracement of diversity and transparency in its organizational practices while maintaining control over its online identity. D’Enbeau (2011) also noted
that this identity was co-constructed by individual members and organizations, particularly through various online forums, surveys, and calls for submission that encourage communication and collaboration. TFNs may also use a variety of platforms simultaneously. WLP, which Moghadam (2013) describes as an “exceptionally tech-savvy TFN”, connects virtually to its members on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube as well as through a blog (p. 154).

Digital spaces have several advantages as places for transnational feminist organizing. These spaces transcend borders as actors situated in various offline locales can simultaneously interact and communicate more quickly than previously possible (Moghadam, 2013). Digital space does not require the expense or time commitment of international travel. Contact can be more frequent and records can be maintained of conversations within those spaces. However, though access to the web is rapidly increasing across the globe, a persistent digital divide still exists in terms of material access as well as literacy and use of the web (Kakar, Hausman, Thomas, Denny-Brown, & Bhatia, 2012; van Dijk, 2005). In addition, concerns about surveillance and harassment online or in the offline spaces were women access the web may restrict participation (Kakar et al., 2012; Newsom & Lengel, 2003a, 2003b). Various sociocultural factors may also be at play as in certain contexts the Internet may not be considered “appropriate” for women (Kakar et al., 2012; Newsom & Lengel, 2003a, 2003b). Additionally, some of the scholarship that has acknowledged digital spaces has focused on ones that have been utilized in addition to and along side physical meetings. For example, AWID published daily blog posts from conference activities, summaries from plenary sessions, and audio recordings on its website (Dare, 2008). Similarly, virtual forums have been used to
engage in translocal debates and to collect and disseminate information around conferences, including Beijing-plus-Five and WomenAction2000 (Sreberny, 2001). Thus, digital spaces are constructed as secondary or supplemental to face-to-face international meetings, still privileging those sites.

Conclusions

As this review of previous scholarship indicates, scholars have continued to privilege international conferences and meetings as the primary sites of transnational feminist work, and particularly those that occur in relation to larger transnational political sites and intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations. Given that these spaces can produce exclusions and replicate existing power relations among variously positioned women, attention is needed to interrogating their value as well as ways in which to make these spaces more inclusive. This body of literature also illustrates the ways that transnational feminist organizing is multi-located (Youngs, 2004), occurring in and across multiple spaces often simultaneously. Transnational feminist activists may be present in the physical location of an international conference and also active in a corresponding digital space. The coexistence of these multiple spaces and scales merits further attention in the transnational feminist literature. In addition, activists may be at an international conference while also acting within specific counter-spaces or public spaces that coincide with the conference, calling attention to the ways multiple places and spaces play a role in constructing the organizing process. Interdisciplinary scholarship related to space and social movements has also called attention to the ways multiple spatialities intersect and affect organizing and thus more attention is needed to how space “plays a constituting role in social movements” (Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont, 2013, p. 19).
Scholars have also continued to privilege these offline meetings, even in the context of discussions of digital spaces. Moghadam (2013) argues that “of course” face-to-face meetings are still necessary (p. 154). Similarly, Pudrovksa and Ferree (2004) argue that while digital spaces may provide “clues” to TFNs’ identities, scholars need to attend to the “actual spaces” an organization uses (p. 136). Such arguments seem to delegitimize the digital by constructing it as not a “real” space. In addition, since the primary focus of this scholarship has been on identity construction and has privileged those TFNs that meet offline and those gatherings as the locations of transnational feminist organizing, research has yet to attend to the possibilities of transnational organizing in and through digital spaces. This study then aims to (1) locate the digital as a space of and for transnational feminist organizing and to (2) recognize such digital counter-spaces as tension filled.

**Understanding Digital Space/Place**

To understand digital space as site of and for transnational feminist organizing, it is first important to further examine what is meant by space and specifically digital space/place. Drawing in particular on work in critical and feminist geography and organizational communication, this project will seek to define and interrogate digital space as an embedded, material-discursive construction that is occupied and co-created by multi-located, embodied subjects. The following sections will unpack this definition.

It should be noted before proceeding that some scholars have sought to distinguish between space and place. Space, while constituted relationally, is often seen to represent ‘objective’ measurable space while place is seen as lived and meaningful
space (Cresswell, 2015; Wilhoit, 2016). This is best illustrated by the distinction between a *house* and a *home*. Wilhoit (2016) describes this distinction as follows:

For example, when moving into a new house, one likely understands it as space: the number and size of rooms, the distance of the house from the grocery store and work. However, once one begins to personalize the space with their belongings and it begins to be the site of personal history, space is transformed into place as it is lived and made meaningful. (p. 250)

However, space and place are often used interchangeably or in place of the other in much of the existing literature. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I use the language the authors of the studies reviewed adopt in describing their work.

**Spatial Turn**

Following the “spatial turn” (Warf & Arias, 2009), scholars have grown increasingly interested in space, calling attention to the ways that interactions are always *situated*. Space matters, as Warf and Arias (2009) argue, “not for the trivial and self-evident reason that everything occurs in space, but because *where* events unfold is integral to *how* they take shape” (p. 10, emphasis in original). The terms “space” and “spatial” have often been invoked in academic writing without definition, assuming a shared and uncontested meaning (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994). This work has often produced “mere descriptions” that have rarely achieved analytical or theoretical status (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 7).

Overall, space has been understudied within organizational communication scholarship (Wilhoit, 2017). As a result, spaces of communication such as the sites of organizing have often been overlooked or treated as “unproblematic container[s]” (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009, p. 29). Existing scholarship on organizational space in particular has primarily either conceptualized space as material or social (Wilhoit, 2016).
Material conceptualizations have primarily focused on space as the context or backdrop for communication and organizing or a variable that can be manipulated (Wilhoit, 2016). Materiality in this sense refers to “the arrangement of an artifact’s physical and/or digital materials into particular forms that endure” (Leonardi, 2013, p. 69). The Hawthorne studies represent one of the earlier efforts to assess the effects of space on workplace productivity, and a long line of scholarship has followed suit (e.g., Davis, Leach, & Clegg, 2011; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007; McElroy & Morrow, 2010). However, those who have focused on material space have failed to account for the ongoing constitution of space/place, the meanings attached to it, and its structural implications in everyday lives.

Those focused on space as symbolic or discursive tend to examine the ways that space/place is dynamic, socially constructed, and subject to multiple and conflicted meanings (Dale & Burrell, 2007; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). Communication scholars have in particular drawn on work in critical and feminist geography, including the writings of Foucault (1972, 1980), Harvey (1985, 1989), Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994, 2005), and Soja (1989, 1996), that contribute to understandings of space as a social product. Their body of work challenges Cartesian views of space as a given entity and instead provides tools to understand the ways space is actively socially produced. However, these social and symbolic uses often neglect the ways that space is more than just a discursive construction and the ways that the material aspects of space enable and constrain particular actions. The discursive turn and the emphasis on the social world and organizing as constituted in and by communication has led to a lack of attention to materiality and an overemphasis on the symbolic (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Even studies that focus on space as the product of ongoing sociomaterial interrelations (e.g., Vásquez &
Cooren, 2013) have tended to focus primarily on the ways that space materializes in conversation with little focus on the material realities of those spaces (Wilhoit, 2016).

What is needed then are approaches to space that “take seriously” both the material and social (Wilhoit, 2016, p. 260). This coincides with work within and beyond communication that calls for a material turn and encourages “grappling with the dual presence of material and symbolic elements” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 35). Wilhoit (2017) advocates a constitutive approach that recognizes that space actively produces the organization. Drawing on the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO; e.g., Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Cooren et al., 2011), this approach “looks at both material and social aspects of space recognizing that the permanence and stability of space’s materiality and the shifting, socially constructed nature of space are present in organizations and make organizations what they are” (Wilhoit, 2017, p. 6). Following Massey (1994), Leferbvre (1991), Shome (2003), Wilhoit (2016), and others, space is recognized in this study as the product of interrelations, constituted in and by social and material relations. Spaces then are “sites” that both shape and are shaped by the communicative practices and relationships of the people within them as well as by material objects, bodies, and structures (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Fayard, 2012; Fayard & Weeks, 2011; Massey, 1994; Wilhoit, 2016). As Massey (2005) notes, space is not fixed but constantly under construction. It is “a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made” (Massey, 2005, p. 9).
To make sense of the interrelations of the social and material, I introduce and draw on theorizing within what Lykke (2010) refers to as feminist postconstructionism. Feminist postconstructionism serves as an umbrella term for trends within feminist theorizing that seek new, reformed or rediscovered “thinking technologies” for approaching materiality in light of postmodernism, including feminist new materialisms (Grosz, 1994; Hekman, 2010; van der Tuin, 2009), posthumanist feminisms (Barad, 2003, 2007), and transcorporeal feminisms (Alaimo, 2008). These approaches also draw on and are indebted to a lineage of feminist scholarship, in particular the work of Haraway (1988). Collectively, these scholars are informed by but also transgress postmodern and poststructuralist thought. Lenz Taguchi (2012) argues that “a most crucial aim of postconstructionist feminist research is thus to undertake research where the mutual entailment of discourse and matter is explored” (p. 266). Responding to dissatisfaction with the power granted to discourse as part of the linguistic turn, these approaches represent an attempt to return the body as well as objects, spaces, and technologies to the focus of inquiry not at the expense of but rather in relation with discourse (Ellingson, 2007). This work is especially relevant to feminist scholarship, as feminist scholars have held in tension the conflicts between postmodern ideals of the social construction of gender as well as the material conditions and violences for ‘real’ bodies (Harris, 2016).

Feminist communication scholars are increasingly recognizing these approaches and calling forth the need for such understandings (e.g., Ashcraft & Harris, 2014; 2016).

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Staking out new terminology is not without its challenges. ‘Post’ in postconstructionism could be seen to represent a linear way of thinking, indicating an ‘after’ rather then the ways thoughts run in parallel. The ‘post’ in postconstructionism, Lykke (2010), argues refers to both transgressing and including similar to the ways poststructuralism is seen to be both transgressing and including structuralism. While some may argue that feminist ‘new materialism’ may be the more common label for some of these perspectives, this naming is similarly if not more so problematic, being conflated and confused with historical materialist feminists (e.g., Marxist feminism), whose perspectives are significantly different than those of new materialists (Lykke, 2010).
Ashcraft and Harris (2014) argue that posthumanist accounts, such as those by Barad (2003, 2007), in particular are in line with communication scholars’ interest in the ways the social and material interrelate (e.g., Ashcraft et al., 2009). In fact, Harris (2016) argues that while feminist new materialisms have primarily circulated outside of communication, the dilemmas these approaches introduce are not new to feminist communication theorizing. By introducing Lykke’s (2010) umbrella term of feminist postconstructionism, I aim to tie together this emerging body of work within and beyond feminist communication scholarship.

More specifically, feminist theorist Karen Barad’s (2003, 2007) work is particularly relevant for examining the interrelation of the social and material in the constitution of space, providing what Ewalt (2016) calls an “intensification” of the spatial literature (p. 138). Specifically, Barad’s (2003, 2007) concept of agential realism transgresses binaries of materiality/discourse as well as human/nonhuman and nature/culture (Lykke, 2010). Barad (2003) argues that material and discourse intra-act, terminology borrowed from physics, in an iterative process of becoming (rather than interact which would signify independent entities). Intra-action suggests a relational orientation that recognizes the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007, p. 33). In describing this relationship, Barad (2003) states:

Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. But nor are they reducible to one another. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained
in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. (p. 822)

Through this understanding agency then is recognized as “an enactment, not something someone or something has” (Barad, 2003, p. 826-827). Humans and nonhuman actants then become part of a network of intra-acting. Communication, in line with Barad (2003), is “not about wielding symbols toward material effects. It is, rather, the agentic process through which matter and discourse intertwine and become felt and known.

Communication is how discursive-material permutations become ‘real-ized’” (Aschraft & Harris, 2014, p. 138).

Organizational communication scholars have already drawn on Barad’s work to describe the messy entanglement and mutual constitution of the social and material (e.g., sociomateriality; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). However, what may be disappeared in these accounts is what is significant about Barad’s feminist theorizing – it is through dynamic intra-action that power relations materialize and become reconfigured and that responsibility becomes distributed. Intra-actions both participate in the constitution of power as well as open up possibilities (Barad, 2007). As Barad (2010) states, “‘only in this ongoing responsibility of the entangled other, without dismissal (without “enough already!”), is there the possibility of justice-to-come. Entanglements are not intertwinings of separate entities, but rather irreducible relations of responsibility” (p. 264). Such entanglements then produce “an ethical obligation intra-act responsibly in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Barad, 2007, p. 178).

With regards to space, intra-action provides a means to understand the ways in which space is constituted. Barad (2007), rejecting the idea of space as a container,
argues that “spatiality is intra-actively produced. It is an ongoing process of the material (re)configurings of boundaries – an iterative (re)structuring of spatial relations” (p. 181). Material-discursive practices involve the making and remaking of boundaries and the constituting of exclusions that make space intelligible.

**Conceptualizing Digital Space**

Scholarly literature on space has assumed space to be a physical and geographical location (e.g., a physical office, factory workroom, copy room). As a result, little attention has been paid to digital space as a site for both organizations and organizing (Wilhoit, 2016). Yet, since its inception, the Internet has been constituted in and by spatial terms such as the “information superhighway,” “virtual communities,” “visiting websites,” and “cyberspace” (Graham, 1998; Light, 1995). The use of these terms often goes uninterrogated. The term “cyberspace” was coined by William Gibson, popularized in his 1984 science fiction novel *Neuromancer*, and then adopted in scholarly and popular culture writing about the Internet. Gibson described “cyberspace” as “a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation…a graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system” (p. 51). Gibson’s depictions in his novel contributed to understandings of cyberspace as a virtual “frontier.” As Flanagan (2000) describes, “Like images of the American West, cyberspace is imaged as wild, untamed, virgin, needing mastery and a manifest destiny to guide it” (p. 77). It suggests a vast territory yet to be explored and that exploration as a (hetero)masculine endeavor.

Starting with these roots, scholars have utilized multiple conceptualizations of the Internet’s digital space, many drawing on traditional understandings of physical space.
These include digital space as Cartesian space, as mind-space, as experiential place, as discursive space, and as a material-discursive construction, the latter of which this study adopts.

**Cartesian space**

Early theorists of cyberspace followed formal Cartesian definitions of space as an empty void or container to be filled up with bodies, objects, and interactions (Cohen, 2007). Such conceptualizations draw on abstract mathematical understandings of space as a matter of XY coordinates. Digital space from this vantage point is a bounded, mappable virtual arena that is knowable. While those who study both space and digital space in the humanities and social sciences have for the most part moved beyond these conceptualizations, they are still “extremely resilient” (Graham, 1998, p. 181).

**Mind-space**

Another common conceptualization of digital space has been as an immaterial, disembodied, and dislocated space established for the mind. This is set up in contrast with physical, embodied space (de Souza e Silva, 2003). Digital space then becomes “an alternative place for our minds to inhabit and a space in which one could play with different selves” (de Souza e Silva, 2003, p. 210). The ‘virtuality’ of digital space becomes a signifier for a lack or absence of embodied ‘reality’ (Van Doorn, 2011). This view is one perpetuated in popular culture depictions particularly in science fiction literature, including in Gibson’s *Neuromancer* where cyberspace “can be inhabited by downloading one’s mind into an information space” (de Souza e Silva, 2003, p. 210).
From this perspective, digital spaces are *conceptual* spaces that can “only be explored by the mind, yet metaphorically relate to bodily experience” (Dodge & Kitchin, 2000, p. 30).

**Experiential place**

Rather than perceiving space as empty, others view cyberspace as experientially comprehended. This view argues instead for a lived cyber *place* that emerges through presence and practice (Cohen, 2007). Subjects can gain a psychological “sense of place” through their ongoing interactions as well as technological properties that indicate ‘presence’ of the self and others (Porter, 2004). This view is more fluid and in line with a distinction between space/place previously discussed, which recognizes place as lived space that carries meaning and history. What “counts” as a place can then differ by person (Cohen, 2007).

**Discursive space**

Some scholars have positioned the Internet as an explicitly discursive space, constituted by the presence and distribution of a variety of voices and texts (Mitra & Schwartz, 2001; Mitra, 2005). While acknowledging the different locations of individuals’ voices offline, the view of the Internet as a discursive space holds that without these voices “we would be left with a set of interconnected lifeless computers” (Mitra, 2005, p. 379). The combination of voices functions to create or reclaim discursive space within the virtual public sphere, particularly for marginalized groups (Mitra, 2005).
**Material-discursive construction**

Following from definitions offered at the beginning of this section, this study adopts a view of digital space as a material-discursive construction (Barad, 2007; Fayard, 2012; Lefebvre; 1991; Massey, 1994, 2005; Shome, 2003; Wilhoit, 2016). This view recognizes digital space not as a static container but rather a product that is actively and constantly changing through social and material intra-action (Barad, 2007; Massey, 2005). Emerging then is a view of digital space, similar to physical space, being constituted in the intra-actions between the technical and material features of the technology and the socio-cultural structure, relationships, and everyday lives of those who occupy the space (Sassen, 2002). Rather than being immaterial, digital space instead is “deeply material,” reliant on technological infrastructure, digital objects, and offline contexts, bodies, and social relations (Fayard, 2012, p. 178; Orlikowski, 2007). Scholars have also noted that while users may not be physically present in digital spaces their embodied presence does take on a form of digital materiality, through text and images (Van Doorn, 2011).

**Digital Space in Relation to Physical Space**

Digital space can hardly be defined without a comparison to physical space. It is defined *relationally*, and, therefore, to understand different approaches to digital space it is equally important to understand the various conceptualizations of its relationship to physical space. This relationship has been the subject of much debate among scholars. Articulations of the relationship generally fall into two broad camps – separatist or relational approaches (Table 1). It is important to note that scholars may not fall neatly
into one category, as discourses from each of these categories can permeate the others and scholars might use similar terms in different ways. For example, the idea that people can ‘transcend’ physical limitations is seen in writing across the different approaches. Understanding the differences between these approaches is important as the way the relationship between digital and physical space is conceptualized has implications for the possibilities of organizing for social change, including transnational organizing.

**Separatist approaches**

The first set of approaches views cyberspace as separate and distinct from physical space (Cohen, 2007; Graham, 1998). Following Modernist assumptions, these approaches set up essentialist and dualistic categories of physical/digital and real/virtual. However, the nature of digital space varies from utopian to more dystopian views.

**Digital space as transcendent**

In the first view, digital space provides a means to transcend the confines of physical space, including the body and of geographic distance. Under this utopian view, Van Doorn (2011) highlights how the ideal of cyberspace as a “disembodied refuge” follows a long history of desires to “transcend the earthly trappings of the physical world” (p. 544). The Internet is thought to facilitate this transcendence by allowing for disembodied interaction and the creation of new identities. Such a space was considered to hold potential as a paragon for free speech and egalitarian community, where ideas would be judged on their merit rather than on the appearance or social identity of the author (Kitchin, 1998). Additionally, individuals are thought to be able to interact “freely” across geographic distances and borders that previously would have
been insurmountable (Youngs, 2004). Scholars who adopt these perspectives, which Cohen (2007) refers to as “exceptionalist” theories, posit that cyberspace then is “more free” than physical space (p. 211).

Table 1: Conceptualizing Digital Space and Physical Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separatist</td>
<td>Transcendent</td>
<td>Digital space allows for transcending the confines of physical space.</td>
<td>Digital space is freer and allows for overcoming offline restrictions on organizing and free expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital space is a replacement or substitute for physical space.</td>
<td>Digital spaces are new forms of public space like their offline counterparts that can be sites for political mobilization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital space is a simulation or imitation of physical space.</td>
<td>Actions in digital space are superficial and detract from real world participation (e.g., slacktivism).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Digital space is embedded in the material and social relations along with physical space.</td>
<td>Digital space has both potentials and limitations for organizing and activism based on its embeddedness in physical spaces, technological features, and social structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networked</td>
<td></td>
<td>The digital is part of a larger networked space of both physical and digital spaces.</td>
<td>Networked spaces follow the flows of information, considering the interlinkages that allow for movement formation and bypassing systems of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td></td>
<td>The digital and physical intermingle as a hybrid space.</td>
<td>Hybrid spaces blur the boundaries between the physical and digital, creating openings for new forms and configurations of activism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Digital space as substitute*

Secondly, digital space is seen as a substitute or replacement for physical space (Graham, 1998). While this view still maintains the separation between physical/digital, it asserts that cyberspaces are similar to or the same as physical spaces (Cohen, 2007). Digital spaces then are just “direct transpositions” of offline spaces like the marketplace, library, or public square and should be treated as such (Cohen, 2007, p. 219). Substitution perspectives also draw on assumptions that eventually immersive, 3D virtual environments will in fact substitute for their offline equivalents (Graham, 1998).

*Digital space as imitation*

A third separatist view positions digital spaces as simulations or imitations of physical spaces. Under this view, online spaces are seen as attempts to copy ‘real-life’ processes and practices. These imitations may be seen as poor or cheap substitutes for their offline counterparts (e.g., Turkle, 2011). For example, adherents may see relationships or communities formed online as less authentic or less ‘real’ than their offline models (Calhoun, 1998; Turkle, 2011).

*Relational approaches*

These separatist approaches, however, ignore the situated experiences of cyberspace users who simultaneously occupy both digital and physical spaces (Sassen, 2002; Crampton, 2003; Kitchin, 1998). A second set of approaches recognizes this simultaneity and offers different explanations of the ways that digital and physical spaces interrelate. These relational approaches offer more complex and nuanced understandings
of the relationship between digital and physical spaces and the ways they interact and
ones that are beneficial to understanding the ways in which these spaces are constructed
and experienced.

**Digital space as embedded**

A first relational perspective challenges the either/or conceptualizations of the
separatist positions by arguing that the digital is *embedded* in both technological, material
features (e.g., software and hardware) and in the socio-cultural structures, power
relations, and place-based locations within which people live (Sassen, 2002, 2006).
Digital space then is not *purely* digital but is shaped by material and social contexts,
which can enable and constrain its uses (Sassen, 2002). This embeddedness is not
unidirectional. As Sassen (2006) notes, the digital can “act back” on the social, creating
new openings and possibilities (p. 344). However, the digital can also reproduce existing
social inequalities. In embedded approaches, the digital and physical are imbricated. The
idea of imbrication implies that the digital and nondigital are *distinct* elements that
overlap and operate interdependently, like interlocking tiles on a roof (Leonardi, 2011;
Sassen, 2006; Taylor, 2001). The parts interact but are irreducible (Sassen, 2006). This
metaphor is purposefully distinct from hybrid approaches where the two are considered
indistinguishable.

**Digital space as networked**

A second relational approach views digital space as part of a larger *networked*
space. Cohen (2007) argues that cyberspace is “most usefully understood as connected to
and subsumed within an emerging, networked space that is inhabited by real, embodied
users and that is apprehended through experience” (p. 255). Drawing on Castells’ (1996) ideas about a “space of flows,” this approach to digital space recognizes the various interconnections between the digital and the physical within a larger networked space (Cohen, 2007; Mynatt, O’Day, Adler, & Ito, 1998). Networked space then departs from the embedded perspective by its broader focus on the larger system or network of which digital spaces/places are only a part. Networked space is shaped by the use of information and communication technologies to control information flows across spaces (Cohen, 2007). This view recognizes there is not one, unified “cyberspace” but many heterogeneous networks of humans and technologies across spaces (Dodge & Kitchin, 2000; Graham, 1998).

Mitra and Schwartz (2001) propose “cybernetic space” to describe the relationship. Cybernetic space is defined as “a synthetic space that is produced at the intersection of the real and virtual spaces” (Mitra, 2006, p. 261; Mitra & Schwartz, 2001). Drawing on the idea of “cybernetics” as the study of whole systems, such a usage recognizes the need to understand the whole system – both the “virtual” online spaces and the “real” physical spaces from which the virtual is accessed – and how the combined space functions.

**Digital space as hybrid**

Other scholars argue that digital space is actually a *hybrid* space, which merges both the physical and digital (de Souza e Silva, 2003; Ward, 1999). Ward (1999) argued that the physical and digital are increasingly difficult to distinguish. This is what de Souza e Silva (2006) defines as the emergence of hybrid space – the loss of the ability to distinguish or define the boundaries between the physical and digital. Fayard (2012)
argues that the intermingling of the virtual and physical can make such spaces difficult to study in practice.

The forms hybridity takes differ among scholars. For instance, de Souza e Silva (2003) distinguishes between virtual reality, which involves moving within a computer-generated world while remaining fixed in a physical space, and hybrid spaces, which are enabled through mobile technologies that produce nomadic users who blur the lines between digital and physical space. Harrison and Dourish (1996) offer a more limited view of hybrid spaces as virtual collaboration environments that allow for projections of the physical through the virtual, using examples of long-term audio and video connections between offices. Fayard (2012) similarly examined an interactive space that combined both physical and digital/virtual spaces. Others recognize any digital space that involves virtual interactions between individuals who are located across a variety of physical spaces as hybrids (Broadfoot, Munshi, & Nelson-Marsh, 2010; Ward, 1999; Van Doorn, 2011).

**Understanding the Interrelations of Digital and Physical Space**

The move from separatist to relational approaches to understanding the relationship between digital and physical space is significant as it calls attention to the ways that these spaces do not exist in isolation but interrelate to shape individual’s experiences of those spaces. Digital space then cannot be defined without attention to its relationship to physical space. Such conceptualizations present an opportunity to explore the ways digital space is constructed that more fully account for its embeddedness with and within physical space. Many existing descriptions of the two as embedded lack empirical investigation to understand the specific ways the two interrelate in the lived
experiences of embodied subjects who interact and collectively organize within a particular (digital) space/place. This project provides an opportunity to identify the micro communicative practices and/or tensions in the interplay between digital and physical in the construction of digital space.

While acknowledging the push toward hybrid spaces and of seeing physical and digital spaces as entangled, much of this work still contains ontological slippages that mark the physical and digital as distinct (though interrelated) entities (e.g., de Souza e Silva, 2003, 2006). This can also be seen in work that while recognizing the interconnections seeks to map the online and then the offline, separately categorizing actions in each (e.g., Lim, 2014). The use of terms “digital space” or “cyberspace” inherently negates the hybrid version by constituting a distinct spatial configuration. Thus, I argue that these efforts are still an attempt to account for the embeddedness or networked nature of digital and physical space along with the fact that people are multi-located (Youngs, 2004). Subjects act within and across multiple spaces often simultaneously, especially with the development of mobile technologies and the availability of high-speed WIFI connections. This multi-locatedness does not yet necessarily constitute hybridity but does create theoretically and practically important spatial configurations that merit further exploration.

**Implications of Digital Space for Organizing for Social Change**

The ways that digital and physical interrelate have implications for organizing for social change, and in particular for transnational feminist organizing. Some of the optimism about digital spaces’ potential for activism and organizing draws on remnants of the transcendent view. For this perspective, digital spaces are *more free*, allowing
opportunities for expressing dissent and for challenging and resisting forms of oppression (Daniels, 2009; Plant, 1997). This view also points out the restrictions on organizing in offline spaces, such as a lack of a central meeting location or geographic or cultural isolation that can be transcended through meeting in digital spaces (Light, 1995; Mitra, 2005). For example, Light (1995) argued that digital space “compensates for challenges to women’s organizing in the built environment” (p. 138). Those who see online spaces as a substitute for the offline draw comparisons to public leisure spaces (e.g., public parks, squares) as sites for political mobilization. Arora (2013) argued that Twitter and Facebook can be seen as new forms of public leisure space that, like their offline counterparts, were designed to control but also have been sites for the infusion of democratic principles. Imitation perspectives are more likely to question the legitimacy of actions in digital space. The term “slacktivism” has been adopted to indicate that the activism engaged in online is superficial (Gladwell, 2010). Online activism, from this view, carries negative implications for offline public participation and is not ‘real’ activism (Gladwell, 2010; Putnam, 2000).

Relational perspectives have the potential to provide more nuanced accounts of digital space and its potentials for participation and organizing for social change. The embedded approach adopted in this study allows for moving beyond utopian or dystopian understandings. For example, Sassen (2002) argues that, “Even as it reproduces masculine cultures and hierarchies of power, electronic space also enables women to engage in new forms of contestation and in proactive endeavors in multiple different realms, from political to economic” particularly transnationally (p. 368). Such a view acknowledges both the allowances of the technology itself as well as the socio-cultural
relations that shape interactions in digital space in practice. This view recognizes that offline power relations including issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation are not necessarily overcome online but shape experiences in a variety of ways. Even though NGOs and activist organizations, particularly across borders, are able to interact and organize in digital space, this does not erase the inequalities in their offline settings. Thus, it is important to understand the ways that space and power are interlinked.

**Space and Power**

By drawing attention to the ongoing production of space in the interactions of the social and material, critical and feminist geographers as well as feminist and postcolonial communication scholars have recognized that society is also spatially constructed, having political implications (Massey, 1994; Shome, 2003). In doing so, they recognize the inherent connection between space and power (Foucault, 1980). Towns (2016) argues that integrating feminist geography and communication studies can allow for a “materialization of our analyses of gender, race and space” (p. 122). This section will discuss the ways power relations are spatially produced with particular attention to the ways space is gendered. It will then discuss ways in which marginalized groups have sought to create counter-spaces, also referred to as “safe spaces,” and outline the potentials for the creation of “safe” digital spaces/places.

**Spatial Control**

Space is implicated in the production of cultural power, particularly in the ways that certain bodies are included, excluded, and/or able to move between and within
spaces (Shome, 2003). Lefebvre (1991) argued that space is “a tool of thought and of action” but also is a means of control and domination (p. 26). Spatial control enforced symbolically or by threat of violence has historically been an important and preeminent form of social control, seen explicitly in efforts to exert control over space and its resources (e.g., colonialism), to restrict access to it (e.g., border patrols), or to confine bodies to particular spaces (e.g., internment camps and segregation). Spaces then become imbued with symbolic meaning in ways that carry political consequences. In particular, the ways that gender and sexuality, as well as race, class, and nation, are spatially controlled become crucial means of subordination (Massey, 1994). Critical and feminist theories then provide a means to interrogate the ways power relations as well as resistance are spatially produced and experienced.

Space is gendered in a variety of ways, which can differ culturally and across time. A crucial distinction in the gendering of space has historically been the dichotomy between the public and private, with the public identified as a masculine domain and the private as feminine. The primary means by which space is gendered is through attempts to confine feminine-identified bodies to particular spaces, especially the home (Massey, 1994). Additionally, feminine bodies are restricted in their mobility between and among spaces, particularly masculine-identified public spaces such as work, the streets, urban centers, and other spaces outside the home. Gendered spatial control operates “in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply ‘out of place’” (Massey, 1994, p. 148). Massey (1994) argues that women’s mobility – and specifically “going out” to work – has posed a threat to the patriarchal order (p. 11). The gendering of space shapes the ways spaces are used and negotiated.
Blackwood’s (2010) ethnographic work on tombois\(^{10}\) and girlfriends in Indonesia illustrates the ways that tombois’ masculine gender performances allow them to move in predominately male spaces and grant them greater freedom of mobility than their feminine girlfriends. However, theirs is a “contingent masculinity,” which allows limited access to male spaces given their female bodies and positions them as vulnerable within certain spaces (Blackwood, 2010, p. 174).

The separation of the public and private is also tied to sexuality, with any implication of sex or sexuality relegated to private spaces (Myslik, 1996). Yet, the public sphere has also long been sexualized. Women who are present in public spaces, such as the street, have been read as prostitutes or as sexually available. Women’s visibility in and movement between rural/urban and local/global spaces also reproduces these assumptions of sexual availability. This can be seen in the ways Indian women working nights at global call centers are marked as sexually transgressive and therefore seen as having accepted the ‘risk’ of harassment and violence (Hegde, 2011). Through the repetition and regulation of allowable performances of gender and sexuality in public, these spaces in addition to being masculinized are also heterosexualized. Those who do not perform heteromasculinity are policed and regulated in these marked spaces (Corteen, 2002).

\(^{10}\) Tombois is a term adopted by masculine-performing female-bodied individuals who see themselves ‘like men’ in the parts of Indonesia within which Blackwood (2010) conducted her ethnographic work. Within feminist and queer scholarship, particular attention is paid to the local and global terms utilized by queer subjects. Throughout this section, I adopt the language of the scholars reviewed, who are most often using the terms that individuals use to self-identify. It should be noted that even when terms common to the United States and Europe (e.g., gay, lesbian, transgender) are adopted, they are often given local nuance. As Howe (2013) argues, these terms are “not necessarily monological. Nor are they equivalent in the global North and the global South” (p. 167). In this sense, it is important to recognize that just because the term lesbian, for example, has been appropriated within a particular context (as lesbi in Indonesia or as lesbiana in Nicaragua) the term may not carry all the same connotations.
As the gender and sexual ordering of space suggests, the social and material interact to mark certain spaces as “safe” and others as “unsafe,” particularly for marginalized groups. Conceptions of safety depend on an underlying potential for violence (Roestone Collective, 2014). “Safety” then is intimately connected to fears of prejudicial treatment as well as aggression and physical harm. Rose (1993) describes this fear as “a strong sense of space as oppressive, for example, from being scared walking at night in the city in which I live” (p. 143). Fear serves as a “powerful social imaginary” to restrict mobility as well as the occupation of certain spaces (Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 4). It is important to note that spaces that are deemed “safe” are not necessarily safe for all bodies. Safety is constituted differently based on gender, race, class, age, sexuality, ability and nation. This is illustrated in the ways certain marked bodies are surveilled and disciplined, as Towns (2016) notes that “the murder of Black women by police – disproportionately while driving – speaks to a long-held White mastery over mobility maintained by controlling the movements of people of color of all genders, sexualities, and classes” (p. 123).

For differently positioned women (or those bodies gendered feminine), this underlying threat has been associated with a sense of physical vulnerability to masculine violence, particularly of rape and sexual assault and of being unable to physically defend oneself. This sense is communicatively (re)produced through harassment and comments like “I can’t believe your husband let you out” that suggest women are not only unwelcome in public spaces but unsafe. These ideas can lead to victim blaming when women who do encounter violence in public spaces are “held responsible for being in public spaces socially deemed unsafe” (Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 5). As Valentine
(1989) notes, women’s fear of masculine violence helps explain the perceptions and use of public space as a masculine domain. Valentine (1989) argues that women experience a “geography of fear,” informed by mental maps of places to fear assault that are learned through secondary information or past experience. These “safety maps” are constantly changing. Women are taught to perceive more danger from strange men in public spaces despite the higher likelihood that they would be unsafe in their own homes or with men they know (Valentine, 1989). The positioning of public spaces as unsafe and private spaces, considered the feminine domain, as safe neglects the ways that the home is not necessarily safe for women, especially given potentials for domestic violence (Valentine, 1989). Notions of “safety” and “danger” are then constantly socially constructed and context dependent. Desires for “safe” space then require an interrogation of who or what constitutes a threat, in what ways, and for whom.

‘Safe’ Counter-space

Tied to shifting constructions of “safety,” the notion of safe space has sociohistorical roots in U.S. activist movements as well as related theoretical explications. Historically, marginalized groups have frequently sought to create or claim alternative or counter-spaces of their own to contest their exclusions (Fraser, 1992). The term “safe space” emerged and was mobilized in the U.S. women’s and lesbian and gay activist movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Kenney, 2001). Safe space represents a site in which marginalized individuals can speak and take action without harassment or threat of violence. Additionally, as Kenney (2001) argues, safe space “implies a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance”
Safe space then has political importance as a space from which to mobilize for social change.

The Roestone Collective (2014) argues that creating safe space is both reactive and productive work. It responds to heteropatriarchal structures and threats of violence and attempts to carve out space for community. The U.S. women’s movement has been marked by a variety of “women-only” spaces including bookshops, art centers, bars, camps, and farms, among others (McDowell, 1996). “Queer spaces,” or spaces that have come to be recognized as gay spaces such as neighborhoods or bars, are another example. These spaces create at least the perception of safe space with like others (Myslik, 1996). For example, the lesbian spatial strategy of separatism was seen as a way to form a safe and “ideal” society without the influence of men (Valentine, 1997). Safe spaces are contextual and embedded in particular places. In this way safe spaces are tied up in socially and materially produced understandings of “safety” (Roestone Collective, 2014).

Safe space on a theoretical level is tied to the construction of “counter-spaces” or “counterpublics.” Fraser (1992) proposed the concept of “subaltern counterpublics” to account for the ways that traditional notions of Habermas’ (1991; Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974) public sphere depended on the exclusion of women and other marginalized individuals. Fraser (1992) defines these counterpublics as “discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” without interference from the dominant group (p. 123). Such counterpublics serve dual functions as spaces to regroup but also as grounds for resistance directed externally (Fraser, 1992). Similarly, Chicana feminists draw on concepts of “homeland,”
recognizing the necessity of developing spaces that cultivate a sense of belonging and create “sisterhood among women that restores a feeling of family” while reflecting the diversity and multiplicity of Chicana feminists (Flores, 1996, p. 150). Black feminist scholars have also proposed a related construction of “homeplace” and other “safe” counter-spaces as sites of care and healing but also as sites for resistance and struggle (hooks, 1990). Collins (2000) argued that “safe” counter-spaces have enabled Black women in the United States to discuss their concerns without surveillance and engage in self-definition toward the development of a political standpoint (Collins, 2000). Such spaces are then argued to have emancipatory potential (Collins, 2000; Fraser, 1992; hooks, 1990; Shome, 2003).

Based on the existing literature, safe space has three primary purposes. First, safe space is seen to provide an emotional or psychological refuge from external threats without surveillance by the dominant groups (Collins, 2000; Kenney, 2001; Roestone Collective, 2014; Rose, 1993). Rose (1993) describes this as a “breathing space to reflect, meditate, gain strength and recover a sense of identity” (p. 153). For example, for gay men in Washington, D.C., being in the queer space of the Dupont Circle neighborhood allowed for both a sense of safety and a feeling of being “at home” (Myslik, 1996, p. 168). This “safe” space then provides an opportunity for self-reflection and potential empowerment (Dave, 2010; Howe, 2013). In Howe’s (2013) ethnographic work in Nicaragua, activist-led lesbiana discussion groups saw their purpose as engaging participants in self-reflection in a “safe communicative space” that allowed for developing one’s own sexuality (p. 69). Similarly, Blackwood (2010) argued that female homosocial spaces could provide “safe space” for same-sex relationships in Indonesia,
despite the dearth of lesbi-only spaces. For example, the edges of the household where women are able to interact relatively freely and are not under surveillance or suspicion enabled women’s participation in same-sex relationships and created a safe space (Blackwood, 2010). These spaces can also provide an opportunity to regain strength among people with shared identities and common understandings. hooks (1990) argued that safe spaces were the place where black people in the United States could “affirm one another and by so doing heal many wounds inflicted by racial domination” (p. 384).

A second purpose of safe space is the cultivation of collective identity and solidarity (Howe, 2013; Stephan, 2013; Valentine, 1997). The shared understanding within safe spaces provides for the formation of a “very strong sense of community spirit” (Myslik, 1996, p. 165). Concepts of safe space and community are intimately linked, speaking to the sense of belonging and types of relationships important to the development of “safe space.” The community formed through Sakhi, a lesbian network in India, provided a space in which lesbian-identified women could solidify their sense of community and develop a shared identity (Dave, 2010). The community, as it becomes defined, allows for the mobilization of this collective identity. In Valentine’s (1997) research on Lesbian Lands, the safe space of the commune provided a means to cultivate a shared lesbian feminist identity. Gaining control of a space of their own through Lesbian communes in the United States was seen to give women the “freedom to articulate a lesbian feminist identity, to create new ways of living and to work out new ways of relating to the environment” (Valentine, 1997, p. 111).

A third purpose of safe space is as a site of organizing and resistance (Fraser, 1992; Rose, 1993). Myslik (1996) describes queer space as “a site of cultural resistance
where one can overcome, though never ignore, the fear of heterosexism and homophobia” (p. 167). hooks (1990) similarly argues that safe spaces became sites for resistance and struggle for Black women. These safe spaces then provided grounds from which to mobilize and leverage their collective political identities and counter discourses. Collins (2000) argues that safe spaces have been a “mechanism among many designed to foster Black women’s empowerment and enhance our ability to participate in social justice projects” (p 110). “Safe” counter-spaces have allowed women to formulate and then spread terminology that named and described their experiences, such as sexual harassment and marital or date rape (Fraser, 1992). This purpose is perhaps the most contested, with some arguing that safe spaces that allow groups to become too enclaved may in fact become depoliticized over time (Fraser, 1992; Roestone Collective, 2014).

Creating ‘Safe’ Space Online

Activists and scholars have increasingly looked to the Internet as a potential site for the creation and cultivation of “safe spaces” for marginalized groups, as well as for activism and organizing more broadly (Daniels, 2009; Sassen, 2002; Sutton & Pullock, 2000; Youngs, 2004). The Internet then is conceptualized as more than a tool but also a “place to resist” (Daniels, 2009, p. 108). In allowing individuals to publish and to interact with others across geographic boundaries at a reduced cost, the digital space created through the Internet is thought to help the marginalized surpass traditional power structures and gain a voice of their own.

Scholars have made several broad claims that are connected to why the Internet may provide a “safe space.” First, scholars have argued that the Internet affords greater freedom of expression, allowing marginalized groups the opportunity to speak in ways
they may not be able to offline without the same fears of repercussions. Mitra (2005) argues that Indian immigrants were able to discuss issues and circulate alternative discourses within a website dedicated to that purpose that would not be possible in other spaces. The Internet has the potential as a space to share experiences and explore individual identity. Bryson (2004) discusses how GLBT women used the Internet as a space to both experience and experiment with their gender and sexual identities and performances.

Second, the Internet grants geographic freedom, allowing individuals to interact across borders at a lower cost (Mitra, 2005; Stephan, 2013; Youngs, 2004). Previously, safe space was commonly associated with being in close geographic proximity with people with shared identities who feel similarly threatened (Mitra, 2005). This posed a challenge to those who did not have access to similar others. The Internet allows for those who may not have the resources to travel to a particular offline space or who are geographically dispersed to come together. Wajcman (2004) likened the effect to the impact of the car on women’s organizing: “Just as the car increased women’s mobility and capacity to participate in public space, so the new media have expanded women’s horizons and capacity to connect with networks and campaigns to improve their conditions” (p. 120).

Third, some have argued that the Internet can provide a safe space to escape and resist gender oppression in women’s offline, everyday lives (Nouraie-Simone, 2014). Nouraie-Simone (2014) argues that the Internet is a “liberating territory of one’s own,” providing the Muslim women she engaged a place to resist and break from restrictions on the use of public offline space (p. 62). Lastly, some have argued that the Internet as a
digital realm affords safety from the fear of direct physical violence (Stephan, 2013; Mitra, 2005).

While the Internet broadly has been constructed by some as a “safe space,” examples of so-called “safe spaces” for women online reflect either (1) attempts to carve out “safe” space for particular marginalized groups within existing online communities or (2) the creation of their own spaces and communities. These spaces have various inclusions and exclusions ranging from “women-only” spaces to those that are targeted at specific groups of women but may not exclude allies. “Women-only” spaces have been controversial on the Internet, given expectations that the Internet is an “open” and “free” space (Shade, 2002). Attempts to construct boundaries for spaces of “their own” then have not always been met positively.

11 Online or virtual communities have broad and wide-ranging definitions and have been frequently contested. The often uncritical or “overly excited” assigning of “community” to any online group has been a source of concern for scholars, demonstrating its vague and evolving conceptualizations (Watson, 1997, p. 103). Some have reported being intentionally vague (Baym, 2007) or considering moving to other seemingly less controversial terms such as “social cyberspace” (Preece, 2001). Yet, others have argued that moving away from “community” even online can prove problematic, representing a shift to favoring more individualistic networks and relationships (e.g., “networked individualism,” Wellman, 2002) (Yuan, 2012). What then distinguishes an online platform from a virtual community? Technology on its own and the ability to communicate through it does not guarantee the formation of an online community. Fernback (1999) argues that communities are constantly changing. They represent a process rather than a thing (Fernback, 1999). Watson (1997) argues that community “depends not only upon communication and shared interests, but also upon ‘communion’” (p. 104). This represents an affective component of community. Preece (2001) adopts a more space-based definition, defining an online community as “any virtual social space where people come together to get and give information or support, to learn, or to find company” (p. 348). More prescriptive approaches have also attempted to identify indicators or components that comprise an online community. Preece (2001) argues that online communities are distinguished by their sociability, including the purpose, people and policies, and usability, including social interaction support, design, navigation and access. For the sake of this paper, an online community is seen then as a dynamic process involving interrelations among (1) (relatively regular) members with particular cultural identities and contexts who share common interests or goals as well as an affective sense of belonging and (2) virtual space(s) within which they communicate.

12 Given the range of online spaces for marginalized groups, this paper will more narrowly focus on online “safe spaces” that are for variously positioned groups of “women.” This is not without acknowledging that “women” can be a problematic term given its historically problematic usage that has essentialized “women’s” experiences. The groups discussed herein adopt the term “women” in describing their populations and conceptualize who is included within that term in various ways both formally and informally, as will be discussed later in this chapter.
For one, several studies have highlighted women’s attempts to carve out space within larger online communities. One of the earliest examples of women carving out space within a larger, male-dominated community was WOW (Women on WELL), a forum created for women who subscribed to the WELL (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link) (Shade, 2002). The WELL is one of the earliest and most-oft cited online communities (e.g., Rheingold, 2000). The WOW forum was (and is) exclusive to women only and created stringent rules around confidentiality and privacy for its internal workings and conversations (Shade, 2002). Moderators would go so far as to call subscribers in some instances to assess whether or not the voice “sounded” female (Shade, 2002). A more recent example can be found on Reddit.com in a subreddit called TwoXChromosomes (or 2X), which refers to itself as a “subreddit for women to share information and experiences with other like-minded women” (Workman & Coleman, 2014, p. 3). Community members described it as a “supportive, friendly, welcoming, safe place” unlike the rest of Reddit, where some participants mentioned encountering problematic attitudes toward women (Workman & Coleman, 2014, p. 12).

Within the existing literature, the more common examples are instances of separate women-only or women-centered spaces online. Listervs and forums were some of the earliest cases. A primary example is Systers, a mailing list for women who are computer professionals, academics, or students (Shade, 2002). The founder of the list, Anita Borg, was routinely criticized for not opening up the discussions to men (Shade, 2002). She argued that different communication styles between men and women “prohibits an egalitarian nature of discussion,” and that, as a (geographically dispersed) minority group, women in computer science did not often have an opportunity to meet or
engage in mentoring (Borg, 1993, as cited in Shade, 1993). She also argued, “the likelihood that an underpowered minority is keeping otherwise inaccessible information from the large empowered majority...seems small indeed” (Borg, 1993, as cited in Shade, 1993). These forums have continued to be popular “women-only” spaces along with websites designed for specific online communities. These sites are generally aimed at particular groups, including women with disabilities like GimpGirl (Cole et al., 2011), women within a particular region like the South Asian Women’s Network (SAWnet, Gajjala, 2002), female immigrants like MissyUSA for Korean women living in the United States and Canada (Lee, 2013), mothers like Feminist Mothers (Koerber, 2001), or lesbian or queer women like Queer Sisters (Nip, 2004). These groups may also serve different purposes. While some groups are meant to provide social support (e.g., communities of women with breast cancer; Orgad, 2005), other women-centered groups have used online spaces to organize to effect change in offline social structures (e.g., transnational feminist organizing; Linabary, 2015; Stephan, 2013).

Taken collectively, the women-only or women-centered communities identified suggest the possibility of digital “safe” space. Such spaces hold potential for marginalized groups to seek refuge, develop solidarity and collectively organize. Yet, few have fully problematized the perceived or actual safety of those spaces, often leaving it assumed.

**Transnational Safe Space as ‘Paradoxical’**

Despite what safe spaces make possible, their existence is also fraught. Safe spaces can represent what Rose (1993) calls “paradoxical space,” a concept that recognizes the ways that constructing such spaces is a tension-filled process requiring
constant negotiation. Additionally, spaces that include individuals from varied social locations, like those where transnational feminist organizing is taking place, can produce additional tensions as members attempt to build solidarity across lines of difference. The following sections will outline a tension-centered approach to organizing, a lens that can aid in understanding the ways that paradoxes and dialectical tensions can be spatially experienced; describe tensions that have been identified in feminist organizing, including transnational feminist organizing; and then discuss the tensions and paradoxes of ‘safe’ space and digital ‘safe’ space.

A Tension-Centered Approach

Organizations are inherently sites of conflict and struggle (Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004). As a result, tensions – including paradox, dialectics, and irony – are considered foundational conditions of organizational life (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). The recognition that contradictions and tensions underlie organizational processes uproots traditional assumptions that organizations are rational enterprises (Tracy, 2004). Scholars have argued that tensions are normal and an “outgrowth of the complexity and ever-changing process of organizing” (Putnam, & Boys, 2006, p. 562). In particular, scholars argue that increasing globalization is likely to produce and expose more contradictions and tensions, requiring critical attention (Ballard-Reisch & Turner, 2017; Putnam et al., 2016). I follow Stohl and Cheney (2001) in defining tensions as a broad term involving a clash of ideas or actions and the resulting discomfort. Similarly, contradictions refer to “situations in which one idea, principle, or action is in direct opposition to another” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 354). Contradictions represent opposites that are mutually exclusive yet interdependent that that they cannot be defined without the other (Putnam et
al., 2016). Contradictions and tensions then are not inherently problematic but can be productive depending on how members and organizations construct and respond to them. As a result, scholars have increasingly adopted a “tension-centered approach” to organizational communication research. Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) argue that bringing tensions to the forefront “can lead to richer understandings of actual practice and thereby aid in theory building” (p. 82).

Not all contradictions and tensions are the same. While all refer to the experience and framing of oppositional forces, terms such as paradox and dialectics describe similar yet distinct communication phenomena. Paradoxes emerge when goals or actions are constructed as mutually exclusive. Paradoxes are seen to often bankrupt choice by presenting a binary “either/or” choice between two poles. Stohl and Cheney (2001) describe paradox as resulting “when, in the pursuit of a specific goal (or goals), one calls for or carries out actions that are in opposition to the very goal(s) one is trying to accomplish” (p. 354). A common form of paradox is a pragmatic paradox, which is interactional and context specific. For example, Stohl and Cheney (2001) highlight the paradox of structure, where employees might be told, “Be spontaneous, creative, vocal, and assertive in the ways we have planned” (p. 360). Putnam et al. (2016) argue that paradoxes represent contradictions that “persist over time, impose and reflect back on each other, and develop into seemingly irrational or absurd situations because their continuity creates situations in which options appear mutually exclusive, making choices among them difficult” (p. 72).

In contrast, dialectics allow for the simultaneous presence and unity of oppositional forces. Dialectics represent a “both/and” relationship that allows for
negotiating between the two competing poles. The concept of dialectics emerges from Baxter and colleagues (1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), who, drawing on Bakhtin (1981), recognized the oppositional tensions in human relationships. Definitions of dialectics are grounded in four key assumptions – contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. First, contradiction – what they refer to as the “dynamic interplay between unified oppositions” – is central to relationships and social systems and not inherently negative (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). This recognizes the ways that oppositions (or incompatible ideas, goals, or actions) are unified based on being interdependent parts of a larger system or on their tendency to presuppose the other (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, certainty becomes meaningful through our understanding of uncertainty (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Second, change recognizes the ongoing interplay of stability and flux within social systems. Third, praxis encompasses the idea that humans are both subjects and objects. People make their own agentic choices while also being shaped by their historical and social contexts that restrict and bound their action (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Rawlins, 1992). Lastly, totality demonstrates an assumption that phenomena can only be understood in relation to each other. In other words, it reflects the “constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal and social factors” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7). Dialectical theory, developed by Baxter and colleagues (1988, Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) focuses on personal relationships, but provides an important framework that also helps explain organizational interactions (Tracy, 2004). Dialectical tensions can be still at the interpersonal level as nurses experience a tension between closeness and distance in their interactions with patients (McGuire, Dougherty, & Atkinson, 2006) or at the level of the
organization as leaders navigate a dialectical tension between stability and change (Putnam & Boys, 2006).

In this study, I adopt what Putnam et al. (2016) refer to as a *constitutive approach* to the study of organizational contradictions and paradox. This “bottom-up” approach focuses on the process by which tensions, contradictions and paradox are communicatively produced. This approach involves five key dimensions, including that tensions (1) are made salient and enacted through discourse and interaction, (2) develop and transform over time, (3) emerge from particular socio-historical conditions, (4) are multiple and interrelated, and (5) involve different levels of consciousness by actors in responding to them (Putnam et al., 2016). This approach aids in understanding not just that tensions exist but how they are constructed and reconstructed over time. Looking at how tensions are constructed is significant in that tensions can open and close off possibilities for participation (Putnam et al., 2016).

Rather than focusing on resolving contradictions and tensions, Ashcraft and Trethewey (2004) argue that scholars instead should turn their attention to how members respond to, negotiate, and live within tensions. Responses to tension have fallen into three broader categories: either-or, both-and, and more-than approaches (Putnam et al., 2016). Either-or approaches treat the two poles of a contradiction as distinct and can involve defensive responses (e.g., withdrawal, repressing), selection or privileging of one pole over the other, or separation. Both-and responses recognize interdependence and may involve engaging in paradoxical thinking, alternating back and forth between poles, or focusing on balance or finding a middle ground. More-than approaches involve reframing or transcending the contradiction, engaging multiple voices in dialogue and reflexive
practice (Putnam et al., 2016). How members frame and respond to tension can have organizational and personal consequences including impacts on stress and satisfaction and ultimately withdrawal from the organization (Tracy, 2004). Some suggest more-than approaches, such as finding ways through dialogue and reflexivity to recognize tension and embrace both poles may have transformative potential (Putnam & Boys, 2006; Putnam et al., 2016)

**Tensions in Feminism and Feminist Organizing**

Tension is also foundational to feminist theorizing. Feminist scholarship has long involved interrogating and disrupting binaries and dualisms (e.g., masculine/feminine, mind/body, public/private, scholarship/activism), recognizing that the former has often been valued over the latter. Current feminist communication scholarship recognizes the productive possibilities of tension (Buzzanell, 2016). In fact, Harris (2016) argues that dilemma is the “defining feature” of feminist communication theory, proposing *feminist dilemmatic theorizing* as a means to recognize and prioritize contradiction and paradox for “avowedly political, pragmatic purposes” (p. 151). Falling within feminist postconstructionism, feminist dilemmatic theorizing calls for understanding communication’s possibility for action (e.g., agency) through the intra-action of ‘words’ and ‘worlds’ (Harris, 2016). Feminist dilemmatic theorizing involves an “active, intentional cuddling” of incommensurable ideas, including of modernism and postmodernism (Harris, 2016, p. 164). Feminist communication theory then embraces tension and contradiction (Buzzanell, 2011; Harris, 2016). Bringing feminist dilemmatic theorizing into conversation with the constitutive approach to the study of organizational
contradiction and paradox sparks recognition that the discursive and material are mutually implicated in the constitution of contradiction.

Feminist theorizing also contributes to studies of organizational tension and paradox by recognizing the ways paradox is not neutral. Instead, as Putnam and Ashcraft (2017) argue, “paradox actively participates in the relations of power that define organizational life” (p. 345). Paradox is a means by which power relations are (re)produced but also can create new possibilities for action. Within organizational communication, gender, organization and paradox are seen to be “mutually unfolding” through communication (Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017, p. 333).

While tensions are inherent in all organizing forms, scholars have particularly attended to those present in feminist and other participatory organizing (e.g., Ashcraft, 2001, 2006; Buzzanell, 2017; Buzzanell et al., 1997; Dempsey et al., 2011; D’Enbeau, 2011; D’Enbeau & Kunkel, 2013; D’Enbeau et al., 2015; Harter & Krone, 2001; Trethewey, 1999; Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Stohr, 2015). Based on prior research, one of the most pressing tensions experienced by feminist organizations, including TFNs, is the need to balance solidarity and difference. Feminist organizations need to create alliances across multiple forms and intersections of difference including socio-spatial positions (Dempsey et al., 2011), class (Acker, 2006), race (Allen, 1995; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003), and/or feminist values (Ashcraft, 2000, 2006; Ferree, 2006; Sperling et al., 2001) while not universalizing these stakeholders’ experiences. Transnational counter-spaces in particular represent attempts to engage difference while also identifying connections and similarities in participants’ experiences (Dempsey et al., 2011). This tension plays out in TFNs as a need to balance between building a unified coalition while recognizing and
taking into account the multiple social locations of their members (Dempsey et al., 2011). Organizationally, this tension can manifest at different levels and within different organizational processes.

Feminist organizations are challenged to maintain their internal participatory organizational processes that tout collaboration and consensus in ways that both include diverse voices and allow the organization to make decisions and accomplish task goals (Buzzanell, 1994; Dempsey et al., 2007; Dow, 1997; Stohr, 2015). By often rejecting formal bureaucracy, feminist organizations, including TFNs, strive to be nonhierarchical and participatory in their processes and structures. However, these organizations still have to coordinate action among members while taking care to recognize power differences and avoid marginalizing the people these organizations represent (Dempsey et al., 2007; Leidner, 2001; Linabary & Hamel, 2015). Organizations may strive to collaborate and draw on member expertise by inviting perspectives and participation (D’Enbeau, 2011; Linabary & Hamel, 2015). Yet, these collaborations can have their limits. Feminist organizations may struggle to balance their need to control the organizational environment to maintain it as a “safe” space while also allowing for the autonomy and empowerment of its target populations. This tension has been particularly recognized within domestic violence prevention programs and shelters that strive to empower survivors while also needing to exercise control to run a safe and effective shelter (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; D’Enbeau & Kunkel, 2013; Vaughn & Stamp, 2003). Ashcraft (2006) highlights how feminist organizations face pressures to formalize and may still operate forms of ideological control. As such, feminist organizations may adopt forms of “bounded diversity” (e.g., “We’re inclusive… to a point”) to accomplish
tasks (Ashcraft, 2006). Similarly, Dempsey (2007) proposes the concept of “bounded voice” to describe the process in which organizations may strategically limit the inclusion of stakeholders voices to certain forums. Tensions related to voice can then be a key struggle for TFNs. Given their diverse memberships, TFNs must balance the need to speak both with and for organizational members and to reflexively consider whose voices get privileged in the process (Linabary & Hamel, 2015). TFNs’ attention to and acknowledgement of differences suggest a possibility that they may speak “more responsibly” for others (Stohr, 2015, p. 12).

Additionally, organizations must also grapple with a desire to be transparent about their identity and agendas while staying accountable to the values of various stakeholders (Dempsey et al., 2007; Gelb, 1995). Organizations must balance a need for external support from donors with their own identities. Organizations may also be working to collaborate with other women’s organizations while simultaneously differentiating themselves in order to maintain their financial support and viability (D’Enbeau, 2011). This creates autonomy and control related tensions as funders and outside agencies such as the government and media pressure such organizations to change their organizing practices, to become more centralized, or to change their mission and activities (Dempsey et al., 2007; Gelb, 1995). Some TFNs may strategically use transparency to maintain control of their own identities and differentiate themselves (D’Enbeau, 2011). Publicly sharing statements of values, lists of funders, and annual reports opens the organization up for scrutiny while simultaneously allowing the organization to shape expectations (D’Enbeau, 2011).
Organizing across differences then requires constant attention to power differentials and existing inequalities. In attempting to negotiate the tension between solidarity and difference, transnational feminist spaces risk perpetuating the very exclusions they seek to address. As Dufour et al. (2010) note, “the construction of transnational solidarities remains a problematic endeavor” (p. 17). As transnational feminist organizations construct counter-spaces to engage in dialogue around difference, develop alternative discourses and narratives, and, in theory, disrupt the traditional hierarchies (Dempsey et al., 2011), more attention needs to be paid to these spaces and the tensions they (re)produce.

**Safe Counter-Space as ‘Paradoxical Space’**

In making sense of and interrogating the tensions inherent in attempts to create “safe” counter-spaces for differently positioned women, as transnational feminist organizing entails, Rose’s (1993) concept of “paradoxical space” provides a useful theoretical tool. Rose (1993) defines paradoxical space as occurring when “spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – centre and margin, inside and outside – are occupied simultaneously” (p. 140). Rose traces indications of such discursive and embodied positions across feminist writing, drawing on concepts like hooks’ (2000) margin and center and Collins’ (2000) “outsider within,” as well as conversations around lesbian separatism. As with Harris’s (2016) feminist dilemmatic theorizing, for Rose (1993) feminism itself as a subject becomes a discursive example of such a space as it both responds to and relies on hegemonic masculinist discourses. Rose (1993) argues that paradoxical spaces are “multidimensional, shifting and contingent,” relying on a dynamic tension between poles (p. 140). In this sense, while Rose mobilizes
language of “paradox,” the both/and nature of such spaces more closely approximates the concept of dialectics.

Following the Roestone Collective (2014), “safe” space can be seen as an encounter with paradoxical space. In this sense, safe spaces are simultaneously safe/unsafe and inclusive/exclusive. First, safe spaces are both safe and unsafe. Safe spaces can be sites of internal conflict. Kenney (2001) notes that infighting within gay and lesbian activist organizing diminished the sense that these spaces were “safe.” In addition, racism, sexism, classism, and internalized homophobia may also threaten the safety of a particular space (Kenney, 2001). Valentine and Skelton (2003) argue that while the lesbian and gay scene in the Midlands of the UK could be both a positive and supportive community for young lesbians and gay men, it could also be a dangerous space where they may face risks of abuse and exclusion. In this sense, “vulnerable social groups are not just marginalized/oppressed, but can also marginalize and oppress each other” (Valentine & Skelton, 2003, p. 863). Yet, these threats are not only internal. Gay neighborhoods considered “safe havens” have often been the target for violence (Myslik, 1996). In Myslik’s (1996) research, queer spaces where gay men congregated were actually more prone to targeted violence than public heterosexualized spaces. The sense of emotional and psychological safety of being together with similar others in this case undercut their physical safety as gay neighborhoods became “hunting grounds” (Myslik, 1996, p. 167).

Safe spaces are also exclusive while they are inclusive. For example, lesbian communes faced struggles around establishing boundaries, including around whether or not male children would be allowed, around celibacy, and around the inclusion of
heterosexual and bisexual women (Valentine, 1997). While these are examples of direct exclusions and boundary policing, such exclusions are not always explicit. They are often produced and reproduced informally through communicative interactions. Language use and the policing of categories is one way that these exclusions get (re)produced. The use of the term “women-only” is highly fraught depending on who is seen to count as “women.” “Women-only” spaces can reproduce binary and essentialist notions of “woman” and of femininity (Rose, 1993). Additionally, globally circulated terms of Western origin like gay, lesbian, and transgender may not be adopted in particular local contexts. The framing of a group based on these terms may necessarily produce exclusions of different localized gendered and sexual subjectivities. Lesbiana discussion groups in Nicaragua had to walk a tension between older Nicaraguan terms such as “cochona” and global terms like “lesbian” that make them legible, particularly in international contexts (Howe, 2013).

Internal issues related to race and class can also create divisions and exclusions. Elitism within supposedly “safe spaces” can alienate and exclude those without the same access to resources including activist discourses (Dave, 2010). Sakhi, the lesbian network in India, saw divisions between those who were seen as “politically competent and the politically incompetent, or the proper and the less-than-proper lesbian subject” (Dave, 2010, p. 607). Additionally, in lesbian communes in the United States some experienced marginalization as a result of the dominance of white lesbian feminists in the commune and their lack of consciousness surrounding the intersectional nature of the oppression experienced by differently positioned women along race and class lines (Valentine, 1997). Disabled women could also find themselves at odds with a community that was
not responding to their needs (Valentine, 1997). In the effort to develop a collective identity, sameness has often been privileged over difference and in doing so served to reproduce exclusions.

Producing safe counter-space in light of these paradoxes then requires constant negotiation. The Roestone Collective (2014) argue that “cultivating safe space entails modulating particular paradoxical binaries, reconfiguring how these are felt or instantiated. Moreover, this is precisely the productive work that safe spaces enable” (p. 11). This draws attention to the fact that creating a “safe space” is not a one time event but ongoing in individual and collective actions. It is constantly being constructed and reconstructed.

**Paradoxes in Online Safe Space**

Similarly, the idea of “safe” space online poses several challenges that require further interrogation. Similar to their counterparts offline, online safe spaces can also be seen to represent paradoxical space, similarly safe/unsafe, inclusive/exclusive and simultaneously online/offline.

Online spaces are also not necessarily safe. In attempting to study a women-only email listserv, Gajjala (2002) found that an assumption that the posts were private had “lulled participants into thinking that the e-mail discussions were like conversations in a friend’s living room, where their privacy could not be invaded by unwanted researchers or nasty encounters that might have real-life consequences beyond the artificial boundaries of cyberspace” (p. 182). The assumed safety of online spaces has also been violated by the existence of abuse and violence in these spaces. An early example of online violence occurred in the LambdaMOO, a multi-user dungeon (MUD). This
community’s sense of safety was disrupted in the 1990s when a “Mr. Bungle” used a subprogram to in effect virtually rape several female community members (Dibbell, 1993). The potential for anonymity and impersonation online and the openness of most web spaces also allows for the possibility of disruption in a supposedly “safe” space. Feminist online communities, similar to offline spaces, have often been targeted with harassment (Balka, 1993; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002), as have marginalized individuals on the Internet generally (Jane, 2014). Ju Oh (2012) argues that, “The constant assault from sexually harassing representations and utterances violates the right of women to be safe in cyberspace” (p. 253).

Spaces online often still replicate the inclusions and exclusions found in safe spaces offline. Formalized exclusions draw boundaries around the safe space and the identities of those who inhabit it. For example, MissyUSA, which is a forum for married Korean women who are residing in the United States or Canada, requires a stringent screening process that includes a personal statement from the applicant with her anniversary date, reason for coming to the U.S., and residence, among other information. This, Lee (2013) argues, provides a sense of security and homogeneity to community members. There are also informal ways that these boundaries are policed. For MissyUSA, members sometimes use gendered stereotypes to cast suspicions on the gender identity of members. For example, one interview participant was suspicious of a post on technology, arguing, “Moms (women) are usually bad at these kinds of things. But the information was extremely knowledgeable and detailed, so I thought it was definitely a dad’s (man’s) writing” (Lee, 2013, p. 479). Other exclusions happen in more subtle ways. Lee’s (2013) interview subjects expressed discomfort at posting on upper-
middle class members’ posts and said these divisions limited the sense of community experienced on the site.

Policing of the categories of women and of lesbian continue to (re)produce exclusions in “women-only” or women-centered digital spaces. Moderators on GimpGirl were confronted with users who desired more exclusive parameters for the forum (Cole et al., 2011). Conflict was initiated when a poster called into question the inclusion of bisexual and transgender individuals on the QueerLadies forum she said was meant for “LESBIAN women with disabilities” (Cole et al., 2011, p. 8). Similarly, on Queer Sisters, boundaries around categories of queer and lesbian became a site of contention, resulting in queer identifying individuals exiting or becoming inactive (Nip, 2004).

Lastly, the notion of online safe space assumes a separation between digital and physical spaces as well as from other digital spaces that is inherently problematic. Most articulations of safe space online fail to attend to the fact that women in these spaces are multi-located (Linabary, 2015; Youngs, 2004). For example, a woman may be accessing the supposedly “safe” space online from a cybercafé, where she is simultaneously being sexually harassed and fearing for her safety (Linabary, 2015). Her relative “safety” then is based on the context and relationships among those spaces.

Conclusions

In conclusion, safe spaces, whether online or offline, should be recognized as paradoxical and tension-filled spaces that are relationally defined and context dependent. They are socially and materially produced within particular places and at particular times (Massey, 1994; Roestone Collective, 2014; Rose, 1993). Additionally, what constitutes safe and unsafe is also socially produced in everyday interactions. The notion that online
spaces can be “safe” for marginalized individuals, including women, is challenged by inherent contradictions in the material and social structures of the Internet, which position spaces as both safe/unsafe, inclusive/exclusive, and online/offline.

This is not to say that online communities should not be mobilized as “safe spaces.” Safe spaces online have important value – providing places from which to form collective identities and engage in activism at various levels from the local to the global. However, critical reflection is needed on the constraints of such spaces. The Roestone Collective (2014) argues that cultivating safe space then necessarily involves “continually facing, negotiating, and embracing paradoxical binaries” (p. 10). Scholars and practitioners cannot take for granted notions of ‘safety’ in online space. It is important to understand how “safety” is culturally and materially constructed within specific online spaces.

**Present Study**

The transnational continues to be an important site for feminist activism and therefore deserves critical attention and theorizing from scholars across disciplines as well as from practitioners and activists. Given that transnational feminism involves attention to building solidarity across differences (Mohanty, 2003), where we locate the transnational impacts who is included and therefore whose ideas are privileged in these spaces. In particular the work of TFNs provides a context within which to explore these issues. Locating the transnational feminist organizing of TFNs at international conferences, in public streets, and digital spaces, existing scholarship has already made some important headway. While the existing literature speaks broadly of the spaces and scales of transnational organizing, it does not necessarily always attend to the specific
material and discursive ways these spaces are constructed. In particular, there is little attention to both the informal and formal meeting places at these conferences and how those might shape organizing practices. Moving forward, more attention is needed to the construction of these spaces, how spaces are made (in)visible, and the implications for the transformative potential of transnational feminist organizing. Specifically, digital spaces have been minimally attended to as sites where transnational feminist organizing actually takes place, making them ripe for study.

This study explores the possibilities and limitations of digital counter-space for transnational feminist organizing in an effort to work collaboratively with members of one such space to further enable women’s mobilization around issues of shared concern. In doing so, it builds on understandings of how digital spaces are discursively and materially constructed in ways that facilitate organizing across difference. “Safe” digital counter-spaces hold potential as sites in which differently positioned women can develop solidarity and organize around social change goals. Yet, digital counter-spaces for transnational feminist organizing may be simultaneously safe/unsafe, inclusive/exclusive, digital/physical, and global/local. Participants in these spaces then must constantly negotiate these tensions in their transnational organizing practices. Developing, identifying, and enacting strategies for navigating these tensions then are key to constructing more transformative spaces. Thus, this study aims to do so by working collaboratively with a digitally based TFN, in line with its engaged feminist position. Accordingly, the following questions form the basis for this study:

RQ1: How is digital counter-space discursively and materially constructed?
RQ2: How are tensions produced in the ongoing construction of digital counter-space for transnational feminist organizing?

RQ3: How do members communicatively respond to these tensions?

RQ3a: How do community members communicatively respond to these tensions?

RQ3b: How do staff members communicatively respond to these tensions?

Interlude: Critical Reflection on Constructing a Literature Review

Literature reviews seemingly represent a summary of and arguments derived from existing scholarship. However, the boundaries, scope, and citations involved are political choices that should be opened up for critical reflection based on the inclusions and exclusions that take place in the selection process. Literature reviews serve to mark boundaries, codify narratives about a field or area of research, and become static representations of scholarship at a given time. As Ahmed (2017) puts it, “Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (p. 15). Ahmed argues that citations are ‘bricks’ through which we build our ‘dwellings’ but that those bricks can become ‘walls.’ Citational practices have been marked by both sexism and racism (Ahmed, 2017). In particular, some feminist scholars have highlighted the ways that citational practices in particular have erased and/or appropriated the work of women of color and “Third World” women. For example, Alexander-Floyd (2012) highlights the ways “intersectionality” has travelled, becoming in some contexts stripped of its roots in a body of work theorizing U.S. black women’s experiences of oppression. Similarly,
Mohanty (2013) has critically examined the ways her own work has been appropriated and misread through a “citational politics” that nods to her work as a rhetorical move but in doing so often erases her emphasis on systematic analyses of power and efforts to decolonize knowledge production (p. 981). Literature reviews also provide an indication of who a scholar is in conversation with, providing evidence of a scholar’s location within those conversations and an accountability to the scholars and fields from which they draw. For example, Wallace (1989) criticized Rich (1986) for not speaking with women of color in her foundational piece on the politics of location despite speaking indirectly to the challenges they had raised, triggering concerns of appropriation.

Questions around citational politics prompted moments of critical reflection in constructing my literature review. For example, I became attentive to how the theorizing of feminist scholars is taken up in ways that can serve to erase their feminism. Work related to the material turn within organizational communication is indebted to feminist scholars like Barad (2003-2007) and Massey (1994, 2005), yet their feminism is rarely acknowledged nor is the politics of their work made visible. These erasures are significant as this theorizing is tied up in understandings of power and accountability that can become de-politicized as they travel and are taken up. Additionally, while being intellectually excited about ideas within the umbrella of feminist postconstructionism, I started to notice the whiteness of this body of work as I began incorporating it into this chapter. As I began to dig deeper, I discovered Ahmed’s (2017) response, which had been to call out the whiteness of this burgeoning field. In the process, she noted, “Someone invested in that field replied to me that it might be right to describe the field as white but that this whiteness was ‘not intended.’” Citational privilege: when you do not
need to intend your own reproduction.” (p. 150). Rather than throwing out these bodies of work, I seek through these reflections to call attention to these erasures and exclusions to encourage reflection on the role they play in the formation of our academic ‘dwellings.’

In constructing and reflecting on this literature review then, a few critical notes are worth mentioning. First, my access to existing literature, most of which has been written in English and at U.S. universities, shapes and limits my knowledge and understanding of what constitutes transnational feminism, space, and tension. It should also be acknowledged that while there is some diversity in the TFNs that have been studied by researchers, there has been a significant emphasis on and privileging of the practices of “professionalized, English-speaking, Western-oriented TFNs” (Dempsey et al., 2011, p. 214). My review and detailing of this knowledge then has the potential to perpetuate existing erasures within this context.

With that in mind, I have attempted to be conscious of this potential, to draw on a range of interdisciplinary scholarship, and to seek out examples from a variety of contexts, where possible. I seek to practice my scholarship “betwixt and between spaces dedicated to the focused pursuit of a single theoretical, methodological or disciplinary sphere” (Ellingson, 2017, p. 3). However, I recognize that my knowledge of the literature is likely incomplete and it is quite possible that as such I may also be likewise contributing to the same problems addressed by the feminist scholars mentioned above. As such, I seek to engage in continual conversations with others regarding what voices might be missing, particularly with attention to the voices of those who have traditionally been marginalized in academic spaces, and seek to speak to and with these voices within my scholarship. One conversation I led me to an online resource – the Gender Balance
Assessment Tool created by political science scholar Jane Sumner, to check gender and race representations on reference pages. While reliant on MLA style citations that include first names, this tool encouraged me to reflect on the make-up of my reference page. I did a cursory review of my initial reference page, noting when possible the gender, race, discipline, and nation in which the scholar was located. Doing so was a useful exercise to consider who I was in conversation with. Most of the scholarship within organizational communication cited herein has been authored by white women and men and by individuals situated within U.S. and European universities.

Second, this literature review draws almost exclusively on the voices of academics. I have grappled with the accessibility of this text to those whom this project is meant to serve and the reliance on privileging the existing academic scholarship in crafting an argument for this project, given that it is meant to be an engaged feminist project. As such, I continue to reflect on what it means to appropriately and authentically structure this text as a whole in line with its commitments. The traditional dissertation and academic manuscript structure is still based on a very researcher-driven approach. If the goal is to contest traditional power relationships within the knowledge production process, what does that mean for structuring the dissertation? If an engaged feminist approach means centering those traditionally marginalized and creating more equal power relations in the research process, what would that should that look like in the production of texts? These are questions for which I do not feel there are adequate answers.

In revisiting this literature review at different time points in the construction of my dissertation, I am struck by the ways it becomes immovable. I wonder how this
chapter would read if I was to have written it fresh today. What would have changed, shifted or been removed? My own thinking has evolved and I have been exposed to new ideas and areas of scholarship. In the span of time since the first writing of this chapter, new literature has been presented and published. I have been engaged in other projects that have challenged and moved my thinking in new and different directions. In revisiting this chapter, I felt tension between a desire to trust in the scholar I was and the desire to better represent the scholar I am in the process of becoming. I have to come to place of recognizing that this literature and these arguments represent a snapshot, a glimpse into both where I have been and where I am going. In these ways, I was strategic in what I chose to add in the revision process, providing a few updates but mostly focusing on that which has provided more theoretical grounding for my arguments and that which has changed my thinking in significant ways.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Consistent with this study’s engaged feminist approach, I employed digital feminist participatory action research (D+FPAR) to answer the research questions articulated in Chapter 2 and generate actionable outcomes in collaboration with the organization under study. In doing so, I drew on multiple qualitative and participatory methods in ongoing cycles of reflection and action. In this chapter, I first describe FPAR as well as efforts to engage in participatory research in online contexts. Then I situate and describe the context of the study. Third, the methodological strategies for the present study are detailed as well as the methods of data analysis. Next, I discuss methodological considerations specific to the context. Lastly, I outline strategies to promote quality and rigor in the research process.

Feminist Participatory Action Research

Engaged scholars have turned to traditions of participatory research as a means to democratize the research process. Participatory research is not one particular method but rather is a collaborative, engaged approach to inquiry (referred to variously as action research, participatory research, participatory action research, community-based participatory research, etc.) that seeks to address practical concerns and operates on the assumption that research should be conducted with stakeholders (Hacker, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). With roots in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), participatory approaches call into question “who has the right to speak, to analyze, and to act” (Hall, 1992, p. 22). Participatory research aims to involve participants (those affected) at every stage of the research process. Unlike research that aims to explain or
describe, participatory research has as its end goal transformation and social change. This goal is achieved through cycles of reflection and action (Williams & Lykes, 2003).

Feminist scholars have called into question which people are empowered and which social structures are challenged through participatory and action research methodologies (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Maguire, 1987). Women were often at the periphery and invisible in early participatory research (Maguire 1987). Additionally, feminist researchers have drawn attention to the androcentric roots of participatory research, with criticisms including reliance on male-centered language, women’s unequal access to participation and project benefits, inadequate attention to the obstacles women faced, the exclusion of gender issues, and the absence or marginalization of feminist theory (Maguire, 1987; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

As a result, several scholars have argued for and engaged in a feminist-infused form of participatory research. Feminist participatory action research (FPAR) reflects a set of iterative, emerging processes and outcomes through which participants collaborate with the researcher to co-produce knowledge and action aimed at transformation (Frisby & Creese, 2011; Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Maguire, 1987, 2001; Reid & Frisby, 2008; Williams & Lykes, 2003). Feminist participatory action research (FPAR) provides a means to contest the traditional power relationships within knowledge production by honoring the voices and knowledges of participants and affirming their right to have a say in decision-making about their representation (Lykes & Crosby, 2014). FPAR can be understood as “a conceptual and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women’s multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation, and action, while confronting the
underlying assumptions researchers bring into the research process” (Reid et al., 2006, p. 316).

Specifically, feminist participatory research (1) centers those who are traditionally marginalized; (2) attends to the interlocking and intersecting relations of power, including gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation; (3) allows members to become active agents in analyzing and redressing the affects of oppression and violence in their communities; (4) attempts to unsettle power relations including those in the research process; and (5) honors voice, difference, and diverse forms of action through participatory processes (Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Reid & Frisby, 2008; Reid, Tom, & Frisby, 2006; Williams & Lykes, 2014). The ‘action’ in FPAR has been defined in various ways. Reid et al. (2006) consider action to range from “speaking to validate oneself and one’s experiences in the world to ‘the process of doing something,’ such as taking a deliberate step towards changing one’s circumstance” (p. 327). This is distinguished from social change, seen to represent a more long-term outcome of individual and collective action to improve lives and communities (Maguire, 2001; Reid et al., 2006).

FPAR has several advantages. First, this approach recognizes the power hierarchies in the research process and actively attempts to disrupt them by attending to and attempting to create more equal power relations by including participants in the process (Williams & Lykes, 2003). Harding (2015) argues that PAR’s emphasis on redistributing power in the research process makes it more accountable to communities, particularly vulnerable groups, whom the research affects. Second, it recognizes the role of participants and researchers in co-constructing knowledge. It acknowledges that
‘reality’ is not merely observed but rather collectively constructed through communication. Third, it attends to the positionality and power of the researcher and seeks through practices of reflexivity – or constant critical examination – to attend to how power is operating (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) (see Reflexivity). Fourth, this approach is considered to produce knowledge that is relevant and useful to addressing issues of practical concern to the communities directly affected. It draws on culturally and contextually specific knowledges of participants and recognizes this knowledge as valid, while still being able to critically assess its construction. Through their involvement, participants may have a more vested interest in the knowledge produced and may be more likely to act on it (McIntyre, 2008). Lastly, this approach has transformative potential for both individuals and collectives in the form of critical awareness, empowerment, and steps toward social change (Maguire, 1987; McIntyre, 2008; Frisby et al., 2009).

Moving FPAR Online

Given the context and content of the present study, I classify this project as an example of digital feminist participatory action research, or what I will refer to as D+FPAR. The digital recognizes that this study is both situated in and on a digital space

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13 I use D+ in the style of Mayorga’s (2014) digital critical participatory action research (D+CPAR). Mayorga (2014), who introduced D+CPAR, used digital tools, alongside offline methods and engagement, as a means to facilitate public engagement and publicly archive information gathered throughout the project. The way I use D+ is similar yet different, in that my project is fully digital and the community it engages with is an online community. While critical approaches bear some similarities to feminist research in their attention to reflection, power and participation, a feminist approach to digital participatory research provides new and different contributions by drawing on feminist epistemological, methodological, and ethical tools.
and utilizes digital methods as the means for collecting and sharing data and collaborating with participants/co-researchers.

The Internet has introduced a new ‘frontier’ for social science research (Lee, Fielding, & Blank, 2008). In particular, researchers have embraced the potential for adapting traditional research methods to online contexts and coming up with innovative alternatives (James & Busher, 2009; Lee et al., 2008; Linabary & Hamel, 2017; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Markham & Baym, 2009). By not needing to travel extensively to engage with each participant, online methods open up possibilities to access more geographically dispersed and difficult to reach populations, potentially encouraging more cross-cultural research. The Internet is also increasingly a site of social interaction that merits study in its own right.

However, given persistent digital divides in the access and use of the Internet (Kakar et al., 2013; van Dijk, 2005), researchers must attend to the inequalities and exclusions that may be (re)produced by conducting research in online contexts. The Internet has also introduced or heightened a variety of methodological and ethical challenges, including issues of privacy, power, informed consent, and representation, among others (e.g., Corple & Linabary, 2017; Johns, Chen, & Hall, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009). Internet research is then a site of innovation and flux. Thus it is still important that researchers justify their methods and why using particular online methods is applicable to particular contexts and questions. Since members of World Pulse (this study’s context) participate in an online setting and that is the site of the phenomena under study, the use of online methods is considered appropriate. Online methods also allow for overcoming distance, cost, and other practical considerations in working with a
geographically dispersed population. Working only with those in physical proximity to
the researcher would necessarily exclude large swaths of the population of World Pulse.
Yet, the population of the community represents a diverse group of women who come
from a variety of different backgrounds, with different (technological) skill levels and
socio-cultural contexts, which have to be accounted for within the research process (see
Methodological Considerations).

Few exemplars of online participatory work (especially feminist work) exist.
Insights can be drawn from researchers who have engaged in qualitative research online
(Fielding et al., 2008; Mann & Stewart, 2000), particularly those of online ethnography
(Baym, 2000; Hine, 2000, 2015) and online interviewing (James & Busher, 2009;
Linabary & Hamel, 2017). However, the application of participatory and feminist
methods online is still a site of exploration and experimentation. Online participatory and
action research to date have taken place primarily in education and online professional
development (Embury, 2014, 2015; Schmidt-Jones, 2017). Yet, scholars have argued that
online participatory and action research offers opportunities for expansion and innovation
in participatory methods. It has the potential to expand the communities with which
researchers engage, including those that are geographically dispersed (Embury, 2014). In
some cases this can be about accessing particular communities while in others technology
is used as a strategy particularly for engaging youth in participatory projects (Flicker,
Maley, Ridgley, Biscope, Lombardo, & Skinner, 2008).

It is difficult to find work that has engaged participatory research methods solely
in and of online contexts. For example, in a rare example of digital critical participatory
action research (D+CPAR), the #BarrioEdProj, which focused on community-school
relations in East Harlem, was still situated around an offline place and relied on building relationships and meetings with co-researchers offline (Mayorga, 2014). Online tools and spaces were utilized for creating and sharing data (Mayorga, 2014). Similarly, Ingram et al. (2017) used D+CPAR to engage in a series of offline meetings to collaborate on creating a video about advocacy strategies to address microaggressions against transgender persons, which was then disseminated through a variety of social media channels. Lennie, Hatcher, and Morgan (2003) provide an example of an FPAR project, focused on rural women’s empowerment and information and communication technologies, that relied on both online and offline participatory methods. The emphasis on a combination of online and offline tools to both conduct research and share results led Embury (2015) to claim that no examples of fully online action research were currently available. While at least a few examples have since emerged (e.g., open education for online music learners; Schmidt-Jones, 2017), even these acknowledge the dearth of fully online participatory or action research studies.

This project then is unique in several ways. First, it utilizes participatory methods to research and engage with a community that is first and foremost digital. Second, given the geographically dispersed populations who are part of this online community, this project relies on digital tools for collaboration and research. In this sense, this project presents one example of more fully digital participatory action research and specifically offers an example of feminist participatory action research online. The following section will describe the context of the present project before outlining the methodological strategies I employed.
In most parts of the world, women come from communities where they are not allowed to voice their opinions, so when a woman finds a platform where she is actually encouraged to say something, to talk for herself, to make use of her voice, it’s very encouraging and it’s very, that is, to me that is the first step of empowerment – if someone is able to have a platform where they feel free to speak. That is what World Pulse provides.

– Long-time World Pulse community member (Phase 1)

The context for this study is World Pulse (http://worldpulse.com), a digitally based transnational feminist network and online community of women and their allies with members in more than 190 countries. World Pulse’s mission is “to accelerate the global changes women seek by using digital communication to unite and amplify women’s voices, solutions and impact worldwide.” World Pulse was founded in 2001 by a former international journalist. It started as a print magazine aimed at allowing women to speak for themselves and be heard. It saw rapid growth and innovation as it transitioned to launching a website and eventually to dissolving the print magazine in favor of its online community. Today the nonprofit organization, with a physical office in Portland, OR, USA, provides a digital space for community members14 to speak, connect, and mobilize. World Pulse is similar to a social media network in its functionality – allowing members their own profile, journal (or blog), connections to other members, and private messaging. Additionally, World Pulse also offers access to trainings (e.g. Digital Changemaking 101, Advanced Digital Changemaking, formerly Voices of our Future),

14 I use the term “community members” to refer to those who are registered members on World Pulse’s online platform. This terminology is used by the organization to refer to these members. While staff are also ‘members’ of the community both by their involvement and their registration as members, I consider them as a separate group for the sake of this study, having different experiences with and goals in their involvement with the digital space.
promotes community leadership (e.g. Listeners\textsuperscript{15}, Welcomers, Translators, Community Champions, Impact Leaders, Ambassadors), provides a forum for resource sharing (e.g., Resource Exchange) and crowdsources stories and solutions among its members (e.g., Digital Action Campaigns, Story Awards), amplifying these voices to decision-makers and influential forums. In these efforts, World Pulse has partnered with a variety of public and private organizations including UN Women, Intel, USAID, and World Vision, among others. World Pulse is an organization situated at the nexus of the women’s empowerment and development and technology start-up sectors. While many development efforts fixate on issues of women’s access to the Internet, World Pulse represents the next step, focusing on providing a platform for women once they are online and a means to sustain their activity there. Like a technology start-up though, World Pulse often must respond quickly to its dynamic online community and to new technological innovations. It is constantly changing and evolving, as evidenced during this two-year project by several introductions of new features, changes in programs, and a major platform redesign in November 2016.

The organization relies on an approximately 20-person staff, including the CEO and founder, a COO, and staff in development and partnerships, programs and services, marketing, and technology and administration. Its organizational structure has included a board of directors, a community advisory board (CAB) of long-time active community members, a global advisory network of leaders and experts, and countless volunteers.\textsuperscript{16} World Pulse represents a network of community leaders and members worldwide, with

\textsuperscript{15} Some of these leadership positions were renamed, disbanded and/or added during my project. For example, Listener and Welcomer roles were replaced with the Encourager role within the last several months of my study. Within the findings, I attempt to clarify these roles as participants’ experienced them.

\textsuperscript{16} As evidence of ongoing change, the CAB was disbanded in favor of other leadership models during the timeframe of my project.
its largest constituencies in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. World Pulse is primarily staffed by Western women (and a few men), though it did contract with two active, long-time community members as staff. As an organization, World Pulse is conscientious of these positionings as it attempts to speak to and within its community. Staff members invoke various self-reflexive practices, including direct and formal inclusion of members’ voices and practicing ethical consciousness around members’ voices, to account for the voices of differently situated stakeholders (Linabary & Hamel, 2015). The World Pulse community adopts the mantra “No one speaks for me. I speak for myself.” In this context, participatory methods allow for community members to have a say in their own representation.

World Pulse was selected as the site of study for several key reasons. First, as a digitally based TFN, World Pulse provided a unique site from which to explore the ways that women unite and mobilize across geographic distances and individual differences to achieve social change goals. While it shares some similarities with a variety of organizations (e.g., Facebook, Global Fund for Women, Vital Voices, Lean In, and AWID, among others), to date no organization is doing exactly what World Pulse claims to do. World Pulse, in its theory of change,17 “invites women to unite their voices and mobilize online while connecting them to resources so that their solutions to local and global problems are amplified and they take action to transform the world” (Hamel & Linabary, 2014). Through World Pulse’s digital space, women share their voices through their blog-like journals, connect with like-minded women and allies worldwide in the online community, and access and exchange informational and material resources (Linabary, 2015).

17 A theory of change is an articulation of how and why an organization creates impact.
Second, I have an established relationship and rapport with the staff and community. I discovered World Pulse while working as a journalist. Being a feminist and having an interest in ways that digital media could provide opportunities for marginalized groups to speak and be heard, I registered at WorldPulse.com in August 2011, becoming a member of what was referred to at the time as “Pulse Wire.” That fall I served as a volunteer Listener for that year’s application cycle for the Voices of our Future, a digital journalism and leadership training program. In fall 2012, I approached World Pulse as a site to recruit participants for my master’s thesis research, which focused on issues of voice and empowerment online broadly. I completed reflexive online interviews with 36 women who were members of World Pulse for that study (Linabary, 2013; Linabary & Hamel, 2017). In addition to my thesis, Dr. Stephanie Hamel and I produced a 77-page report, Voicing Online, for World Pulse based on that data in May 2013 and gave a presentation to the organization in June 2013. In July 2013, we met with the staff of World Pulse at their offline headquarters to provide additional feedback and to work with them on their indicators of impact. This led to consulting work toward the development of World Pulse’s organizational and external theory of change (TOC), which included a two-day workshop in November 2013, a preliminary internal report and operations map in January 2014, interviews with organization and community members in May 2014, and the creation and revision of the external TOC in summer 2014. The TOC, which is meant to drive future monitoring and evaluation work, was informed by and co-constructed through reviews with the CAB, staff, and the board. It was also further informed by an analysis of community members’ contributions to a digital action campaign around digital access in 2014 (Linabary, 2015). This analysis aimed at
understanding the technological affordances of World Pulse’s platform. After that, I served as a sounding board for other researchers and consultants working with the organization.

The original pitch to the organization for its involvement in this current project built off of this work and subsequent conversations with my original organizational contact, Maddie (pseudonym), about the need for an in-depth investigation into the different aspects of the organization’s TOC to better understand the processes by which World Pulse’s impact is achieved. I first approached the organization about this project in June 2015 and was asked to prepare a brief proposal to be discussed with the new COO. This was delivered in July, and I received the go-ahead from the organization in August.

This project thus builds on previous research and relationships with World Pulse staff and community members. It also has led to a continuation of the relationship in other forms. In December 2016, based on my ongoing relationship with the organization and knowledge of its impacts, I was approached to do paid consulting related to World Pulse’s monitoring and evaluation. At that point, I had completed data collection for Phase 2 of this dissertation project. After a series of conversations with other scholars and critical reflection around what it meant to occupy the dual roles of consultant and researcher, I accepted the consulting role, which I continue to this day. Doing so has allowed me, as an engaged feminist scholar, to respond to a need of my collaborative partner and continue to build and maintain the relationship.

A third reason this site was selected is that the organization and community had needs to which the project could respond, in line with this project’s metatheoretical commitments to engaged feminist scholarship. As indicated above, this project
represented an opportunity to dive deeply into the first level of World Pulse’s TOC, focusing on how it is that World Pulse creates an *inviting, supportive, and authentic* digital space for women to unite and mobilize, what it means to do so, what the challenges are in creating and maintaining this kind of environment, and how this contributes to the other levels of the TOC. Staff specifically expressed an interest in also understanding the strengths of the platform as well as how it contributes to social change outcomes. During an interview in Phase 1 of the current project (described later in this chapter), one staff member said she wished to understand “*how to maximize these strengths, specifically to increase collaboration between individuals and feminist organizations globally, to develop a technology that makes sharing vital resources and timely information very easy for the purpose of movement building and change.*” Additionally, staff members interviewed during Phase 1 expressed an interest in better understanding who comes to World Pulse and why and who could be coming, World Pulse’s similarities and differences with other platforms, and what advantages members find in digital organizing for social change and its relationship to offline organizing. These interests were in line with the study’s research questions and also informed data collection efforts to be discussed later in this chapter.

Additionally, World Pulse has been going through a period of change that had and has the potential to affect its community. As the platform changed, staff were curious “*if members’ experiences of the website being an ‘inviting, supportive, and authentic space’ stayed the same, improved, or declined.*” In 2015, World Pulse launched a new, redesigned website (“WP.com 2.0” as one staff member referred to it) and the first phase of new functionalities. Examples of some of the significant changes in 2015 included a
restructuring of member groups around a few key topics (e.g., Economic Empowerment, Leadership, Gender-Based Violence, and Technology and Innovation), French navigation and functionality in addition to English and Google Translate capabilities, easier viewing and incorporation of photos and video tools, the ability to make journal posts private or public, and the capacity to report content deemed spam or inappropriate, among others. Another major redesign took place in November 2016, which restructured and streamlined the website, introduced a new color scheme and log, launched new leadership roles, eliminated groups altogether, and created new “Love” and “Encourage me” buttons for posts, among other changes. These changes required constant evaluation of the ways in which this project could respond to the organization and its needs throughout these transitions.

Methodological Strategies

As an FPAR project, this study relied on ongoing cycles of reflection and action that built upon each other in its design (Figure 1). While depicted somewhat linearly, these cycles are necessarily overlapping, occurring at times simultaneously while always informing each other. For explanatory purposes, this project can be thought of to comprise four primary phases. Each of those phases and the corresponding methodological strategies are described in detail below (Table 2). These various strategies are in service both to the research questions proposed in this study as well as the aim for transformative outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design (Fall 2015)</strong></td>
<td>Consultation Interviews</td>
<td>2 staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 long-time community member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings with Organizational Contact</td>
<td>5 meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>50 documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Understanding (Summer and Fall 2016)</strong></td>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
<td>41 community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>100 hours of participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>330 documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175 screenshots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration &amp; Analysis (Spring 2017)</strong></td>
<td>Participatory Online Workshop (POW)</td>
<td>17 community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group with Staff</td>
<td>7 staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Meeting Evaluations</td>
<td>11 community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member Reflections</td>
<td>6 staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31 community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action &amp; Outcomes (Ongoing)</strong></td>
<td>Continued work with community and staff members on outcomes identified. Documented through notes, recordings, and reflections.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Cycles of Reflection and Action

**Phase 1: Design**

The goal of Phase 1 was to consult with the organization and the community on the project’s design to further ensure the project was responsive to their needs. Three primary methods were used to do so: consultative interviews, meetings with the organizational contact, and review of internal and external documents. This phase was meant to build on...
the already existing relationship and prior work done with the organization and to understand any current considerations I would need to take into account.

**Consultative interviews**

First, I conducted three consultation interviews – two with staff members and one with a long-time active community member. These interviews were designed to get staff and community member feedback aimed to inform the study’s design and outcomes. At this stage it was considered important to talk to both staff and community members given that these groups have differing goals and experiences of the digital space and both needed to be taken into account in the design process. These interviews took place by email and/or Skype depending on the preference of the participant. Email interviews were considered appropriate for several reasons. First, participants were geographically dispersed, making face-to-face interviews impractical. Second, it allowed participants to dictate when and how they responded to the interview prompts, turning control over the process over to the participants (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). Third, email interviews also responded to the different levels of access and bandwidth of the participants. Lastly, email interviews, which occur asynchronously, allowed for participants to critically reflect on their responses. This sort of critical reflection is thought to produce more in-depth and reflexive texts (James & Busher, 2009: Linabary & Hamel, 2017).

With the organizational contact, five staff members were identified who had knowledge of the community and of the organization’s long-term planning. These staff members were approached by the organizational contact, Maddie, and invited to respond to a set of three primary prompts: (1) What questions or issues are you most interested in this project addressing related to World Pulse’s online space? (2) What should be kept in
mind in selecting and designing methods for answering these questions?, and (3) What would you like to get out of this project? In your mind, what would be some ideal outcomes?. Reminders were sent to encourage additional response. Two female staff members responded to the prompts and engaged in additional follow-up exchanges.

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) was also contacted by Maddie and invited to participate by responding to the set of prompts. The CAB, which at the time was comprised of five members, was selected for participation at this stage because of members’ active involvement in the community and their regular convening as a source of feedback to the organization. The invitation for the CAB to participate occurred during the holiday season. Follow-up reminders were sent. However, no current CAB members responded to the prompts. One CAB member indicated she had a low level of Internet access at the time and would be unable to participate at this time. However, an invitation was extended subsequently to a former CAB member who during this phase of the study transitioned from a CAB member to a paid staff member with the organization. She participated in a mixed-medium interview that included both email responses and a 35-minute Skype call. The Skype call was recorded with her permission and transcribed. Given the low levels of participation from community members in this phase, I incorporated some aspects of Phase 1 into later phases of the project, particularly through the member reflections in Phase 3.

Meetings with organizational contact

The study’s design also draws on conversations and meetings with the organizational contact. I had been working with Maddie as a main point of contact with the organization since spring 2013. The present study takes into account our meetings
starting in June 2015. During the design phase, we had five meetings – three Skype calls and one in-person meeting in Portland, OR. These meetings ranged from 20-60 minutes. These meetings were documented through typed notes and/or audio recordings. It should be noted that between Phase 1 and Phase 2, Maddie exited the organization, and I was assigned a new organizational contact.

**Document analysis**

For this phase of the project, internal and external documents provided by World Pulse staff and World Pulse site content were reviewed. Documents can provide rich sources of information and insights into organizational discourses, histories, and interactions, and their construction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These documents included those related to the organization’s mission and vision, branding, public communication, programming, and strategic planning. These documents were selected based on their ability to provide context to the design of this project and inform how World Pulse’s digital space is constructed. I completed an initial read on approximately 50 documents. The majority of these documents were also included in the corpus for Phase 2.

**Phase 2: Building Understanding**

Phase 2 involved the use of multiple online qualitative methods in order to answer the study’s research questions. I used several methods to build understanding about World Pulse’s digital space including (1) in-depth interviews, (2) participant observation, and (3) additional document analysis.
In-depth interviews

I conducted 41 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with community members. Interviews allow for gaining an understanding of participants’ lived experiences and subjugated knowledges (Hesse-Biber, 2014), as well as soliciting information about past experiences and about processes that cannot be directly observed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Through the interview process, the participant and researcher co-construct meanings and knowledge in conversation. Interviews then allowed for gaining an understanding of community members’ past and present experiences of World Pulse as well as its relationship to other spaces they experience.

Participants determined the digital platform and format (e.g., text, audio, video) of the interview. Interviews took place using email, Skype, WhatsApp, Google Hangout, and IMO, depending on what was considered convenient and comfortable by each participant. Previous researchers have argued that it is important to allow participants to choose the medium for the interview interaction when possible to increase rapport and help balance the power relations between the researcher and researched (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Additionally, collaborators encouraged this practice during Phase 1 of the project. Approximately half (20) of the participants chose to do the interviews asynchronously in a text-based format over email. The remaining participants opted for video- or audio-based interviews using Skype (10), WhatsApp (8), Google Hangout (1), and IMO (1). One participant engaged in an interview both synchronously and asynchronously through the chat function of WhatsApp over the course of three days.
Recruitment

I recruited participants for this phase using a purposive sample of members of World Pulse’s online community. I used two recruitment strategies (a) general calls to the community and (b) direct invitations to participate. First, a general call in English was posted on the World Pulse Resource Exchange and promoted through World Pulse’s Facebook and Twitter accounts. I shared recruitment message drafts with the marketing team at World Pulse, who offered to provide feedback on the language used to make it more accessible. They did not see any need for changes. World Pulse staff crafted social media messaging on Facebook and Twitter, which they ran by me for my approval before posting. The general call provided a basic description of this portion of the study and directed members to a form where they could submit their email address to be contacted with more information. I sent an initial email to 17 members who indicated they wanted more information and sent at least one follow-up message to those who did not respond. In total, six of those members decided to participate in the study. One additional participant contacted me by email directly after seeing the Resource Exchange post.

A second recruiting strategy involved direct invitations to specifically target community volunteers, new members, and inactive/lurking members. Recruiting from these groups was not meant to create a stratified sample for comparison purposes but rather to ensure a sample that was inclusive of different member groups and diverse perspectives. Staff members also reviewed a draft of the direct invitation and had recommended inviting at least double the amount of participants I hoped to reach. Therefore, a total of approximately 150 community members spread across those groups received direct invitations to participate. For community volunteers, I contacted 20
volunteers in each leadership role available at the time (e.g., Community Champions, Welcomers, Translators, Listeners). I selected volunteers based on length of membership in an effort to understand how the digital space has changed over time, selecting the 20 volunteers in each role who had been members the longest. It should be noted that several members were volunteers in more than one role, and in these cases were only contacted once. For new members, it was important that they have at least some familiarity with the digital space, so I recruited from the newest members to have received the “vocal contributor” badge, marking engagement within the website. I sent initial invitations to 40 of the most recently joined vocal contributors. I then engaged in a quota sampling technique, limiting the number of invitations per country to increase the national diversity in the recruitment, as often multiple people from the same country joined at the same time. Using this strategy, I then selected another 30 vocal contributors in order of newest membership. Volunteers and new members were identified using the online directory on World Pulse and then sent direct invitations through the private messaging system website. If they were interested in participating they were encouraged to email me or provide an email address where they would like to be contacted. Invitations were sent in either English or French, depending on the language the member used to participate within World Pulse. A World Pulse Translator (a volunteer who helped translate for French-speaking members) translated the recruitment materials into French, and also contacted several French-speaking members directly to share with them about the study. However, no French-speaking members chose to participate in the study. For each direct message in either English or French, I addressed the member by name, which I recognized as important from my previous work with World Pulse and cultural norms
within the digital space. Thirty-four participants, both volunteers and new members, were recruited using these methods.

Lurking or inactive members were difficult to identify and recruit given the kinds of activity made invisible by the platform. For example, a member could appear inactive based on a cursory look at a profile page but actually be quite active in terms of commenting and engaging with others. I opted to use a snowball sampling method to recruit inactive members by asking participants if they knew of anyone who had since left or become inactive. Participants had difficulty identifying anyone who had; however, they would acknowledge periods in which they had become inactive for a time. One participant had left for several years and recently returned. In this way, I was still able to understand experiences where members had left or become inactive, though was not able to recruit participants who currently identified as such (for further discussion see Limitations in Chapter 6).

Participants

Participants represented a diverse range of membership lengths and experiences (see Table 3), ranging from two months to nearly 15 years. The 41 participants included 38 members who identified as women and three who identified as men. At the time of the interview, members were residing in 16 different countries, including Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, England, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Nigeria, Peru, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, the United States, and Zimbabwe. Several participants are currently living in countries other than their country of origin representing additional countries. Similar to the population of World Pulse, a majority of my participants were in African nations, with multiple participants coming from Nigeria and Kenya in particular.
Members ranged in age from 20 to 79. In terms of education, almost all participants had at least some college with nearly half having or currently working on advanced degrees beyond their bachelor’s. At the time of the research, participants worked in a range of professions, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits, education, journalism and communications, writing, social work, community development, IT, banking, sales, crafts, farming, medicine, consultation, and law.

Approximately three-quarters of the participants accessed the Internet on more than one device and daily, though participants identified a range of challenges and barriers to access, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Procedures

After reviewing an information sheet about the study, participants were asked to identify an appropriate and secure email address for corresponding. Participants were first invited to select the platform and format of the interview and to respond to a set of background demographic questions and questions about Internet access that informed the interview. They were encouraged to answer at their comfort level and not to answer any questions that posed any security risk. Participants were also told I was happy to arrange to conduct the interview in the language they would prefer. All interviews except one were conducted in English. One interview was conducted in both English and Portuguese using Google Translate, following the engagement of the participant.
### Table 3: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of Membership</strong></td>
<td>New members (Less than one year)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existing members (1-5 years)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-time members (5+ years)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Returning members</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender/Sex</strong></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age not provided</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who opted for an email interview were invited to engage in a series of email exchanges. Following the approach of James and Busher (2006) and Linabary and Hamel (2017), four interview question sets of 2-4 questions each were sent one at a time.
with follow-up questions to help facilitate dialogue. To increase retention, emailed reminders were sent after a week of non-response. Audio interviews were recorded with permission and ranged in length from 30 to 72 minutes, averaging approximately 50 minutes.

The semi-structured questions were informed by data collected during Phase 1, past research, and the existing literature (Appendix A). I used similar questions across interview formats. Additionally, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for flexibility in the ordering and phrasing questions, probing for additional insights, and shifting directions in the conversations. Participants were also asked whether or not they would like to be involved in future conversations around this project and/or collaborate on possible outcomes. Given the time and resource constraints of members and following practices World Pulse has used in other efforts to conduct research on its community, those who participated were entered in a drawing for one of three $40 USD prizes.

Participants’ responses were collected into a document and stored on a password-protected computer. Interviews conducted through audio platforms like Skype were audio recorded with the permission of the participant and transcribed. In total, the interviews in all formats resulted in approximately 320 single-spaced typed pages.

**Participant observation**

Secondly, I engaged in participant observation on World Pulse. Participant observation is defined as “the embodied emplacement of the researching self in a field site as a consequential social actor” (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012, p. 65). It involves observing and/or engaging in everyday activities as well as recording those activities. Observing and participating in World Pulse’s digital space allowed for a deeper
understanding of the ways the space is both discursively and materially constructed and experienced. The material aspects of the site in particular cannot be fully accounted for in interviews. Observing interactions that were happening publicly on the site provided additional insights into the ways that organizing across difference is both enabled and constrained. It also informed subsequent interviews and conversations with participants and collaborators. Additionally, participating also allowed for critical interrogation about how I was experiencing the digital space and assumptions that I was making about how organizing was taking place.

![Figure 2: Continuum of Participation in Digital Spaces](image)

In digital space, the notion of participation can range on a continuum (see Figure 2). Mere presence on a platform can constitute a passive form of participation often referred to as “lurking.” Lurkers visit a digital space or online community with varying frequencies but rarely produce any visible contribution or post (Baym, 2000; Ridings & Gefen, 2004). While contested, lurkers are still considered participants as they actively navigate to the website and occasionally login. This level of participation can potentially pose problems for researchers’ attempts to establish mutual visibility with other participants (Hine, 2015), requiring alternative strategies to make participants aware of the researcher’s presence. On the other end of the spectrum, active participants may be frequent contributors and perhaps leaders or moderators in an online community. As an
example within World Pulse, community leaders and volunteers represent this more “active” position. Members serve in roles such as Community Champions (i.e., group facilitators), Listeners, Mentors, and Welcomers.

For this project, I engaged in participant observation at the level of contributor. In doing so, I both observed interactions and contributed by engaging with other members, in line with expectations for (active) membership in the community. Doing so fulfills the need to engage with the material and social aspects of the space and observe interactions as they occur. Hine (2015) argues that researchers engaging in online participant observation should reflect on the “conventions of co-presence and reciprocity employed within each medium by participants” (p. 57). Additionally, maintaining a presence in the digital space had the added benefit of helping establish rapport. In the past, my status as a World Pulse member has aided in the interview process and helped reassure participants. For example, during a 2013 interview, a World Pulse member from rural Italy wrote, “The fact of being a Pulsewire member made you not a complete stranger: we have never encountered before, but being there together was a highly likely indication of shared ways of existing, if not of values.”

In this study, activities and interactions were observed over a one-year period. I completed approximately 100 hours of participant observation. During this time, I observed and participated on World Pulse’s platform, followed World Pulse’s social media accounts, and attended Facebook Live events. Approximately 75 hours occurred during the first six months. I continued to engage periodically throughout the second six months to aid in understanding during analysis and to observe changes following a redesign of the platform in November 2016, conducting an additional 25 hours. I
documented my observations and reflections by writing jottings and field notes, taking screenshots, collecting documents and links, and downloading pages. These were collated and organized using Evernote on both my laptop and mobile device to create multimodal fieldnotes.

**Document analysis**

I collected additional documents for analysis during this phase of the project. Specifically, I collected training materials, external communication by the organization (e.g., emails, calls for stories, campaigns), organizational policies and program materials (e.g., terms of service, editorial guidelines, community leadership programs, trainings), and media coverage. This also included screenshots, documents, and downloaded pages collected during participant observation, with the exception of members’ stories. Members’ stories were only analyzed outside of my participant observation if members asked me to refer to them or if they were used as exemplars within organizational documents, such as trainings. In total, my corpus included approximately 330 documents and 175 screenshots.

**Phase 3: Collaboration and Analysis**

Phase 3 involved engaging in collaboration with key stakeholder groups – community members and staff – to identify solutions and strategies as well as get member reflections on the research process. This stage was informed by themes identified during the preliminary analysis of Phase 2 and served as a means to involve participants in the analysis process.
**Participatory online workshop (POW)**

All Phase 2 interview participants were invited to a participatory online workshop (POW). This workshop relied on asynchronous and synchronous tools to facilitate dialogue among the participants around key themes identified in Phase 2. The goal of this workshop was to both share back preliminary findings with participants and involve participants in the analysis process and in identifying solutions and strategies in response to these findings (Appendix B). The workshop format, similar to a focus group, can be a means to engage in collective meaning making and catalyze action and reflection processes leading to action (Crosby, 2009; Dodson et al., 2007; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

Given that participants were dispersed across various time zones, I initially offered two different workshop dates and times. I also checked with staff at World Pulse to ensure that the timing of the workshop did not compete with other planned programming. In the end, all but one participant opted for the same time, so one workshop was held and I made other participation options available to those who were unable to attend at that time or who had connectivity issues.

The POW relied on a variety of digital tools to allow for different forms and formats of participation. The initial workshop was facilitated using a Zoom video conference, recommended by World Pulse staff as a low-bandwidth software, as well as a Google Doc for visualization and collaboration. Participants were able to join the 60-minute Zoom conference using their computer or phone and to participate by voice and/or chat functions. Additionally, I used a Google Doc, which was made editable and shared with participants, to talk through the findings and pose questions. Some
participants opted to type directly into the document and respond to each other’s writing and some only joined within the Google Doc during and/or after the Zoom conference based on connection issues. I made a conscious effort to find ways to accommodate members’ different digital access and locations. A total of 12 participants engaged in the initial workshop, including one participant who joined through a WhatsApp call on my phone that was put on speaker so she could engage with the others in the Zoom conference. Another two participants participated in audio calls (Zoom and Skype) after the initial workshop following the same format and lasting between 30 and 50 minutes. Three more participants responded to questions asynchronously by email or in a Google document after the fact, making 17 total participants in the workshop. Of the 17 participants, 15 identified as women and 2 identified as men. Participants were residing in eight different countries, including Cameroon, Canada, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Syria, Uganda, and the United States.

The workshop was documented in several ways. The initial workshop as well as the two audio interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed. Chat records and Google Docs were also collected for analysis.

**Focus group and POW with staff**

Using the preliminary findings as a guide, I conducted a 90-minute focus group discussion with seven female World Pulse staff members. A focus group was considered ideal for this process as it allows for gathering multiple viewpoints on the topics under discussion, dialogue among members around key issues, and collaboration around outcomes. The goal of this session was to understand the staff members’ responses to tensions within the digital space, identify challenges, and begin discussing next steps both
for World Pulse and related organizations. The format of the 90-minute focus group included approximately 50 minutes of semi-structured discussion (Appendix C) and the remaining 40 minutes followed the same structure as the POW. This allowed for both gaining an understanding of staff members’ experiences with the digital space as well as engage them around the preliminary findings.

I worked with my new organizational contact to identify staff members who work most closely with community members. These staff members, one of whom participated in Phase 1, received an email invitation to participate in the focus group. All agreed to participate. The focus group was conducted using a Zoom video conference with staff using video, audio and chat functions to participate. A Google Doc was also used to talk through the findings and pose questions. While the Google Doc was made available for staff to comment in during and after the discussion, they focused their participation within the Zoom conference. While all participating staff members were on their own computers, several of them were co-present in the same physical space (e.g., conference room) within World Pulse’s headquarters in Portland. The focus group was audio recorded with permission and transcribed. Chat records were also collected for analysis.

**Post-meeting evaluations**

Community and staff members were invited to complete a post-meeting evaluation designed to get their feedback on the process and outcomes of the POW and focus group discussion. Following the meetings, each participant was sent a link to complete an online questionnaire using Qualtrics, which was available for approximately two weeks. The evaluations allowed participants to provide anonymous feedback about the research process. The questionnaires included six open-ended questions (Appendix
D). Participants were also asked if they would be interested in collaborating with the researcher on outcomes from the study. Separate but nearly identical questionnaires were created for community and staff member participants. Eleven community members and six staff members completed evaluations. Those who participated in both the online workshops and the evaluation were eligible to enter a drawing for either $40 USD (community) or a $40 USD Amazon gift card (staff). Qualitative responses to the open-ended evaluation questions were pulled for analysis.

**Member reflections**

Additionally, I used two forms of member reflections. Rather than viewing these as a “check” or “verification” of the research findings, I view member reflections, following Tracy (2010), as an opportunity to invite additional reflexive conversations about the process and outcomes of the research process and to further include participants in the analysis process. First, 31 interview participants responded to a set of reflection questions about the interview. In the style of reflexive email interviewing (Linabary & Hamel, 2017), an additional question set was emailed to all participants following the interview that allowed participants to review and reflect on their interview responses. This approach allows participants to ascribe meaning to their experiences in the interview, participate in analysis, and critically assess their own perspectives and insights with the potential for increased critical consciousness (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). Participants were sent their complete transcript or interview record and asked to respond to a set of five questions about their observations of the interview process and their experiences (Appendix E). Participants were also invited as part of this process to make any additions or clarifications they would like to their responses, if so desired. Three
participants revised their transcripts by either clarifying their thoughts or filling in areas within the transcript where the quality of our connection or lost connections made what was said difficult to discern.

Second, in addition to being able to reflect on the preliminary findings through the POW, participants were invited to review a draft of the recommendations emerging from the study and provide feedback. Throughout Phase 4, any documents and reports produced will also be shared back with participants, who will be invited to read and respond, as they are willing.

**Phase 4: Action and Outcomes**

Phase 4 involves working with community members and staff on actions and outcomes identified throughout the project. This is an ongoing process that extends beyond the scope of this dissertation. This process is being documented through field notes, audio recordings and/or reflexive journaling. Participants identified two categories of outcomes throughout the previous phases of this study. First, we would produce a formal report with recommendations that can be distributed in multiple formats (e.g., written, visual, audio) for both World Pulse and for other organizations and advocates. Second, and based on those recommendations, we would develop tools and/or resources related to safety and inclusion to further enable women on and beyond World Pulse’s platform to mobilize and organize for social change. These and other outcomes and actions will continue to evolve as the project moves forward. All participants who participated in the post-meeting evaluations indicated an interest in collaborating on the project’s outcomes.
Data Analysis

Data were analyzed throughout this project in multiple ways (Table 4). Inspired by Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2009) four levels of reflexive interpretation, I propose a reflexive analytical process involving five overlapping cycles of interpretation. This process draws on principles from thematic analysis and brings to bear the study’s critical transnational feminist lens, the collaborative processes detailed above, and the reflexive process to be discussed later in this chapter. A “reflexive” approach to interpretation recognizes both the ways these different forms of analysis interact and the need to interrogate the process by which data and representations are constructed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). These multiple, overlapping cycles reflect back and forth on each other in the ongoing interpretive process of refining and representing the study’s findings.

Following Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2009) model, the first cycle of interpretation involved interacting with the empirical material by reading and rereading interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and other research records. Given the amount of data generated by this project, I used NVivo to collect, manage, and catalog all of the materials collected. Two separate NVivo files (i.e., one for documents and one for all other data) were required given the amount of data and codes generated. I also interacted with the interview data by making notes both during the interview and as I transcribed. Documents were read as they were collected during the participant observation process. Following an initial read, I sorted the documents in NVivo by type and in the order they were collected.
Table 4: Reflexive Analytical Process: Five Overlapping Cycles of Interpretation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Analysis</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interact with the empirical material</td>
<td>Read and reread interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and other research records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic interpretation</td>
<td>Conduct a thematic analysis involving an open-coding process, thematic mapping and memoing, and constantly comparing themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative interpretation</td>
<td>Engage in collaborative sessions with staff and community members, reflexive question set responses, and member reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical interpretation</td>
<td>Interrogate and contextualize uneven power relations and contradictions as part of a critical transnational feminist analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on representation</td>
<td>Practice reflexivity around the analysis and writing process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Inspired by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009)

The second cycle involved systematic interpretation. At this stage, I analyzed the data qualitatively using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I immersed myself in the data as part of an iterative open-coding process. The first stage involved open coding of the first 20 completed interviews. I then did a close read to refine those initial codes. Multiple readings allowed for more focused coding and the identification of broader themes. Second-stage coding involved developing ‘structured questions’ (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) based on the literature and emergent themes. I then engaged in directed coding based on these questions. The same was then done with the remaining interviews and fieldnotes. A similar process was followed for data from
different phases of the project. Thematic mapping and memoing were used to make further connections within and between codes to formulate coherent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were constantly compared and refined alongside the data and participants’ interpretations throughout the analysis process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The third cycle involved collaborative and participatory interpretation using strategies outlined in Phases 3. This cycle accounts for the participatory approach adopted by this project, expanding on Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2000) model. In this cycle of interpretation, themes identified by participants in the collaborative sessions with staff and community members and member reflections were taken into account. This involved taking into account what they considered most significant in reflections on their own transcripts (e.g., member reflections). It also involved presenting preliminary themes to staff and community members for discussion, and rereading the findings side-by-side with their comments. I have also made efforts to represent participants’ interpretations both within the findings themselves as well as through interpretive boxes within Chapters 4 and 5 (see Crystallization).

The fourth cycle involved critical interpretation, using the study’s theoretical lens of critical transnational feminism. In particular, viewing the data through critical transnational feminist lens provides an opportunity to interrogate and contextualize uneven power relations and contradictions in differently situated participants’ lived experiences (Norander & Harter, 2012; Swarr & Nagar, 2010). I used several analytical strategies in this cycle. First, the critical transnational feminist lens informed structured questions developed as part of the second cycle. Second, I used node matrices in NVivo to attend to similarities and differences among participants. For example, looking at
regional differences among the use of ‘sisterhood’ language. Third, I reread the preliminary findings with this lens in mind, looking for discussions and invocations of different identities, power relations, spaces and scales, and discourses. I also paid careful attention to what was left unmarked, erased or unsaid.

The fifth and final cycle involved reflection about representation. In particular, this cycle demanded reflection on how the interpretations are textually produced and their implications. This involved my own reflection on representation in this project as well as conversations with others (e.g., collective reflexivity) including participants. This cycle is captured in the “Interlude” section at the end of this chapter. Such an approach is in line with FPAR principles to honor voice and differences as well as the study’s reflexive strategies to be detailed in subsequent sections. While these five cycles do build sequentially on each other, they are iterative and overlapping as part of an ongoing reflexive process moving back and forth between them and allowing them to reflect on each other.

Methodological Considerations

Given the context of this study, several issues were taken into consideration in making methodological decisions. These considerations were informed both by prior work with the organization and by data collected as part of Phase 1 of the project.

Language and Literacy

The Internet is primarily based in and dominated by English. World Pulse historically has been no exception. As previously indicated, World Pulse’s community members are from more than 190 different countries and therefore speak a variety of
languages. World Pulse has responded by initiating Google Translate functionality, full French functionality (in response to a growing population on the site from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other dominantly French-speaking countries), and volunteer Translators.

Most participants on World Pulse necessarily then interact with the site in English, though a growing number make use of the alternative options. Mandating English as the language of this study would necessarily exclude members and replicate global power relations. In an effort to be inclusive and in the spirit of the metatheoretical positions of this study, I indicated that when possible the interviews would be conducted in the language of participants’ choice. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, interviews were conducted primarily in English.

Given participants’ various social locations, language skills, and education levels, attention was also needed to phrasing of recruitment messages and questions. In an interview during Phase 1, a long-time community member pointed out the importance of simplifying language in any calls for participation in the project. She said:

*I would suggest when you are reaching out to them you should simplify your [language], because you are doing important, the work is very important so they should be able to just get clearly that what you are out to do is a, b, c, d, and like there is short, simply worded paragraph so you don’t get intimidated by seeing a PhD. Because a local woman may not have a bachelor’s degree even, but they are doing some good work so we don’t want to intimidate them.*

To address this, I was reflexive drafting of messages, carefully considering the implications of my language choices. Additionally, I sought support of World Pulse staff in reading drafts of recruitment calls to provide feedback on their accessibility and relied on a volunteer Translator to make them accessible in French.
Digital Access

Despite the fact that community members interact in World Pulse’s digital space, members have differing levels of digital access. Inconsistent power or Internet sources, lack of infrastructure, technology costs, and time or distance to access cyber cafes are all examples of ways in which participants’ access can be constrained (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). For the research process, this necessitated making multiple options for participation available, both synchronous and asynchronous and with varying levels of bandwidth required, in order to make the project inclusive. As a community member stated during Phase 1, “I just figure the more platforms we have to make the women have to choose from then we are going to have more chances of getting as much information as possible.” For example, email was a low bandwidth option that could be accessed at a time convenient to the participant and allowed the participant to extend the interview over whatever time period the she or he wished. Meanwhile, Skype required a stronger and consistent Internet connection and simultaneous interaction.

Time Constraints and Other Participation Barriers

World Pulse has operated on feminist values and principles whether or not it claims the label publicly, emphasizing voice, participation, and consensus in decision-making (Ferree & Martin, 1995). Ideally then, this project would be fully participatory. However, participatory approaches can require more time commitment on the part of participants and the researcher. The small staff of World Pulse is already stretched thin and the members of the online community have a variety of online and offline commitments. Certain populations within World Pulse are also regularly asked for
feedback. This places other demands on their time and can induce fatigue. As a result, organizational contacts at times were cautious about who should be involved at what stage to avoid overloading either population. Ideal levels and extent of participation are then not always feasible.

To account for this, I adopted several strategies. First, I incorporated multiple avenues and opportunities for participation in different formats across the study timeframe. Second, I worked with World Pulse staff to ensure that timing of my requests did not conflict with other programming and evaluation that they had underway. Third, I strategically opted not to include data collection with staff during Phase 2, waiting until later in the project in order to use my time with them productively. Lastly, I remained flexible and patient, being willing to adapt the project to respond to the participants’ constraints, as seen in the POW.

**Strategies for Quality and Rigor**

Over the years, diverse criteria, tools and strategies for promoting quality in qualitative and participatory research have been proposed. While any attempt to present rigid, universal criteria or standards for qualitative research are met with skepticism, the use of flexible and contextually situated means to assess and improve the quality of research can still be considered useful as a ways to enhance the research process and produce deeper understandings and transformations (Tracy, 2010). Even within feminist research, certain “best practices” are considered foundational to the work though they might look different depending on the context, perspectives, and nature of the project. The present study adopts several strategies to promote the quality of the research project,
including reflexivity, cultural humility, accountability and transparency, and crystallization.

**Reflexivity**

A key question for feminist research, particularly transnational feminist research, is: How can research produce knowledges across multiple lines of difference, avoid reproducing existing power relations, *and* seek transformative ends? Feminist scholars, among others, have called attention to the importance of reflexivity as central to the research process. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012) state, “A reflexive methodology seeks to describe reality within its multiple contexts, to encourage interaction between the researcher and the participants, and to minimize power differentials during the research process” (p. 567). As a result, reflexivity provides an avenue to interrogate the impact of the researcher, evaluate the research process, and enable the development of a critical consciousness, leading potentially to empowerment outcomes (Finlay, 2002).

Reflexivity, following Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012), is a “holistic process” that occurs throughout the entire research process. It occurs at multiple levels. Reflexivity first and foremost is considered an ongoing critical awareness of the self. What I will refer to as researcher reflexivity demands a constant examination and interrogation of the researcher’s positionality and presence particularly in relation to participants. It recognizes the need to consider the ways power and privilege are operating in the research process. As DeVault and Gross (2007) write, “Research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, but, rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance” (p. 191). Feminist researchers have been instrumental in pointing out that
even in research that attempts to be less hierarchical power differences cannot be entirely eradicated from the research process (Stacey, 1988). Reflexivity then provides a means to expose the ways that power is exercised in the research process.

Reflexivity, secondly, occurs in dialogue with others in the form of what I refer to as *collective reflexivity*. It is a “communal process that requires attentiveness to how the structural, political, and cultural environments of the researcher and the participants and the nature of the study affect the research processes and product” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012, p. 560). Participatory research practices that aim to disrupt power hierarchies and create socially relevant research are considered one means by which this is accomplished. Specifically, researchers are encouraged to reflexively listen and engage in dialogic relationships with participants (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Feminist researchers have argued that such reflexivity can “open a way to a more radical consciousness of the self” and be transformative both for the researcher and the participants (Finlay, 2002, p. 225).

Third, participants are equally recognized as having the “capacity to be reflexive beings” (Finlay, 2002, p. 218). Feminist researchers have argued that participants can also engage in reflexivity (referred to in this project as *participant reflexivity*), providing opportunities for participants to evaluate their own experiences and perceptions.

Reflexivity is risky, as scholars have critiqued its potential to devolve into narcissistic and self-indulgent texts, uncritically assume that the researcher can be wholly self-critical, and/or lead to feelings of paralysis among researchers (Denzin, 1997; Finlay, 2002; Patai, 1991). However, Pillow (2003) insists that these risks should “not mean that we need to throw out reflexivity for some other methodological tool” (p. 192). Instead it
Table 5: Strategies for Reflexivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher reflexivity</td>
<td>Researcher engages in a constant self-examination and interrogation of her/his positionality and power throughout the research process.</td>
<td>• Self-interview at each stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Written and/or audio recorded journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Recorded conversations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation reflexivity</td>
<td>Participants are invited to evaluate their own experiences and perceptions.</td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Member reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective reflexivity</td>
<td>Researcher and participants engage in dialogue</td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Participatory online workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus group</td>
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</table>

requires careful and cautious consideration of what is meant by reflexivity, its goals, and how it is enacted.

As indicated in my methodological strategies, this study incorporated multiple kinds of reflexivity throughout the research process (Table 5). In terms of researcher reflexivity, I have adopted several strategies to ensure regular self-evaluation. First, drawing on Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012), I engaged in a self-interview, responding to a set of reflexive questions at each phase of the research process, with particular attention to issues of power, positionality, and participant voices. Secondly, during data collection and analysis, I regularly journaled my immediate responses and salient observations through audio recordings and/or writing. These recordings were dated and collected for critical interrogation in later stages of the project. Third, I recorded conversations in which I discussed what I was experiencing or observing as part of the project. In
particular, I sought out academic colleagues who could provide both a sounding board and alternative perspectives at different stages of the project.

**Cultural Humility**

Related to reflexivity is a commitment to cultural humility in efforts to dialogue and collaborate across difference. Cultural humility refers to an “ongoing self-reflection and self-critique, particularly identifying and examining one’s own patterns of unintentional and intentional racism” (Ross, 2010, p. 316; Tervalon & Murary-Garcia, 1998). Cultural humility goes beyond cultural competence (e.g., knowledge of cultural practices) to emphasize practitioners’ (sub)conscious attitudes and skills. Cultural humility thus includes a recognition of one’s own biases and privileges, an ability to identify and analyze unequal power relations as they manifest in policies and practices, and a capacity for non-authoritarian, cross-cultural communication. Researchers who practice cultural humility are encouraged to “relinquish the role of expert,” actively seeking to disrupt unequal power relations and engage in respectful collaborative partnerships with communities (Ross, 2010, p. 318). In this project, I strive to enact cultural humility through my methodological choices; by including questions in my self-interview related to my own biases, privileges, and positions; and through my reflexive journaling.

**Accountability and Transparency**

Globalization has created demands for greater accountability in research as participants increasingly have access to the products of research. Accountability to research participants then has shifted, requiring a heightened awareness of the political
implications of research work (Bickham Mendez & Wolf, 2012). If the goal of FPAR is to engage in research with and for the participants, then transparency and accountability are an essential part of the research process.

Transparency involves being open and honest about the research process. Traditionally, this has occurred through clear documentation of research decisions and processes and the inclusion of detailed information in methods sections and appendices (Tracy, 2010). When conceptualized this way, transparency is primarily in relation to the scholarly community and not necessarily to participants. Given this study’s participatory and feminist foundations, the research project should be accountable not just to other scholars but also, and perhaps primarily, to the community itself. Several efforts already mentioned contribute to this effort, such as including reflexive questions with the interview, conducting member reflections of the findings, evaluating the workshop, and producing various outcomes, including those that are accessible to the community.

In an effort to further my transparency and accountability to the World Pulse community as well as potentially promote further collaboration at all stages of the process, I have also been sharing digital updates about my project. I created a page about the project on my personal website (https://jasminelinabary.com/ transnational-organizing-online), which was shared both with participants in the study as well as linked to on my journal on World Pulse. In doing so, I follow the example other scholars who have made an effort to make their research process more transparent by using blogs or other online platforms to open up their research processes and/or data to participants and others (e.g., Mayorga, 2014; Stewart, 2015). Such a step is also in line with the goals of engaged scholarship and PAR, which aim to democratize the research process. Each
update opens an invitation for additional feedback and conversation with participants, who at times have commented directly on the post or followed up by email.

Crystallization

As discussed in the Preface of this dissertation, crystallization is a means of using multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation to create deeper and more complex account of the topic at hand. Several aspects of crystallization are already addressed both in the Preface and earlier in this chapter, including the use of multiple methodological and analytical strategies and reflexive praxis. With regards to the utilization of multiple genres or mediums of representation, I invoke two different approaches to crystallization. First, I utilize integrated crystallization, which involves producing a text that consists of multiple genres (Ellingson, 2009). This dissertation document does so using “Interludes” at the end of each chapter that take different forms. Within the writing of the findings chapters, I incorporate pull-out boxes to share reflections from the participants, and make visible their interpretations. I also make use of an “open-sandwich” structure (Ellingson, 2009) within the findings, privileging participants’ voices in each section prior to my own analysis. Further, I materialize the constructedness of the analysis typographically (Handford & Taylor, 2016). Specifically, I distinguish and draw attention to quoted words from participants within the findings using italics. Second, I intend to utilize dendritic crystallization, which involves using multiple forms of analysis and genres of representation without or in addition to combing them into a single text (Ellingson, 2009). Through Phase 4, I intend to collaborate on outcomes that involve different and non-academic genres of representation for this study’s findings and to remain open to continued development and formats.
Interlude: The Problem of Representation

A little more than four years ago, I threw a book against the wall. Not just any book, but the *Handbook of Feminist Research*. I was frustrated. I felt like I was not given adequate answers for the problem of representation – or how researchers should or whether they even can ‘represent’ others’ experiences. Today I recognize that there are no easy answers, but rather as researchers we must find ways to ethically and reflexively navigate tensions related to representation, particularly when we work within emerging contexts that produce new and heightened vulnerabilities. This is especially challenging within digital spaces where material traces become permanent and searchable. Additionally, as this project indicates, issues of safety and vulnerability are complex and context dependent. Furthermore, attempts to represent or speak for others are inherently problematic, risking reproducing some of the very exclusions I seek to counter.

Within this broad context, what does it mean then to *represent* the diverse and intersectional identities of members of a digital space for transnational feminist organizing in ways that are rich, meaningful and complex? *And* what does it mean to do so in ways that do not reveal and expose participants? I have grappled with these questions regularly and engaged in conversations with others to try to unpack what it means to do so – both in terms of contextualizing participants’ voices and in preserving their privacy and confidentiality. As Ellingson (2009) notes, “the issue concerns not merely an academic dilemma of how to enrich or complexify our accounts. Rather, material and relational consequences of our representations affect our participants and ourselves as researchers” (p. 37)
Given that the focus of this study is on a ‘safe’ counter-space, I do not wish for my study to contribute to it being any less safe. While the nature of the interactions and relationships within World Pulse’s digital space may lower the risks associated with a participant being identified by other members in comparison to sites in which members are more at risk for harassment and surveillance, I am conscious that members are differentially situated within overlapping online and offline spaces that shape their risks.

In attending to the context and different vulnerabilities for this particular project, I have opted to err on the side of caution. In doing so, the chapters that follow do not always include rich detail about the participants. Despite the significance of naming to humanize and personalize participants’ experiences, I have opted not to use pseudonyms to reduce the ability to trace participants through the findings and in so doing be able to identify them. Rather, I describe participants using their gender identity, nation and other characteristics when deemed appropriate to contextualize their responses, while being mindful of the amount of detail I reveal. Aesthetically, this is less than ideal, but doing so allows for greater likelihood that participants’ confidentially will be preserved.

In labeling participants using descriptors, I run the risk of both marking and unmarking difference in ways that reproduce marginalizations. I have been conscious in reviewing the analysis to attend to the erasures I may have made and whose bodies I may have left unmarked. For example, individual staff members who participated remain minimally described within the chapters that follow in part because in doing so would serve to quickly identify them. In doing so, however, I leave those with arguably the most institutional power within the context relatively unmarked. Additionally, I recognize the ways identities are imbued with different meanings within particular contexts. For
example, I had multiple participants who reside in the United States for whom their race as well as their immigrant status shaped their experiences in meaningful ways. Yet, these identifications may not be as salient for participants situated elsewhere.

Moving forward, I plan to engage in continued reflection around representation by sharing about these challenges with my collaborators both to be accountable to them in the process of constructing this document as well as attend to any vulnerabilities or other considerations I may not be taking into account.
CHAPTER 4. CONSTRUCTING SAFETY

*World Pulse is a public forum that strives to be a safe, supportive, and nurturing community for women to experience connection, personal empowerment, and community building. We want you to have a great experience and feel confident of your safety as you express your own voice.*

– World Pulse training document

In this chapter, I explore the notion of ‘safety’ in relation to World Pulse. Specifically, this chapter seeks to unpack how World Pulse’s digital space is constructed as ‘safe’ and how this construction produces contradictions that have implications for organizing across difference. I first detail the ways World Pulse’s digital space has been discursively and materially constructed as safe (RQ1). Second, I demonstrate the ways safety becomes contradictory through various practices, discourses, and overlapping spaces (RQ2). Lastly, I identify the ways community and staff members chose to engage and respond to these contradictions (RQ3).

**Digital Space as ‘Safe’**

*It’s a safe space and that is what’s unique and I like about it. It’s a safe space where you go onto the platform and you can share publicly but you can also feel safe.*  

‘Safe’ is a common descriptor of World Pulse, both within members’ talk about digital space as well as within the organization’s self-talk. Many interview participants, like the woman in Trinidad and Tobago quoted above, described World Pulse as safe within the context of the interviews before being prompted by questions about safety. This would often occur in the context of explaining how World Pulse is different from

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18 Participants’ words are included as written or stated. In the case of email interviews, I have kept their stylistic and punctuation choices intact. Spelling corrections were made in some cases when it appeared two letters had been transposed. In some cases quotes were edited for clarity using brackets.
other digital spaces of which they are a part. In describing what it meant to be a safe space, one woman in Nigeria stated:

*A safe space is where we have equality. No presence of a man threatening me with men are the head. A safe place is where I can write what I feel and believe its the truth without any one querrying and intimidating me. A safe place is where I can write about the domestic violence that I experienced and someone online will not report me to my husband that I have written about our secret. A safe place is where nobody will always being any oppressive religion to silence me or make me shy about what I write. A safe place is where the third gender will not be judged for speaking out. A safe place is that place where I can be naturally ME without inhibitions.*

In these ways, safety was seen to manifest in particular spaces, like World Pulse, where individuals feel they can act without fear of threat. Safety then is also tied up in notions of identity, trust, and voice.

Similarly, the organization uses ‘safe’ language in its self-descriptions. During the course of my participant observation, I observed ‘safe’ language mobilized in descriptions of the organization on “about” pages, within trainings, and used by staff within Facebook Live events. For example, in a training module, World Pulse is described as “*a safe space and supportive network for you to express your voice and unique solutions to issues affecting your community*” (Digital Changemaking 101 training module).

While ‘safe’ is a persistent descriptor across both the organization and members’ talk, members were unsure what made them adopt this descriptor. As a black woman in the United States described, “*I’m very unsure of why we feel World Pulse is a safe space for us to share. I honestly feel comfortable. I have never given it a thought as to why.*” For members who were interviewed, the sense of safety they experience in World Pulse’s digital space has been a *feeling* that they encounter but had not fully processed, as the
member above indicated. Understanding how ‘safety’ is constructed then requires unpacking the taken-for-grantedness of the material and discursive practices that communicate safety to members.

In the following sections, I first discuss how the digital space becomes constructed as ‘safe’ through material-discursive practices. Second, I illustrate how it is further constructed through the (in)visibility of particular kinds of talk and interactions within World Pulse’s digital space. Lastly, I describe the ways World Pulse’s safety is defined relationally within the structure of the broader Internet (Table 6).

Material and Discursive Practices

One of the ways [World Pulse is safe] is that they verify the passwords. They have also posted a security online safe kit that one can use to learn how to stay safe online. I may add that the fact that there are open lines of communications whereby I can email the head office in case of any threat is a plus.

The digital space of World Pulse is constructed as safe through material and discursive practices that mutually constitute it as safe. In describing World Pulse, members, like the woman in Kenya quoted above, drew on these practices that taken together communicated to them that it was safe.

For some, joining the site became a key moment where World Pulse’s concern for safety became visible. When clicking on “Sign up,” new members are greeted by a 3-point explanation of World Pulse: “(1) Connect with inspiring women changemakers from 190 countries (2) Hear their stories, and feel safe to share your own, (3) Exchange resources and support within our growing global community, and help impact 2.9 million lives and counting.” Feeling safe then is a descriptor of World Pulse introduced from the first point of contact. When registering, members are provided with guidance when
selecting a username: “Tip: Consider using a name that is not your own, if you live in a place that does not support free speech.” Newly registering members are also given guidance on what makes a strong password. Registration is free of cost.

Typed or audio verifications are also used to ensure that the new registration is a human person (as opposed to a bot) who joins with intention. World Pulse staff discussed how new user accounts get “filtered” through technological features built into the site to determine which new accounts should become “trusted accounts.” Human monitoring of new accounts also takes place. As one staff member explained:

*We have someone checking all of our new user accounts and people coming in. So on just a very practical level, we are monitoring spam and any kind of—you know, folks who might be joining the community to take advantage of other people and then dealing with that directly. So that’s just like a tech solution to creating a safe space, so that at least the people who join are the people who really want to be joining and participating.*

As with most websites upon registration, you must agree to a Terms of Service. The Terms of Service indicate that the “purpose of the Site is to provide users with a forum with which to communicate their opinions and experiences and connect around issues important to them. For World Pulse to carry out this mission, it is important that all users of the Site respect one another.” This document provides a list of activities the site may not be used for including for comments that are “harmful, abusive, harassing, threatening, pornographic, obscene, vulgar, profane, hateful, incites violence, false or misleading, invasive of another’s privacy, and/or racially, ethnically, religiously or otherwise objectionable, all as solely determined by World Pulse,” among other activities including defamation, impersonation, promotion, and stalking.
Table 6: Digital Space as ‘Safe’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Codes/Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material and Discursive</td>
<td>The digital space of World Pulse is constructed as safe through material and discursive practices that mutually constitute it as safe. These practices communicate to members that the space is safe and that safety is an organizational value and community norm.</td>
<td>New Member Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>Program and Training Practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connected Spaces</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing Safety in</td>
<td>The digital space is constructed as safe through the (in)visibility of particular kinds of talk and interaction within the digital space which communicate to members that it is safe. These kinds of talk and interaction are further enabled and constrained by the technological affordances of the digital space as well as organizational policies and practices.</td>
<td>Presence of Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk and Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of Vulnerable Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of Sameness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Absence of Negative Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe in Comparison to</td>
<td>The digital space is constructed as safe in comparison to the broader Internet and other social media sites specifically.</td>
<td>Internet as Unsafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td>World Pulse as Safer than Other Digital Spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On subsequent pages during the registration process that ask for additional information, such as what country you reside in and your profile photo, new users are allowed to skip these steps. This registration process communicated to members that the digital space is safe. As another woman in Kenya described:

*There are protections for you that you get to read. And since those protection policies are just out there you are even, before logging in, there is something there and they offer you options where they tell you if you feel threatened in your...*
security, kindly use some other name or something, you know? Yeah, they put that protection wall, yeah. So as you read you tend to agree because they understand that some information which you are putting there may not be ok for you when you leave the platform, you know? So for me that makes me feel safe.

Many participants discussed the option to protect one’s identity by choosing an alias rather than one’s real name as a username – which is both allowed for within the infrastructure of the site as well as reaffirmed by messaging from World Pulse – as an indication of safety. On the Public Profile page in Account Settings, members can input their real name but again they are provided with a caution: “This information is not required. Security Note: Any information shared here is shared publicly on your profile page. This page can be seen by anyone who can access the Internet, not only the World Pulse community.” As one woman in Nigeria said, “It is [a safe space]. You can choose to be anonymous or use an alias.”

Within World Pulse programs, this concern about members’ safety expressed through protection of one’s identity manifests in requests to further feature or publish members’ stories beyond the website. As a woman in Zimbabwe explained:

_The other thing that I love is that is they tell you, they say, ‘Ok, we are going to be publishing your story. If you don’t want to use your photo, if you don’t want to use your name, you can let us know what name you want us to use.’ They give you an option to make sure you are really secure. And also if you don’t want your story to be published, they will ask you, ‘Do you think you’ll be safe with the story out there because nobody will take care of you?’ It’s just good to know, ‘Ok, I am safe, and then they can put it up.’ And another one, ‘I am not safe. Let’s wait for an opportune time when I am safe.’ I think it is a very good space where they are very attentive._

Members also discussed specific technological features of the site that communicated to them that it was safe including the use of “a secure protocol (HTTPS),” a lack of pop-ups, passwords, and buttons allowing members to contact staff and report suspicious activity. One man from Nigeria who had been a member of World Pulse years prior
found himself shut out of World Pulse upon his return and considered this a reason why World Pulse is a safe space:

RECALL I said I used to be a member of WP and left for a long time and when I got back I couldn’t login in again because I forgot my log in details and the email address I used had been deactivated. I had to rejoin.

Members also noted the ability to select if a post to their journal (blog) should be shared publicly or privately contributed to their sense of safety, as a woman in Kenya indicated:

Everything is protected, because I remember when I was doing some of my journals, you are given options to share them or just to leave them with you. Because going to do a journal you have been given an option whether to share it publicly, whether to share it in a group, or whether or just share it only in your journal and that makes it personal – no one can read it unless you want to share it.

These technological features came to matter to members in part through the information World Pulse provides to them about safety at sign-in, through toolkits and trainings, and in a “Staying Safe Online” guide ever present at the bottom of the webpage. As a black woman in the United States described:

One thing about World Pulse is they make a conscious effort to let you know about safety through their training programs – how to be safe, how to be aware. That’s probably the first thing that I ran into when I first joined, in one of the introductory courses. It’s kind of like if somebody is new to World Pulse joins and they take advantage of everything that is available on that website they should be safe.

The “Staying Safe Online” guide provides “The top five ways to stay safe online,” including using an alias, being aware of the risks of public Internet cafes, creating strong passwords and changing them, never posting personal contact information in public journals, and always logging out. It also includes a link to World Pulse’s Safety and Security Toolkit – both a 7-slide overview PowerPoint that can be downloaded from Dropbox as well as a more detailed web page covering topics such as risks for “citizen
journalists,” vulnerability, anonymity, support networks, passwords, backing up and deleting files, and using public or shared computers, among other topics. Versions of these training materials, all in English, are repeated in World Pulse’s signature trainings, including its Digital Changemaking 101 and Advanced Digital Changemaking courses and volunteer trainings. Members noted that it was through these trainings that they have become aware of the kinds of safety concerns that can exist. As a white woman in the United States stated:

_I think it was even one of the first [volunteer] trainings, they said something about if you don’t see a woman’s picture it might not just be because she doesn’t have a picture but because it would be unsafe for her to actually have her picture there and the name that she gives may not be her real name because that may not be safe for her. It was kind of like a wake up, you know, that I needed to keep in mind a broader context for the women I was speaking with in places that I hadn’t necessarily been aware might not be a safe space and what kind of life risk this woman might be taking to write her story, to even be on the Internet. So I appreciated that they attended to that in the trainings, and it really made me much more cognizant of that._

Volunteers play a key role in furthering these practices. In fact, for one volunteer role – that of Community Champions – “creating a safe and meaningful environment for discussion” was considered a key task, according to an announcement about the position.

Actual organizational practices that coincide with these technological features further communicated this commitment to safety. Members noted that the “Contact us” link at the bottom of every page allows them to reach out to staff in case of any issues. Several reported both during interviews and during the participatory online workshop that they have used this to contact staff and received “immediate” and “effective” responses. Members noted that they felt safe due to the response by staff when any concerns are raised. As one woman from Canada explained:
I am really glad that when I have a question about whether somebody doesn’t seem to be who they say or there’s not enough information about them, I’m really glad there’s that level that I can send my concern and say, ‘Could you take a look at this?’... And I think it’s part of why I do feel so secure on World Pulse. I know that’s there and I can use it, I can access it. That ‘contact us’ button is available to anyone.

Similarly, a member in Cameroon noted that when she did have experiences with scam messages World Pulse took swift action.

I have two experiences of scam messages that came to my private email, but World Pulse was fast enough to alert the community by email of the presence of a scammer in the community and the member was deleted, in all two instances. That was action that took place within 24 hours.

The safety of World Pulse’s digital space is further emphasized through its connected spaces, such as corresponding social media platforms. The World Pulse Facebook page includes language suggesting they provide a “safe and supportive space for women and men around the world to unite for change, both on our platform and on our social media channels.” As a result they indicate that comments are moderated with promotional posts, profanity, hate speech and abusive language subject to removal. Comments are suggested to include “encouragement of our community and intelligent, respectful discussion of global issues.”

In sum, material and discursive practices intra-act to construct World Pulse’s digital space as safe from the moment members join and as they continue onto corresponding platforms. These practices work in tandem to constantly communicate to members that the space is safe as well as reinforce safety as an organizational value and community norm. In the next section, I demonstrate how this further plays out through talk and interaction among members within the digital space.
Constructing Safety in Talk and Interaction

*I consider world pulse a safe platform. For example first of all for a renowned organization like world pulse it is bound to be, else it would have lost credibility with complaints. Secondly the ease with which members tell their personal stories comes on how secure one feels.*

As this statement from a woman in Ethiopia indicates, World Pulse is further constructed as safe through the presence and absence of particular kinds of talk and interaction within the digital space. Specifically, community members described World Pulse as safe based on the (a) presence of supportive interactions, (b) presence of vulnerable communication, (c) presence of sameness, and (d) absence of negative interactions. These kinds of talk and interaction are further enabled and constrained by the technological affordances of the digital space as well as organizational policies and practices.

**Presence of supportive interaction**

*World Pulse is very different. It is not like a social networking site that everybody throws their opinions about your post -- good, bad and hurtful. World Pulse is a true embodiment of sisterhood. Sisters support each other with kind words, support all the time. There are no hurtful comments that brings a sister down, but rather encouragement that lifts the spirit of a sister up. To me it is not similar to any site that I belong to right now. I feel secured belonging to World Pulse because I know everyone is my sister. There is love, thriving. There is support, thriving. There is peace, thriving. And above all there is that equality for all.*

As this statement from a woman in Cameroon suggests, World Pulse members reported that the presence of supportive interactions with other members of World Pulse contributed to their sense of safety. The kind of encouraging interactions taking place on the platform indicated to members that World Pulse is different from other digital spaces. As a woman in Nigeria stated:
What I normally see is positive comments, motivational comments that ask you to go ahead. Even when people share their experiences you know that you are not the only one. You are not even the worst person, you know? It is safe to me. And the World Pulse members I have connected with offline, they have been nice people. Even in some sites the person may even lure you to meet offline and it becomes clear that the person is harmful. But, no, the ones I have met outside, I mean offline, they have been very genuine as the ones I meet online. So World Pulse is very safe for me.

Members like her discussed the kinds of encouraging and constructive comments they received on their stories as unique to World Pulse. During the months I engaged in participant observation in the digital space, the vast majority of comments fell into this category. Norms of interaction included that members’ comments often involved addressing the author of the post by name, thanking her for sharing her story, offering support, sometimes affirming what was said by calling direct attention to a line or piece of information or adding to it by sharing from personal experience, closing with messages encouraging the person to persist (e.g., “Keep strong!,” “Don’t stop!,” “Keep voicing out,” “Keep the fire burning!”), and concluding with a salutation and name of the commenter following formal letter writing practices. Salutations included nods to sisterhood, friendship and love. In return, authors would respond back, thanking the commenters. This mutual acknowledgement was a key cultural practice within the digital space. As a woman in Kenya described: “If you look at how people make conversations, it is in such a way that no one shows their excesses and the responses are constructive in nature. Otherwise people would not be free to tell their story as is.”

In my own interactions, I sought to learn and emulate normative practices. In my field notes following the first time I commented during my participant observation, I wrote, “I commented on the story and followed it. In commenting, I made sure to address her by name, to thank her and encourage her. I am the first to comment” (fieldnotes
excerpt, June 8, 2016). The following day I received a response thanking me for my comment and seeking to connect more. In reflecting on commenting practices, I wrote later, “In my comments I find myself focusing on thanking, affirming, and asking a question to push solutions forward” (fieldnotes excerpt, August 20, 2016).

World Pulse reaffirms these supportive behaviors through trainings, which engender particular kinds of interactions. In the Digital Empowerment Training Manual, trainees are encouraged to visit other members’ profiles to read and comment on their journal entries with the following notes: “Positive, helpful comments are a powerful way to encourage others and to find out more information about a particular topic. Supportive comments will also help you make personal connections within the World Pulse community.” Members are also encouraged in trainings to consider “What can you offer that is valuable? Feedback? Support? A related, new idea? A connection to another participant who might share our concerns or interests?” (Advanced Digital Changemaking training module). In directions to guide commenting in the basic training, trainees are encouraged to “Share anything supportive that might continue the conversation!”

Additionally, World Pulse further bolsters this through volunteers who serve in Listener roles (now Encouragers). Listeners are described as those “who read others’ posts, leave encouraging comments, welcome new members, and create connection and interaction within the community.” They receive training on the types of comments to provide. Staff described these roles as a “built-in system for people to model behaviors that we want to see in the community” As one staff member explained, “They’re doing a lot of the commenting and setting that tone, so even if somebody doesn’t know
something’s coming from an Encourager, if they have the training, people are benefiting from that training because they’re--it’s modeled.” One Listener from Kenya affirmed this, saying:

As a community Listener you are given this stuff, probably the specific words, adjectives for example you should use, these are guidance on how you should do things. I think most of the women or men on World Pulse I think adhere to this policy.

World Pulse took a step further with reinforcing the kinds of comments the organization expects to see during a redesign in November 2016. World Pulse embedded expectations for comments within the material features of the digital space – changing buttons for “Comment” to “Encourage me” and “Recommend this” to “Send me love.” This was a purposeful move to set the tone for interactions, as one staff member explained:

For example, we have a love button, but, you know, it’s different from another, like you look at Facebook, for example, you can express like a range of emotion and types of comments and purposes, but like what you’re saying – the site was trying to direct a certain type of participation that feels supportive to somebody especially who may be not used to speaking out very much online.

While members could still choose to comment in ways that are not ‘encouraging,’ these changes reinforce behavioral norms by communicating to new and existing members about the types of interactions that should be taking place within the digital space.

Presence of vulnerable communication

Participant: World Pulse is the safest space I know online.

Jasmine: Ok, so why do you feel that way?

Participant: Yeah, I feel that way because everybody is vulnerable on World Pulse. Normally on the Internet, things are really, there is this facet of I have it all together, you know, my life is good, my world is good and all of that. But on World Pulse everybody feels part of their lives are not so inspiring and then brings it together with the parts that are inspiring. So that’s why I feel, I feel like
there is nothing to protect myself from. I can just be. I can just tell my story and be who I am without any fear.

As this exchange with a participant from Nigeria indicates, members suggested that the vulnerability of the stories shared on World Pulse also indicates that it is safe. By vulnerability, members refer to the sharing of personal, often traumatic and sometimes stigmatized experiences that leave one exposed. These include members’ experiences with rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, breast ironing, maternal health challenges, the death of a child, being unwanted as a girl child, and sex and menstruation, among other topics. Many of these stories involve discussions of topics that are explicitly or implicitly gendered experiences (e.g., menstruation) that are tied to cultural stigmas and larger institutional and structural barriers. Members described World Pulse as a place where women could “speak freely,” particularly about topics such as these that might be taboo. As a woman in England described:

It just seems a place where you can express what you are feeling – even things you might not feel comfortable talking about sort of in your own society you can express them freely on World Pulse. Like the other day, I was reading something about menstruation and how in so many communities and around the world in so many cultures it’s considered taboo and you can’t talk about it, you are isolated from your community if you are menstruating, that sort of thing. And it’s like you can’t just go and talk about to like your guy friends at the pub or something, you know, but on World Pulse I felt like it was a really good forum to discuss it and all women go through that so we all know what it’s like.

Another member, a woman in Uganda, described World Pulse as the “only place that I feel free and comfortable sharing my stories.” Members indicated that this was also something that distinguishes World Pulse from other digital spaces. One black woman in the United States described telling someone she met about World Pulse:

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19 Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a contested term, with some preferring the use of female genital cutting (FGC) or female circumcision. FGM is used here, as it is the primary terminology members have used to describe their own experiences.
I also told her people are open and honest enough. They don’t feel like they need to hide or pretend. They unmask themselves as women – their pain, their struggles – they are giving it all out. I think the work is honorable. People are being vulnerable online, which is not generally something that we would do, you know? Even on Facebook I’m not seeing people like that, Facebook, Instagram. Here we post our pictures. But our pain, our struggles, our, those things that may be considered shameful are not on Facebook. But I find that on World Pulse people are able to be vulnerable, be themselves, be authentic people, have a conversation around issues that face women.

A cycle is also created in which members share openly about their experiences, including trauma, and in doing so create discursive space for other members to do the same. As the participant further described:

When somebody else has shared their vulnerability, I am encouraged to share mine. Oh, ok, maybe I can. And I think it might be a process for everybody. I share one story, I don’t see anybody judging me about it, and then maybe I can share a little bit more. I think that’s where the comfort level is. You throw something out there, you see the support that you get from it, and then you build on that. And then you form connections and maybe you do have your certain people that you kind of like connect to that are your support system. That’s what it is to be, to be honest.

In this sense, vulnerability breeds more vulnerability, as members witness others sharing their stories and the kinds of responses they receive.

Members indicated that the level of courage and strength members demonstrate by sharing vulnerable contributes to a belief that members are “not to be messed with,” as a woman in Canada explained:

It really was obvious to me pretty early that everyone writing in is incredibly strong and so anyone who thinks they might try mess with anyone writing in World Pulse would be up against about 27 thousand really powerful, determined leaders and that’s not a kind of safety that you have, for instance, on Facebook, where you have a much wider population.

Members are encouraged to engage in this kind of “honesty” and “personal” sharing through different discursive and material features. In trainings, members who participate are provided with direction in terms of what makes a good story. In the Digital
Changemaking 101 training, trainees are told, “So how do we tell our stories? We tell our stories by speaking honestly about feelings, emotions and thoughts, recreating the places and circumstances around us, and giving our Listeners images that they can see in their minds.” In this there is an emphasis on both honesty and the value of emotions within this kind of writing. In the Advanced Digital Changemaking course, participants are similarly told that a “great post” would include personal experience, address a situation that needs to be changed and provide a solution. Participants are further told that “narrating your life story is a courageous act” – “Your story, told in your own voice, helps others understand something in a new way, and supports other women in speaking up, as well.”

This is further reaffirmed as these stories get promoted through World Pulse, through becoming featured on the platform, recognized as a Story Award winner through a badge, and shared on social media. These practices make these kinds of stories visible to others, as one staff member shared, “I would say that the content that we’re promoting, you know, so when we put like, you know, through Story Awards what we’re highlighting and then people being able to see other people speaking out.”

Editorial guidelines for the Story Awards encourage members to consider whether they have a personal connection to the topic, whether they are amplifying voices and perspectives that are underrepresented, and whether their writing is solutions-oriented when addressing difficult topics, among other considerations. These stories, and recognized members, become visibly acknowledged within the materiality of the platform through badges that call attention to those who have been awarded as well as separate tabs featuring these stories. In these ways, vulnerability is made visible and normative within the digital space.
Presence of sameness

I feel much more comfortable sharing stories in worldpulse because we are a group of vibrant ladies almost targeting similar goals in the future.

As a woman from Uganda described above, members also expressed a sense of safety due to perceived similarity to and identification with other members in terms of shared identities and goals. This sameness materializes through markers that communicate World Pulse is a platform “for women” and through the sense of shared purpose emphasized through organizational discourses.

While participants indicated that members were diverse and had cultural differences, many suggested that that their shared gender identity as women made them feel comfortable sharing their experiences. As a woman in Zimbabwe shared:

*Yes it is [safe], to the extent to which we are all women saying the things that affect us without fear or feelings of judgment that what I’m saying might “offend” men. Because in other spaces we are always getting policed as women...and sometimes by other women and mostly about things that are perceived as offending men or being inconsequential to their existence and therefore immaterial.*

Similarly, a black woman in the United States indicated that it was the support of other women that contributed to her comfort in the digital space:

*I think what might be responsible for that is, first of all, we are mainly women and women tend to understand women’s issues, understand that we do have complex lives and we need spaces to unwind. If we can get support from other women, we will be stronger for it. I think, part of it is some kind of camaraderie that we have as women and we kind of tend to want to lean on each other, especially with women who have, you know. I honestly believe that the women on World Pulse are people who have gone through a process in their lives. They are no longer, and that may not be true for everybody, but for the most part people feel like it is a space for me to be able to unwind.*
In addition to shared gender identity, participants also suggested that members are “like-minded” in terms of their social change goals both within and beyond World Pulse. As a woman in England explained:

*Like I said, I do feel safe there. I feel safer there than I do probably on any other platform. I think it’s just the fact that most of the members are all really like-minded people that despite maybe cultural differences they all have maybe the same end goal in common. I think that makes the conversation a lot safer, if you will.*

Members reported feeling understood by others because of seemingly shared social change goals and experiences. As a woman in India explained:

*Yeah, it is a safe space because you have like-minded people, like-minded problems. Until now, I have not come across such people who are unsafe or have just come on for some kind of fun or just having a social side, let’s have an account and open it up. I’ve not yet come across such people or maybe I have not interacted with them. Or I have interacted with people who have been through life, who have seen the ups and downs of life, who have been through different kinds of depths and have some kind of evolution, have some kind of confession, so when you interact with such people you feel safe because you know that you will be understood. You will not be understood by whatever you are being told. As I said, when we were interacting with our mentor, [Name], right? It was like, ah, I started instantly, we started talking, ‘Tell about yourself so I can understand what do I have to coach on, in what ways I can help you,’ and it was not that I was talking to him for the first time. I felt as if I knew him. He had such a warm personality that I felt safe talking to him so that is some kind of feeling which World Pulse gives me. When I talk to [Name of staff], when I talked to [Name of staff], when I talked to anyone, it’s not that I have not met them, because in reality even if we have not met, it felt like we knew each other. So that is the kind of safe zone, which I have felt.*

In this case, a belief in a shared goal has also contributed to a sense of familiarity and trust in relationships with staff and other volunteers who have worked with members. In describing this shared goal, the meaning was often assumed. In most participants’ talk, this goal was a broadly defined and sometimes ambiguous social change goal related to “women’s empowerment” or “gender equality.” One participant described this shared goal as “women coming together to make a difference.”
This sense of sameness is further emphasized within trainings and within other organizational texts that emphasize opportunity to “connect with other like-minded women.” In particular, groups within World Pulse were described as one such opportunity within the Digital Changemaking 101 training, “You can join any group at any time to connect with like-minded people working to create change on issues such as ending gender-based violence, promoting economic development or protecting environments.” Further, in the organization’s talk it emphasizes a shared purpose. World Pulse is not just a platform or a social media site but a digital space that is “for social revolution,” that people log into “to speed up change, and that “connects women worldwide for change.” This language further emphasizes a shared action-oriented goal of members of the platform.

Absence of negative interactions

And you find a lot of supportive women. They don’t correct your grammar. They don’t criticize you. The one thing with World Pulse is you are not bullied. On World Pulse you are embraced with your faults, your flaws and your strengths. No one is looking at you whether you are learned or not learned. You are just equal. You are just women with one goal – save the world. And for me, that makes it unique.

Participants, like the woman in Kenya quoted above, repeatedly indicated that they considered World Pulse safe because they had not personally seen or experienced any negative interactions within the digital space. As a woman in Cameroon explained: “World Pulse, for me, as of now is very safe. I have not had any negative experience on World Pulse yet. From what I see, I don’t think I may have negative experience.”
Participants also reported that World Pulse was a place where they had not seen “any nasty thing happen,” been hacked, or witnessed anyone taking advantage of what members do on World Pulse. As a woman in Kenya described:

*I would say so far that I have considered World Pulse to be safe. maybe this is because I have not heard of any crazy stuff happening within that platform or anything being used against me or anyone else.*

The absence of negative interactions for some participants made it difficult to consider any scenario where World Pulse could be unsafe. As a woman in India described: “*Not to say that trouble makers can’t do anything here even if they want to, but my positive experience with WP limits my imagination as far as that is concerned :).*”

More specifically, members indicated that they had not experienced trolling or harassment on World Pulse, which they considered to be common to other online spaces. They reported receiving no “negative” or “hurtful” comments on their journals. They also indicated that World Pulse was a place without “insults” and where no one was present “just for fun.” As a woman in Cameroon described:

*Yes, World Pulse is a safe space. I feel protected when I am writing a post or interacting with other women on world pulse. There is no bad-mouthing, no cyber bullying, blaming, no shaming, racism, no abusing, no pushing away. In fact, I consider World Pulse to be the safest online space I am belong to [online].*

She went on to attribute this to World Pulse’s values, which, she said, “*calls for everyone to be a sister’s keeper. It is about a true sisterhood and true sisters wouldn’t bad-mouth or bully each other.*”

Some recognized that while harassing or trolling comments may exist, they are not visible to members, creating a sense that such comments are uncommon and unwelcome. As a woman in Canada explained:
And I may not be aware of what they’ve had to screen but I think that anything that’s not that loving, supportive, dedicated, genuine sisterhood, it just doesn’t exist here. I don’t know what happens to it, if it has happened at all. It just falls away, maybe negative people don’t find World Pulse. We have a protective magic bubble perhaps, although I’m sure there’s more that’s being screened and gently but firmly detected that I’m not even aware of. I feel that within World Pulse is where I feel the safest.

Staff indicated that screening is taking place, which can lead to the appearance that such comments do not exist. Staff shared that they monitor content on the site to make sure people are not “abusing” the platform and to reward positive behavior. One staff member described that, “Monitoring is key, both for spam and for “off culture” or abusive behavior. I think our size allows us to do this more comprehensively than other social networks may be able to do.” Based on their size relative to other platforms, staff have been able to keep up with monitoring behaviors in ways that other, larger digital platforms may not be able to manage. World Pulse also engages in practices to reward behaviors staff say they do want to see on the platform by providing positive reinforcement through Story Awards, badges, “love” and comments on stories, and likes or retweets from World Pulse on social media.

In sum, safety is constructed on World Pulse through the (in)visibility of particular kinds of talk and interaction within the digital space which communicate to members that it is safe. Talk and interaction deemed desirable by the organization are affirmed through material and discursive practices.

Safe in Comparison to the Internet

I am old enough to remember a time without the Internet and the early, more gentle years of the Internet. Some say it has gotten out of control and like I wrote, there are Internet trolls and many women are harassed online. I am sure you are aware of the sexism that is happening during this [U.S.] election. This is not how I would like the world to see us. But, we can’t just sit aside while this is occurring.
World Pulse, and others, are carving out a civilized conversation and showing others how the Internet is (and should be) a positive force and that people can disagree in a constructive way without shouting over each other and accomplishing nothing.

As the white woman in the United States quoted above indicates, World Pulse’s digital space is further constructed as safe in relation to the broader Internet within which it is situated. Overwhelmingly participants argued that the Internet is unsafe. When asked whether or not the Internet was safe, some participants would laugh and respond with “Of course not!” or “Oooooh no.” As a woman in Cameroon put it, “The Internet is a reflection of our real world. As the real world is not safe, so too is the Internet not safe.”

In describing ways the Internet at large is unsafe, participants provided examples of experiences with hacking, negative or harassing comments, scams, and threats. Members discussed how “so many online comments these days are truly horrific and often misogynistic.” Harassment seemed to be a common concern among members, as a woman in Zimbabwe shared:

The Internet is full of people who, there are some people who just come there to make other people feel bad. You know, maybe there was a time when I am just doing a small study, ‘What causes other people to say such things to other people who they don’t even know on the Internet?’ Some people would just go there to feel better by making other people feel bad. There is threatening, saying bad things about other people, so it’s not really safe because one has to go through a training to know what to do when they receive threats, when people say bad things about them, to just know, no, to not get down.

Some participants indicated that the Internet is especially unsafe for young people. A man in Uganda indicated that it was “especially not safe especially when it comes to the younger generation” given the potential for “misuse.” Others talked about how younger generations may have a lack of knowledge about the potential dangers. As a woman in India explained:
Especially in India, even while using Facebook, all girls upload their picture for public and write all the details. There are many cases regarding misuse of pictures and all but still the situation is same. No one has knowledge about it and mostly no one try to get in to it. What happen if personal details will be misused..!!

Participants also discussed ways that “everything is just out there” online. Personal information becomes public and locations can be known to others or to organizations. As a woman in Kenya explained:

_I usually feel like having all our information on the Internet in a way makes us accessible to anyone especially all those who are able to hack and gather information about someone. Having read and heard about Wikileaks, hackers who have been able to use someone’s information against them, both here in Kenya and abroad, it results in me being very cautious about even the information I reveal on the Internet. Also the Internet bullying that has been reported; it has never happened to me, but it can be scary stuff._

While other digital spaces were seen by members to be unsafe, World Pulse became an exemplar of what safety looks like.

As described throughout, safety was a characteristic that members said made World Pulse unique or different than other online platforms or communities of which they are a part. Members would often compare World Pulse to other digital spaces to show the ways that World Pulse is safe. Facebook was a commonly used reference point.

As a woman in Canada explained: “[World Pulse is] certainly a lot more safe than Facebook where anyone can pop up and yell at you for what you’re saying. You can’t get away with it here.” During the POW, participants again reaffirmed the difference between World Pulse and Facebook. As one participant from Kenya stated:

_In most of these places right now I see like the election is coming in in Kenya in August if I write one sentence now for example, on Facebook, I’m going to get a lot of negative answers, abusive answers, a lot of disagreement, people on the negative. Also, there’s no collective, there’s no collective voice on a solution. Nobody is trying to look for a solution. But on World Pulse, you always feel safe because everything that you speak about people look at it positively and in a way that is going to bring solutions._
Similarly, a woman in England compared World Pulse to YouTube and the kinds of comments people receive there: “I have not seen any of these catty comments or like you can go on YouTube and read comments and everyone is being completely nasty to each other for no reason – it’s not even relevant to the video it’s on. But I’ve never seen that on World Pulse.”

World Pulse’s digital space was then seen as safe in comparison to the broader Internet and other social media sites specifically. In this sense, safety is defined relationally with World Pulse being perceived as safer than other digital spaces.

**Synthesis**

In sum, the digital space of World Pulse is constructed as safe through discursive-material practices that communicate safety, through presences and absences, and through interrelations with other digital spaces. The digital space is constructed not just as safe but as safe for women to share their experiences, connect with others, and mobilize for change.

The digital space is constituted in an ongoing process of becoming safe through material and discursive intra-action (Barad, 2007). It is through this process that members come to understand and make sense of World Pulse as a ‘safe’ space, beginning with the registration process and continuing throughout members’ interactions within the digital space. It is through organizational language and technological features that safety comes to matter. Everyday organizational actions, like the responsiveness of staff when contacted, further contribute to the constitution of the space as safe.
Wilhoit (2015) argues that space is “where an organization is made materially present” (p. 5). These findings reveal that meanings of space are constituted through particular presences and absences. Specifically, members make sense of their safety by pointing to the presence and absence of particular kinds of talk and interaction. These presences and absences are produced through the affordances of the digital space as well as what the organization chooses to make (in)visible. Affordances of an object or space represent the “possibilities for action” perceived by the user (Gibson, 1986, p. 442). Affordances – which are constituted relationally between people and materiality – both enable particular actions but can also limit or constraint those possibilities (Hutchby, 2001; Leonardi 2011). In the case of World Pulse, the organization’s design of the digital space – through its technological features and reinforced through organizational policies and practices – enables particular kinds of actions deemed to be ‘desirable.’ Comments are not just comments in this case but “encouragement.” Further, the organization controls behavior within the digital space by making “positive” behaviors visible through different reward mechanisms (e.g., awards, badges, comments, shares on social media platforms) and making other kinds of behaviors invisible through monitoring which creates erasures read as absence by members. Members participate in the continued constitution of the digital space as safe in their talk about the space as well as their interactions within it, including their engagement in supportive interactions and vulnerable communication. These behaviors compound in that the presence of vulnerable communication without visible threat inspires more vulnerable communication from more members.
Additionally, members’ identification with others within the site based on their perceptions of shared identities or goals further contributes to a sense of safety. In these ways, members’ association with a (albeit at times vague) social change goal constructed through the digital space contributes to a sense of belonging. Cultivation of collective identity and solidarity is one of the purposes of a safe space and this sense of belonging is considered important to the development of safe space (Howe, 2013; Stephan, 2013; Valentine, 1997), which is seen here in members’ discussions of their shared identities and goals. Members’ articulation of these identifications through their continued interactions with others and intra-actions with(in) the digital space becomes a means to draw boundaries around the digital space and who and what it is for, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Further, World Pulse’s digital space is constituted relationally. It is defined based on its relationship to and within other digital spaces. These overlapping spaces shape members understandings of safety and serve to define World Pulse as safe in comparison to other digital spaces that are perceived to be unsafe. While these comparisons allowed members to make sense of how World Pulse’s digital space was safe, they also reveal the ways in which World Pulse is situated within and among (digital) spaces that are unsafe – both the broad Internet and specific platforms like Facebook. This is further complicated as World Pulse has Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media pages in addition to its own platform that are also digital spaces where the organization is made present. The intermingling of these spaces requires continuously reconstructing boundaries between what counts as ‘World Pulse’ and what is excluded in order to construct the digital space as safe. This intermingling also suggests a permeability that counters
assumptions that any one space may be safe, producing contradictions of safe/unsafe that will be further explored in the next section.

‘Safety’ as Contradiction

I think it’s a safe space, but even safe spaces can become vulnerable depending on who writes what he writes and what type.

While the vast majority of participants described World Pulse as safe, this was still often paired with recognition that this safety was precarious, as a woman in Brazil suggests in the quote above. Other participants would hedge their responses regarding the digital space’s safety with language like “I think it is safe,” “seems safe” or that it is safe “as of now.” They would also indicate they themselves have not had any bad experiences “so far” or “yet.” Such responses indicated anticipation that the space could become unsafe.

One new member, a woman from Ethiopia, expressed the most hesitancy to declare it safe:

As I’m a new member, and as I’m not able to hear from many of you because of my Internet, I’ve no answer for this question. Maybe I can answer later. For the time being, it seems safe. From the materials I read, and according to the women I interact with things look good.

Several participants acknowledged that this safety was not “100 percent.” For example, when asked whether World Pulse was safe, a white woman in the United States described it as follows:

In life there are no 100% guarantees for anything. All I know if that the people that tend to get involved with World Pulse (and with similar organizations) either because of their professional work or interest in women’s rights tend to be more mature, decent people that want to listen and have respect and sympathy for others.
World Pulse’s embeddedness within the Internet writ large for some participants presented possibilities that the safety they find in World Pulse could be disrupted. As a participant in Kenya said:

*Being a platform available on the Internet, absolute safety is difficult to achieve. But I will not point out any shortfall since I haven’t encountered any so far. I like the fact that World Pulse strives to protect the identity of people who might not be free to speak probably because of their situation/standing in the society. What probably would be an issue is whether there are any persons enrolled in the platform for reasons other than promoting World Pulse mandate; say gathering information for ill motives.*

In this sense, members, like the woman quoted above, suggested there was the potential that someone who did not share their goals or commitments could enter the digital space and cause disruptions.

This was further evidenced in my conversation with a member from Cameroon:

*Participant: I cannot say it’s really safe, because sometimes the people who we can accept in a community group on the Internet we don’t really know, sometimes, personally. We don’t know who is who, what another person has to do. People can mask themselves and appear something else and do something, so I cannot say it is safe.*

*Jasmine: Have you seen any examples of that happening on World Pulse so far?*

*Participant: No, for now no. Maybe some others have, but for now no.*

*Jasmine. Ok, but you anticipate that it’s possible those things could happen?*

*Participant: Yeah, it’s possible. It’s possible...*

This became a common concern for participants who recognized the possibility that someone could be disingenuous or mask their identity, leading at times to suspicion and distrust of certain communicative behaviors, as will be discussed more in the following sections.
For some participants, discussing whether or not World Pulse was safe provoked reflection, as they tried to make sense of their feelings about World Pulse’s safety as well as some of their own experiences. As a woman in Kenya described:

*I would say so far that I have considered World Pulse to be safe. Maybe this is because I have not heard of any crazy stuff happening within that platform or anything being used against me or anyone else.*

Even participants who described World Pulse as safe would later share experiences that indicated otherwise or share their suspicions about other members. In these ways, safety then became contradictory – as World Pulse was seen to be both safe and unsafe simultaneously, requiring members and the organization to navigate this tension.
In the following sections, I first discuss the ways particular discursive and material practices simultaneously make members feel safe and unsafe within World Pulse. Then, I highlight how neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility permeate safety talk for both the organization and members, creating tension with espoused feminist values. Lastly, I examine the ways members’ embeddedness within multiple, overlapping spaces shapes their perceptions of safety within World Pulse’s digital space (Table 7).

Table 7: ‘Safety’ as Contradiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Codes/Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practices Producing Contradictions</td>
<td>Contradictions of safety are produced when material and discursive practices that constitute the digital space as safe for some members simultaneously leave others feeling vulnerable. These practices interact with members’ social locations and their past and present experiences to construct perceptions of safety.</td>
<td>Profile Practices</td>
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<td>Interactional Practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public Posting Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourses of Individual Responsibility</td>
<td>Contradictions of safety are produced through the permeation of neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility in safety talk.</td>
<td>Organizational Discourse</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Member Talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embeddedness within Overlapping Spaces</td>
<td>Contradictions of safety are produced as members are embedded within multiple, overlapping spaces that shape their perceptions of safety and shape how members choose to interact within the digital space. A member’s sense of safety is not fixed but shifts over time based on what is happening in her national and local context and what she is experiencing in her offline environment that communicates (lack of) safety.</td>
<td>Physical Locations</td>
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Practices Producing Contradictions

*I haven’t felt unsafe on World Pulse because I think that, I don’t know that we can completely make anything totally safe but we can protect ourselves as well by understanding, because, ok, I think there was somebody who... requested friendship but no pictures, no background information, no profile information and I did not accept it because I did not feel that person was being genuine. You never know who that person is without them sharing their stories, sharing their picture. I kind of look around – what has he shared? If you don’t have a picture, what are you hiding? Not to say everybody that doesn’t have a picture is hiding, but I tend to look at what you have shared on the platform before and assess. We have to be responsible for our own safety.*

As the black woman in the United States quoted above suggested, discursive and material practices that constitute the digital space as safe for many members have also simultaneously produced contradictions. These contradictions emerge in moments where the same practices or features that make some members feel safe leave others feeling vulnerable. In this section, I provide examples of three practices that produce contradictions and contribute to a culture of suspicion.

**Profile practices**

*So even on the World Pulse community where I am also a Welcomer, when you welcome new members and so forth, I scrutinize profiles in terms of, ok, you know you welcome them, and you say, ‘Ok, can you put up a photo so persons can see who they are interacting with, say some things about yourself, if you have a website or if you are associated with an organization?’ So you look for those credentials that will allow you to feel safe knowing that this profile or this member is someone who is genuine, someone who is here to help and to promote this sense of security and safety. So those are some of the things even as Welcomer on World Pulse that I will do. I find after a week or two weeks or even a month that this profile, this member who has created his profile has not responded or they may have put a link which leads to something and I simply reach out to a member of staff and say, ‘Hey, I think you should check this profile out,’ because also as a champion and as a Welcomer you also have the responsibility of having a safe space for other members of the community.*

While participants recognized that pseudonyms, lack of photos, and lack of profile information can be measures of safety for members in certain contexts, members
who took advantage of these features have often been viewed with suspicion. This can be seen in the above response from an active volunteer in the community from Trinidad and Tobago, who described the steps she feels she has a responsibility to take in the community when viewing such profiles.

Many members did express an appreciation for the material and discursive ways they are encouraged to consider their own safety, particularly with regards to their names and profiles. As discussed earlier in this chapter, members are encouraged during the registration process as well as through trainings and other means to consider whether or not they should use a pseudonym, based on their offline location and the subjects on which they anticipate writing. Materially, the web platform allows for such usernames and does not require members to provide evidence of their identity or of a ‘real’ name as other platforms like Facebook have. Members are also not required to include a photo and little profile information is required when setting up one’s account.

However, for several participants these same practices were viewed with growing suspicion. The volunteer quoted at the start of this section was not alone in scrutinizing members’ profiles. Several other members discussed this concern, particularly when considering whether or not to connect with another member. For some members, these suspicions are grounded in past experiences in their online or offline lives. As a woman in Peru shared:

*Maybe it will necessary can see how exactly people are. For example two months ago somebody wrote to me about a post that I do, he/she was kind and nice and telling me how much he/she like my story and stuff like that. When I want to see who he/she was, and in the profile it doesn’t appear a name, I don’t even know if is a man or a woman, and has no picture. So for a woman who has experimented psychological violence (by an ex boy friend) and also was being molested for men in my youth, I don’t feel secure having a conversation with this person because I don’t know who he/she is. Maybe I am overreacting but maybe not.*
In this case, her sense of safety was directly threatened by not knowing the identity of
another member, despite the fact that the other member may be taking steps to protect her
or himself.

Concerns about other members’ authenticity often emerged later in the interview
or as members further reflected on issues of safety. As a man in Nigeria wrote as a
follow-up email after reflecting on interview questions about safety:

_I was reviewing some of my response especially as it relates to safety and it just
occurred to me that there’s need to give people intending to join WP the option of
showing their face or put up reasonable profile that would reassure other
members you are a real person and someone you really should network with._

These concerns were also often raised when asked what World Pulse could do to ensure
that the digital space stayed safe. Several members indicated at this point that they would
like to see efforts to verify, validate or otherwise determine whether or not new members
were “genuine.” As a woman in India suggested:

_Yeah, I think they should be verifying accounts before the accounts are being
made. Like somebody opens a new profile and somebody has put on this is my
story, this is, I am from this place. I think there should be something, which is
very hard, but still there should be some kind of verification – not only their mail
account because anyone can open any kind of mail and then get it verified, but
there should be some kind of verification. Even just numbers won’t do because
people will not be sharing their telephone number. It is harder to do but I think
there should be some kind of more introspection, inspection on the kind of profiles
there might be. There are profiles that are posing, ok, you never know. It might be
a man is posing as a woman and the person is interacting with a woman and
sharing all the details and then you come to know, ok, this is somebody else. So
this is one thing which there should be some kind of ensurity on this thing. I don’t
know how they would do it._

Members like the participant quoted above recognized that such verification practices
could be difficult to achieve. She later suggested that existing members could also vouch
for new members. In these ways, practices that were meant to provide safety have
produced a culture of suspicion, contributing to the ongoing tension between safe and unsafe within World Pulse’s digital space.

**Figure 4: Moment of Reflection**

*I think, as I’m reflecting with you about this story, Jasmine, I haven’t really made any attempts to communicate with women in Iran or Iraq or Syria and, you know, it may be because I have those concerns for myself just about, would it be safe for me to do that, knowing where those countries are in relationship to the United States. I hadn’t really thought about it that much until you raised the question this morning because I’ve read literature by women writers from those countries, etc., but I’m realizing that possibly that’s been working on my hesitancy to do that. So that gives me a good opportunity just to think that if I think this is a safe space (laughter) why not reach out to women in areas that are going through these tremendous areas of conflict? Perhaps I could be a support to whatever woman is there. So, again, Syria has just been for whatever reason, I read Nicholas Kristof’s column, and you know, he’s just been saying Syria is really our Anne Frank of this time. So, you got me going on a tangent I hadn’t really thought about much. (Community member, United States, Phase 2 Interview)*

**Interactional practices**

*Yes, I do consider World Pulse to be a safe space although I do get some messages that I am not too sure if it is really from a member of World Pulse or not.

While participants discussed the kinds of interactions visibly taking place as supportive and the absence of negative interactions, some of these same members, like the woman in Nigeria quoted above, have in fact experienced negative interactions. These became moments of disruption – producing tension as members sought to understand these experiences in light of their perceptions of World Pulse as a safe space.

In particular, members discussed receiving messages – both as comments and private messages – they perceived as scams as well as instances where other people used their writing without their permission. Many of the perceived scam or spam messages were related to money. As one participant from Kenya shared:
wp might not be safe when people with different objectives other than those of world pulse join the club and start harassing others with unsolicited requests like the one I received from a certain member claiming to be in the US military service and said she was offering to send me money. I did not know the person but she wanted my contacts which I declined to give.

Similarly, a woman in Syria wrote that she received a message she thought was from a “bad woman” who asked her for money. At times members indicated they had not experienced negative interactions, but then described situations that put them on edge, as one member in Uganda did:

I have never experienced any negative interaction with any world pulse member but one challenge that I once met in the community was about some spam who disguised herself to be a world pulse member and tried to con me, and asked me to send her my personal email, being new and with no idea about spams or even if they ever existed I ignorantly sent it to her because she claimed that she had some thing very important to let me know. So she sent an email about her story which really moved me to tears and I gave in to give her any help that I would afford. She wanted my account number and a photo but having even no account so I decided to consult my Aunt and told her the lady’s story if she too can help but she actually told not even to try sending my email but it was too late for me because I had given this lady and even more details about. From the story my Aunt definitely realised she was a spam and cautioned me against dealing with them.

As her statement indicates, messages read as scams were seen to be the work of individuals who ‘disguised’ themselves as members and used the same practices of vulnerability that are normative within the community in order to gain the trust of and exploit ‘real’ members.

One member in Nigeria reported receiving one such message and how she became skeptical of other offer messages she received, including one from World Pulse:

As regards to getting messages, it is more of someone advertising something on treating HIV to me but I deleted it immediately I got it. I think it might have been a message sent in error. I have received such message only once though. It is not a regular thing. The other one was when I received an email that I won a prize for a survey. I thought it was a scam but it turned out to be a genuine message from one of World Pulse staff. I did double check her identity online though before I responded 😊.
In this statement, she illuminates both the experience of negative interactions, but also how it contributes to behavior, making her suspicious of future requests or offers.

While rare during my participant observation, I encountered a few posts and comments that suggested scams or the use of the platform for business purposes. In field notes from September 12, 2016, I recorded my first encounter with a spam comment:

_This morning around 6:30 a.m. I had an email come into my inbox: “Xander222 replied to you.” These are the emails I get when someone comments on a story I have chosen to follow. The comment was made on a story about female inmates. While the first part of the comment suggested some engagement with the story, its conclusion was clearly an ‘inappropriate’ use of the platform – “The conditions, for example, in detainment facilities, are alarming, in ways words can’t express._

_Buy Viagra Online [link].” This is the first real incidence of spamming I have seen. I then went and found it on the actual page. It was still up and not blocked. I left it — because I’m curious to see how long it takes for a community response. I also went to the profile page. It had no information other than a username — showing how easy it is to enter the community._

Even when comments such as the one above are removed (as it eventually was), material traces are often left within the platform that indicate the potential that negative comments were present. Several occasions when reading stories and interacting on the platform, I came across comments that had been removed and were indicated through a post that read, _“This comment has been removed by the commenter or a moderator.”_ In these moments it is unclear why the comment was removed, leaving the member to assess for her or himself the meaning of the removal.

Other members have had encounters where their work has been used in ways they did not intend or without permission. A member in Nigeria discovered that her writing on World Pulse had been lifted and was being used elsewhere for business purposes. As she described:
You manage your own information in the World Pulse site, so I think it is safe. But you know, but I told you that I realized that people were using my articles in the World Pulse for other things outside World Pulse -- that is what I don’t understand. That is what I don’t really understand. I called attention to World Pulse then because even somebody was using it for business and essay writing kind of thing and even before you, I tried to download it, my own article, I wanted to download it but I couldn’t download it unless I paid money.

There were also experiences reported where connections made through World Pulse with the potential for collaboration took a turn. The same participant also reported getting connected to another World Pulse ‘sister’ who earned her sympathy and sought her assistance with an NGO. This person started using the participant’s content both from World Pulse and her organization’s Facebook page as her own. As she described:

> When all efforts to stop her from using my posts and pics did not work out for me, I got the World Pulse to stop her. I also put a stop to my association with collaboration and those were pictures of women with disabilities...Her attitude proved to me that she was not genuine.

This experiences fuel continued suspicion of other members. After the above encounter, this remember reported that for a long time after words she was “not too keen to post journals to my wall. I hardly trust any form of closer association.” Instances such as this then disrupt the sense of safety members have, making the digital space feel unsafe.

**Public posting practices**

So sometimes I read some very personal stories and I wonder if many people with such stories would feel safe knowing that people who are not on World Pulse can access their stories. I don’t know if I’m communicating it, but World Pulse has this public access, right? When I actually thought about that was when I was looking for something online that had my name in it, I was looking for that, and my article on World Pulse came up in Google. And then I knew it was a public, that everything posted on World Pulse can actually be seen by the whole world. But maybe, I don’t have a problem with it. Anyway, I didn’t have a problem with it, but I just feel like some people may have a problem with their very personal stories being accessible to the public.
While members engage in vulnerable communication, sharing their personal experiences openly with others, some members raised concerns about World Pulse’s posts being automatically public and that others may not have full awareness of what that means. A few noted, like the woman in Nigeria quoted above, that they did not initially realize their posts were publicly accessible to non-members. Other participants also mentioned searching on Google and coming across their posts.

While some recognized that their posts to their journal were public, they may have thought that posts to groups within World Pulse were private to that group. One participant discussed the training programs and assignments requiring sharing “something really personal” that has to be posted on your journal in order to submit the assignment, but that posting it to one’s journal makes it available to others both within World Pulse and outside of it.

The public availability of these posts can have consequences. A woman in Peru noted that depending on the topics under discussion, posts on World Pulse could have offline repercussions for some people:

"[It] is not safe because everybody also people out side of world pulse can read you, and maybe if you are denouncing something about a person, institution, work place or even a country, somebody could read you and chase you or denounced because of your ideas. For example: In my article, I speak about my boss and other important people from the hospital where I still work, they didn’t read this kind of platform, but if they do I am sure that they will call me for give “explanations” of what I talk in that article. Of course I will accept my article and telling (once again) the bad way they act with me, I don’t feel scared of that, I even if they fired me or something I will denounce them, but what about other people in a similar situation?"

In addition to having consequences outside of World Pulse, it can also influence what members are willing to share, and the extent to which they feel like they can engage in the kind of vulnerable communication that World Pulse is known for. One participant
noted that she is careful not to “share too much personal information” on World Pulse, knowing that those not connected to World Pulse could access it. In the redesign of the platform in November 2016, World Pulse made available post privacy options of “public,” “private,” or “members only,” allowing members to decide when they post which they would prefer and making that visible to other members through a colored icon above the post’s headline on most stories. Public, however, is still listed as the default.

In sum, the discursive and material practices of World Pulse interact with members social locations and their past and present experiences to construct perceptions of safety within World Pulse, producing contradictions when practices related to profiles, interaction, and posting that contribute to some members’ sense of safety make others feel unsafe. Collectively, these contribute to a culture of suspicion and constrain members’ actions, as they may lead members at times to opt not to connect, interact, or share their stories.

**Discourses of Individual Responsibility**

“As long as you are using it smartly, Internet is a good place.” Safety also becomes contradictory through the permeation of neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility evident within safety talk, like that in the quote from a member in India above, which stands in tension with the espoused (feminist) values of the platform and members. Under neoliberalism, “vulnerability is rebaptized as personal responsibility, and vulnerability that gives way to victimization becomes the fault of the victim” (Stringer, 2014, p. 153). In other words, a focus on individual responsibility has the potential to perpetuate victim-blaming logics that are at odds with an understanding that certain bodies are positioned as more or less vulnerable through intersectional power
structures. These discourses are not unique or necessarily specific to World Pulse but rather are shaped by larger big ‘D’ discourses of neoliberalism that circulate transnationally.

**Organizational discourse: ‘What am I doing to protect myself?’**

*World Pulse wants your voice heard loud and clear, instead we also want you to be safe. Ask yourself, what am I doing to protect myself?* (Online Safety and Security Toolkit)

Within the organization’s discourse, safety is positioned as an individual responsibility through language that emphasizes member’s need to protect themselves. Members are regularly encouraged to ask themselves, “*how am I protecting myself from risks and threats?*” Toolkits and trainings encourage members to self-assess their safety and apply strategies to “*protect from*”, “*control*,” and “*minimize*” their own risk.

Members are encouraged to ask themselves questions such as:

- *How secure am I? What do I need to feel safe?* • *How well am I taking care of myself? What am I already doing to protect and care for myself?* • *What can I do to help maintain my security and reduce risks?* • *What can I do to improve how I address my needs?* (Advanced Digital Changemaking training)

The emphasis on “*I*” language places the responsibility for safety on the shoulders of members to protect and maintain their own security.

Language and talk also focuses on legal liability, as members are warned, “*You should know that World Pulse is not equipped to provide legal protection to online community members facing security threats online or offline*” (Staying Safe Online guide). In doing so, the responsibility is shifted from the organization to members, who must then account for their own safety.
Safety trainings also emphasize tools and knowledge to help members “take steps to protect yourself” and “ensure you remain out of harm’s way.” While tools and knowledge are undoubtedly helpful, especially for those who may be unaware of the potential risks associated with online activity, this focus implies that one’s safety is controllable, that taking these steps ensures safety, and, therefore, those who do not take these steps are putting themselves at risk.

**Member talk: ‘Being responsible for your safety’**

*Internet is not 100 percent safe but it can be safe when we avoid instances where we expose ourselves to danger.*

This same talk is present among members, some of whom like the woman in Kenya quoted above, indicated that the Internet was safe *if* you, the user, take responsibility for your own safety. Members would make comments like “the Internet is safe provided you use it wisely” and “It’s safe if you use it safely.” Within these statements is an understanding that the onus is on the individual to take necessary precautions and protect herself. As a white woman in the United States further explained:

*Well I would say that has to do with self-selection. If I choose to go to sites that I know could be threatening or could be, or could be harmful to me, I just don’t go to those kinds of sites. I’ve never done anything with pornography online. If I get into something where somebody is very violent in their language or it may not even be that far over, but they are very demeaning and there is a lot of opportunity for that right now with the political climate in this country, I just don’t continue to engage. I’ve made a point of not putting very much up on my Facebook pages about the political stuff going on in this country because I know that it’s so fraught with reactive stuff where people feel like they could just say anything that would be harmful. So for me, that’s it. It’s where I choose to go and how I chose to engage and not engage on the Internet.*
Particularly when it comes to sharing information, participants indicated that it was the individual’s responsibility to be cautious about what they share publicly. As a woman in Nigeria stated:

> Whatever it is that you don’t want the other person to know you just don’t put it out there, that’s mine, but if you are comfortable and you feel ok, I don’t care, whoever gets to see whatever it is that I’m putting out there, I don’t care, then you can put it there. That’s the way I see it.

Members also discussed steps they considered to be normative such as “You do not over share your personal stuff online. You keep your secrets to yourself.”

Others discussed scamming attempts online and indicated that it is easy to determine what is fake, as seen in this statement from a participant in Ethiopia:

> Their cheating tactics are already same. I answer for few of them: “Please if you’re scammer, don’t waste your time around me.” But they do insist, no matter how they’re rejected. Nobody comes out of the blue and ask you to share with him, million dollars. There’s no lottery that you’ll win without buying a ticket. Nobody can come from nowhere and fall in love with you and propose you to marry him after one email or two. Only a foolish person can be trapped by them.

One participant compared the ways one needs to be ‘vigilant’ online as similar to the kinds of precautions one should take offline. As a black woman in the United States explained:

> I think people just have to be confident such that anywhere else – even in our lives on a daily basis walking in a grocery store, we have to be conscious of our environment. Nothing much, yes, we do have laws that protect us, we have enforcement agencies to protect us but does that ever cover the base? It doesn’t, because we are all still vulnerable in one way or another. You just have to be vigilant. Just like walking into an airport, you don’t know what is going to happen that day. You just have to be aware of what’s around you, make sure there’s no package that is lying idle. So I’m unsure of what else World Pulse can do other than create that space which they already have to talk about keeping yourself, listening to your intuition and being safe.
Similarly, several other participants also indicated they were unsure what World Pulse could do to maintain a safe space, as it was up to individuals within the platform to ensure their own safety.

Participants indicated that age played a role in being able to take control of one’s own safety. Young women were considered to be especially vulnerable. Participants expressed a need to “guide the young ones who are accessing or using the Internet” as they may not be aware of the precautions they need to take to protect themselves. As one member in the United States explained:

*It is safe, relatively safe, because I have the judgment... I am old enough to be able to decipher things. I am not sure how a teenager would have reacted to that (receiving friend requests that do not include a profile photo). Generally, any platform would be the same as World Pulse for me, so being responsible for your safety."

This kind of talk suggests, again, that safety is an individual responsibility. The risk is that this talk contributes to a culture of blaming and self-blaming of those who do have experiences in which their sense of safety is violated.

**Embeddedness within Overlapping Spaces**

*Logging into the same the sites from different place also makes a different effect on you, because you are in a different kind of atmosphere. People around you are different. How do they take you when you are logging in? How do they take you when you are on your calls? So this all makes it more impactful, because if you are not free enough, if you do not have enough freedom to call to or to talk with people, people at your home don’t know, they don’t know what World Pulse is or whom you are talking to but they should be having that much understanding and faith and I should have that much faith to convince them, ok, this is a site where I’m safe. So this is usually a thing where you stay in which type of country, which time of atmosphere, which type of family that impacts you, so here I have been supported. My family has been supportive. Everyone knows World Pulse. Everyone knows, ok, mama has a Skype conference, so my children are like, ‘Ok, maybe we are going to get early dinner because of our mother’s Skype call’ (laughter). They have been supportive.*
While members may have found World Pulse’s digital space to be safe, they were simultaneously located in multiple, overlapping spaces that shaped their perceptions of safety. Members, like the woman in India quoted above, described both their physical locations when accessing the Internet and the nations in which they were situated as influencing their sense of safety, having implications for how and what they might choose to share within World Pulse specifically or the Internet in general.

**Physical locations**

*I usually access the Internet from the house. I definitely don’t find it safe to go to an Internet café. Even regular cafés that open, I don’t go there, because first of all the kind of service is very bad with the Internet and then sometimes it is not safe because it is a shared network.*

As the woman in Lebanon quoted above indicates, members interviewed discussed the ways their physical locations shaped their sense of safety. Members access World Pulse from a variety of locations such as home, work, school, libraries, and public cafes. They also access World Pulse on a variety of devices, including personal or public computers, mobile devices, and tablets.

In most cases, participants felt the safest within private spaces. Participants tended to feel the most safe when at home on their own devices. They would discuss accessing World Pulse from their living rooms, from their beds early in the morning or late at night, or other spaces within their homes. As a white man in the United States stated “Since I use my computer from home, I feel completely safe. No one has the opportunity to harass me.” Being on one’s own device meant being free from hacking or from prying eyes that they may not wish to see what they are sharing. Participants indicated using their own devices allows them to “keep tabs” of what they do online.
It is important to note, as one participant did, that private homes are not a safe space for all. She suggested World Pulse consider “incognito settings” for members who may not want their browsing histories to show, highlighting the fact that even some common safety precautions may not be sufficient if one’s home is not safe. She said, “Even though a person can use a pen name and express her opinion but sometimes that might not work if the troublemakers are right inside the house, using the same computer.”

Participants would often discuss the private spaces of their homes, in contrast to public spaces, made them feel more open to sharing on World Pulse. As a woman in England explained:

\[\text{You know I’m almost always at home right now when I’m on World Pulse so again, that’s a safe space, isn’t it? I don’t have to be in a cyber café worried that people are reading what I’m writing. It’s me and my fiancé and I can say things on World Pulse that I can say to him, so I feel safe in my own home. So I think that enables me to be a lot freer, a lot more honest about what I say on World Pulse.}\]

Public spaces were then seen as unsafe. This was seen as tied to gendered notions of safety, as a woman in Canada discussed, though acknowledging it may also vary by cultural context:

\[\text{As a woman I have never felt and I still don’t feel safety. I’m always on guard and at the same time I know I’m still walking on streets in which I do have access to public space that a lot of women don’t. So I fear for the safety of all my sisters and I’m very conscious of my own constantly, it’s a major issue. And we are in more danger when we speak out.}\]

Participants also indicated not having to use a public Wi-Fi connection contributed to their sense of safety as a woman in Nigeria explained:

\[\text{Well, I think, maybe because I don’t use public Internet. I have my own device, I buy my own data, I can use it anywhere, I don’t need to use the public, whether in a café or in a public place where Internet is free. Once I’m in Nigeria, I can use my data anywhere and it’s my own private device, so maybe that’s why it feels safe a little because I’m not, my information is not just everywhere.}\]
A few participants also indicated using their private data to access World Pulse while mobile, such as while travelling on a bus or moving between spaces. For some, this connection felt safe. For others, this depended on the setting, as being in big, urban centers may make them more cautious about being online on their phones in public, as a member in the United States explained:

> Ok, so in Nigeria because of, if I go home I’m in a city and that city is a big city. I would compare it to like New York City. It’s fast. There are people out there who are lurking, predators out there. There’s a lot of crime, a lot of, you know, crimes of all sorts. They may want to steal my phone, they want to attack me physically, they may want to kidnap me. Those are the things that would be of concern. In terms of where you are at any given in time in the big city, that will come to mind. In the villages, I think there would be much concern for those kinds of things but then you probably won’t have access to the Internet…If you go to a place like New York City where there are pickpockets and stuff like that, you’d be more conscious of holding up your phone or where your phone is and stuff like that. So those kinds of thought processes.

Semi-public spaces like work places were considered somewhat safe for accessing World Pulse. A woman in Cameroon indicated that she felt about 80 percent safe at home and 60 percent safe at work. When asked why she felt less safe at work, she shared: “You know, you never know if they are recording. One or two people, so you can never tell. Sometimes one can never tell really, because human beings can surprise you, so one can never tell.” Others discussed ways that they strove to make their workspaces more private. As a member in Nigeria shared, “Just like I speak with you now, I’m in my office. It’s my lunch break. So I can just stay in with the doors closed with my phone.”

Participants also acknowledged that access to the Internet from home and personal devices was a “luxury” that not everyone had. Socio-economic conditions dictate who has private access. One member in India shared that several years ago she
could not afford to have Internet at home or a desktop computer. That meant when she had to access the Internet she would have to go to cyber cafes.

So whenever you have to access to some mails or you have to send some mails, you have to go to the cyber café. Cyber café somewhere, somewhere down the city in your own place or near to your own community was sometimes a bit safer, but then if you are joining somewhere or going somewhere logging in from any kind of cyber café is not, never safe. Because you never know who is like peeking on you, you never know if your IDs are being hacked, you never know how you will be misused, so that is not a safer place anywhere I think when you go to cyber cafes.

Participants’ identities also shaped which offline spaces they considered safe to access the Internet. As one participant in Nigeria shared:

I am a disabled woman, right? So because of the nature of my disability I don’t go to places that I think are not safe because there is a common thing in Nigeria to use people... I go to places I know that they are very safe to open my, to sit down and say I want to work because when I am working online I use all my energy and my attention there. Most times I do it privately. I do it in my office. I do in the house. It depends on where I have Internet.

Several participants also expressed concern especially for younger women and girls who they felt were more vulnerable. Participants who considered themselves older were likely to indicate they did not feel as much at risk. As one member explained: “I’m in a much more safe area [physically]. And also, I’m not as vulnerable because I’m 67 (laughter). I don’t get tracked the way teenagers do, or harassed.”

Members’ sense of safety on World Pulse then is related to the safety they feel in the physical locations in which they are simultaneously located and shaped by their intersecting identities. These locations matter then, dictating when and how members choose to interact within the digital space.
By saying that World Pulse can’t be absolutely safe I refer to people who are in places that restrict, say freedom of expression. An example would be Ethiopia especially during times of political instability, states of emergency when the government monitors what the people are saying on the Internet. It is unsafe for anyone to criticize the government, on whatever platform, at such a time.

Participants, like the woman in Kenya quoted above, also indicated that the nation in which they currently reside plays a role in their sense of safety. In particular, different sociohistorical conditions and current geopolitical contexts influenced whether or not members felt safe offline and, therefore, in what they could share online through World Pulse.

In particular, members discussed contexts where governments may monitor online activities and where certain topics should not be discussed. As one participant shared:

Where I live mostly in [Name of city] which is a very controlled state where one has to mind one’s activities in terms of what they do and say, is a bit of a setback but I really do not let this hold me back. I try to keep within the remits of the government laws. Social media is very often controlled and the Internet access can be a nightmare. I really do not feel safe sometime because I have a feeling I am being monitored.

Others suggested that they are uncertain of some of the ways their activities might be monitored and this raises concerns about safety. One participant shared that she could not be sure of “being 100% safe” on World Pulse for these reasons. As one participant whose country is in the midst of a civil crisis shared:

I don’t know because at work we have our equipment and it belongs to the government, so I work in a hospital. And also at home, I don’t know the way they manage the network or they know, I know they are very strong in this space... I don’t think I’m safe.

Some members indicated there are certain topics governments would not want to see discussed, whether those are comments about particular officials, elections, law breaking,
or issues of corruption. Given this, a manual with resources for members who might conduct World Pulse’s Digital Empowerment Training with others offline encourages trainers to:

>[P]lease choose themes that are appropriate to talk about considering local safety and security risks (For example, you would not want to people to discuss a current political uprising if this might put them at risk outside of the training environment.)

Another member shared about her experience during a World Pulse training where offline circumstances in the country in which she was located raised concerns:

> I think I just had some problems during the time I was going through Voices of the Future training. Sometimes I would have to go in an agency because there was political violence and some things like that. It was so hard to catch up with others, but there were some people always telling me, ‘This is the impact. This is what you are supposed to do.’ And also, I was trying to share about what is going on in my country. They were worried people were trailing me from here and then the other thing was when you write bad things about the government… but nothing of the sort has ever happened up until now.

For some members, their online and offline activities have had repercussions. The most commented story on World Pulse as of May 2016 was a post about women, including four World Pulse members, being arrested in Sudan in 2010 at a protest related to state violence against women. World Pulse also circulated a call to action in April 2016 to pressure authorities in Uganda to release a university professor and activist who was charged with “insulting the president and violating his right to privacy” on social media.

However, other members felt that the kind of topics discussed on World Pulse did not put them at risk. As one member in Kenya shared, “There is also the fact that the content on World Pulse is not one that would be a threat issue to anyone in my context or physical location.” A participant in Lebanon also indicated that her interactions on World Pulse are not ones that would necessarily put her at risk:
Let’s suppose my World Pulse account got hacked. Let’s suppose that. There are just some messages, like introductions between me and other members, and the articles I have posted, so it’s not really something major. You see my point? I mean, it’s basically what you have shared and what I really want to say to the world. It’s not like hacking your Facebook inbox for example (laughter)

A few suggested that they are not ‘important’ enough or talking about the kinds of topics that would merit further scrutiny by a government or other entities. As a woman in Colombia shared, “I am not someone important in my country. I am just a woman who writes, so I don’t feel that I do have any political problems or issues different than most of what my community listens to so I don’t have the necessity to change my name.”

Some participants said while their own national context did not limit what they could say online, they are aware that is not always true in other contexts. They would often provide examples of people they knew in other countries who were more limited in what they could share, as a woman in England did:

*Obviously being in the United States and now being in the United Kingdom, we don’t have to worry about what we say online. But like I’ve got a friend who lives in China and you know she communicates with me over WhatsApp because she can’t get on Facebook or anything very easily and I think if I was her I’d have to be a lot more guarded in what I said. But for us, we don’t have to worry about that.*

In another instance, one participant in the United States described her attempts to encourage some people she knew in the Ukraine to join World Pulse:

*What’s bringing me to tears is about Ukraine because there’s a center there in Ukraine called [Name] and I know that they put out a newsletter once a year (pause) and because I’ve been there and because I know a couple for the people who work with that center, they have let me know that they are very cautious about having a presence online, because at first I was like, ‘Oh, wow, get on World Pulse, etc., etc.’ And they were like, ‘Maybe not because we don’t know what somebody is going to do with knowing that this women’s center is in [Name] and that we have ways of supporting the soldiers and their families, you know?’*
Others would indicate that they feel free and do not self-censor but then would indicate that their location may impact what they would be willing to both search for and share. A participant from India said that in her experience her government does not censor her content, but…

*Considering the colossal amount of feminist and alternate narrative content that I access, I might be labeled or doubted by people who happen to peep into my screen or I might be wary of accessing certain opinion pieces because the very nature of visibility and limited perception.*

Cultural norms within a community may also dictate whether or not women in some circumstances can talk about particular issues. In some cases, they might feel more likely to speak out within digital spaces like World Pulse than in their communities. As a participant in Lebanon shared:

*I think, yes, many women have issues when speaking out. They have concerns. There may be concerns from the community, so that’s what I really see as cyberspace is it is safer for them to speak up than speaking face to face in their community.*

On the other hand, given the global membership, at times members have felt uncertain about discussing particular subjects, concerned it might but others at risk who are situated in other cultural contexts. As a staff member explained:

*We had one member who was very active. She became really, she felt really affirmed by one of the Story Awards prompts about, you know, being in the queer community, and so she felt like ‘Oh, World Pulse is taking a stand on this’ by asking for stories, but then she actually became, she mentioned in our survey, that*
she became fearful of putting her story out there. She ended up doing it, but...she didn’t want to put women she’s connected to on World Pulse at risk by identifying herself as lesbian identified.

For some members, the nature of their offline work may also dictate whether or not they feel they are at risk. If their work involves certain kinds of advocacy work or work related to human rights, they may feel less safe. As one participant shared:

The issue of safety is the environment. Maybe here in Nigeria we really don’t have much restriction on use of Internet or issues like that, but again it’s based on what kind of work. If you are working, like when I was in a human rights organization, we worked on sensitive issues. I mean, you can be monitored anywhere you are working because they know information you are passing across may be harmful to the government. So you may be monitored. But where I am working now I don’t have such fears because the government is not interested in what I do here. It was only when I was in a human rights organization that I worked with fear because we talked about sensitive issues about government and come up with information that indicts, indicts leaders in positions and we upload that. But in such situations, we take measures in doing that. We stay in closed places, not open places. So what I’m trying to say is that security of the Internet is, in this part of the world, in Nigeria, women are really safe compared to some places in the Arab world. We don’t have much threat unless the kind of work you are doing, if you are working against government then government will be after you. They can even take your devices. They can even take your laptop. They can even take anything from the house, even if you are in your house working. So that is what my experience is here.

In this sense, the context matters when it comes to how safe one feels. For those residing in conflict zones or areas prone to violence, their sense of safety is significantly affected by their offline context. As a woman in Syria shared:

In the past I was very, very safe and I did whatever I wanted to do and nobody stopped me. I really was working in a very strong state to achieve my goals. But now, since 2011, we really...everything has been changed. We don’t, we are not safe now. We are in danger. We can’t go out, go out and let’s say after, in the evening or because we have, let’s say, lots of bad people now. They try to, yeah, to get money by anyway they can do. I am really happy to attend World Pulse and to write, but I try always to be, not to be make my assertions in public in case the government or some, ah, people who try to spy us to ask me, ‘Why you are writing this?’ We are not free to say whatever we want. I think you understand what I mean...
In this sense, a participant’s sense of safety is not fixed but shifts over time based on what is happening in her national and local context and what she is experiencing in her offline environment that communicates (lack of) safety.

**Synthesis**

In sum, the construction of World Pulse’s digital space as safe is precarious and cannot be understood outside of its relationship with being unsafe. Even constructing World Pulse as ‘safe’ through presence and absence and in relation to ‘unsafe’ digital spaces earlier in this chapter demonstrated the ways that ‘safe’ is defined in relation to ‘unsafe.’ Contradictions of safety are communicatively produced within and through the digital space. First, tensions are made salient to members through material-discursive practices that make some members feel safe and others feel vulnerable. The salience of these tensions was often tied to members’ lived experiences within other digital and physical spaces and digital literacies that shape their “geographies of fear” (Valentine, 1989) within digital spaces. Members’ *digital geographies of fear* then develop over time, as certain material and discursive intra-actions become cues that communicate whether or not digital spaces are safe and for whom in the same ways that they do within physical spaces. The presence of these cues then contributes to a culture of suspicion and distrust with (some) potential connections and at times limits members’ willingness to engage with others. Additionally, these become salient during moments of disruption, critical incidents in which members encounter something that seems contrary to their perceptions of the digital space as ‘safe’ (e.g., scam messages). These moments create a rupture that produces contradictions.
Second, these tensions emerge from and within particular socio-historical conditions. With regards to safety, tensions emerge within a context of globalization, where neoliberal discourses circulate transnationally and interact with diverse patriarchal structures (Mohanty, 2013). These discourses manifest in organizational discourses and members’ talk related to ‘individual responsibility’ for safety, similar to the ways such discourses operate with regards to offline violences like sexual assault that place the onus on the individual to take preventive measures. According to Stringer (2014), “The ideal neoliberal citizen is often explicitly figured as one who avoids ‘victim mentality’; one who assumes personal responsibility for guarding against the risk of victimization, instead of focusing on their right not to be victimized.” (p. 2). Under this logic, the focus becomes on risk management, which obscures the power relations and social structures that gave way to the risk, and any situations that result in victimization become considered the fault of the victim, seen as a personal failure. The risk of such discourses then is that they can lead to a logic of victim blaming and undercut efforts to organize collectively (Mohanty, 2013). While this is not to say that certain ‘preventative’ actions are not prudent, placing the responsibility intensely on the individual neglects a critical interrogation or response to the different vulnerabilities and risks individuals face and why.

Third, contradictions of safety operate across multiple spaces and scales that shape the sources and meanings of tension. Members are multi-located and their sense of safety is co-determined by their presence within these multiple spaces, including the physical spaces (e.g., home, office, cyber café) in which they access the Internet. Additionally, members’ locations within a particular national context – one which may or
may not be their country of origin – embeds them within both local and global power structures that interact to shape their sense of safety and to enable and constrain how they choose to interact within the digital space. Further, members’ intersecting identities interact with the spaces in which they are located to produce different meanings of and tensions related to safety, situating some spaces as more or less safe for some bodies. In particular material conditions (e.g., socio-economic status) place those with the least access to resources at the most risk.

**Member Responses to Safety Contradictions**

*Well, on World Pulse or on any of the sites, what I do is, like, I do clear my history; that is one thing. Because even if I own my laptop, if some day this laptop goes spoiled or anything, right, that is the time when people usually have habit of getting logged in to your Gmail account or Facebook account and they keep it logged in. There is an option to keep logged in. I always unclick it, because it’s like if you keep logged in you never know tomorrow if the computer is going to crash and if you are going to hand over the same thing to a person who is only doing the repair, ok. He can use your data, your personal information for any purposes. So that is something I try to do – unclick it. Then I try to be on safer mode, I usually use the https mode – it is the safer one.*

Both community and staff members respond to contradictions of safety in a variety of ways based on the meanings they ascribe to the tensions they experience and their different levels of consciousness about the contradictions. The statement from a woman in India quoted above exemplifies one way members have sought to navigate being safe/unsafe. In the following sections, I outline community member responses followed by staff member responses (Table 8).

**Community Responses**

*Some of the actions that I take to keep myself safe online is that first of all knowing where I am. When I say knowing where I am, knowing what platform that I am on, knowing what is the purpose and the mission and the vision of this...*
platform and knowing the security settings and so forth of this platform, understanding and getting a knowledge of if I say something here would it be available and can it be searched on Google at some point if someone just puts in a search. How safe is this private or this secret group that I am in? What are some of the security settings? Who is in this group? Who makes up this community?

Table 8: Member Responses to Safety Contradictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>Self-Censoring</td>
<td>Self-imposing limits on topics discussed as well as the tone or the content of particular posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withholding</td>
<td>Purposefully not sharing certain information, including personal information, in public spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>Relying on a sense that the space is safe and choosing not to enact any strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking Control</td>
<td>Enacting specific material-discursive practices perceived to offer protection from harms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differentiating</td>
<td>Assessing and strategically adjusting strategies across devices and locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting Cautiously</td>
<td>Using ‘safety’ cues to dictate when and with whom to connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercising Care</td>
<td>Recognizing one’s interconnectedness and making choices based on how actions may affect others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Members</td>
<td>Distancing from ‘Safe’ Talk</td>
<td>Avoiding and replacing the use of ‘safe’ within organizational talk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Redirecting Interaction</td>
<td>Intervening to encourage conversation that achieves organizational and community goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Going the ‘Extra Mile’</td>
<td>Engaging community members in dialogue about potential risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silencing as Tool for Protection</td>
<td>Making a decision to not share or further promote a member or her story based on safety concerns for the member and/or the organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members, like the participant from Trinidad and Tobago quoted above, respond to safety contradictions in a variety of ways, based on different levels of understanding of the tensions and the choices they make to navigate them. In the following section, I highlight seven ways members have responded to contradictions in the digital space: (a) self-censoring, (b) withholding, (c) ignoring (d) taking control, (e) differentiating, (f) connecting cautiously, and (g) exercising care. These responses are not mutually exclusive and members may enact them simultaneously or shift their responses over time.

**Self-censoring**

_There was a time when myself and my husband used to work for a paper that used to do advocacy and so we would go out there, get stories about a lot of the mismanagement that was going on, a lot of abuses of power and things like that, and would put it out there. But it became our life. It became very interesting. It was kind of dangerous but I think we came out. So now, I have toned it down. I think I don’t go all out with those things I used to get in._

Despite statements that World Pulse’s ‘safe’ digital space allows them to speak freely, some members, like the woman in Zimbabwe quoted above, have opted to self-censor their writing in terms of the topics they discuss, the tone in which they write, or the content of particular posts. In one case this was because of a member’s ties to others in her offline context:

_I mean I have family who are political, really high up, and it’s always important to watch what you say so if there are any issues that are anti-government I think I’d rather see them not in media. So I’m a bit cautious._

Self-censoring was practiced particularly by participants who work or live in conflict zones. Topics to be avoided often included politics. For example, one participant shared:

_Most of these things, as I told you, I try to write in a very clever way. If I’d like to express an idea, I try to write the words that don’t make me in danger. And I try to, not to speak a lot in, let’s say, politics or anything that make (laughter) the government angry. That is because I don’t know if they can read what I write or_
they, you know, I think yes, they can that. So this is the only way I can keep myself safe.

Some participants also avoid talking about conflicts themselves, as one participant in Brazil stated, “I avoid talking about armed conflict, as [I] work and practically live in slums where there all the time conflicts between bandits x bandits and thugs x police.”

This response to contradictions of safety means that members self-impose limits on the topics of discussion and therefore the topics under which they can organize.

Withholding

The other strategy is that I will be careful about the information I upload online because people can misunderstand and use it against you or even if you are vulnerable people can use that information to attack you. I have not allowed my phone to set location so that am not easily tracked and when uploading anything it will not indicate where I am...so I generalise the location rather than specify it.

Another member response to safety contradictions involves withholding certain information, especially personal information. Members talked about at times that they “don’t disclose a lot of information.” This could involve location information, like the woman in Kenya quoted above, as well as other personal information such as ID numbers, contact information or in some cases their names. Some indicated that they avoid posting person information as comments online, but if necessary they would send the information privately or share it on a Skype call. A few of those interviewed have used pseudonyms or “nicknames” either currently or in the past. As another woman in Kenya shared:

I use a pseudonym to protect myself. Especially, there was a time before I came out confidentially about how culture affected me, I was using a pseudo on Facebook. I was not using my real name. So when I came to terms with what I was going through I shared it only because I was confident enough and I was not feeling vulnerable. So another thing, apart from using pseudos, when I feel I am very vulnerable, I don’t share it online because I know I’m vulnerable in this
space and it can affect me. I tend not to share it. I keep it to myself. So that’s one way of keeping safe online.

Members then indicate that withholding is a strategy that can shift across spaces and time depending on their perceived safety or vulnerability.

**Ignoring**

Believe me, before registrations of myself on world pulse, thought about security never come in my mind. I didn’t even think to check out privacy policy and I have uploaded my picture and all details including city and state.

As this member from India suggests, some members indicated that despite concerns about safety, they did not consciously choose to enact any strategies. When discussing ways they keep themselves safe online, they would say “no,” “not really,” or “no strategies.” One participant said, “Sadly no! Hehe I think I rarely think about Internet safety.” Another participant said, “Mmm. I guess I haven’t really thought about that because I don’t have a sense of not being safe on World Pulse.” In this sense, some members’ response to contradictions of safety is to rely on their sense that World Pulse is a safe space and ignore the ways in which it might be unsafe.

**Taking ‘control’**

There are several points that we keep in mind while accessing World Pulse online. Even if we know that no one is visibly keeping track of the activities on World Pulse, we have to stay alert. Like my facebook account was hacked and is no longer in use by me. Not only user Id and password have to be taken care of, entire World Pulse sessions have to be looked after.

Like the woman in India quoted above, some members discussed very specific material practices they use to take control of their online safety and to protect themselves, including changing passwords, logging out after each session, clearing browser histories, using secure browsing (e.g., https), encrypting messages, and avoiding public Wi-Fi. A
member in Zimbabwe discussed how she enacts these practices across all of her online interactions:

*Online in general I use VPNs, email encryption, I use CC cleaner whenever I delete things. I use safe browsers and avoid free WIFI. I always opt out of my passwords being remembered on sites that I log in to. I use two-step verification. I never share my password and generally change it every now and again. I also use different passwords across different networks. Sometimes I THINK I’m paranoid.*

Participants indicated that these were tactics they have learned over time and that they understand are *supposed* to keep them safe. Some even discussed that they “try to follow the guidelines I learned in World Pulse,” which included tactics like having strong passwords.

Some members indicated that they hoped these strategies were “*enough.*” One member in Cameroon explained her strategy:

*Most of the time, what I’ve learned is that I should not use the same password for a very long period of time. So I try every now and again to change my password, so I also try to change it so I don’t get, you know, get people hacking into the account and maybe using it negatively...So I just, from what I was taught, I have to be changing my password every now and then. So that is what I am using. It’s keeping me safe for now.*

Members in this sense have learned and adopted material practices that they perceive will protect them from harms online, including on World Pulse.

**Differentiating use across spaces and devices**

*I for one do not answer the phone on the street for fear of burglary. I hope to be a safe place to view the messages. I do not go out with my laptop on the street I leave it at home and when I’m at home I try to place that I have confidence to use the computer and bother to erase what happened I copy and leave the password.*

Some members discussed how they are intentional about differentiating between which digital spaces they access from which devices and from which physical locations.

As the woman in Brazil quoted above indicated, sometimes material circumstances
influence when and how members chose to access World Pulse. World Pulse was sometimes seen as a digital space that should not be accessed on the go. Others discussed how they only access World Pulse when they are at home, a space in which they feel safe.

Some members strategically only use their mobile devices for accessing certain digital spaces but not others, as one member in India shared:

_Then, ah, for mobiles, I do use it for WhatsApp or my personal mail account or my Instagram which I am very fond of, but I don’t access Facebook or World Pulse or anything from my mobile, because you get on a community, you get all the notifications, you get all the spam and your number also gets revealed, so it’s better to differentiate between the two keep the number and the net different._

The particular offline locations where members access the Internet generally and World Pulse specifically also dictated what tactics they felt at times were necessary to enact to keep themselves safe, as a woman in Uganda shared:

_One is that I make sure am all myself like no one round me to interrupt, sign out immediately after use especially when am using our library computer so that none can access my documents or posts._

Members then are able to assess and strategically adjust their strategies based on their locations and devices, which dictate the places in which they choose to access World Pulse as well as the specific actions they take during and after their interactions within the digital space.

**Connecting cautiously**

_I’ll give you an example. It’s like on World Pulse, if I haven’t seen you share your story or if you don’t have a picture, the combination of things. You might not have a picture but you have a story and you’ve shared it. Some people do not want to share pictures and I am aware of that. But then, what is your story? Then ok, that could lead me to add you or not add you. When I feel that this person is just out there, nothing, that’s a no-no for me. Other platforms, especially for Facebook, if it’s not somebody I know, sometimes I might not remember that I know them, but_
if I see that we have quite a few connections I may ask, ‘Do you know this person personally?’ because World Pulse most people are strangers to each other so that’s a little different.

Members have also responded by being cautious regarding whom they connect with on World Pulse, treating as suspicious certain profile features. Lacking other cues because other members are not necessarily part of their extended social network offline, participants, like the member in the United States quoted above, have relied on user names, photos, profile information and journal entries to tell them whether or not they should connect. A member in Nigeria indicated he is not “attracted to people who don’t have pictures on their page. I feel like we need to see what you look like to engage with you.” Others indicated this applies outside of World Pulse too, as a woman in Kenya shared:

I am very cautious about accepting friend requests. For example, on Instagram I have protected myself. I normally go through protection policies for each and every online platform I join. For example, on Instagram my account is private. So before you read anything, my pictures and anything I am posting on Instagram, you have to request to follow me. So if I look at your profile and it’s not what I want, I don’t allow you to follow me on Instagram. I do the same on Twitter. If you follow me and I feel something fishy about your profile, I just block. Same with Facebook. So I am very keen with who follows me, who friend requests me, who posts on my wall, who contacts me on what. I somehow use the policies for protection on social platforms. So I hope it’s enough.

Several members indicated doing research on people who contact them or add them as connections. As a woman in Peru stated, “I always check the profile of people who send me a private message.” Other members go beyond World Pulse in their research of potential connections, as one member in Nigeria shared: “I double check a person’s identity online to be sure and if I am still not sure, I contact another staff of the organisation.”
This process played out in the process of conducting this study when one participant asked me to “please verify who you are.” I provided more information about myself and a link to my personal website. The participant also indicated he asked a World Pulse staff member about me who “assured me about your intentions.”

This response was also seen in participants, like the member from Trinidad and Tobago, who sought to police other members in the community, encouraging them to provide more information and then reporting them to staff if they did not respond.

**Exercising care**

*I do find that I’m more cautious about sending stories further onto Facebook. I get permission because I want to make sure that the open exposure is wanted.*

Some members also indicated that they exercise care for others when responding to contradictions of safety. These members discussed ways they were aware that their own actions could impact someone else’s safety, whether those were other members on World Pulse or people within their offline contexts.

Members, like the woman in Canada quoted at the start of this section, talked about weighing the costs of sharing stories from World Pulse outside the digital space and seeking out permission. Others talked about considering the content or location of the member before sharing. Members also talked about choosing their words carefully when they interact with others and when they write their journals. As a woman in Nigeria explained: “I am mindful of what I share. I use respectful language, I am conscious not to use offensive language.” Others indicated that they “do not seek to provoke people” and “try to be balanced.” A member in Brazil shared that this was something she learned from being involved in World Pulse:
I learned in World Pulse the value of ethics and care about safety. I always try not to expose people in the text [and] when necessary to cite a person [who] does not write his real identity not to expose it.

Others recognized that those in their offline contexts might also be put at risk and tried to exercise care around those individuals. A member in England indicated she tries to “keep it vague but talk about experiences in general” so as not to put anyone in danger. A member in Zimbabwe specifically considers her husband when she writes, asking him to review her content before she posts:

Whenever I write, when I say this is what I want to write about, I write it, and then I send it to my husband and say, “Do you think this is ok?” And he’ll say, “Yeah, it’s fine” because I think he is the next person who would be in danger if anything was to happen and then I would be the next person to be in danger if anything as to happen with him so if he approves, I just go ahead and post it and then yeah, we’ll see.

In this sense, members’ responses indicate interconnectedness with others, recognizing that their individual choices with regards to safety may not only affect them but have implications for others.

**Staff Responses**

I wanted to share a philosophical question that I struggle with.... and I am mindful of. It’s very personal to me only I think. Can we (or should we?) really promise a safe space in a world where safety is actually *never* guaranteed? I personally get stressed when we talk about creating a safe space and much prefer enjoy explaining that we are creating something that is inviting, supportive, generative... etc.

**World Pulse staff must also navigate and respond to safety contradictions in their everyday organizational practice. While the material-discursive practices discussed earlier in this chapter that construct World Pulse’s digital space as safe can also be seen as part of an ongoing and emergent organizational response, the following reflect additional strategies of staff members that are both proactive and reactive to safety**
contradictions, including (a) distancing from ‘safe’ talk, (b) redirecting interaction, (c) going the ‘extra mile’, and (d) silencing as a tool for protection.

**Distancing from ‘safe’ talk**

*In fact that’s something that we too have had that conversation and it’s challenging...Instead of saying “safe community,” we try to say more of supportive community or inviting community because I think it has been on our site. Going back to what you were saying about people feeling that it’s on them to be safe, I think we do have that in our language. I say those things. I--it’s part of my training, you know? So it’s like you assess your safety and you take your own risks because we are a supportive community, we are not providing any safety for you, so it is there in our language. We have had--I think we have found ourselves in a difficult position because in the past we used ‘safe’ or ‘safe space’ so I think we’re more and more aware of the use of the word in the community.*

In recognizing safety contradictions, some staff members have responded by desiring to create distance from the use of ‘safe’ within organizational talk, preferring to substitute other modifiers like “supportive” or “inviting” to describe World Pulse. Staff members, as quoted above, describe a felt tension in the use of the word and what its implication might be if they are not able to fully deliver on it. As another staff member stated, “It’s not just you [Name] - I am totally with you on that concern AND on the preference for rather describing an inviting, supportive environment. 100%! ”

Staff members indicate they have continued to discuss the use of ‘safe’ internally. One staff member in a post-meeting evaluation indicated she has already been more cautious of the use of the word “safe” following our discussions

**Redirecting interaction**

*I remember there were some conversations where there was a-- I remember one comment, and I don’t remember what the topic was, but the person leaving a comment on the story left a comment that was a little bit, a little bit critical. Not necessarily wrong, and not necessarily unhelpful, but a little harsh in the presentation, and [Staff name] came in and left an additional comment that was
sort of recognizing what the person said, but reframing it in a way that was more supportive and encouraging and recognizing all the ways that this person’s story was trying to get at that and trying to bridge that gap and form a little bit of a middle ground, so that they could continue the conversation in a way that was a bit less kind of an affront and a defense and a little bit more about finding commonality.

At the level of everyday communicative interactions within the digital space, staff members have responded with what they referred to as “gentle redirection” of conversations that they feel are deviating from the values they would like to promote within the space. In the above example, a staff member enters in the conversation in the comment section to try to bridge differences between the person who posted the story and the commenter. This was considered different from moderating a conversation, which was seen to be a more direct intervention. As one staff member described:

*I know in the past there has also been a practice of, rather than just directly moderating a conversation that may be straying from the culture we want to promote, there’s been a gentle redirection that happens by participating in that discussion and guiding it to a different tone or a different outcome, perhaps.*

In expanding on the example that starts this section, staff members shared that in this instance, the commenter was initially not receptive to the redirection. Rather than leaving it there, the staff member involved engaged in further dialogue with the community member outside of the digital space to redirect rather than simply removing the comment or ending the conversation there:

*[Name] tried to gently redirect and then when that didn’t work, long story short, they ended up having a Skype conversation because she was like ‘I actually don’t understand what you’re telling me.’ ‘I don’t understand like why you’re telling me this isn’t okay’ and so I think [Name] was so nervous about that phone call, but then realized that [the community member] really didn’t understand the other point of view and how somebody else could perceive that because she just felt it so strongly, and then once she understood she was able to redirect, and I think she did stay part of the community--and so that relationship--and she kind of gained some new understanding from that. And so it’s not too often that we need to do that, but we have done some personalized conversations.*
In this sense, staff members have strived at times to engage in interventions, moving beyond the a more technical view of their roles as moderators to use redirection strategies to help facilitate conversation that achieves organizational and community goals.

**Going the ‘extra mile’**

*I think, in terms of safety, we also try to go the extra mile and be cautious about how we are playing a role directly in our member’s safety. So for example I know, [Name and Name], you do this with Story Awards -- like you might have the legal ability to republish something or promote something without getting extra permission, but you go out of your way to make sure that the person’s ready for that, that they are giving permission, that they’re aware of the consequences.*

Staff members also discussed responding to safety contradictions by going the ‘extra mile’ to ensure that community members are aware of and making decisions regarding their own safety, particularly when they are sharing vulnerably within the digital space. This is especially the case when it comes to promoting members’ content, knowing that by doing so it may have a wider reach that could have additional repercussions. For example, being selected as a Story Award winner comes with promotion as a featured story on the website, in e-communications, and on social media networks.

Staff members discuss feeling an ethical obligation to make sure community members fully understand the risks. As one staff member stated:

*This is something that’s coming up a lot right now and there are a number of people who will share something that is potentially well, incriminating is a really strong word, but it is out there publicly. They may not be aware that they’re writing a story about, that could be potentially libel against a government official if she’s claiming he sexually harassed her potentially. We kind of do take that step and say, ‘Okay, have you considered these, you know, five things in terms of the risk that you’re assuming by publishing this, and it’s your choice. You understand the context better and what you’re willing to do, but we do need to let you know that this is what could happen.’ And we’ve had people who, you know, usually*
people are okay with that and they’ve thought about it already, but we want to make sure that they’re not enticed by the $100 honorarium to kind of put themselves at risk, but that they really understand.

Staff members then are aware of different motivations for submitting and different levels of understanding of the potential risks both online and offline for members who chose to be vulnerable in the stories and experiences they choose to share. By engaging in dialogue with members prior to promoting content, they can consider safety in new ways together and at times come up with alternatives to share content in ways that balance both safety and vulnerability.

**Silencing as a tool for protection**

*We had someone we wanted to promote really big, but couldn’t after doing a safety and security assessment... Super disappointing, because she is incredible and her project was incredible! But we do look into these things - and that’s the point.*

While staff members discussed generally engaging in dialogue with community members and allowing them to determine what level of safety and vulnerability they feel most comfortable with, there have been instances where the organization has had to make the call not to further share or promote a member or her story based on safety concerns. In these cases, silencing has been a tool used for protection both for the organization and members. Staff members discuss a felt tension between letting members’ voices be heard and times when they have had to intentionally silence when the risks seemed to high. In elaborating on the critical incident referred to above, staff members discussed the difficult decision they had to make as an organization:

*It really was World Pulse, and what was tricky is we had to do it from the safety and security standpoint from the organization. So she was super clear that she was willing to take the risk and that she understood, for example, that she could be killed. She said, ‘I know that and I’m willing to do that’ but we said, ‘What’s*
the risk for us if we know that that’s a potential and we move forward anyway and we promote her?’ And so I worked to negotiate with her. We had kind of a plan B and said, ‘Are you willing to do this other thing because that wouldn’t put you or us as much at risk?’ And she said, ‘No, I’m not willing to do that. I am only willing to go like all the way’. And so we just had to say ‘That just puts us as an organization at too much risk in terms of moving forward.’ It was really hard. Really hard. I hated having to say, ‘We can’t do this.’

Despite emphasizing an individual responsibility for safety, this incident provides an example of the ways in which the organization still at times responds to safety contradictions by exercising its decision-making power with regards to members’ participation and voices.

Despite this being a difficult situation, staff members indicated they considered this an incident where their response worked:

*It’s a really disappointing scenario, but at the same time, I kind of see it as a safety success story for us because we couldn’t change the situation on the ground that she was facing. We could’ve, however, made it a lot more dangerous for her and being cautious about how to approach that and doing it collaboratively with her, I think hopefully helped to mitigate that situation, as much as we were involved at least, as much as we could.*

In this case, staff members recognized that a member’s offline location – both her nation and her physical location – and the topics she wished to discuss within the digital space would make her unsafe, despite World Pulse being seen as a place to speak ‘freely.’ In this way, safety was defined both individually and collectively and in relation to both online and offline actions.

**Synthesis**

Members’ responses to contradictions of safety are varied, with different implications for efforts to organize across difference. These responses are part of the ongoing construction of the digital space as ‘safe.’ First, most community member
strategies focus on coping with tension through defense mechanisms like withholding, self-censoring or ignoring. These choices are shaped by members’ offline locations within particular contexts that limit their options for how to respond as well as their possibilities for participation. For members such as those in conflict contexts, their safety across spaces is especially at risk. In this case, those with the most threat to their safety may be more likely to respond defensively. For those who adopt a strategy of ignoring the tension, this response has the potential to leave members vulnerable. Additionally, a staff response reflecting a desire to distance from ‘safe’ talk operates as a defense mechanism to cope with and neutralize tensions based on contextual constraints. Avoiding safety talk, however, may serve only to deny tensions that will continue to be latent, as safety is an integral aspect in the constitution of digital counter-space.

Second, community members who responded by taking control, connecting cautiously, and/or differentiating use demonstrated different levels of consciousness about and engagement with tension. In some cases, these responses could be seen as both-and strategies (Putnam et al., 2017), where members reflect on paradoxes and strive for integration and balance, shifting their responses across time and space. In the case of differentiating use, this may represent vacillation between the poles of safe and unsafe. However, these responses risked in some cases falling into either-or logics by assigning safe and unsafe to different spaces. These responses can also create a sense of paranoia, as members’ explicitly indicated, saying “I THINK I’m paranoid.” These responses, which still focus on individuals’ safety, limit the kinds of participation and organizing that can take place. Particularly, connecting cautiously suggests that members may be
reticent to connect with others based on discursive and material cues, which can inhibit possibilities for collaboration and action.

Third, community and staff members also demonstrated responses relying on reflection and dialogue that approximated a *more-than* response. While other responses of community members indicated a self-orientation to the tension, the exercising care response illustrated a self-and-other orientation. This orientation has potential for efforts to build connections across difference when members are able to recognize their interconnectedness with and therefore their accountability to others in order to develop creative solutions that go beyond the individual. Staff members who go the ‘extra mile’ to engage community members in dialogue exhibit similar kinds of care to develop alternatives that do not foreclose participation.

Fourth, staff member responses often illuminate multiple, overlapping tensions they seek to navigate, including those of autonomy-control, individual-collective, and voice-silence. At some points, these multiple tensions manifest simultaneously resulting in responses that leave staff feeling paralyzed in their choices. This was demonstrated in silencing as a tool for protection when staff members were confronted with a situation where finding a third way, or alternative, does not seem possible, closing off opportunities for participation. This example also illustrated the ways in which tensions are being simultaneously navigated by different entities (e.g., individual members, staff, the organization) and that these responses interact to either open up or close off participation.
Interlude: On Being Vulnerable

I am struck by the seemingly dual meaning of vulnerability — as being open (being willing to share openly about one’s very personal experiences) and being exposed or at risk. In this Interlude, I reflect on my own (un)willingness to be vulnerable:

I feel like a failure with regards to my own writing. I said as a participant observer I would write in my journal on World Pulse. I have avoided it. I have done anything but. I feel such a blockage in writing about myself. Nothing comes to me. Granted, I also don’t allow the time for anything to come to me, but I feel both inadequate and protective of my privacy despite my desires for transparency. If I study other people being willing to be vulnerable, shouldn’t I also be willing to be vulnerable? Why do I expect others to share their stories but hesitate about sharing and guard my own? If the ‘personal’ is political, why do I struggle to articulate the ‘personal’? This to me is one of my biggest personal tensions in this project.

What are my fears about sharing my own story? Some of it is embedded in my personal experiences. I have often tried to block out my own feelings and emotions by distracting myself. I still catch myself throwing myself into my work as a way to not have to think about or process difficult experiences. Speaking vulnerably requires digging up things that have been buried, that I may not want to revisit.

Some of it also comes from my own understanding of the Internet as an unsafe space. Writing vulnerably in this digital space that is supposedly safe, where others are also vulnerable in their writing, where there is (seemingly) support for what you may write to me still does not feel safe. Some of this I know comes from my work related to online harassment and my knowledge of what is possible. My (hyper)awareness about
online harassment makes me hesitant to speak about myself for fears of how it might be used. My own digital geographies of fear have been informed by my observations of others’ experiences within and beyond digital spaces. Along those lines, I am concerned about how I can be about open my experiences in a way that is genuine and vulnerable, but also protects those I love. That’s where I face some hesitancy. I am fearful of naming of experiences. I continue to feel convicted about my own (in)ability to ‘voice.’

The irony is that in writing these interludes and this one in particular – revealing the mess and the failures of the research process – I make myself vulnerable. I include that which is usually omitted and cleaned up within the writing of research (Ellingson, 2017). By transgressing normative writing conventions I both resist and reify my own vulnerability.
CHAPTER 5. CONSTRUCTING INCLUSION

By joining our community, you are becoming part of an online sanctuary where every woman can be heard, magnify the power of her voice, and equip herself with the tools to become a vocal agent of change.

– World Pulse training document

In this chapter, I investigate inclusivity in relation to World Pulse. Specifically, this chapter explores how World Pulse’s digital space is constructed as ‘inclusive’ and how, like with safety, this produces contradictions that impact efforts to organize across difference. This chapter follows a similar format to Chapter 4 by first examining how the digital space becomes materially and discursively constructed as ‘inclusive’ (RQ1). Then, I illustrate how inclusion becomes contradictory through practices that make difference visible and inhibit participation (RQ2). Third, I outline community and staff members’ responses to these contradictions of inclusion (RQ3).

**Digital Space as ‘Inclusive’**

I’ve been supported and included? All the time. All the time. I think it must be the corporate culture of World Pulse. Yeah, you can tell that from the way trainings are done, the way one can share whatever the issue is close to their heart.

In members’ talk, World Pulse is depicted as an inclusive space, where they feel supported and able to speak and connect with a diverse group of people, particularly women. Inclusion then is key to World Pulse’s construction as a ‘safe’ counter space for women to organize around issues of concern. Members, like the member from Kenya quoted above, described the digital space as “inclusive,” “welcoming,” “open,” and “diverse.” They articulated feeling “accepted,” “valued,” “connected,” and a sense of “belonging.” Members also said World Pulse takes a “holistic approach” in which
“everybody can speak out loud in this platform equally.” As a white woman in the United States explained:

*World Pulse is unique to be sure. It encourages strong, meaningful communication and collaboration between advocates from all around the world. Some of the members of the online community are amazingly dedicated individuals that want to reach out to wide audience. World Pulse is inclusive and encourages all voices to be a part of their conversation so I have become less intimidated over time. I hope that more people can learn about World Pulse because the community will only grow larger and make more of a difference.*

In these ways, inclusivity is an essential component to what some described as the “*magic*” of World Pulse.

Organizational discourse also emphasizes that World Pulse is a “global” community and a digital space for “*all women*” as articulated in their redefined mission to “*to create a world where all women thrive – one click, one comment, one connection at a time.*” Documents also emphasize what activities “*every member*” can do and engage in.

In the following sections, I dig deeper into how this sense of ‘inclusion’ becomes constructed within World Pulse’s digital space through material and discursive intra-action. Second, I illustrate how it is further constructed through the talk and interactions of members within World Pulse’s digital space. Lastly, I describe the ways members’ offline interactions contribute to defining World Pulse’s digital space as ‘inclusive’ (Table 9).

**Material and Discursive Practices**

*Even the whole platform itself feels very inclusive because you see a wide range of people, a wide range of thought processes, and wide range of countries being represented... It’s not spoken. It’s already implied by the platform itself.*

As this statement from a black women in the United States indicates, members saw inclusion as ‘baked’ into the design of World Pulse, implied through material and
discursive practices that work together to construct its digital space as inclusive. In the following sections, I discuss how this occurs through practices of familiarity, practices of including the excluded, practices of recognition, and practices of caring.

Table 9: Digital Space as ‘Inclusive’

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<th>Codes/Examples</th>
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<td>Practices of Including the Excluded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constructing Inclusion in Talk and Interaction</td>
<td>The digital space is constructed as ‘inclusive’ through members’ talk and interactions within the digital space.</td>
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Practices of familiarity

I think that World Pulse only is similar in the “design part”, I [mean] in the fact that you can receive private messages, you can post stories and you can comment others stories. But is different in the kind of people you find in this, is people who is fighting for her rights or for other rights, is people who denounces the things that are wrongs, is people who rise her voice for freedom and also is very available to share common points of view and supporting you in your projects (the comments that they leave you in every story is a way to supporting you). I never found people like that in facebook, doesn’t even found people like this in Mogul.com (where I write too). In Mogul you can share stories too, but people in this platform prefer love stories, “funny stories” or even “strange stories” and they don’t support stories about empowerment or where I denounce events or facts against women’s health or women’s rights. I still don’t feel that “I fit” in Mogul.

Like the woman in Peru quoted above, members described the familiarity of World Pulse’s material features that made it feel similar enough to Facebook and other social media sites that they could understand its functionality yet still different in its intention. Members described it as like “Facebook but not.” Features like the ability to register, create a profile, post their own content, comment on stories, and send private messages were all considered familiar to participants. As a white woman in the United States explained:

Using a social media structure where I post my picture, I write my story to whatever degree I want to, I can put a friend request for somebody, they can put a friend request for me, I can develop that relationship with them.

Yet, members indicated that what set World Pulse apart is the shared purpose that is constructed through the platform. In this sense, World Pulse brings together people who share a common vision and who can support each other in that vision in ways that are distinct from other platforms and that makes them feel more included. As a woman in Colombia similarly described:

Really [World Pulse] is a very powerful one because it has an intention. I have Facebook or, well I go for Twitter... World Pulse has the power to connect people
with an intention, to be able to speak and to be able to be listened. So and the other ones, you are not really there to listen even though it could be your family, your friends or people you don’t even know, but this one has intention. The other ones to me, they don’t.

Facebook became a common point of comparison, as members saw Facebook as a place that focused on the self -- on fun, being social, or “boasting about your lifestyle.” World Pulse’s focus in contrast was seen to be related to a cause, as a woman in Lebanon explained:

I feel Facebook is just not, it’s a business. When you think of it, it’s maybe for fun or a place for social prestige but it’s definitely not for specific cause. If you write something on Facebook, even if it is related to a cause, it will not reach out to so many people as it would on World Pulse... But yes, I think World Pulse is different. It’s not just for fun or any posts for some people. I mean, it’s a place for everybody. You don’t have to be a female to be there, you don’t have to be a feminist even. You just have, you just have to believe that females are humans and they have powers. I mean, that’s the basic. I feel the main thing is that there is a cause.

Members also indicated they feel World Pulse stands out among other sites that also purport to have similar goals, as a white man in the United States described:

I have joined other online sites that promote human rights, but have left them because they don’t have a focused goal as World Pulse does. World Pulse seems more sincere toward their goal of helping women tell their stories over an extended time. World Pulse seems more user-owned, rather than be controlled by those who originated the site.

World Pulse embraces this familiar but different perception of members. The “About page” following the redesign includes language describing World Pulse as “social media for social revolution” and a “social network” that focuses on “creating a world where all women thrive.” Further, they make the distinction directly – “We are NOT your average social media site.” Within its Digital Changemaking 101 training, World Pulse visually positions itself within a graphic among other networking platforms including Facebook,
Twitter, and LinkedIn, among others, and then later described itself as a “global social networking platform connecting women’s voices to transform our world.”

The purpose of World Pulse is further communicated from the moment a member joins with the use of the “changemaker” identity to describe members. On profiles, members are encouraged to fill out a “My Vision” section to “Inspire, call to action, tell us what your vision is!” They are also asked to select topics and regions of interest that will “showcase your passion areas to World Pulse’s community.” These areas include economic empowerment, environment, girls, human rights, education, gender-based violence, health, leadership, men and boys, and technology. Further, the trainings and others ways of getting involved emphasize “change” and “creating change” as goals members have. For example, Digital Changemaking 101 is described as a course that “helps beginning and experienced changemakers become comfortable sharing their stories, connects participants to other changemakers around the world, and teaches them to use digital tools to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.”

In sum, the familiarity of the material features and discursive actions through the platform has made the digital space seem accessible, yet the construction of a different purpose for the platform through the organization’s discourse and material features makes members feel more included.

**Practices of including the excluded**

*Inclusion for me begins with the fact that there is a platform for women. It starts there and everything else is a bonus.*

Members, like the woman in Zimbabwe quoted above, also discussed the ways World Pulse materially and discursively set itself up as a space for women, in particular,
to have their voices be included and to share stories that are excluded from other online and offline spaces. As a member from Nigeria described, “The fact that women are given a platform to air their views is incredible!”

This is reinforced through the language used throughout the digital space and in the kinds of stories and topics that get promoted and recognized. In a variety of documents, World Pulse positions the problem it is responding to as the exclusion of women’s voices: “Women have been consistently excluded from top economic and political decision-making positions, and their voices drastically underrepresented in all levels of society...We all know that when we include women’s voices it benefits our world” (Digital Changemaking 101 module). For these reasons, World Pulse argues, “It is particularly important that those who have historically not had a voice in traditional media, such as women and minorities, are empowered to participate in the new digital communications environment” (Advanced Digital Changemaking module). Further, World Pulse quotes from The World Bank (2014), “If women’s participation is to be transformative, their voices need to be heard in a broad range of decision-making forums, from households to national parliaments.”

More specifically, World Pulse emphasizes its role as an amplifier of “underrepresented,” “untapped,” “underreported” and “unheard” voices as members are able to self-publish their own content through their journals and then see that content promoted to gain further visibility. As a woman in Ethiopia described, “Yes, when I know that I’m allowed to write my story and publish it by my self, I feel included.”

World Pulse’s programs – including the Story Awards and trainings – further emphasize role of the digital space in highlighting underrepresented voices. For the Story
Awards, editorial guidelines include asking: “Does your story amplify voices and perspectives that are underrepresented in global media? We look to publish stories that are unheard and surprising. We aim to shed light on important issues that are rarely discussed.” In trainings, members are also told that World Pulse is committed to these kinds of stories. For example:

*World Pulse is founded on the belief that there is a world of untapped knowledge, innovation, and vision held by women. We encourage members to produce content that demonstrates the collective power of women globally.* (Advanced Digital Changemaking module)

Members indicated that that the stories they see visibly on the platform – stories that are recognized and promoted – as well as the calls for stories demonstrate this commitment. Calls for stories have included topics such as displacement, HIV/AIDS, reimagining traditions, reproductive rights and justice, global LGBT rights, and menstruation, among others. Additionally, digital action-campaigns organized by World Pulse (sometimes with partners and sometimes on its own) and organized by groups or members have also focused on crowdsourcing women’s voices and actions on topics such as gender-based violence, climate change, digital access and empowerment, and girls’ education. As a white women in the United States described, “*This is work that is rarely covered in the press and World Pulse is one of those organizations that seeks to put these often overlooked women’s stories into the forefront/media landscape.*”

Members indicated they see World Pulse place from which to challenge common discourses, particularly about their nation or region. For some, this was the motivation behind joining World Pulse – a chance to share alternative stories. As a woman in Colombia articulated:
I just wanted to share the stories, because I think that I have seen another Colombia and that many people here, even people living here haven’t been able to see it. So I just wanted to share those faces, and those girls, and the people I have been able to see, the indigenous communities. I really want to connect to all the people that are interested in listening to those stories.

Some members indicated they hoped through their presence to counter common media discourses. Two participants from the Middle East talked about wanting to challenge media framings of the region as it relates to women, religion and conflict. As a woman in Syria described:

*Because it’s a blog such that you can write whatever you want and also there are many platforms and many different women that they write their stories. At the beginning, that motivated me to join. Second, to meet people from all over the world. And to make them know what is the positive things about Syrian people during this crisis, because everything you know about us, that we have war and negative things, but I try to make the whole world know what positive things we do during this war as people and as positive people who try to live even though our situation isn’t very nice... It’s a platform to let all women all over the world know about Syrian women and about Syria.*

Another participant shared that she seems the potential to use World Pulse to educate people about her country, Cameroon, and the African context generally, not just for those who are outside but also to remind women from the region of their value:

*I want them to know what Africa is, how an African woman, the values of the African woman, the potentials that African women carry. You know, it’s very important to us. Most times we don’t have the opportunity. So I would really want to let them know we are unique. We are also awesome. We have a lot to give out too. Because when I talk with my women most times ...they are like, ‘We don’t think you can make it out with other people, like white’. I say, ‘Why not?’... So on World Pulse if I have to really meet all the members, they are definitely going to enjoy knowing about Cameroon and Africa as a whole.*

In these examples, participants make clear that they see World Pulse as a space where they can gain a voice and share alternative or counter stories about women within particular local and regional contexts. The digital space then is constructed as inclusive
by its positioning as a space for the voices of women and stories that are traditionally excluded from other spaces.

**Practices of recognition**

*When I was told that my experience has been recognized I was actually really thrilled...You know, there are things you do in life that you know someone is recognizing you. You know, yeah, I am a woman, I have done so much work and some of words have been noticed and just been appreciated. It was encouraging to me that at least what I’m doing is making an impact and someone has seen my work and my story is getting publicity. I was happy. It has encouraged me to do more so far.*

Members also discussed the organization’s practices of recognizing members’ voices through the Story Awards program, selection for leadership roles within the community (e.g., Community Champions), and receiving additional opportunities as making them feel included. Several members, like the woman in Kenya at the start of this section, discussed having received a Story Award and then being featured on TIME magazine’s website as contributing to them feeling included. As discussed previously, Story Award winners are recognized through a “Featured Storyteller” badge as well as by being featured on the website, within e-communications and on social media. Winners also receive a $100 USD honorarium and may be syndicated through media partners like TIME.com. Such acknowledgement contributed to members feeling like their voices had value within the digital space, as a member from Peru experienced: “*One of [my stories] won the featured writer prize and also was publish in Time.com, this was very exciting for me and very unexpected as well, I never knew that my words could be ‘so important.’*”
The opportunity to be featured as part of the Story Awards came with further interactions with staff, who provided editing support. A woman in India described this as a meaningful experience:

*Being featured on TIME through WP has been a particularly enriching experience because the kind of help that the editors extended while helping me edit my piece for publication was just amazing. As an aspiring writer-feminist, this means a lot to me.*

Members also discussed their selection for leadership roles as significant. Community Champion was a leadership position that existed within the digital space for six-month terms between 2015 and 2016. Selected members were described as “community members who model World Pulse’s core values and help create a thriving, interactive network.” Being selected for this role was seen as an honor, as a woman in Nigeria explained:

*Even while I was made a Community Champion it made me feel important. It made me feel like, oh, my effort, my efforts in World Pulse are being recognized. So I feel so encouraged.*

Other members listed a variety of experiences and opportunities they have had through World Pulse, including trainings, travelling, attending conferences, and being selected as part of the new Ambassadors program as making them feel included. Ambassadors represent a “select group of experienced and dedicated World Pulse members” who are focused on connecting more women from their countries and regions. Having many of these experiences, a member in Colombia said, “I do feel that World Pulse is community where you are being listened.”

Another woman in Nigeria described her experience participating in the I am a Leader campaign – a crowdsourcing campaign on leadership organized by Community Champions in the leadership group – and being featured:
So, I engaged in this I am a Leader campaign. They called on us to share our leadership stories. I was featured. Because my story was featured, I was also invited to a leadership course, a webinar, a leadership webinar. So I felt really, I don’t know how to even describe how I felt, but it felt really nice, you know? I share my story all the time. Even when my story is featured, nobody thinks to give me something back. So I just felt really, the webinar was great, because I think it was just about five of us that were on the webinar, so apparently it was something that they really thought through and thought that would contribute to my growth and development and just because I told my story they decided to make it available to me. That was a time that I really, really felt included.

For members like her, feelings of inclusion were tied to feeling acknowledged within the community, particularly by staff members, through the receipt of additional opportunities or recognitions.

**Practices of caring**

World pulse is similar to other online communities in that you first need to create a profile before you start posting items; it is different in that there is a personal touch with the world pulse admin because they contact you by addressing your name and it’s not robotic. When you need clarification about something, whoever wrote to you takes ownership to respond to you so it’s feels live.

Lastly, members also distinguished World Pulse’s digital space from those of others through the ways the organization is perceived to practice and exhibit care. This is seen to occur in several ways, reinforced by technological features and specific practices enacted by staff members that make members feel included.

First, from the time of joining the platform, members noted that they received regular communication from staff who addressed them by name, as a member in Kenya described at the start of this section. This communication continues, including when members become less active. Several members reported receiving emails from staff saying they had not seen them in a while, as a woman in Nigeria experienced:

*Whenever I’m not coming to the site, someone sends a message, ‘Oh, [Name] we’ve not seen you for some time, try to contribute and make comments and read...*
other people's stories and then I'll go back again and go and check and read somebody's story and then make a comment. It shows that World Pulse is in touch with the people on the platform and they care.

In addition to reminder emails, members also reported receiving regular updates through email that make them feel connected to and valued by World Pulse. As a man in Uganda explained: “Being a volunteer and Listener for world pulse plus the updates I receive from the pulse team concerning any upcoming events, activities, such make feel I am part of world pulse or included.” The specific language used in crafting these organizational emails contributes to members’ sense of feeling valued, as a black woman in the United States described, “You should see one of those emails. After that, you don’t need more [explanation] (laughter).”

World Pulse uses a combination of personally crafted messages sent by volunteers and staff as well as automated messages that are triggered by certain activities (or lack thereof) on the site to encourage participation and reach out to members. Weekly or biweekly e-communications provide updates to subscribers about Story Award calls, featured stories, and other activities on the platform. A quarterly “Inside the Pulse” email provides organizational updates. These quarterly updates begin with a letter from the founder and CEO and address the receiving member by name (e.g., “Dear Jasmine”). During my participant observation, I also received emails about my activity within the digital space that addressed me by name. The first was received when I became a “vocal contributor,” receiving a badge on my profile in recognition of “my leadership in the World Pulse community. Vocal Contributors are World Pulse leaders who maintain higher-than-average level of engagement and activity through World Pulse’s online community platform.” When I purposefully dipped my activity following the end of my
first six months of participant observation, I received an email titled “We’ve missed you on World Pulse!” in which the World Pulse team expressed that “We haven’t seen you on World Pulse as much lately, and just wanted to check in,” providing nudges of “simple ways” to stay engaged. When World Pulse was administering its annual survey, emails were also addressed by name from the founder and CEO and at least once in the subject line (e.g., “Jasmine, I want to hear from you!”). This personalization of emails takes place technologically but becomes a purposeful choice to address members by name.

Second, members described practices the staff engaged in during their interactions with them as volunteers, trainees, or just in asking questions that made them feel like they were being heard and acknowledged. As a woman in Trinidad and Tobago explained:

*They have a staff that is very quick in responding to your concerns and your questions and getting you supported in anyway possible – even directing you to sources of information and organizations that will assist you in what you are trying to accomplish.*

Members discussed feeling like staff knew them by name and this made them feel included, as a member in Kenya experienced: “*Also there is the fact that they reply your emails if you contact them with issues or questions... They personalise your emails and that also makes you feel like someone knows you more than just an online platform. it makes you feel like you have met at some point.*”

Members also mentioned specific staff members by name with whom they have had meaningful interactions. Some also mentioned the CEO and founder of World Pulse and experiences with her where they felt like she recognized them. As a white man in the United States described: “*[She] has always known my name and acknowledged who I am. She and the World Pulse staff have responded to my emails of encouragement.*”
Similarly, a woman in Cameroon explained that most people may not even know she is the founder because of how she interacts with members:

> You may never know that [she] is the founder unless someone tells you. She relates with everyone on an equal and sisterly basis. When you need something like a recommendation, she responds to you ASAP and makes that available before any due date. World Pulse is very special.

Members recognized the CEOs personal touch, in particular her commenting on stories on the platform and her responsiveness. One member referred me to a post she wrote on World Pulse about her, in which she discusses these practices and how much it surprised her once she found out she was the CEO:

> It took me some months to realise that she was the founder of World Pulse. It was unbelievable because I was not expecting the founder of an organisation to respond to articles on their platform, because the CEO, according to Nigeria standard was expected to be the leader in an arm armchair directing. It was what I expected but [she] proved me wrong.

She went on to describe the various ways the CEO directly has encouraged and supported her, including writing letters, recommending her for programs and trainings, hosting her in the United States, and inviting her to serve in the organization in various ways.

Members who have been volunteers described their experiences, particularly in the Listener program, and the ways in which their interactions with staff were marked by mutual respect and interest in them as holistic beings. In describing one staff member, another member from Nigeria said:

> [She] did not manage us like volunteers. She managed us like, oh, we were all sisters, you know, trying to go forward and get contributions. And I really liked that. And I liked the fact that she would also reach out and want to know how I am feeling and tell me how I’m shaping initiatives through my efforts as a Listener, and talk about things beyond World Pulse.

Others discussed the manner of address, articulation of programs, and facilitation practices during trainings as ways World Pulse staff tried to “make sure everybody felt
"like they mattered, whatever they said counted." One member also discussed proposing an idea to staff, and, even though the suggestion did not pan out, expressed appreciation of the fact that staff listened to and considered her suggestion. High-touch and personalized practices then of addressing members by name, responsiveness to requests and questions, and engaging in supportive interactions with members then contributed to members feeling included.

In sum, World Pulse is constructed as ‘inclusive’ through the intra-action of material features and discursive practices. These intra-actions produce practices – of familiarity, of including the excluded, of recognition, and of caring – that communicate to members that inclusion is a value embedded within the digital space and of the organization. Inclusion is further constructed through talk and interaction among members, as discussed in the next section.

**Constructing Inclusion in Talk and Interaction**

*I feel like a deep connection with the fact that I know people outside want to listen to other women and other stories even though that they are living in maybe different conditions without, for example, living in a country where there is no work, and people are willing to listen and respond and to help and to be supportive. I think that makes me believe that I will come every time.*

As a member in Colombia describes above, World Pulse is further constructed as inclusive through members’ talk and interactions within the digital space. In particular, the digital space is constituted as inclusive through (a) interactions that make members feel ‘heard’, (b) meaningful connections that move across digital and physical spaces and (c) metaphorical language used by members.
**Feeling heard**

I think that I do really feel included when I write my story and someone comments on. You feel that personal touch, in the same way when I comment on stories and the story owner writes back and it kind of starts a conversation.

As this quote from a woman in Ethiopia suggests, members frequently discussed that the comments they receive from other members on their journal posts communicate to them that they are included. Comments contributed to them feeling important, valued and respected within the digital space. As a woman in India explains “Each time I write a piece and an unknown face and voice appears in the comments section, I feel elated, excited, loved, included and supported.”

The culture of encouraging comments begins when members register for World Pulse and write their first post. Participants discussed receiving welcome messages from other members, which immediately communicated their inclusion within the online community. As a woman in Kenya shared:

> I also feel that that i belong to a community that is aiming to positively change the world into a better place for instance when i first wrote my story [Member] welcomed me. This gesture motivated me to contribute a lot as well as interact with others though a quite a busy person. She made me feel important.

Members indicated that welcoming practices of World Pulse, facilitated by a volunteer program for Welcomers, set World Pulse apart from other digital spaces and helped to establish an understanding of the values within the digital space. As a woman in Cameroon described:

> Yeah, like, when I just joined World Pulse, the welcome message I got was so touching to me and it was so touching that I could not help it than to share it with a friend who, she finally also joined World Pulse because of that welcome, the World Pulse message I got and I shared it with her. So she thought the group was something visionary. She decided to join.
In addition to “welcoming” comments, members also discussed receiving regular comments on their stories – describing both the nature and, sometimes, quantity of comments. Some members indicated that the comments received on World Pulse are a motivating factor in their continued involvement within the digital space.

Practices of commenting to let other members know their stories have been heard are embedded within multiple volunteer roles and encouraged within trainings, where trainees are often asked to comment on other members’ stories as part of their assignments. Volunteers discussed what they perceived to be the significance of this exchange, as a black woman in the United States shared:

*Most of the time what happens on World Pulse is that, ok, you are, you make a comment and there is an answer and then you make a comment and after replying I thank them for sharing on the World Pulse platform and I ask them to keep up and inform what is the project to keep up in terms of what they are doing, to encourage them, because sometimes they are in situations, even when you read, you are like, ‘Oh my goodness. She was in those circumstances! Wow!’ You don’t know how they can keep on moving on, but they do. So you just make sure they know we are interested in their stories by listening, by giving ideas or suggestions sometimes, and most of the time that’s all they want because you cared to respect what they are doing even though maybe those around them don’t, you know, to tell them that what they are doing is great.*

Several participants discussed the significance of the act of ‘being heard’ within particular cultural contexts, where women in particular may not have seen their own voices as important. One member described her experiences as a Nigerian woman:

*You know, I come from a society where women are just, like, rules are foisted on women – you have school, you have to take care of children, you have to do this, you have to, you have to, you have to. It’s only men that require, that we fully respect when they want to talk. Because of that they have free reign in Nigerian society. So I feel like if we, that World Pulse would help a lot of Nigerian women if only they could connect with it, to actually realize that your voice counts for something, you know? World Pulse is a community where no matter what you say there is always somebody who relates with your story or has something to tell you, to comfort you or there is always someone talking. There are lot of conversations going on in World Pulse. So I feel like it would help a lot of,*
Nigerian women recover their voices. That’s why, that’s really why I feel passionate about World Pulse because the relevance of World Pulse in this time -- I can’t emphasize it enough. It’s just a very relevant platform. I’ve been asking myself why I didn’t get to know about World Pulse earlier. That’s why I feel really interested and really out there about World Pulse.

This sense of someone “always” being there to provide support and encouragement then is recognized as especially important when some women’s voices may not be validated in their offline locations. Similarly, one volunteer, who has been living in the United States, also finds that giving and receiving comments on stories on World Pulse can be particularly important given some members’ educational and cultural backgrounds:

I would say given the women who are posting on World Pulse and I feel that women are, and this may not be the case for other people or other Listeners, not that educated, but they are leaders or strive to be in their communities. Just by my name they know that I’m from Africa, because we recognize, just by the name you have an idea of where you are from just by your name. And I understand that I am more educated than they are. For women in Africa trying their best who did not have access to education at least to get to the highest education, I have been called a peer, called a sister who is educated even though she lives now overseas, but has the time to read their posts, to exchange with them. For them, this means respect. What I am doing with them is just respect - respect as human beings, respect as a woman, respect for what they are doing. And many times even an educated African woman does not get that. So once you give all this to a person, any person, whatever the gender but especially women wherever they come from – Africa or elsewhere – that’s all the need to boost them. And that boosts me too because I appreciate more the situation in which I am.

As the above quote indicates, the exchange also fuels those who take on Listener roles as they hear back from those they seek to encourage and support. This was common among members who saw themselves not just receiving but also giving comments to others, as a woman in Nigeria explained:

Whenever I read other member’s shared stories I connect with the stories and when I am able to respond I get a response of “thank you for commenting” or “thank you for reading my story” I feel included and that gladdens me.
Commenting practices within World Pulse contribute then to members – both those giving and receiving comments – feeling included within the digital space.

**Meaningful connections across spaces**

For me, I found these [interactions] meaningful because these are women that I talk to when I am really, really low. You know, I’m still grieving my son and I’m still going through a really tough time…So whenever I’m feeling low and I am just feeling like I can’t handle it, I need something, I seek support, I reach out to her and she responds really, really fast. So I have a friend to count on from World Pulse. I never thought, we constantly talk – [Name, Name and Name] – these are all women I met through World Pulse – and I talk to them basically like my sisters. I am happy, I am happy, I can talk to them on any issue. For me, they’ve become sisters. We are on that level. For me, I find that really, really meaningful, because they are not just building me up personally – they are also helping me build my career. [Name] gives me advice on how to run my organization. [Name], when something comes up – a conference, a training – she recommends me. It is just so meaningful to me. We are not just friends – they are building my career. I also help that I am building them because sometimes when they need statistics I give them, when they need to sell something, they will come for me. For me, that’s meaningful and impactful.

Members also discussed meaningful connections that they had with other members that moved across digital and physical spaces. These connections have provided social support for members, like the woman in Kenya quoted above, who have gone through difficult circumstances, like the loss of a child, as well as other kinds of technical and financial support. The nature of these interactions has contributed to members feeling included. Making such connections has been considered key to members’ experiences, especially for existing and long-time members. As a member in Nigeria explained, “And through World Pulse actually I have met so many friends. That is the most important thing that World Pulse has done in my life, apart from helping me to hone my voice.”

Members have established these connections through shared experiences like trainings or being Community Champions for a particular group on World Pulse. They
have also established these connections through offline meet-ups or organically by connecting with others with shared interests over time. For another member in Nigeria, her most meaningful relationship emerged organically through commenting on a story:

> I think my most striking interaction so far is a girl called [name]. [Name] wrote about some experiences in her neighborhood and then I commented and then she reached out to me by email and we connected on Facebook and built the relationship. So it was no more about just meeting online, like we actually became friends. That was really wonderful.

Similar to what she experienced, many of these relationships have moved beyond World Pulse and into other digital spaces, such as email, Facebook, Skype, and WhatsApp, among others. Members might use these platforms to share resources such as news or videos with friends from World Pulse on Facebook.

Members may also use these other platforms to coordinate activities, keep up to date on each other’s activities or organizations, or engage on a more synchronous communication channel. A member in Trinidad and Tobago explained the communicative process of forming these relationships and their evolution across platforms:

> When you connect with someone and you do, after you read the commenting, you do the private messaging. Then you sometimes share, because a lot of the members of the World Pulse members especially from the Voice of the Future training we are now connected by a social media, so we are able now to follow each other and what we are actually doing maybe on a daily basis or a weekly basis, follow each other’s organizations on Facebook and like those organizations, share it, follow the individuals’ website if there is one, and also have an email communication going... We also do Skype calling just to check in on one another, to see how things are going in our area. So World Pulse is not just that platform where women come together on that platform alone. The platform also offers and brings with it other branches of social communication that persons can continue to maintain relationships, you know, while they are on World Pulse and outside of World Pulse.
In some cases, these relationships have not just moved off platform, but offline. Members shared stories of meeting up with other World Pulse members within their own countries and when travelling abroad. A woman in Canada described her experiences meeting other World Pulse members offline:

So the first World Pulse sisters I’ve met in person were here in my local area but I am very close to I number of World Pulse sisters from far away and when one I had been in touch with a lot came to New York we got to meet in person and talk for days. So that’s just amazing, that we are able to not only be in touch by computer but that, and this is also part of the bigger World Pulse system – they bring her over or they have managed to find ways that all kinds of organizations are bringing these amazing women in from a lot of countries, that those of us who are here locally are able to also meet in person. We might not have had the funds to travel distances but ways are being found to allow for us to meet...I have to say meeting in person was the most meaningful.

Some members indicated that they have been able to become closer to people they already knew or knew of in their offline contexts. A member in Nigeria had this experience:

Then another inspiring and very surprising thing I found was that World Pulse made me closer to people I knew in person...So I knew someone, or I know maybe someone that does a lot of nonprofit work or advocacy work around women’s and girls’ rights, and then I know a particular part of them, maybe I know that they are very passionate about education but on World Pulse I get to see them from another light, you know? I get to have another kind of conversation built with them. Let me give you an example. I don’t know if you know, [Name]? .... So I knew her as a powerful change agent for young girls but then it was through World Pulse when I read through her stories, her articles that I got to know that she has actually been through a lot of struggle when she was younger. She had about 3 or 4 surgeries and that was how she lost her voice, and, you know, it just gives me a very dynamic view of people I thought I knew before joining the platform.

These offline interactions in particular, reported frequently among members in Nigeria, Kenya, and Cameroon, have brought additional closeness within those relationships, as another member in Nigeria explained, “Later, I began to meet these online sisters in real life events...Their families became my family members.” This relational closeness was
also indicated by members sharing about buying each other’s products, visiting each other when they are sick, and supporting each other through deaths within their families and within the community. When a World Pulse member from Nigeria died, members rallied online and offline to offer support, offering tributes online and offline calling and meeting her husband to offer support and encouragement. In recalling the meaningfulness of this relationship, a woman in Nigeria said:

*And again, [Name], who just died a few months back, she has been so nice, because one day when I have some difficult times, she would talk to me and say, ‘I have not been seeing you online. What happened?’ I just tried to share a few things with her, and she was like, ‘Ok, let me call you.’ And because of that she was always calling to encourage me, to talk to me. And I tell you when I got this job, when I started working here, a few weeks into my job, she called me and said, ‘Where are you?’ I said, ‘I’m in Lagos.’ She was coming to Lagos for her visa issue and can she come. And I said, ‘Oh my God, come.’ And she came to my office and I was so excited. I never knew anybody. Somebody I never knew before only I know from World Pulse and she came all the way from the North. I was so excited. I was making noises and I was telling everybody. It was a great thing.*

Through these relationships that have moved across spaces online and offline, members have been supported in a variety of ways that have advanced individual members’ in their personal and professional lives. A woman in Cameroon experienced this with an active long-time community member:

*My positive interaction experiences are many but the one on the top of my brain is meeting [Name] on World Pulse in 2012. She has remained a supportive person and mentor ever since. She helped me start my own organization by giving me advice on how to start and go about it. She connected me with women in other parts of the world who were doing the same work I was interested in. She has given financial support more than ones. She gave me the opportunity to volunteer in her organization in Cameroon and I learned a lot from that. Its been an amazing journey with [her].*

Similarly, another member from Cameroon shared her excitement that a World Pulse member from the United States responded to work she was doing on menstrual hygiene and doing trainings on entrepreneurship and leadership and has decided to come to
Cameroon to help with the trainings. She attributes this to World Pulse: “So that is the kind of relationship, that is the kind of bond that I find in World Pulse.”

Participants indicated they have also found technical support through each other. One woman from Kenya found this support early on when she joined World Pulse, “I also felt included when I seemed not to know how to use the wp website and [another member] guided me.

Similarly, a member from Nigeria has found members from her own country who she reaches out to when she needs support:

Just like was telling about [Name]. She is in technology too. Apart from World Pulse, I met her at World Pulse but outside World Pulse I know we have developed that relationship outside World Pulse. Like sometimes when I have some difficulties I don’t have knowledge about, I’ll just call upon her and she’s always there to respond to me. Just like a good Southern lady (name) she too when I’m having an issue, I’ll just call upon them. Because these two ladies are Nigerian so it’s easier for me to have a conversation with them. So anytime I call upon them they are always there for me to guide me on what I’m not doing right.

Some participants have also received financial support from other members that has enabled them to attend trainings or conferences. Through the support of another member, one participant from Nigeria was able to attend a course in Canada:

You know, it was just a comment I made on somebody’s journal that attracted her to me and she wrote me and said, ‘Let me know what you are doing in Nigeria.’ When I told her I had opportunity of even going for a course to uplift myself in Canada, she quickly said, ‘I can sponsor you.’ I didn’t even ask her. She just sent me some money. Honestly, I didn’t even ask. She just said, ‘I can do that for you.’ She just sent me money. I told her, ‘Don’t send it to me. Send it to my school.’ She sent money to my school -- $2,000 for my school fees. She said she wanted to give me $5,000…She voluntarily paid my ticket to go for that course, gave me pocket money while I was there, and after that course my life turned around. Honestly, I had some idea of human rights. I had some idea of speaking out. I had to know what is my right because then I was like emotionally down, you know, intimidation and things, I don’t even know how to go about it. But after that course, I was like, ‘Wow.’ So I had such a great experience. When I came back to myself, it was great….After this course I went in Canada, I came to Nigeria and
now I’m like a hot cake. I write my applications for my job, they must call me for interviews. Do you understand it?

Interactions like those described above, can have a lasting impact on members who received such support and resources through their involvement within World Pulse’s digital space and through interactions that have moved into and across other digital and physical spaces.

**Metaphorical language**

I would say World Pulse is the top meeting place where you meet and make sisters. You just find your own sisters. Sometimes you just get to meet some people that will matter in your life. So I will tell people this is a place where you never get lonely...This is a place where you go and want to be included.

As expressed in this statement from a member in Zimbabwe, members rely on home and familial metaphors to describe the digital space and the meaningfulness of the relationships within it. In doing so, they discursively construct World Pulse as a private, intimate place within which each member is in close relation to others.

First, members used a metaphor of home to describe World Pulse’s digital space. Members would often use this in reference to a sense of belonging they felt within the digital space and a yearning for that feeling among other women. As a woman in Canada explained, “From there I just felt as if I’m home, in a way that I have been looking for my whole life. With women finding each other globally.” She went on to describe that the “tone” set within the digital space made it feel like “coming home.”

For one member in Nigeria, this feeling of “home” was tied to having one’s own, personal space within the larger digital space of World Pulse. She stated: 

*But World Pulse is, like, you feel free to have your own password, your own profile, it’s like your own home, because you only have access to your site, to your own personal site, journal and information, you know, your profile in the*
World Pulse site. That makes it more useful. You can connect and look around and there are plenty of personal emails. You can communicate interpersonally. It’s very, very unique. I have not been to any other group that is like World Pulse.

More often though, the feeling of home was tied to a level of understanding and the types of relationships found among members, like a member in India described:

Where in World Pulse you actually don’t know anyone, ok, you just go and comment on the person’s thing but you feel like you are at home, you understand the feeling of whatever the person has written, and the person who has written understands, ok, whoever has come and commented has actually felt what she has written. So it’s the kind of bond, it is the kind of family that you feel into, you can express your things, you can go and share your things with others, which I have not found yet in any other place.

The metaphor of home was then tied to the metaphor of family in describing the relationships within World Pulse’s digital space. Members described being made to “feel like a member of the ‘family.’” Familial language was used to convey a kind of mutual support and bond among members. As a woman in Uganda described:

First of all the warm hospitality that i got having succeeded registering is some thing that made me feel like i was in a different beautiful world .I felt much loved , cared for, you know i had gone through much hurdles that at one point i really feel may be life is not worthy living or i ask my self what I am i living for but to find people who shine light in my life was something that created a big impact in my life . I have been inspired, motivated and empowered in this community and its the only place that i feel free and comfortable sharing my stories because i consider it another loving family that you get encouraged to fly to greater heights.

One member in Cameroon described World Pulse similarly, as a way to separate it from other digital spaces:

World Pulse is different. Different, why? Because World Pulse is, one, it’s a family, if I could use that word. To me, World Pulse is family because the moment you get into World Pulse you are accepted. You write, you meet women who are like, ok, they try to bring out the best in you. You are not left behind. It’s like they want you to move along. They want you to get to where you want to be. So for me, World Pulse is family.
Most frequently members adopted a particular familial relationship to describe their connections on World Pulse – sister. Members, particularly though not exclusively those who are situated in African nations, often referred to their “World Pulse sisters” in conversation and would use sisterhood in attempts to describe their relationships with others. As a woman in Nigeria explained: “But on World Pulse everybody is treated as a sister, everybody is treated as a friend. It’s this cordial relationship among World Pulse than any other community I’m seeing”. Sister language was used in describing in some cases specific supportive relationships with other World Pulse members or applied to all members. Another woman in Nigeria used it to describe forming a relationship with a particular World Pulse member:

I met her the first time when I went for the event and just I fell in love with her. I heard about her work with breast ironing before I met her so at least that was the place she comes from. So we got talking and she is like really amazing, and even on the platform she is really amazing – sharing, connecting with me, commenting on my articles. And then when we met at the conference in May, she had just known me for about 3 weeks, and then we were communicating like, you know, sisters despite generational gap between both of us. We still got along. It was a sister role, something like that. So that’s another way I’ve related to someone on the platform.

Many emphasized this relationship was possible despite having not met each other offline, as a woman in Ethiopia described: “[World Pulse is] a platform that makes one feel that they are not alone, sisters that have never met each other yet engages like they live next door.”

Some made a point of indicating this was not a word they were throwing around lightly, as a member in Nigeria explained, “The opportunity to share my stories and the daily comments from my sisters online…I continued over the years because we grew to become REAL SISTERS.”
Members also used the sister metaphor to describe the way not only to describe others but to describe the way they choose to interact themselves, as evidenced in this statement from a woman in Cameroon:

*I interact with everyone on World Pulse on a sisterly scale. I read posts and comment to on them. I also send friend requests to sisters whom I think share the same vision and do the same work with me. I follow them to learn best practices in their work in different parts of the world.*

Sisterhood language was also invoked during particular interactional moments, such as during times where members were able to come together across borders. As a white woman in the United States described:

*I was just thinking back this morning to the first training for the Listeners and being able to hear the voices of women in all these different places around the world ask their questions, it gave me the sense of being part of this sisterhood – all of us learning and being in this training together – that was really exciting. I really enjoyed being a part of that.*

This metaphorical language then – of home, family and sisterhood – works alongside members’ interactions within the platform that make them feel heard and establish meaningful relationships to constitute the digital space as an inclusive space. In sum, inclusion is constructed through members’ talk and interactions that contribute to members feeling heard and supported within and beyond World Pulse’s digital space.

**Constructing Digital Inclusion in Offline Spaces**

*Ok, my World Pulse story is very, very interesting because I was just chatting with my friend, a fellow changemaker in Nigeria, on what she does is teach low income women, so we were talking and she goes, ‘Oh, have you heard about World Pulse?’ And at first, I thought World Pulse just sounded familiar. I must have heard of it somewhere, or I don’t know, but I just told her that I didn’t really know what World Pulse was all about, and she said, ‘Oh, that’s fine. The World Pulse people will be in Lagos tomorrow.’ We were talking at about 9 p.m. at night and she invites me to a World Pulse meet up for the next day, for 12 p.m. the next day, and I tell her, ‘Ah, this is like such short notice.’ She said something very convincing and she said, ‘I promise you, it’s going to be amazing.’ I said, ‘Ok I’ll*
try. So the next day, my schedule was difficult, packed, but suddenly things just free up and noon, like I didn’t have much to do, so I thought about it. Why don’t I just honor her invitation and go and hear what World Pulse is all about? So that is how I went for a Lagos meet-up. There was someone, I can’t remember her name right now – I know I actually there was an article about my first encounter with World Pulse that actually refers to how I felt that day and all of that. So there were members from World Pulse in Nigeria at the event. They just wanted to tell us all about World Pulse, the opportunities that World Pulse has to offer, the kind of platform that it is. And in like 45 minutes into the event, I was already signed up on World Pulse (laughter). When time came for them to help us register on World Pulse, I went like, ‘I’m already registered.’ And they asked me, ‘When did you register? I thought you said you never hear about World Pulse until today?’ And I go, ‘Oh yeah, I registered like 40 minutes as you spoke about World Pulse.’ I just connected immediately and went on my phone and saw this amazing platform that I had never encountered before and that was how I connected.

Members’ movements and interactions within offline spaces have also helped define World Pulse’s digital space as ‘inclusive.’ In particular, members indicated that their experiences with World Pulse members or staff in offline spaces contributed to their feelings of inclusion within the digital space, demonstrating an ongoing interaction between the digital and the physical.

First, members have organized offline meet-ups for other members within particular local contexts. In particular, members from Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and the United States shared stories of either organizing or participating in a member organized offline meet-up. In some cases, this was participants’ first exposure to World Pulse, as it was for a woman in Nigeria in the narrative that began this section. A few other participants also told similar stories of meetings organized in the living rooms of homes of other World Pulse members that introduced them to World Pulse. One participant organized such a session in Ethiopia:

*Immediately I saw the vision of WP I couldn’t wait to share it with my sisters in in [Name of city] so within weeks I organised the first living room session of digital empowerment with all my friends and got them register on WP.*
Another participant shared about attending this session along with a group of women from at least three different countries who travelled together by car to her house and sat in her sitting room to hear about World Pulse. She said:

_I sign up and join world pulse before the tea break. I read some stories of women on the website. Everything I hear or I read from the women attracted me. That’s how I decide to be a member before the launching ceremony was over._

Others shared stories of hosting other women in their homes when they came from outside the city to attend a meet-up. These meetings led to additional meet-ups to work together on offline outreach and action, as a member from Nigeria described:

_After that meeting, whilst I was in my house, I told [Name] I run an NGO, a personal NGO, where I help the lives of women with disabilities and I need to organize an empowerment program. And she said, ‘Ok, I can come on back and come over. If you arrange and let me know, I will come over and help with the training for the women.’ And indeed, it was an awesome experience, because when I was ready, I organized the program and I invited her. She also came with her team. In fact, it was in my own house again. So they really stayed 2 or 3 days working with the women. It was so exciting and I was so happy with the experience with World Pulse, with everything. I was so happy._

In some cases, like the meeting in Ethiopia, a member of the World Pulse staff from the region was physically present, sharing her experiences.

_Sometimes these meetings happened more than once. A white woman in the United States once organized a group of women who met off and on in Oregon for four or five months to get to know World Pulse. She described their first meeting:_

_I remember having hot cider available for people. And we had about 12 or 13 women that showed up with their laptops. And what I loved about it was that there was a continuum of women’s experience with the Internet and with the web, so that I didn’t have to do all the teaching. I could put people in small groups or one-on-one if somebody said, ‘Oh, I got this’ or ‘I don’t know how to.’ And that’s what I like as an educator is getting people to do that. I created a little ritual connecting us into the world. We watched, [the CEO] has a wonderful talk that she gave that is a TED Talk, so we watched a part of that so they could, I could have her in the room so to speak and they could hear her story from her telling it,
so again, she had flesh and blood. I kept repeating, ‘This is in Portland. You can go up there. You can stop into their offices, etc.’

Members who experienced these offline meet-ups indicated that meeting face to face played an important role in feeling connected to the online community and to other members. In some cases, this contributed to healing, as a member in Kenya explained:

Unfortunately, I have been through some tough experiences and I think when I met the women on World Pulse in Kenya face to face, for me it was it was the beginning of the healing because I was going through so much...I got to heal through the World Pulse forum in Kenya. Through listening to other women’s experiences and challenges, I thought, ‘Wow, it would be nice to support another woman and that is through listening to them’ because when you listen to another woman they get to know someone is listening to their voice and someone is reacting to what they are saying, and not just reacting but reacting positively.

These offline meet ups then contributed to members establishing meaningful relationships that they then took with them into and across digital and physical spaces, including World Pulse.

Second, World Pulse has hosted offline events or invited members into their offices in Portland, facilitating opportunities for members to meet offline. For those within physical proximity to Portland, this has contributed to their feelings of inclusion as members as well as heightened their sense of connection to the staff and other members.

As one member described:

Living within an hours’ drive of the World Pulse offices has afforded me the opportunity to attend a number of their functions and come to know [the CEO] personally. I have had the privilege of sitting in staff meetings and public presentations and hearing the depth of sincerity and the degree of caring for all women from [the CEO] and her staff. They are all reaching out to “help” others with a “hand up,” expecting the women to somehow succeed in finding their own voices and become leaders and role models for the women of their nations/cultures. I have seen this “freeing” and “becoming” by women, some of whom have become leaders in the UN, speaking throughout the world. I have had the privilege to meet a number of these courageous women in Portland and have formed a relationship based on respect for them.
He indicated that he has continued to correspond regularly with women leaders he has
met at World Pulse events and with staff.

Similarly, other members have been able to attend a variety of events at World
Pulse. One participant indicated she has gone up to Portland at least annually for World
Pulse LIVE events. Between 2010 and 2015, World Pulse held annual tours, bringing 2-3
featured members to attend and speak at conferences and events, network, and speak out
through traditional media channels. These primarily U.S.-based tours included stops for
events in major cities such as New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and World
Pulse’s home base of Portland, among others. Featured members, especially in the initial
years, were selected from graduates of the then Voices of our Future training program.
One participant described these events where she could be in the room with other World
Pulse members as an important for her as a way to stay connected to World Pulse:

*Going up for the World Pulse LIVE events, that has really helped me feel very
included on the ground level – just being able to meet women, being able to be in
the offices at World Pulse, the social events that they have, going up for [a job]
interview, feeling really respected and learning also from listening to other
people who were working there, just kind of seeing some of the dynamics of the
dispositions and the interactions there, that was, I really appreciated that. I’m an
extrovert. I like to have that kind of personal experience.*

She also said that being “in the room” with the women whose stories she had been
reading online was “infectious” and appreciated that World Pulse put on events that
allowed her to meet other members face-to-face and have “real” conversations with
them.

World Pulse has also coordinated meet-ups for members specifically in Kenya
and Nigeria, through a partnership with Intel where members have been involved in the
She Will Connect program. She Will Connect is described as a program aimed at
“accelerating closure of gender gaps in technology access and career paths by empowering more girls and women to use technology, connecting them to economic and social opportunities and inspiring them to become future innovators.” The program focuses on digital literacy skills, peer networking and gender relevant content, and income generation opportunities. The partnership with World Pulse is described as being aimed at the second of those components.

Through the offline meetings for this program, which included trainings, networking opportunities, and visits from World Pulse staff, members were able to engage in additional ways offline, as one member in Kenya shared:

 INCLUDED, yes? INCLUDED, yes, because when World Pulse was in Kenya I was part of the team that went to Intel and got to learn more about the Intel She Will Connect program... There have been forums, for example, when the global impact director was in Kenya. We had a forum for women from World Pulse in Kenya. It was not just the normal socializing. We got to go to Intel Kenya. We went to Africa Women in Technology Center. For me, there is that learning, that offline learning where you get to learn more with other members. So someone like me, going to Intel is not just a thing you just walk into, but through World Pulse I got to visit the Intel office in Kenya and I got to know some of the programs that World Pulse is doing with Intel, so like the Intel She Will Connect program. So for me, the interaction has been taken to an advanced level, I must say.

Through these programs, members in Kenya and Nigeria in particular have developed offline relationships with other members that have contributed to their participation in the digital space and within specific World Pulse programs, such as trainings and leadership positions.

Third, members have also been able to engage with each other and with staff at international or regional conferences. A member in Brazil described an opportunity to attend the AWID Forum with staff and another World Pulse member:

In September I had the opportunity to meet members of the World Pulse, it was very gratifying to see there materialized the people who are in the same group
communication ... To meet with [them] in the AWID Forum was wonderful to see people who feel respect and affection for you, who have dreams for a better world, it was very special.

World Pulse or connections made through World Pulse have enabled several women to travel outside of their home countries or regions to interact with others on a host of social issues. Another member in Kenya described opportunities to attend conferences and meet with other members that have fueled her network:

_I hadn’t travelled internationally before joining World Pulse. I never travelled outside of East Africa – Kenya, Uganda and Somalia. So the trip where I met World Pulse and joined the, attended the 2006 AIDS conference in Mexico City, that was a big part of connecting with individuals and organizations from all of the world and then the next year when I went to Canada in 2010, I checked World Pulse and met a lady, she’s called [Name], she’s in Canada. So, we met her. We did a lot of brainstorming together on women’s community work._

Some of these opportunities are ones that World Pulse has facilitated – either through them being shared on the Resource Exchange or promoted and made visible by World Pulse directly. For example, a Facebook note on March 9, 2017 asked: “_Will we see you at CSW in NYC?_” It provided information about World Pulse representation at the UN Women’s Commission on the status of Women and shared specific events members, staff and/or partners planned to take part in, including a session on movement building for safe motherhood and a “_Living Room Meet & Greet_” with the World Pulse CEO and the director of strategic partnerships.

In sum, the intermingling of members, staff and partners within offline spaces has contributed to the construction of inclusion in the digital space of World Pulse as well as how the organization becomes constituted across overlapping digital and physical spaces locally and globally. These face-to-face meetings in living rooms, conference halls,
training centers, and offices have allowed members to interact, feel their voices are heard and validated, form close bonds and collaborations, and begin to organize for action.

**Synthesis**

In sum, World Pulse’s digital space is constituted as inclusive through specific material-discursive practices that communicate inclusion as ‘built’ into World Pulse by design, through the materialization of members talk and interaction, and through mobility and co-presence in offline spaces. Materiality and discourse intra-act to produce practices that communicate inclusion as a taken-for-granted value of the digital space. In the construction of inclusion, technological infrastructures and organizational discourses become entangled as World Pulse sets itself up in relation to other digital and physical spaces. These relations are both complementary and oppositional, as World Pulse becomes defined as different from and a response to exclusionary spaces. In these ways, the digital space becomes inclusive for women and for those who identify with its goals. For individuals, World Pulse becomes inclusive through everyday communicative practices within the digital space when their presence within the digital space is felt through practices of recognition and care, contributing to a sense of belonging.

Additionally, members’ talk and interactions within the digital space contributes to the construction of the digital space as inclusive. These seemingly discursive interactions among individuals within and beyond the digital space materialize through comment sections, through the visibility of their ‘meaningful’ relationships, and through the mobilization of metaphorical language that is both tied and gives meaning to the material. In these ways the material and discursive remain entangled. Organizational practices like the leadership program and trainings continue to shape these interactions,
influencing the kinds and number of comments members give and receive and their opportunities for further connection. The metaphorical language of ‘home’ mirrors that of Black and Chicana feminists who draw on notions of ‘homeplace’ and ‘homeland’ as ‘safe’ counter-spaces for healing, belonging and resisting (Flores, 1996; hooks, 1990). Such language constitutes place making (Cresswell, 2015; Wilhoit, 2016), as members make sense of and ascribe meaning to their lived experiences within the digital space. Meanings and relationships also move across and between spaces of interaction that despite at times occurring outside of World Pulé, whether through other digital platforms like WhatsApp or offline spaces, continue to circulate back, contributing to the ongoing construction of the digital space as ‘inclusive.’ These relationships, both within and across borders, also provide social and material support that enables members’ participation within the digital space and within efforts to mobilize for social change.

Further, the digital space is constructed as ‘inclusive’ through staff and community members’ co-presence in different offline spaces. Physical meeting spaces, whether formally or informally organized, were locations where the organization also became present for members. Members’ physical co-presence and proximity allowed them to interact in ways that translated back to and beyond the digital space, providing further evidence of the ways that the multiple, overlapping spaces in which members are embedded intra-act both in the constitution of the digital space as well as the organization itself.

‘Inclusion’ as Contradiction

I remember a few weeks ago sending a few people onto a World Pulse page and they said, ‘But this is highlighting Africa. This is a more African based or Asian based from the India side’ and so forth. I said, ‘No, it’s a global movement for not
just one geographically location and not only one continent but all the continents around the world. But I had to get people into the individual community and really let them read and see the different individuals from different places — from Canada, from Australia, from the U.S. and so forth. You know, one of them went on and they viewed and they said, ‘Ok,’ but from the initial, first impression that’s what they got. So I think the first impression of World Pulse should from an aspect of a global impression.

Members overwhelmingly considered World Pulse inclusive, yet, as seen in the statement above from a member in Trinidad and Tobago, this inclusivity became contested in their talk and experiences within the digital space. Many members interviewed indicated they had not had an experience that made them feel excluded saying “no,” “never,” “for now, now,” “not really” and “I don’t think so.” As a member in India stated, “I have just joined I don’t know what to say on this but never did I feel that the org is not there for me.”

However, many of these same members would reflect on exclusions within other parts of the interviews, when discussing interactions, their own identities or other risks and challenges. In particular, members from underrepresented regions, new members, members who identified as men, members with less digital access, and members who had not been in physical proximity to other members or staff were more likely to indicate they had felt excluded implicitly or explicitly. In this sense, the construction of World Pulse as an ‘inclusive’ space became contradictory, as inclusion and exclusion came into tension within members lived experiences within the digital space.

In the following sections, I discuss the ways members have come to feel both included and excluded through discursive and material practices that make difference salient. Then, I examine the ways contradictions of inclusion become produced when material constraints inhibit participation (Table 10).
Table 10: ‘Inclusion’ as Contradiction

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Codes/Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Difference Visible</td>
<td>Contradictions of inclusion are produced in moments when the discursive and material practices make difference visible to members. It is in these moments that members experience tension as a result of their intersecting identities or perspectives.</td>
<td>Practices of Regional Representation</td>
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<td>Practices of Language Use</td>
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<td>Practices of Voice and Silence</td>
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<td>Practices of (In)activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhibiting Participation</td>
<td>Contradictions of inclusion are also produced when material constraints inhibit participation. Contradictions come into being when the construction of the digital space as inclusive and supportive meets the material constraints of both World Pulse’s digital platform and participants’ offline locations</td>
<td>Digital Access</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Functionality</td>
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<td>Physical Presence</td>
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Making Difference Visible

*Also another thing I hope really to start writing in Arabic, because, yeah, we need this language. There are thousands of women who write our pages, write in Arabic, but they don’t know foreign language. So if you make it a language in your website it could be really, really spread more. And you can know more about the Arabic world, Arabic people, Arabic women...Because I tried to make the, through our course that they recommended for me to spread the World Pulse and lots of my friends, they don’t know foreign languages so they couldn’t attend and share with us. I really hope that you can add the Arabic language to this website.*

Contradictions of inclusion are produced in moments when discursive and material practices make difference visible to members. As the above quote from a
member in Syria indicates, it is in these moments that members experience tension as a result of their intersecting identities or perspectives. In this section, I provide examples of five practices that produce contradiction by making difference salient – practices of regional representation, language use, inclusive exclusion, voice and silence, and (in)activity.

**Practices of regional representation**

I think, I think that’s one of the drawbacks I may see on the platform that there is more of an engagement with let’s say India or Africa, right, and what is happening there and be it the successes or be it in the challenges, than the Caribbean more so. I don’t know if it’s because once again it’s an oversight, where the Caribbean nations or countries are concerned or I’m not sure if it’s because the Caribbean does not have that full level of statistics in the area of membership...When I think about engagement, one or two persons on the platform that are from the Caribbean and I know they have felt a bit isolated. And sometimes even though I have advanced and World Pulse staff has basically been behind me and been pushing with open arms to offer this opportunity is there, we have this training, sometimes you feel a bit isolated. Not that you are looking for your region to be up there in the making but you are looking for a platform to also really look clearly into the region and say, ‘Hey, these are serious problems that are having in the region, even if the region may be small but these are problems, serious problems that are existing and we need also to offer this region a space.’

As a member from Trinidad and Tobago experienced, members indicated that the hyper visibility of some regions over others in the World Pulse platform – through images, who gets featured, who gets selected and made visible as leaders – contributes to members from other regions feeling isolated, excluded or overlooked. For example, one regional “group” was made among World Pulse groups for Sub-Saharan Africa, given the large number of members from that region. Offline trainings sponsored by World Pulse and its partners also took place in two African countries, Nigeria and Kenya. When the new Impact Leaders program was announced, of the six selected leaders, four were from
Africa, with three of those members from Nigeria specifically. Country flags and images included with featured posts also draw attention to which countries are represented, showing a greater presence of members particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Given that World Pulse aims to amplify voices, it is seen that those voices that do get amplified set, as one member referred to it, a “sort of projected agenda,” which may be missing particular perspectives if certain regions are missing.

Staff members recognized that these sorts of visual representations play an important role as people enter World Pulse’s digital space. Current membership compositions can also impact who is most visible. As one staff member explained:

*I think some people don’t think that they--they don’t see themselves represented in the images that we use. We have a tendency to have a lot of contributors from particular regions, and we have a lot of images that reflect those regions more heavily than others. And so some people may come onto the site and say ‘this feels like me’ and other people may come onto the site and say, ‘This looks great, I’m not sure how I would be involved, this doesn’t look like it’s for me, but, you know, awesome work’ and then kind of count themselves out.*

In particular, staff members indicated they hear this frequently from people in North America, but they suspect is also happens in other places that are not well represented within World Pulse’s membership.

In making sense of how issues of visual representation come into being, members drew on their understandings of interrelations between countries and prevalent discourses about particular nations or regions that mark some as more ‘in need’ of external support and others as less so. As a participant from Trinidad and Tobago further described:

*I think it is sometimes forgotten, you know, because persons look at the Caribbean as a place of music and always happiness and singing and so forth that they fail to see inside the paradise that there are also a lot of poor, a lot of economic deprivation, there’s a lot of abuse. Like the Caribbean right now, from the UN statistics that were given last year June or July by the UN secretary general that the Caribbean is the number 1 in the world, had the highest rate of*
sexual assault in the world... So sometimes it’s frustrating because you feel as though the Caribbean is forgotten and it may be forgotten by choice or maybe by an oversight. But hey, the Caribbean is ok, but we are developing countries that also need levels of support to help with the enhancement of life.

In contrast, a participant from Colombia continued to tie issues of regional representation for Latin America and the Caribbean in particular back to colonization and where people may ‘look to’ for support. “So people here might first go to look for, to connect with people in Spain or Portugal, or other countries from where we were conquered rather from the United States, which isn’t tied culturally to us.”

Practices of regional visibility then make difference salient and contribute to members feeling excluded. This can impact potential members as well as existing members who may express feeling isolated and discouraged.

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**Figure 6: On Regional Representation**

*And I think a tension that I’ve felt a lot of times in terms of trying to really promote ourselves as being very global is the reality out of a certain region, like you want to highlight the success stories, you want to highlight where activity is happening and so it’s almost before we--it’s kind of like the cart before the horse, like if we put a lot of emphasis on regions or regional areas without a lot of focus yet, it’s kind of making it seem like we’re more inclusive and global than we are yet. (Staff member, Participatory Online Workshop)*

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**Practices of language use**

*Well [language] has a huge impact! For example when I going to publish a post at first I send the post to a friend of mine (who has an excellent English language education) and he make some observations and corrections, so some time I want to publish but I wait for him (he is also a doctor and a very busy person, but is one of my best friends and take some time for me). In the other hand, when I post my [World Pulse] articles on my facebook page about the 80% of my friends ask me the Spanish version so for they can read it. In Peru sadly education on English language is still a “benefit for few”. When I was on elementary school I never*
receive any education on English language, so when I was lucky enough to can pay a better school (high school) I have to learn English very fast because all my classmates knew English from their elementary school and I am not. When I was in university I have to learn more fast to read and write because all the publications of medicine and health that I want to read was on English. Many of my friends in university (approx. 30% did know English) so they had a bad time during evaluations and exams. So yes at least in Peru, will be great to have a full Spanish functionality issue in the platform.

As a woman in Peru describes, a key way that difference becomes visible on World Pulse is through language functionalities built into the digital space. World Pulse, like the vast majority of the infrastructure of the Internet, is built on and through English. This includes World Pulse’s training documents. As a result, members predominately write and interact in English. Full French functionality for navigation and system messages was added in 2015 following an influx of membership from French-speaking nations, in particular the Democratic Republic of Congo. Members may also chose to use Google Translate to enable other language options, though, as one member from Kenya noted, this relies on languages perceived to be more “universal” which means more localized languages and dialects are not included. Members are also warned in the FAQs page to “Just keep in mind that Google Translate is not a perfect tool so there may be mistakes in the translation.”

Staff acknowledged that language has been one of the biggest ongoing tensions that they have grappled with. As one staff member stated:

Language has been a bit barrier and we all know—we are all aware about this. Our content and everything is in English currently. There was some big work on French, and there was a good stride there to support the DRC community, but all our content is very English heavy and not only in training.

This predominance of English leads members for whom English is not a primary language to show hesitancies around their own writing, limits accessibility of content as it
flows into other spaces, and can inhibit interaction among members, producing contradictions in attempts to create an inclusive space for women across borders. This is not unique to World Pulse but is brought to light because of its professed desire to be ‘global.’ For members who do speak English, the moments where they do see posts in another language make visible the limitations of language. As a woman in Zimbabwe indicates:

*The only challenge would be that sometimes people post in say, French, and I can’t read French and it gets me thinking how many more women are excluded from benefitting from the various resources because they are not conversant in a certain language- and Africa has plenty of languages. There is an initiative for translation by the community but that is for specific posts and currently only available in French.*

She refers to a community Translator role, a volunteer position for World Pulse members to “lend their skills to translate community content, facilitating cross-language communication in our network” and particularly focused on French-English translation.

Language-based exclusions play out in various ways. For example, one participant from Brazil does not speak English but uses Google Translate in all of her interactions with World Pulse to enable her to speak both English and Portuguese. Still language has been a persistent challenge to her engagement with World Pulse, including her completion of what was then the Voices of the Future training:

*I received an e-mail was in English, found it to be virus, but I was curious and I copied and pasted the Google translator. I found it was a course on communication [from World Pulse] and I was interested and wrote me. I did not think I would be selected because of not knowing English, but I was. It was not easy, but nothing in my life was easy and I know to overcome obstacles in reality. They make me look for alternatives and beat them. I read all the material. I have them yet printed. Copied short paragraphs and translated and pasted on a sheet and so did the handouts of the whole course.*
This also posed challenges in her offline interactions when she attended a conference with other World Pulse members, who spoke English. This moment of trying and failing to understand one another made the difference more pronounced, as she described:

*I attended a moment that made me very out of context, there was no translator, the World Pulse staff tried but failed and I was the only group that did not understand English, was agonizing for more than [another World Pulse member] wanted me help her also had limitations for translations. But at that moment I saw that not everything depends on the other for more good will it has, there was a problem, my lack of understanding the language and the importance of technology.*

Both during the interview and reflecting on her experiences after the interview, she contemplated that she may need to learn English in order to full engage: “*I think I need to learn beyond the language of my country, to learn English. I do the translation, but is what I mean when I read is in fact what was written?*” Other members also indicated that their English skills made them hesitant to write and share, affecting their participation on the platform.

The hegemony of English reproduces exclusions of particular geographic regions, which were not former British colonies. In particular individuals from parts of the Caribbean and Latin America and the Middle East find themselves at a global disadvantage and may not have access to engagement with others within ‘transnational’ spaces like World Pulse unless their socio-economic status granted them access to education that involved English. Members from these countries were more likely to discuss language issues. A member from Colombia who writes posts sometimes in English and sometimes in Spanish on World Pulse indicated that languages of colonization created ties that continue to replicate themselves within regional and language representation on World Pulse:
I think some of that is because there is a lot of aid going from America and Europe to [Africa] because it is really needed. They have relations in between the continent of Africa and the United States. Here it is different because I think most of the relation that people from South or Central America have with United States or Canada is basically through economic things...It is not the same here. The community here still hasn’t been able to still find help with our issues. We don’t have like that type of look, that paternal look with North America...Not many of our people speak English. I know, well, in Africa people speak English as their main language so that could help. But here, it’s Spanish. It is like, let’s say, people here we look, it is like they look for their paternal help with language that they were conquered.

Language functionality then continues to affect who can benefit from interactions within World Pulse’s digital space. Members from the Caribbean and South America as well as the Middle East also indicated that while they have been encouraged to recruit other members from their nations and regions through World Pulse trainings or leadership opportunities, they find this difficult given the barriers language functionality creates. While language functionality inhibits members’ ability to speak and engage within World Pulse’s digital space, members who do speak English indicated that language continues to limit interactions among members even when they desire to engage with each other. They expressed that if they spoke English they could interact more easily with other English-speaking members. A few members shared accounts of receiving comments from members who speak French and stating that they wished they could have engaged with that person, as a woman in Kenya explained:

The only barrier though I would say I have had is language. There was a lady from Congo who speaks only French and I speak only English and we could not communicate for long because of the fact that language was a problem.

Members who spoke multiple languages, such as both English and French, acknowledged that this enabled them to easily interact with members regardless of the dominant language of interaction. As a woman in Cameroon described:
I speak English Language, a bit of French, a bit of Chinese, and much of Pidgin English. For all these reasons, interacting with members of World Pulse has been easier as I can understand the speakers from different language backgrounds (French and English), and different cultures as well.

Those who speak multiple languages also recognized the limitations of translation between English and French, for example, especially given local nuances as languages have become adapted over time. As a white woman in the United States stated,

*I speak some French but struggle to respond to those that write in French—also knowing that so many words and expressions cannot be translated very well into English and that French is probably their second or third language.*

Language functionality then produces exclusions as members seek to share their stories and interact both within World Pulse and beyond.

*Practices of inclusive exclusion*

I’ve been pondering on this question which I didn’t include in my last response...perhaps it won’t be out of place to raise it here. What is the opinion of the founders of Worldpulse on the male involvement in gender based issues especially violence against women? Do they feel men advocating for the rights of women deserve some kind of support and acceptance? I’m actually wondering if Worldpulse was designed in the first place with men in mind.

As discussed previously, World Pulse is explicitly a platform for women. In this sense it aims to be inclusive of those who are often excluded from other digital and physical spaces. In positioning itself discursively and materially as a site for women, this necessarily excludes men and those who identify outside the gender binary.

World Pulse does not explicitly exclude men by requiring members to identify as women, as some digital spaces have (e.g., Lee, 2013; Shade, 2002). In fact, members do not need to disclose their gender identity in the registration process or as part of their profiles. However, this is further complicated as World Pulse’s language does not directly address men or discuss their role within the platform. Staff members indicated that World
Pulse does not consider men to be its “target market” but that they have discussions internally about the importance of including men who are supportive of women’s empowerment. However, this is not explicitly addressed:

So I think just little things that, you know, I think that we all have this recognition that we have of how important men are to what we’re doing, but haven’t necessarily solved what that pathway is and how to integrate that.

Given this, men are implicitly rather than explicitly excluded through the material and discursive features of the platform. Language assumes World Pulse members are women in many cases and uses feminine pronouns in English and feminine versions of nouns in French translations. If a user does not include a profile photo, the default image is an image that presents as a woman with long hair and her arms up.

This leaves men who see themselves as committed to addressing gender issues, like the Nigerian man whose quote began this section, uncertain as to their role and participation within the digital space. The three members I interviewed who identified as men described themselves as committed to World Pulse’s goal. Two of the men emphasized wanting to provide support for women while one specifically discussed working to address violence against women and girls and redefine masculinity. This led to their interest in joining a site that was seen as ‘for women.’ As a man in Uganda explained:

*World pulse as an organisation or platform particularly concentrates or puts its emphasis mostly on women. I am a man who believes that women can change the world and they are great leaders. I joined world pulse to support (give a hand in whatever way I can) and help women achieve their dreams. There is a saying which says that “behind a successful man there is a lady with noble character.” That saying also applies to women. If we want to change women’s world or lives, there is a need of those special men to team up with them in order to see women excelling in whatever they do or to achieve their dreams. (working together) Therefore me as man extending my little experience and knowledge to world pulse a women’s platform makes me feel in a way I can’t explain.*
Yet, the men did acknowledge that their gender identity, along with other intersecting identities, impacted their interactions within the digital space. They try to navigate their shared interests as well as the fact that World Pulse is a space designed for women. As another participant explained:

*I am a white Christian male from the US. When I first make contact with women from around the world I think they categorize me as a rich man, whose word cannot be trusted to be in their best interest. As our correspondence continues I believe they see that I am an individual who cares deeply for his fellow citizens.*

Being a man in a space that is for women has required a member from Nigeria to also be conscious of how he interacts with others:

*A man cannot sufficiently articulate an issue for which he not been at the receiving end. I have never been marginalised because Im a man but a lot of women have been marginalised in their work place and so if you are not woman you cant feel what that woman is feeling... So in making certain contributions I have to be sure Im not been sympathetic when what is actually needed is empathy. I also try to be careful not cross the line between being a male advocating for equal rights for men and women and trying to demonstrate an understanding of feminism as a concept. I also have to choose my words carefully.*

Choosing his words carefully has been a learning process, as he shared an instance where he used the term ‘guys’ as a reference to a group of people at an organization and received a response that there were no ‘guys’ at that organization. From that he said, “*What that meant for me was ’mind your words.’*”

In trying to understand their role within World Pulse as men, at least two of the men discussed trying to connect with other men on the platform, though these efforts were largely unsuccessful. One participant found himself wondering if World Pulse should intentionally bring “*some of the men on WP together to form some coalition and share capacities and ideas.*”
Members who identified as women often argued that men should be involved on World Pulse, in particular because they needed men on board to reach goals of gender equality. As a black woman in the United States stated:

*I think they need to hear our issues. They need to hear our voices. I'm big on gender-based issues so to see men logging into a women's, mainly women's not because it's made for women per se but women plug in and get these ideas. I notice that the men that are plugging in are men who are already tied to gender-based issues.*

Most indicated they had not had much interaction with men through World Pulse, but for the most part the men they encountered they “*didn’t see any problem*” with as they tend to be men who are already doing work around related issues. A member in Kenya found this within her experiences with men on World Pulse:

*I have met a few men on World Pulse, because I think the majority of people on World Pulse are women but even the Kenyan men I have experienced here because they identify me with World Pulse they are men who do great work... I can also see them enjoying being in a community of women because women are very supportive.*

However, while expressing the importance of having men involved, some still had reservations that made them wonder why some men are there. As a member from Trinidad and Tobago explained:

*I think men, having men within the World Pulse community is an advantage and it’s something that should be looked at from the aspect of men now being able to see the views of women and how certain situations have affected and impacted the lives of women across the globe and how they can use their voice and their position and resources to help with various causes that are being represented. But also there should be some vetting to make sure that this man that is joining the community understands his role within the community and will not use the community as a space to, to, to disrespect women, to highlight misogynistic views, or maintain some kind of oppression, even if it’s just for a few hours. And also to make women feel safe that this man who has joined the community is not a perpetrator but he is here to help advance the cause, he’ll help push, he’s here to help support, and also not only support but for the man to be informed so that he can make more informed choices and become a positive and an active bystander for his fellow male counterparts.*
In this sense, men’s role within the digital space remains contested given that the inclusion of men – depending on their perceived intentions – was seen as potentially compromising the safety of World Pulse’s digital space.

Additionally, by focusing explicitly on women, an unintended consequence has also been to exclude those who do not identify within the gender binary. As one staff member explained:

I’ll just mention as well that I think this goes beyond just inclusion of men, because there are members we’ve had in the past who don’t identify as male and don’t identify as female and have said that, I remember one person who emailed saying that they identified as two-spirit and that they did not feel comfortable or like World Pulse was welcoming them.

In this way, the construction of World Pulse as a digital space explicitly for ‘women’ in an attempt to make sure they are included can have the consequence of excluding those outside the binary as well as potential male allies.

**Practices of voice and silence**

We had a woman who was one of our VOF (Voices of our Future) graduates, and I think she was really engaged for a long time. She was like ‘VOF made such a big difference to me that I want to--I want to donate a camera to the next--somebody in the next cohort.’ So that gives you a sense of kind of her sense of inclusion, and then she reached out to me about a year later and said ‘I would like to take my account off of World Pulse,’ and I said, ‘Absolutely, totally respect that. I’m really curious if you’re willing to share why. If not that’s okay, but I’m really curious.’ And she basically said ‘that--like it has too strong of a feminist talk for me. It does not sit well with me based on my family and my religion and my history here in Pakistan, like what I want to be creating and seeing as a women. This is--doesn’t represent me. It doesn’t represent my views on women, and I don’t want to be aligned with it anymore.’ (Staff member)

Difference becomes salient when certain perspectives are given voice by the organization and others are made silent. Certain topics such as feminism, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ rights have been controversial within the transnational space of
World Pulse. When I brought up these issues as ones that appeared to be controversial based on my participant observation, one staff member stated:

*I think you hit two of the biggest ones (reproductive rights and LGBTQ issues) right on the head there, actually. I think those are huge. I think as [Staff name] mentioned as well, just the topic of feminism in general, as a word, is pretty hot button and understood pretty differently by different people.*

While World Pulse indicates members can use their journal to post about whatever topics they want, there are ways that particular stances become normalized and validated. One staff member indicated, “*In terms of inclusion, I think one way we promote this is that we are pretty open (within certain limits) to whatever the members of the community want to talk about*” (emphasis added). In statements about the organization, the word “feminism” is purposefully not used as staff are conscious of different understandings of the term across countries and contexts, and particular stances are not explicitly taken.

However, through World Pulse’s attendance at certain events or affiliations, Story Award calls and Facebook posts certain ‘stands’ become visible. For example, World Pulse representatives spoke at the AWID International Forum in Brazil on “*Feminist Futures: Building Collective Power for Rights and Justice*” and World Pulse was mentioned in a Ms. Magazine post about the need for a “*feminist foreign policy.*”

Through the naming and framing of Story Award calls, World Pulse has also brought these topics to the fore. For example, a Story Award call titled “*Toward Global LGBT Rights*” encouraged members to:

*... bring our voices together to imagine a world where people of all gender identities and sexual orientations can live in safety and be our authentic selves... We invite your stories about LGBT rights across the world—especially those stories that can lead the way to more inclusive, compassionate societies.*
Prior to this, I had seen relatively little on World Pulse that explicitly addressed sexual and gender identity and my field notes from the day this call came out reflected surprise. Staff members indicated that LGBTQ topics and identifying members may not be very visible particularly for new members who may not see themselves in the platform. A member responding to this call shared concern that she might lose “precious connections” with her “World Pulse sisters” by coming out.

Reproductive rights issues, and abortion specifically, have been more visible. A call related to “Women’s Bodies and the Law” highlighted examples such as a strike in Poland in response to an abortion ban. It was also reopened several months later in response to an executive order in the United States to revive the ‘Global Gag Rule,’ denying funding to any organization that provides access to or mentions abortion. This call encouraged members to share about the reproductive rights battles being fought in their communities.

During my participant observation, I also observed articles shared on World Pulse’s Facebook page related to reproductive rights, where the organization responded in a comment related to an article shared about Planned Parenthood:

We support women’s reproductive rights, and that’s Planned Parenthood’s primary focus. Abortions constitute just 3% of the services they offer; their other services include annual exams, STD/STI tests, breast exams and contraception for women – and men, too. We encourage those who question the services provided by Planned Parenthood read this article.

In my field notes, I observed, “This and a post about President Obama making moves to protect Planned Parenthood are the only posts where I have seen negative comments on World Pulse’s Facebook page” (Fieldnotes excerpt, November 21, 2016).
Tensions around these issues were salient for staff members, but participants did not explicitly bring up or discuss these issues in the context of the interviews as ones that contributed to exclusions. Several explicitly discussed or referred to their feminism, dissected patriarchy in their local contexts and made reference to stories on World Pulse about reproductive health and rights, including stories of unsafe abortions.

Sexual identity was rarely mentioned in the context of the interview. One member did discuss how she is conscious of her language, recognizing that members may represent different gender and sexual identities:

So World Pulse has provided a platform where people of different diversities and sexual orientations come in. So I am really conscious when I am responding to people’s journals and commenting so they won’t take, even if I don’t buy the idea of what they are talking about, I don’t have to say that, I don’t have to condemn them. I try, I try, I try as much as possible, you know, to mind my language and to appreciate the good side of what I appreciate of them. I focus on that side of what I really like about them. I don’t look at like this issue of, you know, sexuality and this and this. No, it doesn’t bother me. And gender issues, it doesn’t bother me. I only defend issues I feel strong that, yes, this is my own opinion and this is what I want in the world about women’s issues and not in the orientation but that’s your personal life.

Her comments hint at a recognition that members may have different perspectives, but that those who remain within the digital space may opt to reframe these subjects as personal. The absence of further discussion of these topics in the interview may suggest that these issues are not as salient for these members and that those who hold alternative viewpoints may have become less active or exited the community, as occurred in the example provided by staff at the beginning of this section. However, these silences could also indicate discomfort around discussing them, particularly if members dissent from what are perceived to be normative viewpoints. These differences then become salient.
through both voice and silence as particular stances related to feminism, LGBTQ rights and reproductive justice become normative within the digital space.

**Practices of (in)activity**

Well so far I have contacted those through personal message who are doing good job for the women empowerment, run a radio or publish a magazine but hardly I get reply back. ...Frankly telling, so far I haven’t yet got a single person who is ready to talk about their work or even willing to maintain contacts to enlarge the network and work.

Members, like the woman in India quoted above, also indicated they feel excluded by inactivity – by times when they receive no response to their posts and by lack of interaction in general. This inactivity impacts members’ interactions, creating a sharp contrast with those who discuss feeling heard and establishing meaningful relationships.

A few members, and in particular a few new members, had experienced a lack of interaction or response to their posts within the digital space and had been discouraged. Such experiences have led them to believe that World Pulse is not a “social” platform, as a man in Nigeria described: “But the sense of community is really lost on me... I guess because World Pulse is not SOCIAL in the sense of fostering that connection that an average social media platform would do.” He went on to share a story of sending a friend request to someone on World Pulse and being refused. The person responded by saying that he “came to WP to read posts and be informed and not to be making friends.”

In this sense, there was a difference in the experiences of members who had formed meaningful relationships with other community members or with staff, particularly those who had engaged with each other offline, and those who were newer to the platform and had not made those kinds of connections or received the kinds of encouraging comments in response to their writing that others described as the hallmark
of World Pulse. One participant suggested that you are “on your own” after being welcomed to the space. When asked about whether and how she interacted with others, a woman in Zimbabwe said, “Hardly ever to be honest- it feels more like an intellectual/Resources site than a social one- at least as far as I’m concerned.”

Members who experienced a lack of response described the experience as “more or less close” to being negative or insulting. Another member described it as “I just felt like I was talking in a voice and nobody was listening. That was how I felt.”

One member in India argued that it was the design of the digital space itself that contributed to a lack of or delay in comments. Certain posts may not be visible to other members or may get missed and, therefore, may not receive comments for some time:

*Sometimes it happens like I post something, earlier when I was not a Community Champion – I used to post something and like 2 weeks nothing has been there. No response. Ok, so you feel like, ok, nobody has read it. So was it that bad? You feel like that. But then suddenly you see there are so many responses to it because it takes time on World Pulse. The way the site has been built you suddenly cannot see all the posts and all so they are changing now…So sometimes it used to take time, but then every time whenever I wrote or I used to share something there was a positive response.*

The most recent posts on the platform have been the least likely to have comments.

Additionally, in the redesign, the “My Pulse” page that includes feeds of members’ stories defaults to “Featured” stories, requiring members to click specifically on “Most Recent” to see all of the most recent posts. Posts are also displayed in reverse chronological order, with only about eight posts visible without clicking to “See More.” Members’ posts can then be pushed down and not be visible to other members. During the time of my participant observation, I observed periods of activity and inactivity as certain weeks or day would garner fewer postings and less activity. This was particularly
observed among the now defunct “groups” on World Pulse, which during the summer months went through quiet periods in terms of member activity.

Members indicated that the posts that were least likely to get a response were in the Resource Exchange. Several members discussed how the Resource Exchange has been under utilized. As a member from Trinidad and Tobago explained:

You may see other persons post wonderful resources for an online training, seeking some kind of human support from fellow members within the community, and sometimes you think, ‘Why aren’t people responding to this? Why aren’t people saying, “Ok, I love this training. I’ll take it.”’ I mean the trainings are free. I mean those are some sort of the challenges in the engagement of the community and the persons on the platform because I know persons joined the community for various reasons but I think there should be that foundation reason of I joined because I want to enhance myself, I want to be able to have and live and be trained in certain areas that I can use tools to enhance and grow my organization and to use my voice in the area of the world that I am in to make a difference. And that will come from communicating, from engaging, from accepting certain offers that are sent out by any resources page.

Similarly, a black woman in the United States argued that the Resource Exchange page is not as visible for members and may get overlooked:

I find not many people use that resource tab as much as they should, so how do we get those on the timeline where it pops up? Like a newsfeed kind of thing where if you are interested in this... instead of it being hidden. That page I think is kind of a little bit hidden. Sometimes you have to tell people there are resources out there. It needs to be in the forefront so that people can kind of like, those organizations that are looking for certain things can get what they need and World Pulse is also reaching the audience that they want to reach.

In addition to posts, whether stories shared in a journal or a need or opportunity posted on the Resource Exchange, members also discussed presence of inactive members generally, indicating some people create a profile and do not check it. Some went so far as to suggest World Pulse should “take a second look at those accounts” and provide warning messages that because of inactivity accounts would be deactivated.
Prior to the redesign in November 2016, this was complicated by the fact that activity was not always visible. If members were commenting on other posts and engaging on World Pulse in ways other than posting to their journal, these activities did not materialize to other members when visiting their profile. A person who was very active on the platform in terms of volunteering, commenting, and interacting with other members may appear in a visit to that person’s profile page to have been inactive for years, just based on the date of the last journal post. Following the redesign, these activities were made more visible to other members through profile tabs that include “My Stories & Resources,” “Love I’ve Sent” and “Comments & Encouragement,” displaying and recognizing additional forms of activity.

Volunteers also articulated struggles with motivating members to engage with campaigns or participate within groups. One member described her experience as a Community Champion:

*For me, it was also challenging because as a Community Champion you take the lead in trying to motivate the members of the group to post and sometimes you are excited about a certain campaign you are about to launch and then you realized...*
that while you may want to motivate people and facilitate that space and engage in interaction it’s always left to the individual to also see the need and the purpose of why they joined the group and to continue on with that purpose. So that was a bit challenging to me in, why aren’t people posting? Why aren’t people interacting? Why aren’t people, you know, commenting? Why aren’t people really taking charge and embracing the campaigns and so forth? But then you know you still continue and you still continue in supporting and encouraging people within the group individually by private messages, encouraging them, you know, ‘We would love to hear your voice, love to hear what is happening in your geographical location of the world. Share with us because your information is vital to the progress of the group and for other women.’ So that experience, it was one that I embraced. It was, as I said, challenging, but I also learned a lot.

At least one member who did organize others offline discussed experiences with a lack of follow through from those who did seem interested. When a member in Syria sought to use the Digital Empowerment Trainer’s Toolkit to teach others in her community about World Pulse, she struggled to get her friends to take it up:

> Because when I became a teacher and I teach my friends about World Pulse and about lessons -- you know the course, you send materials. I used them to teach some of my friends. Really they were very, very happy to know about it. I tried to motivate them to write, but no one did that.

In these ways, World Pulse did not live up to some members’ expectations. For those who have experienced a lack of response and interaction, this creates dissonance with their expectations of what a supportive and inclusive digital space should be like.

In sum, inclusion has become contradictory when specific practices including practices of regional visibility, of language, of inclusive exclusion, of voice and silence, and of (in)activity make difference discursively and materially visible. In these moments, members come to feel excluded, as their experiences clash with their expectations for World Pulse to be an inclusive space.
Inhibiting Participation

Even me I was very slow on the take up when I first joined World Pulse. I remember when I was writing because I used to walk miles just to get to the cyber café to read what the people on World Pulse were writing... I remember I used to feel sometimes very frustrated...So I really think the women they don’t know this is, and they don’t have a computer and they would like to talk and they would like to read but they can’t because of the negative access.

As the woman in Kenya quoted above observed, contradictions of inclusion are also produced when material constraints inhibit participation. Contradictions come into being when the construction of the digital space as inclusive and supportive meets the material constraints of both World Pulse’s digital platform and participants’ offline locations. In the following sections, I will provide three examples of these material constraints – digital access, digital functionality, and physical presence.

Digital access

It will be better if world pulse organize trainings in different ways. Like last time, there was training to be a Listener. I was registered to attend that. But the same week, there was Internet problem in Ethiopia. I guess none of us were able to participate the training. So, we can’t participate actively if you always give trainings online.

As this member from Ethiopia experienced, digital access inhibits members’ ability to engage within World Pulse’s digital space. Digital access included issues with Internet access in general, erratic connections, and access to devices that prevent members from participating to the extent they wish to and limit their access to social and material resources through the platform, such as trainings. It should be noted that by the very nature of being a digital space, World Pulse already automatically excludes those who do not have access. However, some of those who are members still struggle to
maintain access and to secure the kind of access that would allow them to more fully participate within the digital space.

Access to the Internet, especially private access on personal devices, was seen in several contexts as a luxury tied to socio-economic status. As a member in Nigeria explained, “Sometimes here in Nigeria we have a bad Internet system, unless you have enough money to afford. But it’s more than the common man can afford. It’s always coming up and down.” World Pulse staff recognized digital access and literacy as the barriers to entry for the World Pulse that may be tied to members’ economic and education status. One staff member noted that education seems to be linked to access and that many of their members have had at least some higher education, an observation that also manifested among those who participated in interviews. As a staff member shared: “And probably those two go hand in hand, right? People who have had higher education may have better access and have had more exposure to technology tools.”

Some members shared that there were times during the course of their membership where they did not have Internet access. Several participants acknowledged that while they personally did not have issues with access they recognized that this was based on their economic status and location within urban centers, as a woman in Kenya said: “I also have access to things such as Internet, technology; while some in Kenya especially the slums and the rural areas have never touched a computer.” Certain locations, such as rural areas, were seen to be less likely to have access, so members who live or work in those areas struggle to gain access on a regular basis. As a woman in Colombia stated, “I think that I haven’t had really the time to be online as much as maybe
as we need because, yes, most of the time I am in the forest so I don’t have connection, so during the night I would write at home.”

Members indicated that having their own devices or connections made a difference. Some participants discussed only having access at cyber cafes, at their university, or through a mobile device. One participant from Cameroon talked about how not having her own laptop limited her ability to share World Pulse with other women.

This issue was further illustrated when members in the Anglophone areas of Cameroon lost Internet access for a period in spring 2017. According to members, this was a “3-month, government-imposed blackout” that affected about one-third of the population of the country. Several members had written about this and tweeted using the hashtag #bringbackourinternet. They shared accounts about how this loss of access blocked trainings and prevented people from taking advantage of opportunities, among other challenges. Digital access then creates exclusions as members wish to participate
within World Pulse’s digital space but are limited by the extent of their access tied to socioeconomic status, infrastructure or at times political turmoil.

**Digital functionality**

*The reason I said the online community did not make much sense to me at first is because it is not obvious at first glance on the website how the members will interact with each other. One has to explore further i.e. navigate the menus join interest community groups to start reading stories and learn how to post their stories and comment on members stories.*

The design and functionality of World Pulse’s digital space has also (re)produced exclusions. Members, like the woman in Ethiopia quoted above, have found it at times difficult to navigate, not intuitive, and limiting of their interactions.

This was especially the case when members first joined World Pulse. Several participants indicated that upon first joining they had difficulty navigating or even understanding the platform. For example, members reported having a hard time figuring out how to share their stories, where to find the comments on stories they publish, how to submit their stories for the Story Awards, and how to interact with others. The construction of the digital space – the material and discursive features – did not communicate to new members how they were supposed navigate the space. One participant indicated that she read stories on World Pulse for a long time having no idea she could actually become a member – “It didn’t occur to me.” One volunteer from India indicated that she sees this happen a lot when new members join:

*There are many, many women over there who are few, who open new accounts who have many profiles but they do not know how to go through it. Ok, we have the Community Champions, we have different kinds of champions, the welcome groups, the groups that come over there and send the message, ‘Ok, you are welcome to the World Pulse community,’ but still you are not comfortable when you are new to it. It takes some time, because I also took some time to go through it and like, ok, I had a friend already so I knew but then everyone doesn’t have.*
In this sense, the digital functionality of the space may discourage new members from joining or continuing to participate once they have joined.

For some, they attributed this to their own digital literacy. A member in Cameroon described herself as “\textit{not a tech person}” and said that it took until she attended an exchange program in the United States before she understood enough to be able to fully participate in World Pulse. In fact, she tried registering and then stopped until she had gained more skills through the program. As she described:

\begin{quote}
When I first discovered World Pulse my technology level was like maybe 1 because I didn’t even know how to go about it. I registered quite alright but then I didn’t honestly know how to go about, you know, like sharing stories, picking topics until I went to the U.S. on the exchange program.
\end{quote}

Others similarly indicated that navigating World Pulse became easier over time, with confusion over the affordances of the platform most pronounced when they joined the platform.

Another time when the functionality of the platform became salient to members was during redesigns, which have occurred several times during the platform’s existence and more frequently in recent years. During the course of my participant observation, at least two significant redesigns took place where elements were introduced, eliminated or reorganized, requiring explanation from the staff either in the forms of a pop-up guide or a detailed text explanation.

Some participants felt that the redesigns of the digital space over time have made it easier to navigate World Pulse. As a woman in Zimbabwe explained:

\begin{quote}
The site was so complicated and complex in such a way that it you would really not be able to understand what’s going on to look at what people are posting. Now it’s really easy to navigate around and say, ‘Ok, I want to go here, and from here to there.’ It’s really not as hard as it was.
\end{quote}
Another member from Zimbabwe also indicated that the website’s navigation has become clearer over time, and across devices:

\[
\text{Well, the interface looks great and is user friendly in terms of navigation and come to think of it I remember a time when it was nearly impossible to view the site on a mobile device but now it looks great on all devices I use.}
\]

However, not everyone felt the redesigns improved navigation. For some, the redesigns required relearning how to navigate and interact through the digital space. As a woman in Nigeria explained:

\[
\text{Yeah, initially it was, for me, it was easier for me to access World Pulse before, maybe because I was so used to the places and what I’m looking for and issues like that. But with the change of the site, one has to study it. It’s like when I joined. I took my time to study the website thoroughly before I am able to navigate, to be able to know the journals, be able to know how to get my friends, to know what is new on the World Pulse. Unlike before, you see people discussing people you want to read, but these days it’s not like that because it took me time to study to know that these are the recent stories from women around the world, you know? It takes, even for someone who has already experienced it and navigated on the website, time to learn where to go.}
\]

The materiality of the platform also became apparent to members when they ran into technical difficulties that prevented them from interacting in the ways they would like, as another member from Nigeria experienced:

\[
\text{Today I tried more than ten times to reply to a comment, it was impossible. I had to leave it. The last time that I wrote an article for the Environment group, I posted it four times before it succeeded.}
\]

The functionality of the digital space has also become pronounced when members come to realize the constraints of the space that limit their ability to interact with other members in ways they would like. Several members discussed the ways they have been forced to move conversations with other members ‘off platform’ to Facebook or
WhatsApp in order to continue to engage with each other. As a member from Kenya explained:

> What I am looking forward to in future on World Pulse would be the ability for more communication directly – like one-on-one chat. Right now you have to go on Facebook because they didn’t have chat. If I want to chat with you, I realized I have to use my Facebook or my phone and use WhatsApp. One of my suggestions for World Pulse is to have an application where we can talk directly like I am talking to you, not Facebook and not WhatsApp.

A member from the United States similarly indicated this restricts the kind of communicative interactions that can take place among members.

> I think because World Pulse doesn’t have a chat feature, which makes it difficult to have communication, immediate communication because you have to wait for a message and wait for a comment. It would be a nice to have a feature online where you don’t have to go to another platform because I had to then connect with her on WhatsApp or through Facebook messenger.

Others also discussed that at this point when they connect with their World Pulse friends from other countries they do not use World Pulse to connect.

Additionally, for members who have certain disabilities, particularly for those with visual impairments, the digital functionality of the platform limits their ability to participate. Staff members discussed how the digital platform is not as accessible as they would like it to be, highlighting examples of a training participant who is blind who had difficulty navigating the site with her text reader software. As one staff member explained:

> So it as an issue with the tech structure of our site, so there is like code and so on that can prompt software to say read this is an image or read this as a link and some of that is missing in the site, and also the structure of the site has been really, really challenging for our visually impaired participants because it doesn’t follow—their software it cannot follow the site.
In these ways the infrastructure of the digital space – its code, organization and the presence or absence of alternative texts – creates exclusions that limit possibilities for interaction for some. Digital functionality then produces contradictions of inclusion by limiting and discouraging interactions that take place within World Pulse’s digital space, which has at times led members to decrease activity or move their interactions elsewhere.

**Physical presence**

_Something I was thinking of, sometimes I see World Pulse holding trainings in other countries but I haven’t heard them training, holding any trainings or any programs in Southern Africa. I have seen other people in India, I have seen other people in Central Africa, but in Southern Africa I haven’t seen anything. So sometimes we tend to feel left out, like we are just here to kind of support that they need them, that support to say we need a member of World Pulse to come into Zimbabwe to do, or South Africa or any other countries nearby, I think it would be good to facilitate those kind of exchange programs and also those trainings where we get to meet World Pulse and also feel physically as members of World Pulse._

Some members, like the woman in Zimbabwe quoted above, have felt excluded because of a lack of face-to-face interaction with other members and with World Pulse staff. Not having the same proximity to other members or mobility to move between different physical locations and across national borders like other members have restricted the kind of interactions they have been able to have with other members. Despite recognizing that World Pulse is first and foremost a digital space, many participants still suggested face-to-face interactions were valuable. At least one participant asked me during the interview about whether or not World Pulse has physical meetings or conferences or if it was “only just an online community.” Members indicated that face-to-face meetings were seen as valuable for “cementing the sisterhood” and advancing actions for social change.
The visibility through posts on World Pulse and on social media networks of offline trainings and meet-ups that other members are not able to participate in makes those who cannot engage in such meetings feel excluded. This has also led members to suggest that such offline meetings of those within physical proximity would be valuable.

As one member explained:

*Just sometimes there are events and things obviously I can’t attend because they are far away... If I don’t have the money to fly from coast to coast then I can’t really get together with people unless I know they are in 2 hours of me or something. I just wonder if there’s a way they could do more close to home where people live – start getting little groups in various areas that aren’t just based in these big cities or places that I can’t easily get to. Because I don’t know if there is an application on World Pulse right now where you can find members close to you or anything like that?*

While sometimes it is financial constraints that limit members’ ability to travel, it can also be connected to geopolitical relations, as a member from Syria found. She expressed a desire to “*really attend programs in some place together with other women from World Pulse.*” Yet, any attempts to travel abroad for conferences, trainings and programs have been unsuccessful as her visa requests are continuously denied. As she explained:

*And always the problem in every program I try to attend is about the visa. The whole world refuses to give us visa and I don’t know why. They must know that we are really... there is a need to improve ourselves and to learn, because we have a new era now and we need to start building everything in a very right way. You know, everything has been destroyed here - what we say, to buildings, for government, I have to say, actually everything. So we need to start from the beginning -- from zero. We would like to start in a very, very good way and in a very, let’s say, with knowledge... I am really thinking of writing something about the issue of this problem and to make the whole world, to ask them why they refuse to give us visa, even though we sent our CVs and they know we are great women and we really work very hard in our community and for society and we try to make change and to give people around us positive energy and try to make them economically, let’s say, you know to make money to live, to be able to work. We really work hard. Really the whole world must know what we do here because they don’t know the real image, the real things we do. When I go abroad I can really speak clearly and freely to say and to express what other people think and what they say about how we can change, how we can help. I don’t know.*
In this sense, those who are able to be mobile – to travel across borders – can gain access to knowledge, skills, and networks that can contribute back to their own and others’ development in ways that those who are restricted from free movement across borders cannot, replicating global power structures.

Additionally, members indicated that physical presence communications that an organization is ‘serious’ about a particular nation or region. Thus, World Pulse staff’s absence from particular locales limits the potential reach, as a member from Zimbabwe described:

*For me, I tell people I belong to World Pulse and then I show them the interactions that we have. I show them on my computer and then sometimes, you say, ‘This is my sister.’ But it would be really good to have somebody from World Pulse to come in and say, ‘Ok, I am here now.’ I think it would really get to be a national sort of, a national event of some sort. I think most of the women’s organizations would be very interested in forging those partnerships to see what they can do. It’s like when you take a person to say, ‘Ok, I’m on World Pulse and they would love to catch up to you but they haven’t even come here.’ Yeah, they won’t take you seriously really.*

In this way, exclusions are created when the physical presence (or lack thereof) appears to play a role in legitimizing World Pulse’s work within particular nations or regions. Members who have been unable to be physically co-present with other members or staff – whether because of a lack of proximity or mobility – then are more likely to feel excluded.

*In sum, contradictions of inclusion come into being when the construction of World Pulse as ‘inclusive’ comes up against material constraints for members. Digital access and functionality inhibit members from participating more actively and encourage them to move outside of World Pulse to interact. Additionally, geographic distance and restrictions on mobility prohibit some members from meeting with others offline, and this*
exclusion is reinforced in reading accounts of members who have been able to meet and gained meaningful relationships and opportunities.

**Synthesis**

In sum, the construction of World Pulse’s digital space as inclusive becomes contested through its relationship to exclusion. The digital counter-space is inherently tied up in contradictions of inclusion/exclusion as its existence represents a concerted attempt to include those who are excluded within the broader Internet and spaces of power. The space is defined then by its inclusions as well as its exclusions. As a result, the digital counter-space produces both intentional and unintentional exclusions in its efforts to create a *global space for women* to organize across differences of race, class, sexuality, ability, and nation (among others). Contradictions of inclusion are communicatively produced by and through the digital space in several ways.

First, tensions become salient through discursive-material practices that make difference visible for members and clash with expectations that World Pulse should be inclusive. Members’ identities are brought to bear as they interact within the digital space and encounter practices that make them question their sense of belonging, such as language, regional visibility, or gender identities. Contradictions of inclusion then have multiple meanings and interpretations based on individuals’ social locations.

Additionally, exclusions are not just produced through interaction, but also through the lack thereof. Absences of interaction (e.g., inactivity), silences around certain topics, and invisibility of particular identities can contribute to felt tensions, leaving members confused, isolated and discouraged. This can create a *vicious cycle* (Putnam et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011) that amplifies the tension over time. For example, lower
membership from particular countries or regions is met with less visible representation, leading to a further absence of members from those areas. Tensions are also made salient in moments when the design of the digital space constrained interaction among members. In other words, the design did not afford particular actions and for particular bodies, closing off opportunities for participation. The sources of these tensions then are multiple – being reproduced in the intra-action of technological infrastructures, bodies, spaces, organizational talk and texts, larger discourses and socio-political structures.

Second, these tensions are also situated within specific meaning structures and sociohistorical conditions. In particular (neo)colonial discourses and structures continue to replicate themselves within the socio-technical infrastructures of the Internet in general and World Pulse specifically. As a participant from Colombia astutely described, relationships between nation-states based on colonial legacies continue to reproduce dependencies and structurally disadvantage particular regions within global power structures (Mohanty, 2003; Swarr & Nagar, 2010). In particular the hegemony of English places those within particular regions and within certain socio-economic statuses at a disadvantage in terms of accessing resources, expanding one’s network, and mobilizing for action. While in this section I discussed language use separately from digital functionality, the two are intimately intertwined, meaning that the very structures of the digital space are built upon English logics. Additionally, many of the constraints that produce tensions for members are tied to socio-economic status and position within global power structures, reproducing broader exclusions where those with more resources are the most likely to benefit. In this way, exclusions are already always produced within
digital spaces based on the barriers to access. Contradictions of inclusion then are reproduced at the intersections of local/global and digital/physical.

**Member Responses to Inclusion Contradictions**

You know, the most often repeated objection to getting involved with World Pulse that I was hearing from women was, ‘I just don’t know how to do that. I haven’t joined Facebook. It just seems too overwhelming. You know, I don’t know how to navigate stuff.’ So I would ask the women who were saying that to me, ‘Well, if we had a small group and we all brought our computers and we did that together, would that be helpful to you?’ ‘Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, but I don’t know where we’d do that, etc.’

Both community and staff members have responded to contradictions of inclusion within World Pulse in several ways, ranging from more reactionary responses to more proactive responses, like the one expressed by the community member in the United States quoted above. In the following sections, I will outline these responses first for community members as they navigate issues of inclusion. Then I will identify responses of staff in their everyday organizational practice (Table 11).

**Community Responses**

Honestly, it’s been awhile since I’ve been on it. I’m just overwhelmed but I don’t know, I usually, like when I get emails I usually get emails and see some of the stories, but it’s not like I have time anymore to actually write. But yes, I just opened, especially on Facebook, now mostly I check the Facebook page because I follow them on Facebook. So, I really look for the update for them now because I am rarely on the website… It’s just that I don’t have time anymore.

Community members’ responses vary and may shift over time. The quote above from a member in Lebanon illustrates one such response involving withdrawing participation. In this section, I outline six responses community members have had to navigating issues of inclusion, including (a) withdrawing participation, (b) tackling exclusions, (c) ‘accepting,’ (d) emphasizing sameness, (e) being reflective about privilege
and (f) cultivating resilience. As with the strategies in Chapter 4, some members may use more than one response strategy and may use them at different times based on their evolving understanding of the contradiction and their different social locations and motivations.

**Withdrawing participation**

* I tried to create awareness through World pulse but I really felt that I am not on right platform as no one is active here and no one actually helping each other...I deleted my story because of [this] reason and second I had a fear of conveying the exact message. My English is not so good. So I feared that whatever I want to convey will be in exact manner ..!!

As hinted at throughout the previous section, one member response to contradictions of inclusion is self-exclusion, or a withdrawal of active participation. The member from India quoted at the start of this section was an example of this as her experiences with a lack of response and inactivity actually discouraged her from participation and that, combined with practices of language, led her to remove a post.

While going so far as to remove a post was a more explicit and extreme example, several members talked about not being as active as they would like due to a variety of factors that have led them to withdraw. An example of this occurred in my interview with one participant in Nigeria:

*Jasmine: So, since you joined World Pulse and you’ve been active on the platform --*

*Participant: I’ve not really been active.*

*Jasmine: I mean, you did the training, so you were more active than some people in that sense.*

*Participant: Ha, OK.*
Like the above exchange indicates, several participants would self-describe as being inactive or less active and would shy away from being labeled active members of the online community. A member in Kenya described herself similarly:

*I would say am not the most active person, hence sometimes stuff pass me by...and also since I have not started any projects yet I usually feel like I have nothing to say since most of them talk about their issues and how they have come up with solutions. I am yet to start any project though I can talk about other stuff.*

At times this self-exclusion came from a reluctance to share, often times tied to feeling like they may not have anything of value to say. A member in Zimbabwe had initially hesitated in joining World Pulse. When asked why, she said, “Hmmm. I didn’t think I had anything to write about or that anybody would be interested in my musings even If I did write anything.”

Some of this may be attributed to the types of narratives that get shared and recognized on World Pulse. As the participant in Zimbabwe expanded, the calls for stories as part of the Story Awards may make some members feel excluded:

*The exclusion is subtle like in the case of call for stories. It means that even if I have my own story which fits in with the theme but in a very small way it may feel like I’m just trying to fit in and yet I do not really have a story of the same importance as those of others in the same category.*

Some indicated that they watched others, especially those who were lifted up as Impact Leaders and featured in Facebook Live events, and were unsure where to begin, as a woman in Nigeria experienced:

*And then looking at the new message that was on Facebook yesterday, you know, it was really encouraging that women, even women that are, it’s not like they are really so much educated like that, they are changing people’s lives, helping other people, maybe people in abusive marriages, or people who have gone through one thing or another, they are helping other women to live their lives properly. It is such an encouraging thing to me. Of course, I would love to do something like that, but I don’t know where to start.*
Table 11: Member Responses to Inclusion Contradictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
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<td>Community Members</td>
<td>Withdrawing Participation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tackling Exclusions</td>
<td>Taking action to make the digital space more inclusive for others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Accepting’</td>
<td>Emphasizing one’s acceptance of difference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emphasizing Sameness</td>
<td>Framing interactions across difference based on similarities of gender identity, goals or shared humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being Reflective about Privilege</td>
<td>Interrogating one’s own position within the world and how it shapes interactions resulting, at times, in changes in perceptions or behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Investing in Alternatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td>Making choices based on limited resources about which constraints to participation to address and when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Re)focusing on Values</td>
<td>Making sense of (some) instances of exclusion by reflecting back on the organization’s mission and values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other than reluctance to share, time also contributing to members’ inactivity. One member shared about having to leave her volunteer post with World Pulse early because of her time commitments. One member shared about leaving the platform for several
years and then returning. Some discussed periods of inactivity or absence from the platform during our conversation.

Periods of activity and inactivity seemed to be common among members. I encountered several instances where members wrote in their posts they had been absent from World Pulse for a time. In their reflections on the interview, a few members indicated they had not visited in awhile or had become less active. As one participant shared, “After this interview, my span as a community champion has ended at World Pulse, although I am still a member and changemaker, and I have become bit less active due to my other involvements and duties outside. Due to many projects which diversified in nature, I’m finding less time for World Pulse.” Members would often discuss their offline work as a way to indicate either times they were travelling in rural areas without Internet access and unable to be active or as a way to explain generally why they have not been as active as they would like, as another participant in Nigeria explained:

*I don’t have any issue with World Pulse but all I have to say is I work, I work, I work a full-time job to earn my living so that’s why I come up at times I don’t come online, you know, and respond to issues as much as I should have if I’m not at a paid job. But I think with time, I’m thinking of leaving my job to be able to go full-time for my NGO. Then I think I may have so much time.*

Some members saw World Pulse as something for those who have the time. Members who expressed a desire to be more active said they felt like they were missing out on what was happening within the digital space, as a woman in Kenya expressed:

*I think the only challenge would be on accessing it...by this I mean I have to get online and be on the platform. The challenge is not on the going online, but it’s that sometimes I am not on the platform as much as I would like to. A lot happens everyday on the platform and thus sometimes I feel like am not keeping up as I would like to.*
This kind of self-exclusion was not necessarily seen as desirable but rather a conscious or subconscious choice based on internal (e.g., feeling like they do not have something to contribute, feeling excluded or not supported) or external pressures (e.g., material constraints).

**Tackling exclusions**

Participant: There is this place where people, especially women from Congo, I go to get involved. Most women from especially Congo are posting comments about what they are experiencing in the country. And because it is in French and I’m a French speaker, I tend to answer the French posts, because I think that particularly because there are fewer posts for the French speakers. Sometimes I used to do both, but now there are so many people sending comments that I focus on the French comments to try to answer post of the time...

Jasmine: Right, that’s great that you are taking it on to really reach out to the French-speaking members on the site. As you said, there are a lot more English speakers on the site and a lot more of them get comments so it’s good to hear that someone is purposefully reaching out to the French speakers.

Participant: It’s actually why, because at World Pulse sometimes, I remember somebody reminding that ‘Don’t forget the French speakers,’ you know. (laughter)

Some members, like the black woman in the United States quoted above, have taken it upon themselves to address perceived exclusions within World Pulse. This has taken the form of whom they interact with, what languages they choose to write in, and what kind of support they offer for other members online and offline. A member in Colombia indicated that she makes purposeful choices about what language she writes in to make her writing more accessible to others:

*I started writing in English and then I realized that if I want that some of even my people want to read and start being the impact of the community they should be able to find some stories in Spanish as well. So I did it... but sometimes I just switch into English as well to be able to communicate with some other people that doesn’t speak Spanish, but yes, it is a burden. It is a burden that we have and it is not going to be solved, because to interact and to translate all the articles every
one writes in so many languages is going to be so difficult. But I think that it is good we as human species don’t have just one language, but I just hope that writing in Spanish could grow as well the community of World Pulse into people who are speaking Spanish.

As expressed in this quote, she recognizes that language is a challenge for a global community like World Pulse, but she strives to make her own mark on this challenge by sometimes writing in Spanish to make sure that there are at least some stories available in her language.

Others, like a member from Ethiopia, have discussed sitting down with first time users to teach them some of the technical basics of how to use World Pulse. One member in the United States similarly found that confusion over how to navigate World Pulse was a barrier to participation and took it upon herself to provide that support to others. She started hosting offline meetings with a small group of women to educate them about how to use World Pulse. These examples show members who have recognized possible exclusions and have taken strides themselves to make World Pulse more inclusive for others.

‘Accepting’

For me, I hope I am not particular about anybody’s color, anybody’s language. All I need is knowledge. As long as you have the knowledge to give me, as long as you meet that thing I need, you have something I need to move forward, I’m not interested in your language, I’m not interested in your race. I see you as my friend. I see you as my sister, as long as the community is in common.

As expressed in this statement from a member in Nigeria, when it came to navigating difference, some members sought to differentiate themselves by emphasizing their own ‘acceptance’ of difference. Drawing on their educational backgrounds, cultural
contexts, and/or mobility, some members would argue that they are uniquely situated to engage people across difference.

Many of these members emphasized that they do not take into account where a person is from in interacting with them, as another member in Nigeria expressed:

*Many of the articles that really draw me to people on World Pulse are from all over, you know in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, many places in Europe, and all over. So for me, I don’t think I even consider, I don’t consider where the person is from, the World Pulse member is from before I make that connection. Most of the time I only discover where the person is from after we both have connected, so it’s very much all over.*

Members also emphasized that their desire for knowledge – to learn from others – superseded any differences. As a woman in India stated:

*As a person, I am a very simple human being. I embrace everyone. I am not a fanatic about anything. So it was easier for me to accept each and every person who came through, came my way on World Pulse. I never discriminated, ok. I want to interact with this person. What am I going to learn from this?*

While most members who identified as women discussed their acceptance of cultural or national differences, members who identified as men, as indicated in previous sections, sought to differentiate themselves from other men. As a white man in the United States explained: “*I have a different attitude than most of my male friends. I always have had.*”

Some member indicated they interacted with others “as a person” and their social locations did not play a role. As a member in Nigeria said, “*I want to believe being a Nigerian has nothing to do with my interaction with people on World Pulse. It’s a individual thing.*”

Other members attributed their “accepting” attitudes to a variety of factors related to their social locations and lived experiences. One member who is currently living in the
United States attributed this to living outside of her home country as well as diversity within her country:

Because I’m open to all cultures, because I get, because I am also not within my own culture, I have the ability to kind of be open to view and I have friends from diverse backgrounds as well. This is even a wider range for me. It gives me a better understanding of culture. For me, we’ve always had that broad mind. As Nigerians, we’ve had broad-mindedness about culture because within our own country we have various diverse groups so translation over to other. You may have culture shock sometimes but because we are educated, we’re versatile, and we’re kind of like exposed even living within my own environment. Obviously, I’m interacting with culture daily so I think on World Pulse it just gives me broader range of cultures from, like it’s 190 countries? That’s amazing.

Similarly, a member in Kenya described her experiences living outside her home country and her education as contributing factors that set her apart:

I have been able to go to school and also lived outside of Kenya. Due to this, my way of thinking is different from someone who has not had such opportunities, both education and also travelling outside of the country. Also there is the fact that some people do not want to experience the world or different social circles. I am one person (don’t know whether it is my personality or it is curiosity or it is how i was brought up) who loves to learn from other people and also interact with people who are making a difference within their communities. In Kenya, most people are not open to experiencing different things in terms of culture, social interactions. I find some people i interact with very closed up since they want to grow-up in Kenya, get education in Kenya, work in Kenya, die in Kenya. Personally, i want to experience more and maybe this is why my experience would be different from another in Kenya.

Members with this response then sought to differentiate themselves from others due to their social locations or experiences to indicate their own acceptance of others within World Pulse’s digital space.

**Emphasizing sameness**

And when I learned, whether we are from different communities, whether we are from different countries, different religions, it doesn’t matter. When it comes to being a woman, there are some kinds of limitations – somewhere there are less, somewhere there are more. In some countries, you have to be inside your house -- you cannot go out, you cannot speak, something like that. In some countries, you
can go out to work, but still you are subdued by the male dominance. Or somewhere it was like you are not subdued, you are equal to men, still you are working more and you are not getting your credit. So it was something I learned from every community, from each and every member of World Pulse. And it was a learning and evolving process for me where I could find that it is not equal wherever we go. Howsoever advanced the country is, women are still women.

As evidenced in the above statement by a woman in India, members also responded by emphasizing sameness based on gender identity, common goals, or shared humanity. Some members went as far as saying they do not think that there “exists any difference” or made more universalizing statements. As one member, a white man in the United States, explained:

*Both of my grandfathers were newspaper editors. I grew up during World War II and became aware of the world and her different cultures, because of their discussions about the world’s peoples. I understood that we are all connected by our sameness as humans, wanting our children fed, educated and freedom from tyranny.*

Others recognized there may be specific differences, but that there are still shared universal experiences, as another member in India explained:

*The diversity represented on WP is indeed astounding. I do come across a number of initiatives, problems, movements, which are culture/area specific. Nevertheless, women who have initiated various organisations or community movements in Pakistan, South Africa, Canada or the US, and have written about those on WP do seem to address certain universal questions that lie at the heart of their specific and immediate problems. All of these things that I read about do appear to draw sometimes neat sometimes indirect parallels to whatever happens in and around my community, India being an extremely diverse nation in itself.*

This sense of shared problems across cultural contexts was a common refrain of members as they sought to make sense of interacting within World Pulse’s platform. As a woman in Brazil described:

*The big difference is that beyond the borders of our country integrates into the world, we come to realize that there are similar problems in any part of the planet as we can exchange information, seek solutions and help us. It was the very
strong points of law and as the culture of a people can hinder this people to have a better quality of life, less violence.

Additionally, ‘sisterhood’ language discussed earlier in this chapter became another way this response manifested. This language was used to describe a relational closeness that demonstrated a level sameness and identification. Members responding to contradictions of inclusion then sought to emphasize similarity as a way of framing their interactions across lines of difference.

**Being reflective about privilege**

*I think just continuing to remind, especially first world women of privilege, that that is part of the privilege for many of us that we don’t have to really think about that and yet that is not the context for many women in the world when they sit down at a computer somewhere. I think just continuing to say that. I think in this country (United States) especially, phones, Internet or whatever seems like such a readily accessible avenue and obviously there is all the stuff with trafficking and violence and those kinds of things, but if it never touches you through the Internet or through your phone or whatever then I think continuing to make sure that that is said, especially if you are Listener or welcome or whatever those other volunteer things. I think it’s really very crucial, very important so that when you come as a Listener and a Welcomer to do that task with an awareness that the woman on the other end of the correspondence might be risking herself in some way to be engaged with me on World Pulse.*

Interacting on World Pulse has encouraged members, particularly those from more privileged social locations in North America and Europe or currently residing in these countries, to respond by being reflective about their own privilege and how it shapes their interactions in ways that might be different from other members. For many, this became especially apparent with issues related to access to technology and the Internet, as evidenced by the above quote from a white woman in the United States. Members recalled reading about or engaging with other women having access issues or
walking to cyber cafes, and reflecting on their own access. As a black woman in the United States explained:

I have immediate access. I would think it’s a lot more difficult – because I remember during one of the, the follow ups for the training that we had, a lot of them had problems connecting, not because the platform wasn’t there but because of the challenges they have with Internet connection, wifi availability. I don’t have those issues. I can focus whenever I want to. It’s just a matter of a click of a button. I have the devices that I need. Some people do not have those devices so I can imagine that somebody in a rural area in Nigeria who wants to connect on World Pulse, that will probably not happen. So in semi, more open areas, sometimes it’s even difficult because they have to go to cafes, an Internet cafe or something like that to get that connection. So I would think that experiencing it that way would be challenging for some.

While technology has been a major trigger of reflection, being part of a global community and coming to an awareness of one’s position within it has led other members to contemplate what their own role should be within geopolitical structures. As member in Canada discussed:

I am definitely a white European-heritage woman who is committed to a movement which is all-inclusive. I’m committed to some work to make sure that I just don’t do the easy route of only being in contact with people who I’m most familiar. I continue that commitment. The opportunity is made so possible by World Pulse, which is already so wonderfully international. My heart is international. One thing I have to offer sitting where I am geographically is that I do have freedom of the press. Women’s issues get covered at least to some extent. I have freedom to examine and work to change the world economy, Canada being very much a part of maintaining the status quo. It’s a priority for me to look at where Canadian companies are doing damage in the world, taking part in wars and in ruination of the planet. Many Canadians have offshore money. I am in a very comfortable position to be able to work on those issues. I have a comfortable place to live and I’ve had these comforts because of the unfair world economy. So one of the main things I can offer as a Canadian woman is to call these mining companies on the misery they’re causing within Canada and globally. That includes being accurate and outspoken about what they’ve done and are doing to indigenous people in Canada.
As this member indicates, her involvement within World Pulse has encouraged her to reflect both on her position within the world based on her national identity and within her country as a white woman with European heritage in relation to indigenous peoples.

For some members, engaging with members from other countries has forced them to confront biased attitudes within their cultural context. A member in Lebanon found this to be the case. She discussed stereotypes and discrimination in Lebanon against domestic workers who may be from the Sudan, the Philippines or other locations. Being a member of World Pulse and interacting with other members from these countries has caused her to reflect on her perceptions as well as those of others in her context. As she described in her experience:

*In the course, along with other correspondents, there was one female from Sudan, which was good actually, because also you meet people... One of the problems here in Lebanon is like, it’s kind of a stereotype that these people, they are just too, like they think they are the best people in the world, I don’t know why, so I think for me, it was really, really good to see people from Africa, from different parts of the Arab world as well who are also achieved, who are also have such voices. I think it also affected the way I looked at myself and my own community.*

For some members, their understanding of their own privilege shapes how they choose to interact with the platform, seeing it as a space for those voices who are most marginalized. As a member in England explained:

*I mean I feel like my experiences are not as important, so like I don’t really write anything on World Pulse that I’ve put up with, or that I’ve experience or encountered anything like that, because I feel like it’s not a space for someone like me to write it. And maybe because I’ve been lucky, I haven’t experienced a ton of gender stereotyping throughout my life, so um, I feel like it’s more for the minorities and things and people from other countries that are facing a lot bigger challenges than I face. I feel like it’s a space for them to interact more so. I feel like it’s my duty sort of just to listen to their stories and help propagate their information rather than go and talk about my own.*
In this way, some members who perceive themselves as being within more privileged positions may intentionally silence themselves as a strategy for creating openings for those who come from more marginalized positions within global structures. In these ways, reflection as a response involves both internal critical interrogation of the self and one’s position within the world but also external changes in one’s communicative behaviors.

**Cultivating resilience**

_I did not allow that to set us back. I still pushed forward. It’s still presently a challenge but I’m still pushing forward because, once again, I’m living the experience. I have been there and I am utilizing that experience to help make a change in the lives of women in what our country is called, an underdeveloped or developing country in the Latin American and Caribbean region._

Some members who encountered contradictions of inclusion cultivated resilience, expressing a commitment to bouncing back from feelings and experiences of exclusion. As described above, a member in Trinidad and Tobago opted to continue pushing forward rather than withdrawing. Members who enacted this response would indicate that their commitments to a shared goal or sense of purpose kept them motivated to continue engaging, as a member in Nigeria described: “Well, I can say it is the zeal to make change happen and zeal in supporting initiatives targeting towards touching and improving lives. It is like an instinct, I can’t hold it back.” In this case, the changemaking opportunities through World Pulse encouraged her to continue despite her experiences.

Members also displayed this resilience through their actions. Such commitments were seen in a member in Brazil, as discussed earlier, when she used Google Translate to continue to communicate and engage with others in World Pulse despite not speaking English. She said, “It is more difficult. Yes, it is, but possible.” Additionally, accounts of
members walking miles to cyber cafes to engage on World Pulse or travelling to other cities during Internet blackouts provide further indication of members’ resilience.

Additionally, members indicated that feeling heard and the meaningful connections they made both with staff and other members provided support for them to press onward despite material constraints that might otherwise inhibit their participation.

As a woman in Cameroon explained:

> When I wrote my first story, it was amazing. The comments I got and I was like, ok. Then when I finished the [Digital Changemaking 101] course I was like, Ok, so I’m beginning to gain this technology and I am also excited because at the end of every assignment you have to write a story and each time I wrote a story I really felt relieved, because at the end... honestly I have this lady now, we met, two of them, we met through World Pulse and now we are on Facebook and it’s fun, you know? And I’m like, so this is really what World Pulse is all about (laughter). And they are all interested in what I am doing, so I am just so happy because that kind of thing goes above my expectations I have. Cameroon, we all know Cameroon is a developing country. It has its challenges. It has some really, really difficult challenges. And you have to be passionate about what you are doing. You have to be focused else you get lost along the way. So because I know what I’m doing, it’s going to help me. It’s going to help my women. It’s going to help my goals. It’s going to help my country. So when I meet women who give me that boost, who are interested and they tell me to keep talking, you can do it, I am just so happy, because that is what I get from World Pulse. I’m really so happy.

Resilience then becomes a response strategy that is cultivated over time based on refocusing on ones’ commitments to change and support from others that encourages members to be creative and persistent in their involvement with World Pulse despite constraints and exclusions.

**Staff Responses**

> At the same time, it’s kind of like the, like the conversation that was going on between us that then it’s like who are we targeting? Like what is our audience? If we’re not targeting that audience, we can’t say well, we’re like actually not including them or are really including them? So that’s--I think that’s a conversation that we are still going on.
Staff members have also responded to contradictions of inclusion in a variety of ways. The many of the material features and discursive practices that interplay to construct World Pulse as safe are also part of the organizational response, but the following are further strategies staff members enact when they experience felt tensions related to inclusion, including (a) investing in alternatives, (b) filling the gap, (c) prioritizing and (d) (re)focusing on values.

**Investing in alternatives**

*It’s all about human power, so what I mean by that is, like for example, for me from the training perspective, I know I have to invest more on that participant, so I with this participant who is visually impaired. I always had an alternative document of the training materials, I always had a connection for calls differently for her and different times, and I had my--the person who’s supporting the contractor sending special emails to that person in particular with different layout of the email and different messaging in the email, so it’s a lot of extra, you know additional, human investment on that, for to create an accessible [program]. And last year we had somebody who was hearing impaired, so we had to a contract support person also doing a lot of investment on making sure that all materials were accessible, so transcribing, sending particular messages and so on.*

Staff indicated that one response to contradictions of inclusion has been to invest in alternative ways to keep members involved who may have otherwise been excluded from World Pulse’s digital space. This was particularly true in the context of training programs where staff discussed investing additional time and resources in finding alternative ways to make programs accessible for members who may have disabilities or who may encounter digital access issues. This ‘high-touch’ response involved material changes in the formatting, structure or delivery of messages. For example, staff members have themselves interacted with community members outside of the World Pulse platform to ensure they could stay involved. As one staff member explained:
It terms of inclusion, I’ll also just mention for those high-touch programs where people participate and our challenge is connecting, I think we’ve done a lot about trying to keep them included. Particularly like using other platforms to stay connected to our platform, so using WhatsApp when they couldn’t connect through any other means, in order to keep them connected with their cohort and their group or whatever their program was until they could get back to World Pulse.

This response strategy has required staff to think creatively about ways to adapt programming to be more inclusive. Yet, as mentioned by the staff member at the start of this section, this also requires significantly more investment, which can be challenging giving the material constraints of nonprofit organizations.

**Filling the gap**

We are looking at how to address a lot of these things through our, our Ambassador program, but we haven’t quite figured it out yet. But we saw the components of the Ambassador program were intended to start to figure out some of these things.

Staff indicated that another way they have navigated these tensions has been to cultivate a group of community leaders and volunteers who can be present to fill the gaps related to inclusion in ways those who are based in Portland cannot. Specifically, staff discussed volunteer roles that allow members to use their locations, skills and knowledges to create connections that would not be possible for staff on their own. The Ambassadors program, introduced in late fall 2017, involves members who “build connections with large groups of women on the ground, bridging the online and offline worlds to bring more women into the World Pulse community.” In this way, World Pulse took an intentional step to help facilitate more offline interactions among members, as well as increase regional representation by asking some who are in underrepresented areas to help recruit more members.
Another related effort has been to involve more regional representatives in decision-making at the organization through regional leads in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Staff members indicated that these representatives “know a lot that we don’t know here in Portland” and are able to help World Pulse take into account regional differences by drawing on their knowledges.

Lastly, the Encourager role, which has been created to roll together what were the Welcomer and Listener roles, is an attempt to address new member interactions, and ensure that members feel heard and connected. These efforts to bring in volunteers to fill in the gaps collectively were seen to help World Pulse navigate possible exclusions.

**Prioritizing**

*Well, I think one thing is that a lot of our community access our site online on mobile phones, and there has been a lot of work with this new redesign of the website that a mobile version was going to be more accessible, which I think we were pretty successful at doing that, so that’s kind of like an organizational priority and technology needed to make that accessible in the format that women are accessing it through mobile. We still have a lot of work to do on that accessibility through mobile, but I think that was a big win, and a big strategy for the organization moving that direction.*

Staff also discussed having to prioritize addressing different material constraints of their platform given limitations on their resources. Improving accessibility through mobile phones became prioritized through the recent redesign to allow more women to be included in the digital space, particularly given that mobile technologies are increasingly the primary means of access in certain regions. Staff acknowledged figuring out what to prioritize given their resources was an ongoing challenge:

*I think that sometimes the solutions are either maybe not immediately obvious or there a little bit further out in terms of resources. So the digital access, you know, is something that we’re super aware of, language, I think we--well, we’re just starting to prioritize language as one of the critical pieces.*
Strategies like Google Translate functionality were then seen as a stopgap while further language functionalities can be addressed. Language was one area in particular staff discussed as a work in progress. As one staff member explained, “There’s a language strategy being worked on, but we also have just Google Translate embedded into the site and we’re working on making that a little more prominent now so that people can see it.” In these ways, staff may have to balance what they are able to tackle within their means, prioritizing some exclusions over others.

(Re)focusing on values

I think the one that you brought up about is really telling and indicative of a larger challenge in that we’re a platform where any woman can come and speak up about the issues that matter to her, but realistically we do have limits on that, and we have a direction that we take that because we do need that conversation to be in line with our culture, values, and brand as an organization, and that doesn’t resonate with every woman. Even those who are trying to make positive change in their community, they may not be able to accept or willing to go along with some of the values that we are putting forward.

When staff members come up against situations where they experience tension related to inclusion, some discussed refocusing on the organizations’ values as one way in which they respond. In doing so, staff members are able to reframe and make sense of (some) instances of exclusion. In the above exemplar, a staff member refers to the situation discussed earlier in this chapter where a member left the platform after she deemed it as having “too strong of a feminist talk.” When staff discussed this sense making through refocusing, they acknowledged it was not always easy to do:

Also, kind of a tension between inclusion and clarity of focus, and so you could say, ‘Oh maybe we’re going to be inclusive of everybody, any woman who has anything to say, and anything she wants,’ and I think there are some platforms that are out there like that. I think--what’s the name--Mogul is a great example for me of that. I feel like Mogul is very inclusive, and yet I don’t see a clear focus
on how they’re maybe pulling people together to have a particular positive outcome or action in the world and so this is always one of the things that we value. But I think it’s not so easy always or not always so straightforward.

This also came up when staff negotiated boundaries around World Pulse’s “target market” and questioned which inclusions and exclusions mattered by asking themselves, “Who are we targeting?” For example, in conversations around the role of men in World Pulse, one staff member explained it this way:

You know when you’re an organization you have kind of a target market, and so inclusion, that’s a very broad term because when you target something, you’re not—it does not mean that you’re being exclusive or that you are trying to exclude people, it means that you are focusing to be very inclusive for a group of people because that’s what your, what your resources, what you stand for, and so within that group. And so World Pulse I don’t think I would describe its target market as being men. So yes, men are welcome. We have men who are member...you know, definitely included, but the messaging and everything isn’t going to be targeted towards them.

Some staff members then strive to focus back on World Pulse’s values and mission of “connecting women worldwide for change” when navigating issues of inclusion and exclusion.

Synthesis

Members respond to contradictions of inclusion in ways that vary based on their understandings of tension as well as their different social locations and motivations. These responses have various implications for organizing across difference and contribute to the ongoing construction of the contradiction as well as the digital space. First, community members in particular again relied on responses that emphasize coping with tension. Strategies like withdrawing participation, emphasizing sameness, and ‘accepting’ can be seen to have negative consequences for the digital space and contribute to the evolving constitution of the contradiction. Members’ withdrawal has
perhaps the most significant implications for organizing, resulting in the loss of those voices and perspectives. This then also contributes to practices of inactivity within the digital space that reproduce the very contradictions that lead some members to withdraw. Members choices to withdraw are contingent on a variety of internal and external pressures that continue to reproduce exclusions, as those who are positioned as having more access to resources are seen as more likely to be able to continue their participation or to feel included.

‘Accepting’ and emphasizing sameness represent attempts to both deny tensions and choose one pole over the other. While these responses represent ways members make sense of and strive to continue working across multiple lines of difference, they risk reifying exclusions by downplaying or erasing differences in other members’ identities and experiences. Contradictions of inclusion are interrelated then with tensions of sameness and difference at the individual level. Emphasizing sameness can produce identification with the organization and collective and contribute to members feeling safe (as discussed in Chapter 4), yet for those who do not see themselves in those identities considered normative this can produce exclusions. For example, ‘sisterhood’ language remains reliant on transnationally circulating notions of a ‘global sisterhood,’ which have often essentialized women’s experiences (Mohanty, 2003). In these ways, the language of ‘sisterhood’ can be seen to mark a particular kind of relation among women that is both productive and problematic. Additionally, discourses of ‘acceptance’ at times showed a level of awareness about differences based on members’ past experiences (e.g., education, locations, and mobility). However, by positioning themselves in opposition to those who are implied to be non-accepting, members adopting this response sidestep
accountability to critical reflection about how their actions (intentionally or unintentionally) as well as other practices and structures may be intra-acting to produce exclusions and erasures.

Second, members’ responses to contradictions of inclusion also approximate *more-than* approaches to tension through dialogue and reflection. In tackling exclusions and being reflective about privilege, community members demonstrate heightened consciousness about the tensions and their own relations to them. In doing so, they demonstrated an attention to both the self and others. For community members who tackle exclusions, they seek to make changes to open up possibilities for participation through resistance, as seen when members make purposeful choices about the languages they are writing in. Additionally, some members who indicated reflective practice around their own privileged positions also took purposeful action as a result. At times responses continue to fall in the in-betweens, depending on how members make sense of and enact these responses. Members who cultivated resilience could be argued to be reframing tensions as a way to creatively embrace both poles without foreclosing possibilities for participation and action. They construct this resilience through talk and interaction both within and outside of the digital space. Such an approach still acknowledges the role of support from others, and thus is a response that has transformative potential within the construction of World Pulse’s digital counter-space. However, reframing also runs the risk of being reduced to selecting one pole over the other or ignoring tensions related to exclusions based on members’ external pressures and constraints.

Third, staff member responses reflect ways organizational constraints shape members responses. In particular, responses such as investing in alternatives, filling the
gap, and prioritizing all demonstrate a need to act in response to issues of exclusion within the finite resources (both human and material) of the organization. Investing in alternatives provides a way to create a ‘third space’ for members to live within the tension (Putnm et al., 2016). Yet, given that each of these responses is individualized, temporary, and requires significant human resources, this work can contribute to burnout if not paired with attention to structural changes. This is reflected in the prioritization response as staff members pragmatically consider which exclusions to address first within their means.

Within these responses are the seeds for another response, or reframing of contradictions of inclusion. In staff members’ efforts to refocus on values as a means to make sense of exclusions, they recognize the ways in which exclusions are not always problematic and may even be necessary in order to maintain their ‘safe’ digital counter-space. Additionally, when community members’ reflections on their privilege lead them to self-silence, rather than seeing this as a form of withdrawal, this could in fact reflect seeds of a critical inclusivity to be discussed further in Chapter 6.

**Interlude: On Digital Access and Functionality**

Throughout the data collection for this project, I was located in various physical and geographic spaces. In this Interlude, I share two reflections from time I spent in Ghana doing fieldwork for the Purdue Peace Project and my own experiences with digital access and functionality.

*September 9, 2016, Ghana, Written Journal:* I was staying up late and getting up early to try to keep on top of emails. For a few days of the trip, I hit a peak in terms of the number of emails from respondents happening on the same day. I got concerned about
missing someone, especially because Office 365 sometimes lumps emails together that do not go together, causing me not to see that another participant has been buried within someone else’s email trail.

My biggest struggle has been with Internet access. I had OK Internet access at the hotel in Accra and was actually able to conduct an interview via WhatsApp there my first night with a surprisingly clear connection. However, I would not be so lucky at my next stop. The Internet was spotty. My computer would not stay consistently connected. I ended up having to copy out email content into a Word document as I got it to load, write my responses offline, and then copy them in and hit send, hoping it would go through. I found mornings – when I was woken up by the call to prayer from the nearby mosque – often had the best Internet connection, usually from about 4:45-6:30 a.m. It was not going to be feasible to conduct any call-based interviews. I ended up emailing a participant asking if we could postpone for a week because of access issues. Even in the WhatsApp chat interview I conducted, there were times the message would not go through. There were moments when, exhausted and frustrated, I contemplated giving up. Sometimes I did for the night and tried again in the morning. I cut myself some slack, responding at minimum to the people who had emailed me the earliest and waiting another day on others. For some, I waited longer than I would have liked, especially as I travelled back.

Overall, I think the experience further highlighted how frustrating it is to have this kind of minimal, inconsistent Internet access. In some ways it often feels worse that having no Internet access at all because it is right there, but it will not do what you want it to. Certainly this gives me an appreciation for my participants who deal with access issues. I conducted a Skype interview yesterday that cut in and out and the participant
talked about access issues. I could certainly relate. My access issues were temporary. I knew I would be able to return to more stable Internet access in only a matter of days. Not everyone has that luxury.

April 25, 2017, Ghana, Audio Recording: I am sitting in a guest house room in the Upper West Region of Ghana, after a long day of field work where we have been in communities sitting with only trees for shade talking to people about peace and the potential for violence. We are now and have been for the past several hours in the midst of a heavy rainstorm at the start of the rainy season in Ghana. In my room, I sit without power, which has been the case for most of the hours since the sky darkened. There was a short time where we had generator power or when the power flickered on and off. But I believe now it is likely out for the night. I have been without Internet for three days, which is typical when we travel up here. We are usually unable to access the Internet. Our phones often roam as they jump the border with Burkina and get confused because we are so far north.

It is in these moments that I think about what it means to be a member of World Pulse and what it means to organize women from 190 different countries across cultures and contexts online. I think about who is automatically excluded because they do not have access. I also think about the women who despite the constraints I experience only temporarily still opt to be involved and may walk in fact miles to access a cyber cafe to go on the Internet to share their voice on World Pulse or exchange messages with those they call ‘sisters’. It is in moments like these that I reflect on my own privilege and remind myself that my condition is only temporary, but other people live it daily. It makes me think differently about my project because it is in moments where things that
we consider ‘normal’ get disrupted that they become salient to us. I am reminded of this constantly through my work with the Peace Project, whether it is sitting in an office at Purdue being frustrated unable to connect via Skype or WhatsApp with a colleague in Ghana or sitting here in this guesthouse room. And again, these are the moments it becomes salient for me and I consider just what a privilege it is to have regular Internet access and the things that it gives me, connection to both people and knowledge and the ability to express myself. I felt these thoughts were important to share in the moment from Ghana, in a moment where access issues are particularly salient to me.
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

I started this project with two goals. First, I aimed to understand how digital “safe” counter-spaces for transnational feminist organizing are constructed and their potentials and limitations for organizing across difference. Second, as an engaged feminist project, this study also had a goal of creating safer, more inclusive spaces for women to organize collectively. I sought to achieve both of these goals through a digital feminist participatory action research (D+FPAR) project involving a partnership with a digitally based transnational feminist network and nonprofit, World Pulse. Drawing on a variety of qualitative and participatory methods, I set out to answer three questions.

First, I addressed the question of how the digital counter-space was discursively-materi ally constructed. Specifically, I found that the digital space was communicatively constituted as ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ in three ways – through material-discursive practices that communicated safety and/or inclusion to members, through members’ talk and interaction which were enabled by the affordances of the digital space, and through interrelations with other overlapping digital and physical spaces in which members’ are embedded.

Second, I investigated how tensions were produced in the ongoing construction of the digital counter-space for transnational feminist organizing. Tensions were produced when material-discursive practices simultaneously made members feel safe/unsafe and included/excluded. This occurred when these practices took on different meanings or made difference visible to members based on their identities, spatial locations and/or past experiences. Tensions also emerged when the discursive construction of the digital space as inclusive came up against material constraints of the digital platform and participants’
physical locations. Additionally, tensions related to safety were produced through the circulation of neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility that created tension with the organization’s perceived feminist values.

Third, I identified how community and staff members responded to these tensions. Members enact a variety of strategies that contribute to the ongoing construction of the digital counter-space. Many responses represent defensive mechanisms or coping strategies based on particular constraints that can potentially limit the possibilities of organizing across difference. However, some of the responses enacted have the potential to open up options for participation through reflection and dialogue, particularly when members recognized their interconnectedness with others.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of this project. I then discuss the limitations of this project as well as areas for future research.

**Theoretical Contributions**

This project contributes to two areas of organizational communication theory and scholarship. First, it makes contributions to theorizing at the intersections of space and transnational feminist organizing. Second, it contributes to scholarship on tension and paradox. In the following sections, I unpack these contributions, speaking to and with existing literature in these areas.

**Contributions to Digital Space and Transnational Feminist Organizing**

This project makes several contributions to organizational communication theorizing related to space and transnational feminist organizing. While relations across
spaces and scales of action are central to transnational feminist organizing (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2011), this body of literature has paid minimal attention to the specific spaces where transnational feminist organizing formally and informally takes place, the discursive-material construction of these spaces, or the implications of these spaces for organizing across difference. This project brought critical attention to the spaces of transnational feminist organizing and in particular to digital space as a site of and for transnational feminist organizing. Digital spaces hold increasing value for transnational feminist organizing given the possibilities of connecting across borders more frequently and without (some of) the barriers to access of other transnational spaces for organizing like international conferences. While digital spaces have often been seen as supplemental or secondary to physical spaces for transnational feminist organizing, this study focuses on digital space as a primary site where this organizing takes place. In doing so, it responds to calls that recognize the need to understand online spaces for organizations and organizing (Wilhoit, 2015, 2017).

This project contributes to theorizing of space by defining and interrogating digital space. Specifically, I offer a definition of digital space as an embedded, material-discursive construction that is occupied and co-created by multi-located, embodied subjects. My analysis demonstrates the ways digital space is constituted through the ongoing intra-action of the material and discursive (Barad, 2003), which communicates and makes the space legible and meaningful for members through presence and absence. The digital counter-space is in a constant state of becoming ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ through these intra-actions. Boundaries are made and remade as members navigate the digital space from the moment of registering. Members participate in the constitution of the
digital space through their sensemaking, identification, and responsive interactions (or intra-actions) with the space and others within and outside it. This illuminates the ongoing constitution of digital space, which like physical space is both designed (by the organization) and lived (by members) (Wilhoit, 2015). In these ways, digital space is likewise both “constitutive of and constituted by organizations” (Wilhoit, 2015, p. 239).

Focusing on digital spaces as constitutive of and by organizations/organizing provides several key insights related to transnational feminist organizing.

First, this project’s focus on digital space makes visible relations within and across multiple spaces and scales that shape transnational feminist organizing. A physical organizational space (e.g., an office) may be located within a particular place (e.g. a city) and these may mutually shape one another (Wilhoit, 2015). However, looking at digital spaces for transnational feminist organizing complicates our understanding of these spatial relations by showing the ways digital organizing is embedded within multiple spaces simultaneously. These relations materialize through material-discursive practices that produce contradictions and reveal differences.

This project thus furthers understanding about spatial relations, in particular the ways that individuals are always already embedded in multiple, overlapping spaces that shape perceptions of safety, for example, and have consequences for the communication and organizing of differently situated members. This study illustrates the ways members’ identities and multi-locatedness shape the possibilities for action within digital space, including their willingness to share counter-stories, connect and collaborate with others, and access resources to mobilize for change. For example, World Pulse is situated within and among other permeable digital spaces and the Internet at large by which it is
relationally defined. Additionally, members are simultaneously located within and across both digital and physical spaces – including both physical locations as well as institutions and geopolitical structures (e.g., the nation) – that collectively co-define the meanings of the digital space. Members who are located within physical spaces that compromise their safety are less likely to experience a particular digital space, like World Pulse, as safe, and, therefore, may be less likely to connect with others around social change goals. This can be seen when practices produce contradiction, making some members feel safe and others feel unsafe (e.g., profile practices). These material-discursive practices over time construct what I term digital geographies of fear, expanding on Valentine’s (1989) geographies of fear, as members’ sense of safety becomes tied to particular cues that communicate whether or not a digital space is safe and for whom. These geographies are dependent on members’ identities, contexts and experiences, illuminating the ways members’ understandings and experiences of safety may vary.

Second, this study explicitly recognizes how materiality intra-acts in these spaces to shape possibilities for organizing. Previous scholarship on transnational feminist organizing has recognized the material effects of the ways spatial relations and scales are socially constructed (Dempsey et al., 2011). This study moved beyond such conceptualizations, arguing for examining the ways the social and material intra-act to mutually constitute space in the context of translational feminist organizing. Specifically, I introduced Lykke’s (2010) feminist postconstructionism to organizational communication as means to tie together a growing need for theoretical tools to “materialize” organizational communication (Ashcraft et al., 2009) and emerging interests in feminist scholarship in new materialist and posthumanist theorizing (e.g.,
Ashcraft & Harris, 2014; Harris, 2016; Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017). Feminist postconstructionist theorizing provides foundations for understanding the relationship between the social and material during the material turn.

Grouping this work under feminist postconstructionism ensures the politics of feminist theorizing related to material-discursive practices are not lost. For example, Barad’s (2003, 2007) conception of *intra-actions* creates *relations of responsibility*, in which all actors, human and non-human, are implicated. In other words, feminist postconstructionism provides an ethical impetus and obligation to interrogate as well as intervene in the constitution of uneven power relations. Additionally, as Harris (2016) argues, “play” within contradictory positions that bring together strands of modernism and postmodernism is not simply about “debating the real” for the sake of theorizing, but rather about making “strategic, pragmatic politics out of progress and parody” (p. 161). In doing so, this approach places the responsibility of reconfiguring relations not on one actor but rather demonstrates how everyone is implicated within the process. By Barad’s (2007) reasoning then we are all accountable for the exclusions we *participate in* enacting – “responsibility entails an ongoing responsiveness to the entanglements of self and other, here and there, now and then” (p. 394). In this study, these theoretical understandings provided fertile grounds for unpacking how the intra-actions between technological infrastructures, bodies, objects, micro and macro discourses, interaction, and offline contexts constitute digital space and how these entanglements *act* to mutually determine and communicate what matters and what (or who) is excluded.

Moreover, examining the social and material as mutually constituting reveals the ways that these ongoing intra-actions both close off and open up opportunities for action.
On World Pulse, these intra-actions have constructed a counter-space for voices and bodies excluded from broader spaces of power to develop a collective identity, provide supportive communication, challenge dominant discourses, and mobilize for action. Simultaneously, this counter-space also intra-acts both with and within structures that can replicate uneven global and local power relations (e.g., globalization, patriarchies, colonialism, neoliberalism), where those with access to resources (e.g., digital access, material wealth, personal devices, English language skills) and mobility stand to benefit the most, limiting but not foreclosing transformative possibilities. In doing so, World Pulse provides an example of the ways the construction of space can both challenge and reinforce spatial power relations.

This study then further contributes by calling attention to the different and intersecting spatial relations of power (Shome, 2003), and how space is implicated in the construction of contradictions of safety and inclusion. Power relations are spatially produced and experienced by members as they move within and across the public/private, local/global and digital/physical spaces and scales. At the macro level, transnational feminist spaces continue to be constituted by and against intertwined logics of globalization, colonization, patriarchy and neoliberalism. Spatial control also operates at the meso level as the organization designs and enacts particular practices that shape and constrain opportunities for interaction. Additionally, members exercise concertive control (Barker, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994) in their everyday communicative (micro) interactions by policing the activities of other members within the digital space. These different levels are mutually shaping, with neoliberal logics trickling down and reproducing in members’ interactions and remnants of colonialism playing out in
technological infrastructures. Yet, transnational space is also a resistant space – crossing borders, defying scalar classification, and challenging practices of exclusion.

Specifically, the digital counter-space also represents what I refer to as resistant spatial praxis – an attempt to resist the construction of the Internet and of other digital and physical spaces as unsafe for or exclusionary of women by creating new spatial configurations.

**Contributions to Tension and Paradox**

This project also contributes to theorizing and scholarship related to tension and paradox. First, this project provides empirical support to the constitutive approach to contradiction and paradox (Putnam et al., 2016). In particular, it highlights the ways that responses to tension contribute to the ongoing construction of organizational paradox. Putnam et al. (2016) argue that paradoxes “emanate from social actions and interactions as organizational members respond to and process contradictions in ways that create systematic patterns” (p. 77, emphasis added). In the case of World Pulse, both community and staff members’ responses to tension over time contributed to constructing the digital space as ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ but also to the contradictions and how they manifested in members’ experiences. For example, as staff members invest in alternative ways to involve members who would otherwise be excluded this contributes to practices of recognition and caring but also can become contradictory when members’ differences are made salient.

In addition to demonstrating the ways responses to tension contribute to the further construction of contradiction, this study also complicates the categories of responses to tension, highlighting the ways responses can be ambiguous and shift
between categories of either-or, both-and or more-than depending on members’ material constraints, the level of consciousness members have, and their self- and/or other-orientation. Particularly those most at risk with regards to safety and inclusion often operated within a self-orientation and responded defensively, focusing on coping with tensions. This illustrates how the choices available to some members are constrained both by the construction of the digital space itself as well as their locations within local/global power structures. Some responses, like differentiating use, can reflect both-and or either-or responses depending on their enactment over time and the consciousness of members. Members whose responses reflected a self-and-other orientation recognized their interdependence with others in their online and offline contexts and demonstrated an awareness and reflexivity about tension (more-than) by enacting strategies that involved exhibiting care and taking action on behalf of others. These responses in particular demonstrate a productive accountability to others and a means to develop creative solutions that go beyond the individual. At the same, as World Pulse staff experienced, these responses may also be constrained, as members have to operate within particular contexts and organizational conditions (i.e., limited resources).

Further, within members’ responses, I identify a possible reframing of contradictions of inclusion. Specifically, I argue that critical inclusivity, a term borrowed from multicultural education (e.g., Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015), can be productively mobilized for digital counter-spaces like World Pulse. I define critical inclusivity as an active interrogation of how spaces and the practices by which they are communicatively constituted may be exclusionary of particular bodies, specifically those who are most marginalized within dominant power relations. In this way, inclusion is not a totalizing
concept, especially given that uncritical inclusion is likely to lead to continued marginalization and oppression (Roestone Collective, 2014). Rather, it demands reflexivity on the part of participants in that space as they actively attempt to create more inclusive spaces for those who are most likely to be excluded both within and beyond that specific space, whether digital or physical.

Second, this project advances the constitutive approach to the study of organizational paradox by calling attention to the role of materiality in the development and ongoing communicative construction of contradiction and paradox. While some work within the critical management tradition draws attention to the material conditions that structure and help reproduce systems of control and thus dialectics of resistance and control (Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Cloud, 2005), the understanding of materiality discussed here focuses on the ways materiality intra-acts in the construction of tension and contradiction over time. Additionally, scholars in the postmodern tradition have been criticized for overemphasizing discourse and neglecting materiality (Putnam et al., 2016). By drawing on feminist postconstructionism and specifically Harris’s (2016) work on feminist dilemmatic theorizing, this project brings forth an approach to paradox that recognizes the intra-action of the discursive and material in the constitution of contradictions in organizing. More specifically, this study illustrates the ways tensions and contradictions emerge and transform over time in these intra-actions. In doing so, this study pushes scholars adopting a constitutive approach to paradox (Putnam et al., 2016) to consider the entanglements of discourse and material, rather than discourse alone or the material effects of discourse. Materiality matters in the constructions of tension as it
can mutually shape the choices and constraints members feel in responding to these tensions.

Lastly, this project illustrates the ways that paradox and tension are spatially experienced and produced. Space becomes paradoxical through material-discursive practices that contradict constructed meanings of the space. In the case of World Pulse, this occurs through moments of disruption when members feel safe/unsafe and included/excluded. Tension is also spatially experienced as members move within and across multiple spaces simultaneously, reconfiguring meanings and producing conflict. This is illustrated when members tried to make sense of the multiple locations in which they were embedded and how these locations impacted their sense of safety within any one of those spaces. This has particular implications for ‘safe’ counter-spaces, which are inherently paradoxical (Roestone Collective, 2014; Rose, 1993). Counter-spaces represent a response to institutional or social spaces that are exclusionary and unsafe for those who are marginalized and represent a purposeful attempt to include the excluded. Counter-spaces are constantly being (re)constructed through material-discursive intra-action, including practices of inclusive exclusion, among others that reproduce tensions. ‘Safe’ counter-spaces then are not stable containers for emotional support, cultivation of collective identity and mobilization for action but rather are dynamic and precarious – in a constant state of becoming (un)safe(r).

**Methodological Contributions**

This project makes several methodological contributions, including (a) introducing digital feminist participatory action research, (b) offering tools for participatory analysis and (c) expanding reflexive praxis. First, this project introduces
what I termed *digital feminist participatory action research (D+FPAR)*. In doing so, it provides one of the first examples of a more fully digital participatory research project. D+FPAR involves the use of multiple digital tools to facilitate data collection and collaboration to co-produce knowledge and action aimed at transformation. Using *digital* participatory methods allowed for facilitating collaboration across time and space, providing opportunities for individuals to engage across geographic borders and physical distances. The use of digital tools also facilitated multiple forms and formats of participation that were attentive to participants’ different locations, access and literacies. The participatory online workshop (POW) was an example of this – using Zoom audio, chat, Google documents, WhatsApp and email all to facilitate members’ participation. I argue that this flexibility and openness to using different tools including some suggested by members to create opportunities for inclusive participation comes from the feminist underpinnings of the method. The *feminist* in D+FPAR provides methodological and ethical tools for researchers as they navigate what it means to move participatory research online. In particular, feminist methodologies provide an impetus for reflexivity in navigating new and heightened ethical dilemmas related to participation and representation. (e.g., access, confidentiality) Additionally, FPAR’s attention to centering the marginalized, attending to the interlocking and intersecting relations of power and attempting to unsettle power relations including those in the research process provide D+FPAR with the means to attend to difference and power in selecting and adapting tools and platforms for participation. In these ways, D+FPAR’s contribution to digital methods generally is less about *what* digital tools it uses and more about *how* it uses them to allow for a different kind of engagement with participants.
Second, this project contributes tools for bringing collaboration into the analysis process. Within participatory research, participants are more likely to be involved in the earlier stages of the research process with researchers often reverting back to relying on their own expertise during interpretation (Dodson et al., 2007). In this project, I made concerted attempts to engage participants in these later stages as well as use the analysis process as a catalyst for action. I advanced a reflexive analytical process, adapted from Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2009) model, involving five overlapping cycles of interpretation. Specifically, I expanded on their model by adding a cycle focused on collaborative and participatory interpretation. This process involved incorporating themes identified by participants through their reflections on their own transcripts as well as through collaborative discussions around preliminary themes. Adding a cycle to the analysis process that focuses on collaborative interpretation provides researchers with a framework for ensuring the participatory aspects of analysis are deliberately included within more traditional analysis processes.

Third, this project expanded reflexive practice by identifying and defining three different types of reflexivity – researcher reflexivity, collective reflexivity and participant reflexivity. Most research that adopts reflexive practices focuses on researcher reflexivity, or the critical examination of a researcher’s positionality in relation to participants throughout the research process. However, other forms of reflexivity are equally important to the research process. Participant reflexivity, following practices within feminist participatory research traditions, recognizes that participants are also capable of engaging in reflexivity. Creating opportunities for participant reflexivity makes reflexivity accessible beyond the researcher, recognizing the potential for such
tools to contribute to consciousness-raising that can lead to productive action. Collective reflexivity affirms the value of dialogue with others to open up taken-for-granted assumptions about the research process. If the goals of reflexivity are to critically interrogate the research process and (power) relations within it, then opening up other avenues for reflexive practice beyond the researcher her/himself can provide important insights into the ways knowledge is constructed. Additionally, existing work related to reflexivity provides little guidance on how to enact reflexivity in practice (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). By explicitly identifying and naming these different types of reflexivity and strategies for incorporating them into the research process (Table 5), this project provides a model for future researchers who seek to incorporate reflexivity in different forms into their projects.

**Practical Contributions**

*The attention paid to safety is admirable. This is a unique community unlike many others. However, other similar organizations could certainly learn from what World Pulse has done (and continues to do) and apply lessons accordingly.*

– Community member

This project also offers several practical implications. In particular, this study provides insights for individuals and organizations seeking to design ‘safe’ digital spaces for voice, participation, and collective action. These recommendations draw on learnings from World Pulse as well as provide World Pulse with ways to create a safer, more inclusive digital space for transnational feminist organizing. Given the participatory approach of this project, the following recommendations were co-constructed in conversation with participants. In presenting them, I draw participants’ reflections, the participatory online workshops, and post-workshop evaluations as well as my own
analysis. These strategies were also shared back with a group of participants who were interested in further collaboration. These participants provided additional feedback and highlighted what they saw as priorities.

**Cultivate Connection**

*It is the very open possibility of communicating directly through our responses to each others’ stories that creates and expands the feeling of connectedness and possibility of being supported and of supporting each others’ work. This is why it is so important that all have some responses to new membership and posts, and feel welcomed and listened to or encouraged. The stronger our connections, the greater the feeling of and real potential for ensuring safety. We need an ever growing number of us willing to make sure that all are responded to.* (Community member)

Organizations should seek to enact strategies to cultivate enhanced connections – both in quantity and quality – among members. These connections, and thus interactions among members, play an important role in the ongoing construction of ‘safe’ digital spaces by providing supportive communication, making members feel ‘heard,’ and developing meaningful connections across spaces. In particular, members felt the stronger the connections the more likely the community was to be able to mobilize collectively for action in general and in a case where a member might be in danger.

Specifically, members indicated that it was most important for new members to feel heard and know about ways to get further involved with the organization. World Pulse’s volunteer Encourager roles (previously Listeners and Welcomers) were seen as a key way of providing this for members. Other organizations can likewise develop programs that mobilize existing, active members to ensure that new members are welcomed and feel heard. Welcoming emerged as one of the most significant practices World Pulse engages in that members thought could be implemented by other
organizations. Participants suggested such programs should be grown to ensure all new members as well as existing members receive encouragement.

Another strategy could be to build into digital platforms ways to connect those with similar interests or who are in proximity to one another. Connecting those who have shared interests can help promote collaboration whereas connecting those in proximity to each other can help fuel offline interactions that can lead to action. Built-in features that can recommend other members to connect with could provide a means for members to regularly establish new connections and expand their networks. Several participants indicated they wished there was an easier way to identify World Pulse members nearby so they could develop relationships with others online and offline that could provide further support and collaboration. However, such an approach must be balanced with a concern for safety, given that providing specific location information could make certain members vulnerable depending on who gains access to this information.

Establish ‘Ambassadors’

*What I had in mind for World Pulse to do has already been done. I wanted to propose to World Pulse to have Ambassadors in different countries that will source new members and encourage them to make their voices heard and actions visible. This has been done on a small scale. I would want for them to increase the number of ambassadors in all countries represented on World Pulse.* (Community member)

Organizations like World Pulse that seek to bring diverse and inclusive groups of people together across borders around issues of social concern can consider establishing “ambassadors,” or representatives who can speak from their situated experiences within particular contexts and expand the organization’s (online and offline) reach within underrepresented areas. While relying on representatives can be problematic given
concerns about who gets to speak on behalf of others (Cornwall, 2003), such an approach can provide a means to enhance regional representation, recognize members, improve understandings of safety concerns within particular offline contexts, and increase physical presence. Prior to World Pulse announcing its new Ambassadors role, several members suggested that regional or national representatives from different areas would be useful. After the role was announced, members indicated that this would have been a suggestion and that they hoped to see such programs expanded to increase the beneficiaries and with a focus on widening the representation. As organizations enact such roles, careful and critical attention must be paid to who gets selected and what regions or nations get represented so that exclusions are not further perpetuated.

Members suggested that those in ambassador roles could also ensure that events and issues from the region they represent get included and promoted within the digital space. In such roles, ambassadors can also gain a platform to advocate within the digital space by calling attention to the ways that certain practices (e.g., language) create exclusions or make members within particular offline locations feel unsafe.

**Mobilize the Linkages between the Digital/Physical and Local/Global**

*I still feel like insisting on offline meetings/fellowship programs. Sometimes not all of us are able to access online and whenever we access it we are only there for a short time because Internet costs money where we are. This means that those with access learn more from the online community than those with limited access. If the training programs could be trickled down to the grassroots level, more women would become empowered. (Community member)*

Organizations seeking to provide a platform for women to organize for social change within digital spaces should not neglect women’s physical locations and locally specific knowledges. This study demonstrates the ways that space is always multiple and
overlapping and that offline spaces play an important role in the construction of digital safety and inclusion. By recognizing this, organizations can mobilize these overlapping spaces. For example, while the digital space became an important meeting place for members to cultivate connections across borders and gain a voice, members continued to desire more offline linkages – both in terms of connections as well as meet ups and trainings. They argued these activities could help establish stronger connections among members that translate back to the digital space, bring about collaborations, and increase the reach to those who do not have the same kinds of digital access. They also indicated that offline connections would help more people feel safe within the digital space.

Within this study, those who spoke most positively about their experiences with World Pulse and also shared some of the most significant impacts from their involvement were those who had engaged with other members offline. This was especially true for members from Nigeria and Kenya who had been involved in offline trainings organized by World Pulse through its partnership with Intel. Through these engagements members have been able to establish meaningful connections that provide support as well as enhanced opportunities and action. Train-the-trainer programs can be one way of expanding the reach of such activities. However, without attaching material resources (e.g., financial, technological) to these programs or addressing particular practices that create exclusions, such programs may fall short, as members found when language or lack of access to a laptop restricted their ability to share World Pulse with others.

With regards to digital access, members indicated that offline meetings can provide a way for women from rural areas in particular to gain digital literacy skills (including knowledge about issues related to safety and vulnerability online) as well as a
means to provide them with cross-border linkages so they do not fall behind those who already have the access and skills and therefore are already able to benefit from the connections and resources World Pulse and similar organizations provide. As one member shared “Most women would love to engage with other women online but are unable to do so due to poor/unstable Internet connection, poor digital literacy skills and lack of basic computer skills.” Offline meetings were seen consistently as a way to make World Pulse more inclusive and ensure voices that are the most marginalized are heard.

**Share Tools and Resources Related to Safety**

I think just to keep on to make it probably an obligation of folks to say the moment you become a part of World Pulse you should take a course in safety…I’m just thinking of myself, the moment I joined World Pulse, I didn’t have that much time on the Internet. And most of the people have their mobile phones and we are all on WhatsApp and use the Internet through data plan or it’s the air time that you just dial in and update it to data plan and then you are online all the time, so to just give an option of just the safety course via WhatsApp. I feel like 98.5 percent people in the urban areas are on WhatsApp and then in the rural areas they also have access to WhatsApp. It would be very, it’s a platform that people can use to train people in safety to kind of throw in, ‘Do you know when you are online you should do this, this, this. You know online you treat people like, this is what you have to do’ and give that much training. (Community member)

Organizations can address safety issues for their digital spaces head on by providing and promoting tools and resources related to safety. Members indicated that this is something World Pulse does well that other organizations should emulate. By calling attention to safety from the moment a new member registers and continuing to do so by offering guides and trainings related to safety, World Pulse expresses a commitment that members argued set it apart from other digital spaces. Members indicated that sharing such resources regularly and across platforms could further improve these efforts. Like the community member quoted above, some members
suggested different formats for the training, such as offering a version on WhatsApp that prompts members to reflect about their safety.

In understanding the ways that overlapping spaces shape members’ sense of safety, it is important for organizations to create training materials and resources that recognize different constructions of safety based on individuals’ identities and locations. Members must be prompted to reflect on their specific vulnerabilities as well as those of others and have a variety of tools at their disposal. As one member stated, “Some countries are more prone to hackings while others are prone to being threatened physically. Maybe the best action would be to analyze the vulnerabilities of safe space by context and not as one basket.” Specific examples about safety differences—such as why some people do not use photos or real names as well as why the lack of photos and real names might make others feel unsafe—could help educate members and encourage them to reflect on what safety means. One participant shared that when she first joined World Pulse she was suspicious of people without a photo or a real name but eventually learned the safety reasons why people might make these choices. Thus, she recommended that education about these issues is important as other members might not be aware of the different choices people may be making based on their offline vulnerabilities.

**Be Proactive and Transparent**

*I guess the only thing that I have noticed is that there is no way–is there any, I haven’t noticed it, but it might be there, is there a way to actually report like if me reading you suspect that there is somebody on there that may just be lurking? Is there a way to report that kind of individual? (Community member)*

Organizations can also enact strategies to be proactive about members’ safety—embedding features within the discursive-material designs of digital spaces that further
demonstrate this commitment. While recognizing that safety will always be precarious for certain (marginalized) bodies, organizations can take steps to help reduce risks.

Given members’ continued suspicions of certain profiles and some negative interactions, additional features can be implemented and existing practices made transparent to members to help address these concerns. Processes to report suspicious activity can be made clear to members. Currently members of World Pulse are able to report a comment as spam or abuse based on an icon that appears with each comment. However, members are less clear about how they can report other kinds of behaviors – such as a suspicious account or other negative interactions that do not take place within the comment section. While some felt comfortable just going to the “Contact us” page linked on each page of the website, others were not sure how or where to report. These processes can be made more visible within the digital space both through language that instructs members on what to do in these cases as well as features like “Report” buttons. Members also suggested practices such as prompting inactive members to become active and other ways of verifying accounts such as through an existing member as ways to enhance member safety.

Members can also be made more aware of the steps the organization actively takes, many of which may often occur behind the scenes, to ensure their safety. For example, members were not necessarily aware of the different ways new profiles are screened. Sharing this information with members can further contribute to the construction of safety, as the organization’s commitments are communicated and made visible.
Limitations

All research initiatives have limitations, including this one. In this section, I highlight four primary limitations and the ways these limitations can provide avenues for future research.

First, levels of participation were a limitation of this study as a D+FPAR project. The process was not always fully participatory. This is a persistent challenge for participatory projects (e.g., Bain & Payne, 2016; Frisby et al., 2005). In this project, for example, having additional community members involved in Phase 1 could have redirected the project in important and unforeseen ways. Not all groups participated or participated at the same levels. While I recognized inactive/lurking members as an important population to interview during Phase 2, I found it difficult to identify and recruit these participants. These participants could have provided unique insights about the digital space that may have been missed. Almost all interviews were conducted in English, despite attempts to reach out to the French-speaking members of World Pulse. French-speaking members could have provided different perspectives with regards to practices of language use among other ways that contradictions of inclusion are produced. Additionally, the majority of my participants, similar to the general population of World Pulse, were from Africa. While I have used various strategies to be attentive to differences in my analysis, having more members from regions and nations underrepresented within the digital space may have provided different insights into the construction of the digital space as ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ and the contradictions that are produced. Thus, who participated and to what degree varied at each phase of the project. Future research related to engaged scholarship and participatory methods, and digital
participatory methods in particular, should continue to critically interrogate barriers and resistances to participation, particularly for the ways that the exclusions produced may replicate some of the uneven power relations (feminist) participatory researchers seek to address.

A second limitation for this study was in capturing the discursive-material intra-action within interview methods. While participant observation allowed for a deeper understanding of the digital space, I relied on participants’ descriptions of the multiple, overlapping spaces in which they were located. Based on limitations of resources and participants being geographically dispersed, I was not able to observe them interacting in both digital and physical spaces simultaneously. While initially I had intended to use photo-elicitation methods, technological, financial and institutional constraints hampered these efforts. Relying on members’ talk about space limited an understanding of how other materialities may have intra-acted in shaping their experiences within the digital space. As Wilhoit (2015) argued, studies of space can be constrained by methods that focus on how materiality manifests in conversation and fail to capture how humans and materiality interact (or intra-act). Future research on digital space should consider the use of methods such as photo elicitation (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), photovoice (Wang, 1999; Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996), or video-based methods (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2016) along with other digital methods to further capture the intra-actions of the discursive/material and digital/physical.

Third, organizational changes during my project provided important insights but may have also produced limitations. My project has taken place during a time of significant organizational change for the organization under study, including the launch
and discontinuation of programs and community leadership positions and a massive redesign of the digital space. This flux illustrates the ways digital space is constantly being (re)constructed. However, Phase 2 data collections primarily took place prior to the redesign. While follow up during Phase 3 and additional participant observation allowed me to draw further insights, these changes may not be fully captured. This illustrates the challenges of studying organizations and organizing within digital spaces as well as doing engaged scholarship within these spaces where rapid growth and constant change is normative. Longitudinal studies with multiple time points for data collection can contribute to understanding how these changes shape and reshape potentials for organizing. Yet, researchers who seek to work with organizational members will need to consider ways to incorporate regular and frequent feedback mechanisms so that the information in the short term does not become irrelevant to collaborators.

Finally, one limitation of a dissertation as a static text is that it does not fully capture the ongoing work of the D+FPAR project. At the time of this writing, collaborations on actions and outcomes for this project are ongoing and therefore this writing does not present a complete accounting of the entirety of the project but rather a snapshot of the project at this particular point in time. Participatory work demands ongoing relationships aimed at action and transformation, and therefore it is in line with this approach to continue to work on other forms of outcomes beyond an initial reporting in this dissertation.
Directions for Future Research

The contributions of this study also introduce additional questions and avenues for further research. The following represent both topics for future research as well as possibilities for methodological application and expansion.

First, future research should explore the communicative construction of safety to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the ways safety is defined and its implications for organizing and organizations. This study illustrates the ways safety is contextually and relationally defined. While some may argue that a sense of safety is a psychological construct, a communicative lens can bring to light the ways safety is constructed through the intra-actions of discourse and materiality within individuals’ lived experiences. Future research should also examine the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, and nation in the construction of safety, as individuals who are differently situated are likely to experience safety differently. A richer and deeper understanding of safety has important implications for organizational communication scholarship, particularly work related to workplace harassment and bullying as well as around efforts to organize in response to police brutality, gender-based violence, and conflict and war.

Second, future research should continue to interrogate notions of ‘safe’ space, with particular attention to how to create safer spaces for marginalized groups to find emotional refuge, cultivate solidarity, and mobilize for change. The contradictions and responses to them discussed here can be examined in the context of other digital and physical ‘safe’ spaces to understand how they are constructed and additional strategies for both cultivating and navigating these spaces. This is particularly important given
increasing, often critical, attention to ‘safe’ spaces within higher education (e.g. Jaschik, 2016) and beyond (e.g., Valenti, 2017). Specifically, future research should seek to bring communication as design perspectives (e.g., Aakhus, 2007; Jackson & Aakhus, 2014) to bear looking into how to design safer, more transformative (digital) spaces to organize for social change. Communication design perspectives seek to “make communication possible that was once difficult, impossible or unimagined” (Aakhus, 2007, p. 116). Communication design scholarship focuses on invention and intervention into communication problems. Design perspectives then have a complementary relationship with engaged scholarship (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2017). In particular, future work should seek to co-design strategies to create ‘safer’ spaces for participation in both online and offline contexts and evaluate those strategies.

Third, researchers should investigate practices of inclusive participation in and through organizing. This study demonstrates how organizations may construct inclusion and the ways in which it becomes contradictory through particular discursive-material practices. It also calls attention to the ways that organizational members may grapple with and experience tension related to what inclusion means within particular contexts. This has particular relevance for the work of non-profits, non-governmental organizations, activists and others who seek to organize across difference and who may utilize alternative organizing structures that promote member participation. In future research, scholars should ask questions about what meaningful participation and inclusion look like, what tensions organizations navigate when seeking to create spaces for inclusive participation, and how we can design more inclusive spaces for participation.
Fourth, researchers should further examine the ways paradox and tensions are spatially experienced. While counter-spaces, as reactive and proactive responses to marginalization, make tensions especially visible, organizational spaces more generally are constitutive of and by paradox and tension. Spatial practices – both digital and physical – could be seen as producing and being bound up in tensions related to open/closed, stability/flexibility, and work/life, among others. Tensions related to safe/unsafe and inclusion/exclusion remain relevant to other organizational spaces, given members’ diverse social locations.

Fifth, scholars should explore the kinds of organizing enabled through digital spaces for transnational feminist organizing. This study argued that digital spaces are sites where transnational feminist organizing is taking place. More research is needed to understand the forms this organizing takes, how this organizing is shaped and constrained both by the technological affordances of the digital space as well as by the circulation of discourses locally and globally, and therefore the possibilities for transformation.

Sixth, more attention is needed to resilience within transnational feminist organizing efforts. Building solidarities across lines of difference is tension-filled work that involves constantly constructing possibilities for action despite barriers to participation, setbacks, and seemingly insurmountable barriers to structural change across local and global scales. Future research should expand and apply work related to the communicative process of resilience (e.g., Buzzanell, 2010) to investigate that processes that enable activists to persist. Such research could also be useful in developing resources to foster resilience within transnational feminist networks.
Seventh, methodologically I encourage continued exploration of what it means to adapt and apply participatory research methods online. This project provided one exemplar of what it could mean to do so, but more work is needed to interrogate the possibilities as well as the limitations to such approaches. Future research focusing on digital participatory methods should ask questions such as: How can we reduce the barriers to and burdens of participation using digital tools and methods (with particular attention to those who are most likely to be excluded)? What new possibilities for action exist through digital (feminist) participatory methods? And how can we evaluate digital forms of participatory research?

**Conclusions**

To conclude, this dissertation project identified digital space as a site of transnational feminist organizing and explored how digital “safe” counter-spaces are constructed and their potentials and limitations for organizing across difference. Through what I termed a digital feminist participatory action research (D+FPAR) project involving a variety of qualitative and participatory methods, I worked and am working collaboratively with members of an existing digital counter-space to identify ways to construct safer and more transformative spaces to further enable diverse women’s mobilization for social change. Through an interrogation of digital space, this study contributes to understandings of the communicative construction of space, how it interrelates with the material, and the ways digital spaces reproduce and/or challenge existing power relations. Furthermore, this dissertation project provided methodological innovation by taking feminist participatory action research methods online. This study – through its theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions – provides a basis for
future work that seeks to design safer, more inclusive (digital) spaces to organize for social change.

**Interlude: Creating Spaces for Transformation**

When I began this project, I knew that creating safe and inclusive (digital) spaces for women to organize across differences was important, but I had no idea just how important it would become. This project took formation more than a year before the 2016 U.S. election, which dramatically heightened its significance. The post-election context has seen intensified harassment and abuse of marginalized individuals in digital and physical spaces (Lenhart, Ybarra, Zickuhr, & Price-Feeney, 2016; Miller & Werner-Winslow, 2016; Williams, 2016) and increased restrictions on mobility across borders for some (e.g. the “travel ban”; Queally, Panzar & Hamilton, 2017). Many gains with regards to women’s advancement both locally and globally are at risk (Abdellatif, 2017; Asquith, 2017). At the same time, the election results catalyzed women’s organizing transnationally, best exemplified in the Women’s March on Washington on January 21, 2017, where people took to the streets and to the web globally with 673 Sister Marches across all seven continents (“Historic,” 2017).

Within this context, the second goal of this dissertation – to create safer, more inclusive digital spaces for women to organize collectively – became even more pressing. So did this project contribute to this goal? And, if so, in what ways?

I believe this project made several strides toward this goal, with the recognition that constructing ‘safe’ digital counter-space is an ongoing process. First, within the project itself, the methods used represented an attempt to create such a space for participation. In evaluating the project, I consider what Lather (1986) referred to as
catalytic validity – the extent to which participants gained increased consciousness that leads to action (Lather, 1986). For those who participated, this process thus far has facilitated members’ recognition of the power of their own voice, cultivated a critical awareness of their own growth as well as constraints, and contributed to a desire to take action. Some participants reported feeling like they have a voice and that their voice “matters” after taking part in this project. As a participant from Peru stated, “I have learned that my voice and my opinion are valuable for people, maybe not in my own city or my own country, but is important for others.” Similarly, one participant in Kenya indicated that she realized she had been able to speak “confidently about myself without fear or criticism.”

Some participants reported that they have been able to recognize changes in themselves. As a participant from Nigeria stated, “I have been able to consciously track the impact of my engagement on world pulse on my general world view and personal qualities. I realized that I am more empathetic and my global view is broader.” Others similarly discussed the gains they had made and the value they saw in being a member of World Pulse along with an awareness of needing to overcome constraints. As another participant from Nigeria stated:

I have learned that at this stage of my life I just need coordination to use my experience and innate power in affecting real change in the world. Through the process of responding I come to learn that networking appears simple but the effect can drastically change the scheme of affairs, network can make changes happen. I also learned that we need patience, persistence and resilience where we encounter obstacle to overcome challenges.

As seen above, members’ discussion of constraints was often paired with an expression of a commitment to persist in spite of these constraints.
Several of those who discussed the value of the project to evaluate their own involvement with World Pulse described a desire to do more or to be more active. One participant from Cameroon described how her participation added to her “energy.” A participant in Kenya described her own evaluation process through the project as follows:

_This has been like and evaluation for me and how I have used the platform of World Pulse. My take-home is that I have not fully utilised the platform to my advantage. The platform offers so much more than I have explored. So for me it is an awakening call that I have to start exploring it even further and use it as much as I can since it offers a lot in terms of trainings, interactions with other women etc._

Others discussed how specific questions within the interview and participatory online workshop prompted them to critically interrogate their own positioning relative to others within World Pulse. As a woman in Canada reported:

_The first question being on reflections about race, class, ability, language encourages me to think more profoundly on these. More than ever I am grateful for the opportunity World Pulse provides for me to learn from others who have different experiences. Laying out these questions also presses me to find ways to find ways to share wealth that we have in North America while we work toward an equitable world economy._

As seen in this statement, she gained further consciousness around her own positioning in the world that sparked a desire to take action, showing evidence of catalytic validity.

For some participants, their involvement in this project has also resulted in new digital skills that further enable their organizing online. Several indicated they were using certain digital technologies for collaboration for the first time, particularly during the POW. As one participant stated, “I have learnt that online /digital platforms are the best when it comes to connecting with people from different parts of the world. And also I will always remember this meeting as my first experience as far as online meetings are concerned.” One participant had never used Skype before but wanted to learn how
through the interview and I worked with her to set up an account and to guide her through the process. As she said afterward, “I was so happy to connect and speak to each other and that was really my first skype call. Thanks for making it happen.”

For staff members, participation in this study validated what they were observing, raised their consciousness about tensions they were experiencing, and contributed to a desire for further dialogue and action. In the post-meeting evaluation, a staff member observed:

*The study validates our theory of change and the potential impact we can have if we execute our strategies well: A warm and inviting (and digitally safe) platform leads to a feeling of confidence and empowerment; our programs and platform can support women around the world if we are able to address some of the issues that come from trying to bring a high-touch model to more women globally.*

Staff discussed feeling relieved that there were “no big surprises” and that what emerged from the study confirmed tensions they had experienced. At the same time, it prompted a desire for continued conversation to dig in deeper to the nuances of the study’s findings to determine what changes they could make, particularly as they continue to grow. Many of their post-meeting evaluations included further questions they want to continue to discuss to better implement strategies going forward. As one staff member stated:

*World Pulse can do a lot more to create a safe and inviting space that encourages women to voice vulnerable stories, to feel heard, respected, and valued. This includes an environment that is warm and inviting, but it also includes technical safety precautions—privacy options, secure server, etc. This is especially important in regions where freedom of expression and press are not givens. We need to put effort into automated spam blocking and community monitoring, especially as we scale what we offer. Language is a consistent topic that comes up - how do we create a global community without a common language and favoring those who speak English well?*

Some staff discussed already paying closer attention to language choices and looking more critically at their practices.
Through this project then, many participants – both community members and staff – developed increased consciousness with a desire for action. These outcomes along with the relationships cultivated throughout the course of the project have the potential to transfer out into the broader World Pulse community as members both take and adjust their actions based on their involvement. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that everyone who completed a post-meeting evaluation expressed an interest in continued collaboration on this project.

A second way this project contributes to the action goal of creating safer, more inclusive spaces for women’s organizing is by offering co-constructed recommendations and a program of action going forward. While Phase 4 is ongoing and not fully captured here, the practical contributions outlined earlier in this chapter represent steps toward effecting change outside of the context of this project. I believe these recommendations, along with other action steps collaboratively developed with participants, can contribute to advancing safer, more inclusive spaces for women’s organizing online if they are taken seriously. As with all research endeavors, including participatory projects, utilization is key going forward for change to occur.

However, I recognize that this project is by no means a panacea. This project did not have the same outcomes for all participants. For example, a few participants reported they had become less active since the project started, though this was not necessarily related to the project itself. Some participants did not participate in later stages of the project for reasons that are mostly unknown.

Additionally, I learned that the same tensions that emerged in the digital space of World Pulse – safe/unsafe and inclusive/exclusive – were reproduced within this project.
I grappled with how best to represent members’ and my own experiences in ways that were authentic and meaningful but did not add to our risk. I often relied on participants’ understandings of their own safety and what would put them at risk, though at times I struggled with whether or not those risks were fully realized. For example, I was concerned about sending back the written transcript of an interview with a participant in Syria as I had done with other participants and the potential risks given her context, so I asked her what she felt comfortable with. She told me to send it, but I found myself still wondering about the potential consequences. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, issues of digital access and language in particular continued to reproduce exclusions in terms of who could and did participate, despite my attempts to facilitate different forms of participation.

As a result, I recognize, like other FPAR scholars before me, that we can never “get it right” (Reid & Frisby, 2008, p. 102), but rather must continue to live in discomfort and be reflexive about our failings with the hope that we will, as Chrisp (2004) said, “get it more right than last time” (p. 92). With this in mind, I hope to remain open and humble in offering recommendations to World Pulse and other organizations as I recognize the ways that constantly (re)creating safer and more inclusive spaces is hard work that is never finished. Sometimes we are more successful than others. It is also work that is not just done by one person — but is constantly recreated through intra-actions in which we are all accountable.

So what does all this mean for the current political moment? I believe that this study provides indications that spaces can be created to enable women to organize across borders and differences to achieve social change goals, but that doing so requires
continuous reflexivity and dialogue among all who participate in their creation to ensure that these spaces continue to become safer and more inclusive to transform our world for the better.
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doi:10.1080/15401383.2016.1248266


doi:10.1080/00909882.2014.882009


doi:10.1177/0163443704042262

doi:10.1080/00909882.2017.1320572

doi:10.1177/0893318911415607


doi:10.1080/08164640802645166


doi:10.1111/comt.12003


APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

These questions were designed to lead participants in a semi-structured conversation regarding their experience on World Pulse. The interview consisted of these and similar questions.

Pre-Interview Questions
Before we begin the interview, I have a few biographical questions to ask as well as a few questions about your Internet access and use. These questions will provide basic information about the participants in the study as a whole and better understanding of your specific experiences.

Please feel free to answer at your level of comfort. Know that you are not required to answer a question you feel uncomfortable with or that would pose any risk to you.

Biographical Questions
• What is your current age?
• How do you define your sex/gender?
• How do you define your race/ethnicity?
• In what country do you currently reside?
• How many years of formal education have you completed? Alternately, what is the highest degree or certification you have achieved?
• What has been your work or professional experience, if any?
• How long have you been associated with World Pulse?

Internet Access and Use Questions
Please share with me how you access the Internet.
• Please share with me how you access the Internet. For example, where are you most often when you are accessing the Internet (e.g., at home, at work, at an Internet café, at another public facility, other), what do you use to access the Internet (e.g., a desktop computer, a laptop, a mobile device, multiple devices, other), and how frequently do you access the web?
• Please share some of the main activities you engage in while online.
• Please describe any barriers you face in terms of your access to and use of the Internet.

Is there any other background information you would like to share prior to the interview?

Interview Questions

Question Set #1: Your World Pulse Story
1. Please tell me the story of how you came to join World Pulse. How did you find out about World Pulse? Why did you decide to become a member?
2. What activities have you participated in since you joined World Pulse? Why?
3. How is World Pulse similar to other online communities or social networking sites you are part of? How is World Pulse different?

Example follow-ups to Set #1
- What motivated you to volunteer/participate? What has that experience been like for you?
- If you were to visit the World Pulse website today, where would you go first and what would you do?
- Has your experience with World Pulse changed since the site was redesigned in January 2015? If yes, in what ways? (For those who have been members prior to the redesign)

Question Set #2: Connecting on World Pulse
1. Tell me a little bit about your interactions with others on World Pulse. Do you interact with others? If so, who do you interact with and how? For what reasons?
2. Please tell me a story about a positive interaction you have had on World Pulse that stands out to you. Is there one that has been particularly meaningful to you?
3. If you have experienced any negative or challenging interactions on World Pulse, please share about that experience.
4. How do you think who you are shapes your experiences of World Pulse (e.g., your gender, race, class, nation, language, ability, etc.) in ways that might be different than if you were someone else? Can you provide an example?

Example follow-ups to Set #2
- Do you find yourself interacting with people you have connected with on World Pulse outside of World Pulse (through other platforms)? Any examples?
- In thinking about the interactions you’ve had and experiences with World Pulse in general, have there been experiences that have made you feel particularly included and/or supported? If so, can you tell me a bit about that experience? What makes you feel included?
- Likewise, have you had an experience so far in which you felt excluded and/or unsupported on World Pulse? If so, can you please tell me a bit about this experience?

Question Set #3: Safety
1. What does the word ‘safe’ mean to you? How would you define it?
2. Do you consider the Internet in general to be safe? Why or why not?
3. Do you consider World Pulse to be a safe space? If yes, what are some examples of the ways that World Pulse is a safe space that you have seen or experienced? If not, what are some examples of how it might not be safe?
4. How does your offline context and your physical location (where you are physically when you are accessing World Pulse) shape your sense of safety?

Example follow-ups to Set #3
- Are there any other challenges or risks you have encountered as a member of
World Pulse? If so, please describe these experiences.

- Are there actions you take to keep yourself safe while you are interacting on World Pulse or elsewhere online? If so, please share.
- What additional steps would you like to see World Pulse (or other similar organizations) take to maintain a safe space?

**Question Set #4: World Pulse’s Impact**

1. Looking back over your experiences on World Pulse, what do you think has been the *most significant change* in your life or the lives of others as a result of your involvement? What are some examples of this that you have seen?
2. Through your involvement with World Pulse, what actions, if any, have you taken individually or with others toward social change goals (locally, regionally, nationally, and/or internationally)?
3. What other examples or stories have you heard about World Pulse that tell you, “Wow! World Pulse is really making a difference”?

**Example follow-ups to Set #4**

- What other examples or stories have you heard about World Pulse’s impact?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?
APPENDIX B. PARTICIPATORY ONLINE WORKSHOP GUIDE

The following are examples of questions used as part of the participatory online workshop with both community members and staff.

Warm-up Questions
• What three words would you use to describe World Pulse?

Safety: How does and can World Pulse create a ‘safe’ space?
• What stands out to you? What is missing?
• What actions can we take to promote the safety of all members?
• What can other organizations learn from World Pulse with regards to safety?
  What recommendations would you offer?

Inclusion: How does and can World Pulse create an ‘inclusive’ space?
• What stands out to you? What is missing?
• What actions can we take to promote inclusion of all members?
• What can other organizations learn from World Pulse with regards to inclusion?
  What recommendations would you offer?

Next Steps
• What would you like to see done with the results of this study?
• What other actions or activities would be helpful?
• How will we know these actions are successful?
• What other recommendations would you give based on these findings and our discussion? To World Pulse? To other organizations?
• Any concluding comments?
APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

The following questions were designed to lead staff members in a semi-structured conversation. The focus group discussion consisted of these and similar questions.

• How does World Pulse try to create a safe and inclusive space for women to gain a voice, connect and transform the world?
  o What are some of the practices World Pulse uses to do this?
  o What are some of the technological features World Pulse uses to do this?
  o How do you individually and collectively try to account for difference (e.g., in identity, experience, location)?

• What are some of the challenges you have encountered in creating and maintaining this kind of environment?

• How have you responded to those challenges? Can you give me a specific example?
APPENDIX D. POST-MEETING EVALUATION

The following are questions used as part of the post-meeting evaluation during Phase 3. Participants in the participatory online workshop and/or staff focus group were invited to complete an online questionnaire that included the following:

Community Member Post-Meeting Evaluation

- What did you like about the meeting we just had? In other words, if we were to do a meeting like this again, what aspects would you keep?
- What would you change about the meeting?
- Was there anything else you wish you could have shared during the meeting? If so, what would you have liked to share?
- What was your biggest takeaway from the meeting? In other words, what is one thing you learned or will always remember?
- Of the possible actions and recommendations discussed at the meeting, which would you like to see prioritized first?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?
- Would you be interested in collaborating with the researcher on some of the outcomes from this study? If you would like to be contacted about collaborating, please share your preferred email address. If you would prefer for your responses to this evaluation remain anonymous, you can email the researcher directly to let her know at [email].

Staff Post-Meeting Evaluation

- What did you like about the meeting? In other words, if we were to do a meeting like this again, what aspects would you keep?
- What would you change about the meeting?
- Was there anything else you wish you could have shared during the meeting? If so, what would you have liked to share?
- What did you learn from the meeting? In other words, what are 2-3 things you took away from our conversation?
- After reflecting on our discussion, what actions would you like to take next? Or what would you like to know more about?
- What specific outcomes from this study would be helpful for your work (as an individual or an organization)?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?
- Would you be interested in collaborating with the researcher on some of the outcomes from this study? If you would like to be contacted about collaborating, please share your preferred email address. If you would prefer for your responses to this evaluation remain anonymous, you can email the researcher directly to let her know at [email].
APPENDIX E. MEMBER REFLECTION

The following are example questions from member reflections. Participants in the in-depth interviews in Phase 2 received a copy of their transcript and were invited to reflect on their responses using the following prompts.

Questions for Reflection

• What have you learned about yourself and your experiences through this process of responding to these questions during the interview?
• What stood out to you as important about your experiences with World Pulse based on your responses? In other words, what are maybe one or two things you think people should take away from your experiences?
• Has anything changed since we did the interview related to your experience with World Pulse? If so, please tell me a little bit about what has changed.
• What outcomes would you like to see from this research project (for example, resources, trainings, tools, reports, etc.)? What would be most useful for you in your work and/or activism?
• Is there anything else you would like to add?
VITA

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EDUCATION

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<td>Ph.D., 2017</td>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>West Lafayette, IN</td>
<td>Brian Lamb School of Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Dissertation: Constructing digital ‘safe’ space: Navigating tensions in transnational feminist organizing online</td>
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<td>Graduate Certificate, 2015</td>
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<td>Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
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<td>M.A., 2013</td>
<td>California State University</td>
<td>Chico, CA</td>
<td>Communication Studies Department</td>
<td>Emphasis: Media, Technology, Feminist Theory</td>
<td>Thesis: Voicing online: Catalysts and constraints for women’s empowerment (recipient of the Communication Studies Thesis Award at CSU, Chico)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.A., 2009</td>
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<td>Spokane, WA</td>
<td>Communication Studies Department</td>
<td>Major: Journalism and Mass Communication</td>
<td>Minors: Visual Communications; English</td>
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HONORS & AWARDS

2013-2017 Ross Fellowship, Purdue University Graduate School (4-year fellowship awarded to incoming Ph.D. students including 1 year of funding from the Graduate School and a commitment of 3 additional years of support from the graduate program admitting the student)
2016-2017
- **Bilsland Dissertation Fellowship**, College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University
  (competitive 1-year dissertation fellowship awarded to outstanding Ph.D. candidates for their final year)

2017
- **Top Student Paper**, Feminist Scholarship Division, International Communication Association

2016
- **K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award**, Association of American Colleges & Universities
  (national award recognizing graduate students who show exemplary promise as future leaders of higher education; who demonstrate a commitment to developing academic and civic responsibility in themselves and in others; and whose work reflects a strong emphasis on teaching and learning)
- **Top Paper Panel**, Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Division, National Communication Association
- **Doctoral Honors Seminar**, National Communication Association
- **Alan H. Monroe Graduate Scholar Award**, Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University
  (award recognizing scholarly activity of graduate students)
- **Brian Lamb School of Communication Graduate Service Award**, Purdue University
  (award recognizing evidence of exceptional and sustained formal and informal service to the school and university over the course of the student’s graduate studies)
- **PROMISE Award** ($750 to support research), College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University
- **Berenice A. Carroll Feminism, Peace, and Social Justice Graduate Award – Honorable Mention**, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program, Purdue University
- **Competitive Conference Travel Grant** ($100), Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association, Purdue University

2015
- **Top 4 Paper**, Peace and Conflict Division, National Communication Association
- **Competitive Conference Travel Grant** ($100), Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association, Purdue University
- **Top Student Paper**, Feminist Scholarship Division, International Communication Association
- **Top 4 Paper**, Organizational Communication Division, International Communication Association

2014
- **Cassandra Book Award** ($750 to support research), Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University
- **Competitive Conference Travel Grant** ($100), Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association, Purdue University

2013
- **Graduate Student Commencement Speaker**, 18th Annual Commencement for Master’s Candidates, California State University, Chico
- **Outstanding Communication Studies Graduate Student**, School of Communication, Department of Communication Arts & Sciences, CSU, Chico
- **Communication Studies Thesis Award**, School of Communication, Department of Communication Arts & Sciences, CSU, Chico
- **Top Student Debut Paper**, Organizational Communication Division, Western States Communication Association
2010
- Whitworthian Legacy Award, Communication Studies Department, Whitworth University

2009
- Alumni Ideals Award, Whitworth University
- Outstanding Communicator, Communication Studies Department, Whitworth University
- Writing Award, Communication Studies Department, Whitworth University
- Weyerhaeuser Younger Scholars fellowship, Whitworth University

**SCHOLARSHIP**

**Journal Articles**

**Book Chapters and Sections**

**Submitted Manuscripts**
Cooky, C., Linabary, J.R., & Corple, D.J. (revise and resubmit) More data, more problems: Interrogating neoliberal challenges to feminist Big Data research.
Krishna, A., Connaughton, S.L., & Linabary, J.R. (under review). Citizens’ political public relations: Integrating political public relations, public diplomacy and international relations scholarship for a cross-disciplinary conceptualization.


Manuscripts in Progress

Linabary, J.R. Weaving a ‘world’ for women: Exploring the affordances of digital spaces for transnational feminist organizing.

Linabary, J.R., & Hamel, S.A. Voicing online: Conditions and catalysts for the emergence of women’s voices.


Conference Presentations


Linabary, J.R. (2015, November). Encountering precarity online: Navigating tensions in transnational feminist research. Paper presented as part of a competitively selected panel at the annual conference of the National Women’s Studies Association, Milwaukee, WI.

Linabary, J.R. (2015, November). The problem of popular feminisms: A call for academic feminists to ‘Lean In.’ Paper presented as part of a competitively selected panel at the annual conference of the National Women’s Studies Association, Milwaukee, WI.


Linabary, J.R. (2015, February). ‘Disciplining’ communication: Problematising the quest for the core. Paper presented as part of a competitively selected panel at the annual conference of the Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association, West Lafayette, IN.

Linabary, J.R., & McDonald, D.J. (2015, February). Feminist dilemmas in social media research. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association, West Lafayette, IN.


Practitioner Publications

Professional Reports


RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

Research Assistant, Dr. Stacey Connaughton, Spring 2014-present
Purdue Peace Project (PPP), Purdue University, Lafayette, IN

- Co-lead researcher of all Ghana projects: In this role, I co-lead projects in Ghana as part of a multi-year, externally funded, locally led peacebuilding initiative in West Africa and Central America. Tasks have included communicating regularly with the PPP West Africa Program Manager to manage the projects; co-developing research materials, instruments, and protocols for all project-related activities; conducting monitoring activities including extensive media coverage and secondary data analysis; traveling to Ghana every 3-6 months to conduct field research and monitoring of PPP project sites; traveling to Liberia as needed to conduct field research and monitoring of PPP project sites; developing executive summaries of travel outcomes; completing transcriptions for Ghana and other PPP project sites; writing professional reports and impact summaries; collecting data and writing summary documents and reports around a practitioner think-tank on locally driven peacebuilding; developing manuscripts for publication in scholarly as well as practitioner outlets; designing participatory workshops, developing learning modules, and gathering resources to aid local peace committees and project collaborators; coordinating videography of projects sites in Ghana and Liberia; designing templates for various reports; contributing to a quarterly newsletter for project updates; giving presentations on the project to various...
audiences; and managing PPP social media accounts (e.g., Twitter). (Funded by a private gift to the College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University)

**Research Team Member, Dr. Cheryl Cooky, Spring 2015-present**

*Purdue University, Lafayette, IN*

- Lead researcher on hashtag feminism project: In this role, I lead the design and execution of an interdisciplinary project I proposed on hashtag feminism that involves analysis of media coverage, tweets, and interview data. Tasks to date have included developing IRB applications, negotiating data access, coordinating meetings, delegating tasks to the research team, facilitating codebook and interview guide design, collaboratively analyzing a large Twitter dataset using qualitative data analysis software, conducting semi-structured interviews, and developing manuscripts for academic conferences and journals.

**Research Team Member, Emerging Leaders in Science & Society Forum, Spring-Fall 2015**

*Purdue University, Lafayette IN*

- In this role, I co-developed and executed evaluation measures for a local stakeholder forum around health communication for epidemic preparedness scheduled for Fall 2015; provided consultation on the design of the forum; and contributed to planning a Spring 2015 panel discussion on interdisciplinary research.

**Research Team Member, Dr. Susan Avanzino, Spring 2013**

*California State University, Chico, CA*

- In this role, I assisted with patient-centered focus group facilitation for Enloe Medical Center.

**Research Team Member, Dr. Alan Mikkelson, Spring 2009**

*Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*

- In this role, I assisted with survey data collection and analysis on the communication of affection in cross-sex friendships (Funded by a McDonald’s Opportunity Scholars grant).

**TEACHING APPOINTMENTS**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2015-May 2016**

*Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN*

- Introduction to Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS 280): This course exposes students to a range of topics, theories, and methods central to the study of women, gender, and sexuality from both social science and humanities perspectives. As the primary instructor, I developed the syllabus, schedule, lectures, activities, assignments, and exams. *(Fall 2015, 1 section; Spring 2016, 2 sections)*

**Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2013-May 2015**

*Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN*

- Introduction to Organizational Communication (COM 324): This course offers an introduction to approaches to organizing, perspectives on and critiques of organizations, and special topics in organizational communication. As the primary instructor, I developed lectures, activities, and exams, and collaborated with a team of instructors on the development
Communicating in the Global Workplace (COM 224): This course explores communication issues that arise in today’s global workplace. The course develops an appreciation of the relationships among communication, culture, and ways of organizing and doing business. As the primary instructor, I developed the syllabus, schedule, lectures, activities, assignments, and exams. (Fall 2014, 1 section)

Fundamentals of Speech Communication (COM 114): This course offers an introduction to both individual and small group presentational speaking. I was responsible for facilitating classroom activities and discussions, grading both written and oral assignments, constructing course policies, and coordinating with course directors. (Fall 2013 and Summer 2014, 2 sections)

Graduate Teaching Associate, August 2011-May 2013
California State University, Chico, CA

Speech Communication Fundamentals (CMST 131): This course offered an introduction to individual public speaking. I was responsible for preparing and delivering lectures, facilitating classroom activities and discussions, grading both written and oral assignments, preparing students for the Rookie Speech and Debate Tournament and Great Debate, constructing the syllabus, and coordinating with the primary instructor. (3 sections per semester for 4 semesters)

SERVICE

Disciplinary Service

Reviewing

- Journal of Applied Communication Research (2 manuscripts, since 2015)
- Feminist and Women’s Studies Division, National Communication Association (3 manuscripts, since 2015)
- Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (11 manuscripts, since 2014)

Conference

- Member of the Outstanding Book Award review committee, Organization for the Study of Communication, Language & Gender (2017)
- Panel respondent, Intersections in Interventions, Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (2017)
- Graduate student representative, Feminist and Women’s Studies Division, National Communication Association (2015-2016)
- Panel chair, (Re)Thinking the Body, Organization for the Study of Communication, Language & Gender Conference (2016)
- Panel respondent, Solving Organizational Issues in Different Work Spaces, Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (2016)
- Panel chair, Young Women and Ethnographies, Feminist and Women’s Studies Division, National Communication Association (2015)
- Volunteer, Pre-Tenure Women’s Conference, Susan Bulkeley Butler Center, Purdue University (2015)
- Panel chair, Communication and Identity, Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (2015)
Volunteer organizer, Organizational Communication Mini-Conference (2014)
Technology support, Organizational Communication Mini-Conference (2014)
Panel respondent, Communicative Approaches to Organization, Education, and Society, Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (2014)
Marketing Committee Chair, Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (2014)

University Service

Committee Representation

Academic and Professional Development Committee for the Purdue Graduate Student Government
- Member (2015-2016)

Events Committee for Women’s Gender Sexuality Studies Program
- Member (2015-2016)

Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association
- President (Fall 2014-Spring 2015): As president, I led and took primary responsibility of the 11-member board charged with providing academic, social, and professional support for graduate students studying communication at Purdue. Activities of the board include providing “buddies” or mentors for incoming students, assisting with orientation and recruitment, hosting an annual conference, organizing professional development colloquia, developing and running fundraisers, organizing regular social events, representing graduate student interests on other committees and boards in and outside the school, maintaining a web and social media presence, and other activities as determined by the board. I convened and presided over all CGSA meetings, coordinated all activities of the board and the delegation of duties to other board members when necessary, met with the graduate director at least once per month, met with the head of the school at least once per semester, and ran elections during the spring semester, among other activities.
- Member, Professional Development Action Committee (Fall 2014-Spring 2015): This committee aimed to cultivate increased professional development opportunities for communication graduate students, including opportunities to present research, gain professional knowledge, and recognize students for their professional achievements, leading to the development of two new graduate student awards.
- PhD member-at-large (Fall 2013-Spring 2014): As member-at-large, I served as a liaison between incoming graduate students and the CGSA board.

Council of Graduate Students at CSU, Chico
- Department representative (Fall 2012-Spring 2013)

Other University Service

Formal graduate student mentor for 5 incoming PhD students and 2 incoming MA students in the Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University (Summer 2014-present)

Graduate student recruitment representative
- Graduate Student Welcome Weekend “Buddy” (Contact and informant for prospective incoming graduate students) (Spring 2014, Spring 2015, Spring 2016, Spring 2017)
- Graduate student representative to meet with prospective and admitted students during campus visits and by phone (Fall 2013-ongoing)
- Recruitment volunteer for the National Communication Association Graduate School Open House (Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016)
- Recruitment volunteer for the Brian Lamb School of Communication Undergraduate Open House (Fall 2014)
Graduate student representative for hiring processes

- Host for graduate student meeting with College of Liberal Arts dean candidate (Fall 2014)
- Graduate student representative for meals with three candidates for an assistant professor in health communication job search, Brian Lamb School of Communication (Spring 2016)
- Graduate student representative for meal with candidate for a College of Liberal Arts cluster hire for advanced quantitative methods (Spring 2016)

Volunteer for Next Generation Scholar event (Fall 2015)

- Reviewer for abstracts for graduate student poster session
- Volunteer for registration, poster session and tours for a group of rural high school students

Host for orientation Q&A session on the Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association (Fall 2014)

Volunteer for Brian Lamb School of Communication graduate student orientation events (Fall 2014)

- Discussion moderator for Chico Town Hall (Spring 2012-Spring 2013)
- Discussion moderator for the Chico Great Debate (Spring 2012-Spring 2013)
- Judge for the Chico Rookie Speech and Debate Tournament (Fall 2011-Spring 2013)
- Judge for the Chico Great Debate Preliminary Speech Competition (Fall 2012)
- Confederate for WeBuild, Inc. Needs Assessment Simulation, California State University, Chico (Spring 2012)

Invited Presentations

- Speaker and facilitator for “Organizing Online: Tactics to Mobilize for Change and Stay Safe” breakout session at the Purdue University Women in Leadership Institute (Spring 2017)
- Co-presenter and facilitator for “Working Across Differences: Lessons Learned from the Purdue Peace Project” at the Purdue University Boiler Share Symposium for staff professional development (Spring 2017)
- Guest speaker on the Purdue Peace Project for Foundations of Human Communication Inquiry II (COM 601) at Purdue (Spring 2017)
- Panelist on graduate programs for the Brian Lamb School of Communication Advisory Board meeting (Fall 2016)
- Panelist for “Faculty of the Future: Voices from the Next Generation” at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges & Universities in Washington, D.C. (Spring 2016)
- Panelist for “You are not a ‘Real’ Feminist!: Feminism in/and Popular Culture,” sponsored by the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program at Purdue University (Spring 2016)
- Presenter and panelist for “Research at Purdue” forum as part of the Brian Lamb School of Communication Graduate Student Welcome Weekend (Spring 2014, Spring 2015, Spring 2016)
- Panelist for annual report and CV workshop sponsored by the Communication Graduate Student Association (Spring 2016)
- Panelist for “The Purdue Peace Project: A Local Leadership Approach to Political Violence Prevention in West Africa and Central America,” at the Purdue University Communication Graduate Student Conference (Spring 2016)
- Co-presenter on the Purdue Peace Project and Brian Lamb School of Communication for Next Generation Scholars tour at Purdue University (Fall 2015)
- Guest speaker on socio-relational context and the Purdue Peace Project for Intercultural Communication (COM 303) at Purdue University (Fall 2015)
- Closing remarks for the Purdue Communication Graduate Student Association Conference (Spring 2015)
- Guest speaker on online harassment for Negotiation in Everyday Life (COM 496) at Purdue (Spring 2015)
Co-presenter for “Professional Development & Graduate School Survival Tips” with Dr. Melanie Morgan for the Brian Lamb School of Communication graduate student orientation (Fall 2014)

Guest speaker on women and voice for Organizational Leadership and Decision Making (CMST 472) at CSU, Chico (Spring 2013)

Guest speaker on “The Gender Report: A Closer Look at Gender and Online News” for Communication Criticism (CDES 303) at CSU, Chico (Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2013)

Guest speaker on feminist theory and technology for Seminar in Communication Studies (CMST 601) at CSU, Chico (Fall 2012)

Guest speaker on visual aids in public speaking for Speech Communication Fundamentals (live lecture portion, CMST 131) at CSU, Chico (Spring 2013)

Co-presenter of public speaking workshop for graduate students at CSU, Chico (November 2012)

Co-presenter of a public speaking workshop for the CSU, Chico, Anthropology Department (October 2012)

Panelist for “Earning a Master’s Degree in Communication Studies: How to Decide, Apply and Be Successful” at CSU, Chico (Fall 2012)

JOURNALISM WORK EXPERIENCE

Managing editor of the Bigfork Eagle and West Shore News newspapers, Hagadone Corp., Bigfork, MT (September 2009-May 2011)

Managing editor and reporter at the Post Community Newspapers, Post Co., Eastern Idaho (May 2009-September 2009)


Online editor, editor in chief, and layout/graphics editor at The Whitworthian, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA (September 2005-May 2009)

MEMBERSHIPS

International Communication Association

National Communication Association

National Women’s Studies Association

Organization for Research on Women and Communication

Organization for the Study of Communication, Language & Gender

REFERENCES

Dr. Stacey L. Connaughton
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765-494-9107
Dr. Patrice M. Buzzanell  
_Distinguished Professor, Brian Lamb School of Communication,  
Chair and Director, Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence  
Purdue University  
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Dr. Cheryl Cooky  
_Associate Professor, American Studies Department  
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