

DISMANTLING

DOMINANT  
NARRATIVES  
THROUGH  
ART

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# Discussion

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## **Dominant Narratives**

Historical Vignette of Gender Diversity

Gender Binary

Social Constructivism

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## **Counter Narratives**

Arts Based Methods

Ethnographic Study

Artivism = Art+Activism

# DEFINITION OF THE DAY

## Dominant Narrative




Describes the lens in which history is told and society is understood by the perspective of the dominate culture (white, cis-gendered male, able-bodies, heterosexual, Christian, English-speaking, class privilege) and taught to us as ultimate truths.



- ▶ Dominant narratives are the stories told by dominant cultures, which construct a particular type of reality and historical perspective.



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- ▶ Dominant narratives claim to represent all people
  - ▶ Marginalized peoples, specifically, often feel as though their experiences are not represented by the dominant narrative,
  - ▶ Instead rely on personal stories as a way of challenging these dominant cultural narratives

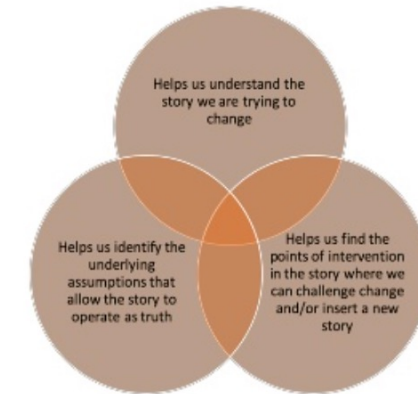


Narratives are created by

- ▶ Community
- ▶ Family
- ▶ Religion
- ▶ Government
- ▶ Institutions

Resulting in Social Norms

## Narrative Power Analysis



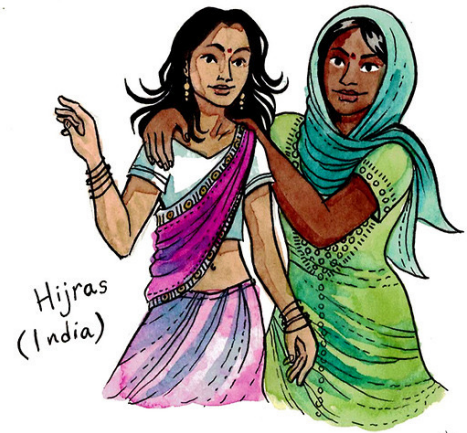
**“A narrative analysis of power encourages us to ask: Which stories define cultural norms? Where did these stories come from? Whose stories were ignored or erased to create these norms? And, most urgently, what new stories can we tell to help create the world we desire?”**

***-Center for Story-Based Strategy***



GENDERS BEYOND THE  
BINARY HAVE  
ALWAYS EXISTED



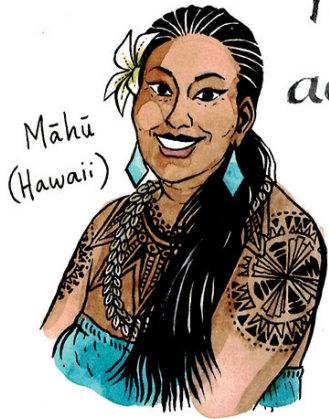


Hijras  
(India)



Hamana  
(New Mexico,  
USA)

respect gender  
across cultures



Māhū  
(Hawaii)



Bissu  
(Indonesia)



Fa'afafine  
(Samoa)

Noah Fignu



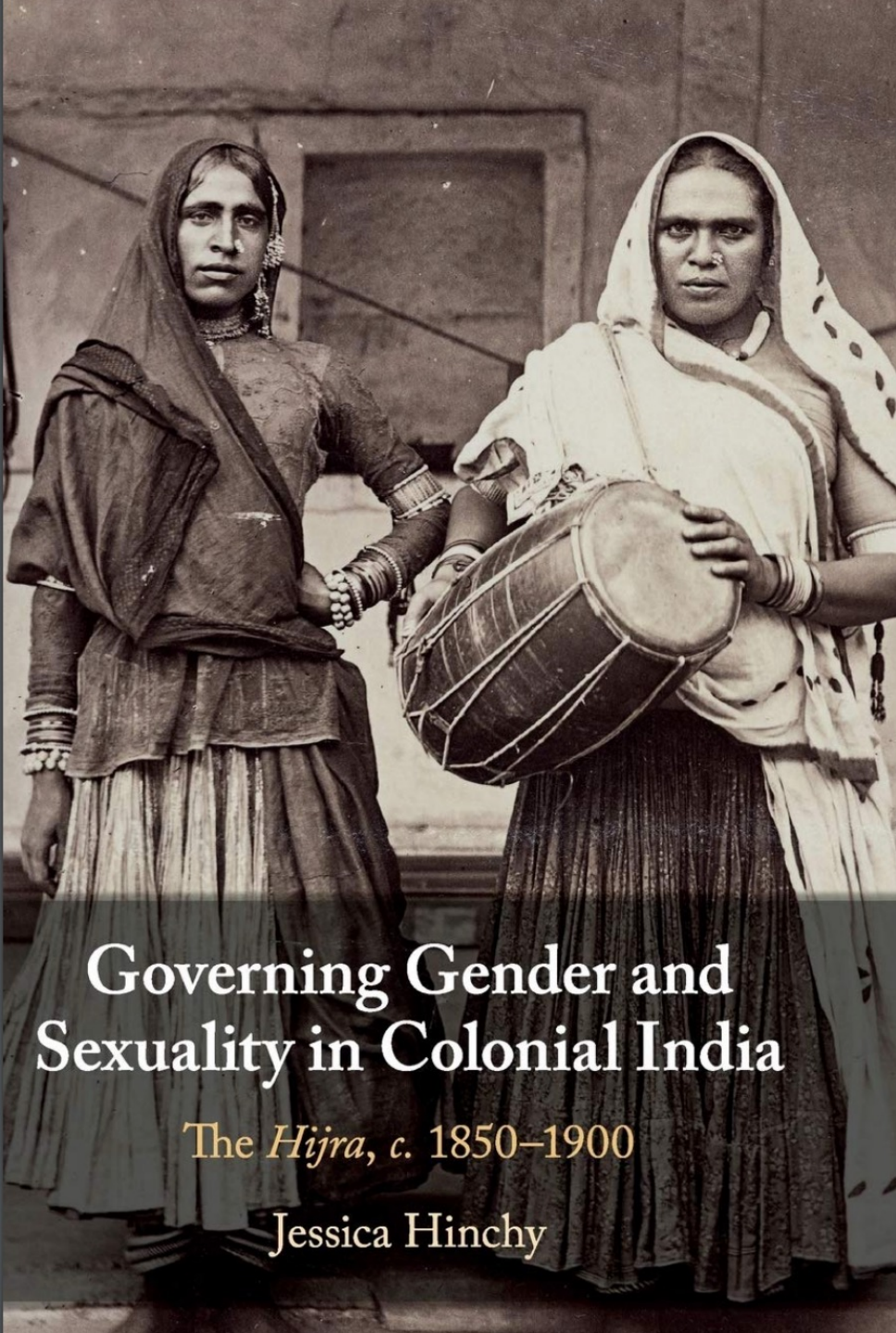
# Hijra's of India

In 1865, the British rulers of north India resolved to bring about the gradual 'extinction' of Hijras.

A Hijra was the victim of the crime under trial –

the judges criminalized Hijras as cross-dressers, 'beggars' and 'unnatural prostitutes

the perpetrator was not convicted



**Governing Gender and  
Sexuality in Colonial India**

*The Hijra, c. 1850–1900*

Jessica Hinchy



# British Assumptions

- ▶ The Hijra community appeared to the British to be beyond the binary gender categories of male and female
- ▶ In 1871, the colonial government passed a law that criminalized Hijras, with the explicit aim of causing Hijras' 'extermination'.

# Panic Narratives

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Hijras were accused of kidnapping, enslaving, and castrating children. Like other 'moral panics', the colonial concern with Hijras involved a preoccupation with, and exaggeration of, the threat that 'deviant' behaviors and people were thought to pose to the social and political order.

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While moral panics have been noted in diverse historical contexts, panic was at the center of how European colonial regimes operated (Hinchy, 2019)



## Place in Society Pre-colonization

- ▶ Ancient Indian myths bestow hijras with special powers to be able to **bless people with luck and fertility**. They are believed to hold the **power to bring riches** and rain (Conner, Sparks, & Sparks, 1997).
- ▶ The history of **hijras** dates back thousands of years, where a third sex is **first mentioned**—and they **are celebrated**—in ancient Hindu texts such as the “Mahabharata” and the “Kama Sutra.



# Mahu of Hawaii

- ▶ Throughout Hawaiian history, “mahu” appear as individuals who identify their gender between male and female.
- ▶ Beyond the Binary,” is explained: “A mahu is an individual that straddles somewhere in the middle of the male and female binary



MANA  
THE HAWAIIAN MAGAZINE

THE MEANING OF  
MĀHŪ





HINA EXPLORES THE ROLE OF MAHU IN HAWAIIAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE LENS OF A NATIVE HAWAIIAN

SHE IS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE TRADITIONS OF HER ANCESTORS AND COMMITTED TO LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.

# Culture Genocide

Hina explains, the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 1800s imposed Western values on the Hawaiian community.

Banning cultural expressions that celebrated diverse sexual and gender norms and traditions- which they believed to be profane

The suppression of traditional Hawaiian values and practices marked a turning point in Hawai'i's history, one in which mahu began a struggle to find acceptance.



# Pre-colonization

- ▶ Māhū were particularly respected as teachers, usually of hula dance and chant
- ▶ Māhū were also valued as the keepers of cultural traditions, such as the passing down of genealogies. Traditionally parents would ask māhū to name their children
- ▶ According to the pre-colonial history of Hawai'i, māhū were notable priests and healers.

# Two Spirited

The term “Two Spirit” comes from the idea that everyone has both a male and female spirit within their body,

and a person’s identity comes not from their physical form, but from whichever of the two spirits is more dominant within them.







# Native Americans

Europeans forced their religion, culture, and other aspects of life on the indigenous people of North America,

in an attempt to 'civilize' them, and one of those aspects of belief was gender expression.

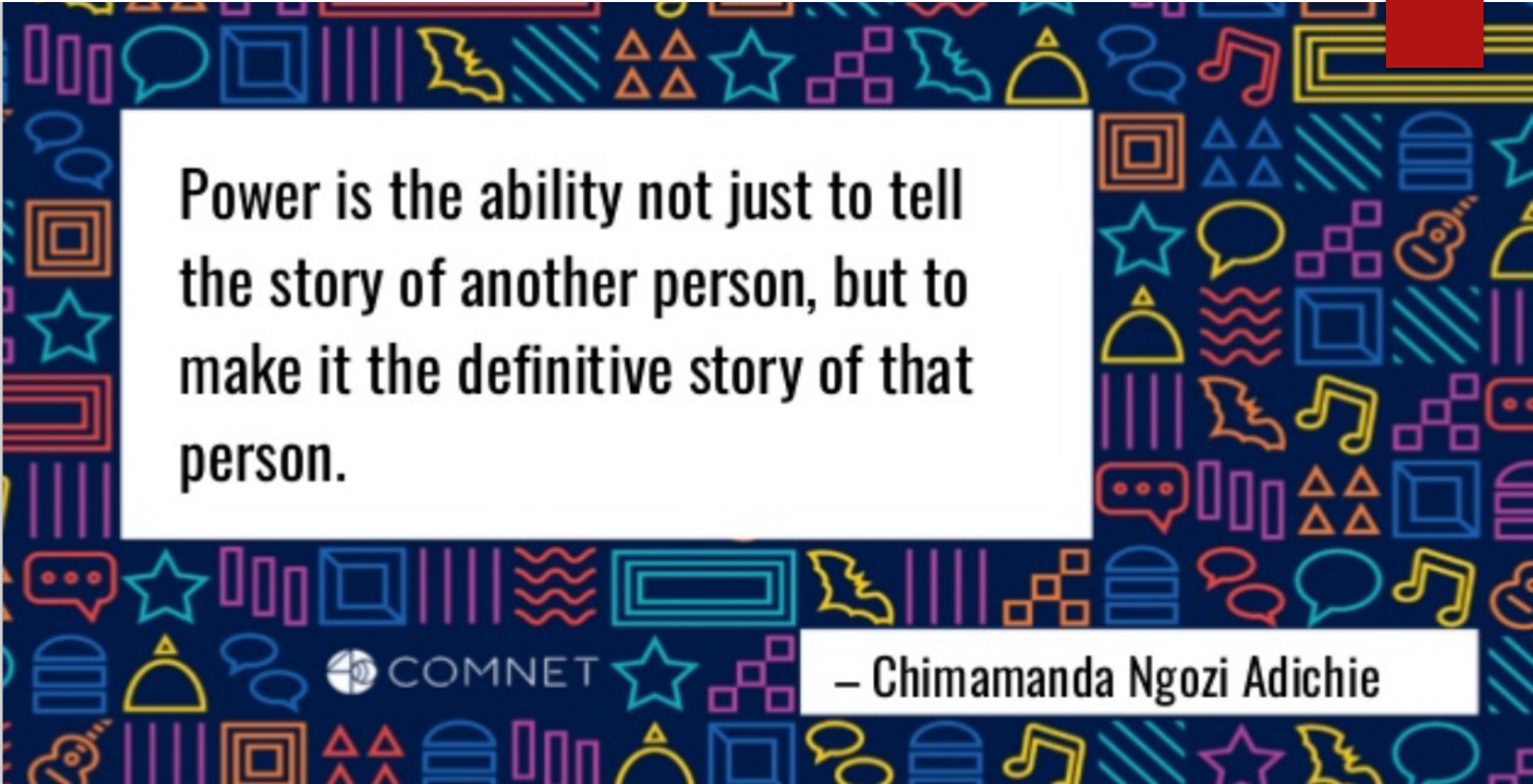
# What Assumptions Are Being Made?

Not natural – immoral- sinners – less than human



## **Social construction theory:**

- suggests that what we see as “real” is the result of human interaction.
- Socialization: the process of social interaction by which people learn the way of life of their society and where they learn their specific roles in that society.



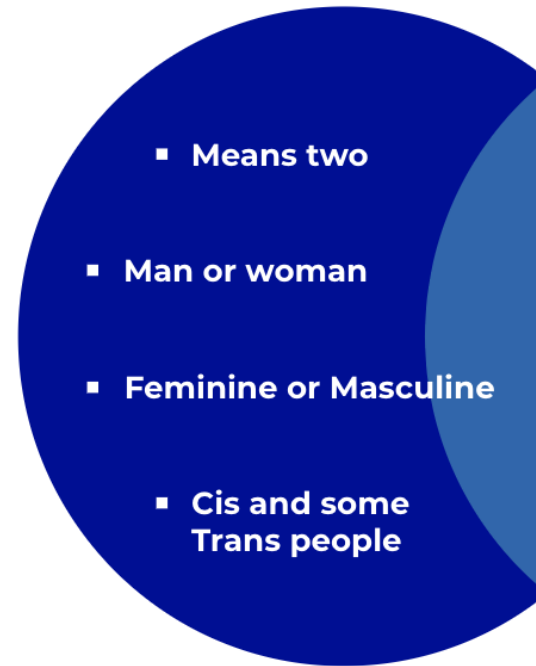
Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



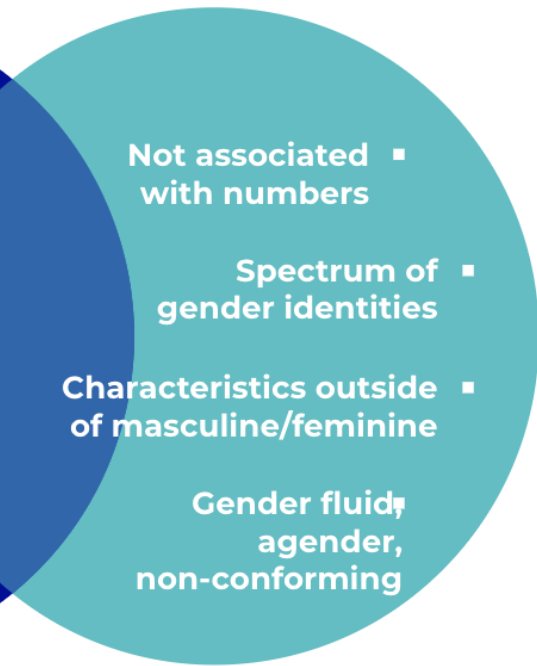
# The Binary Narrative

**Binary**

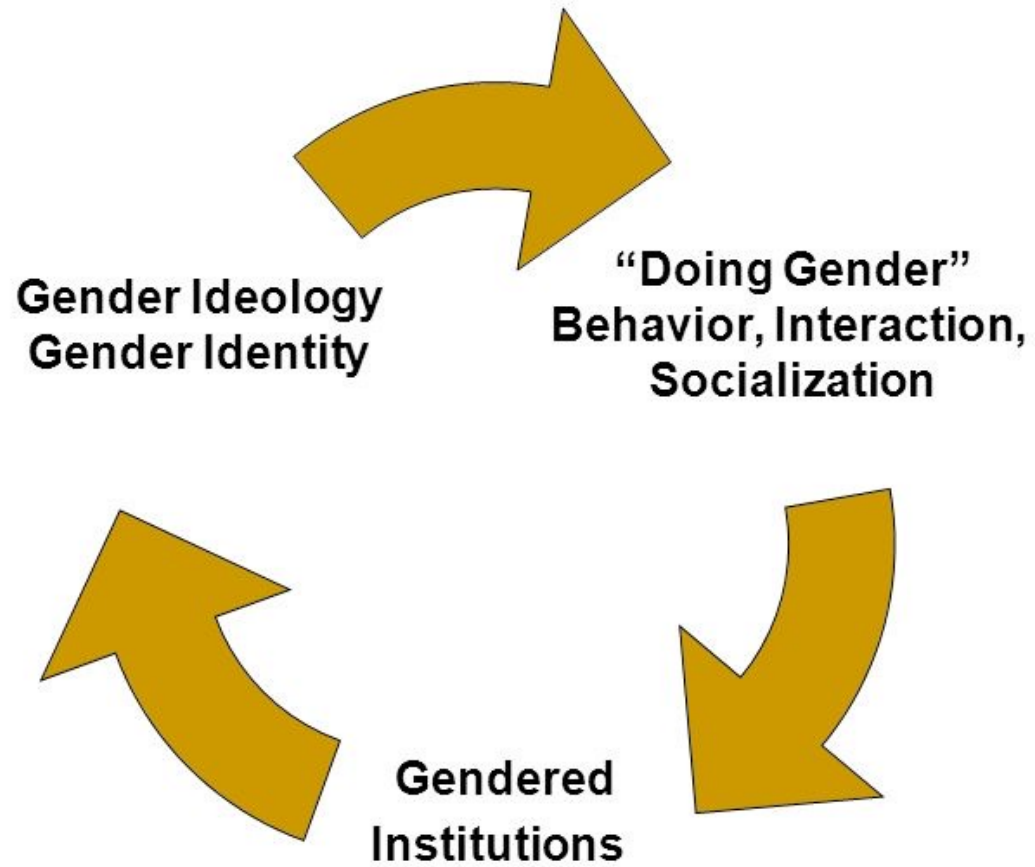


Not associated with numbers

**Non-binary**



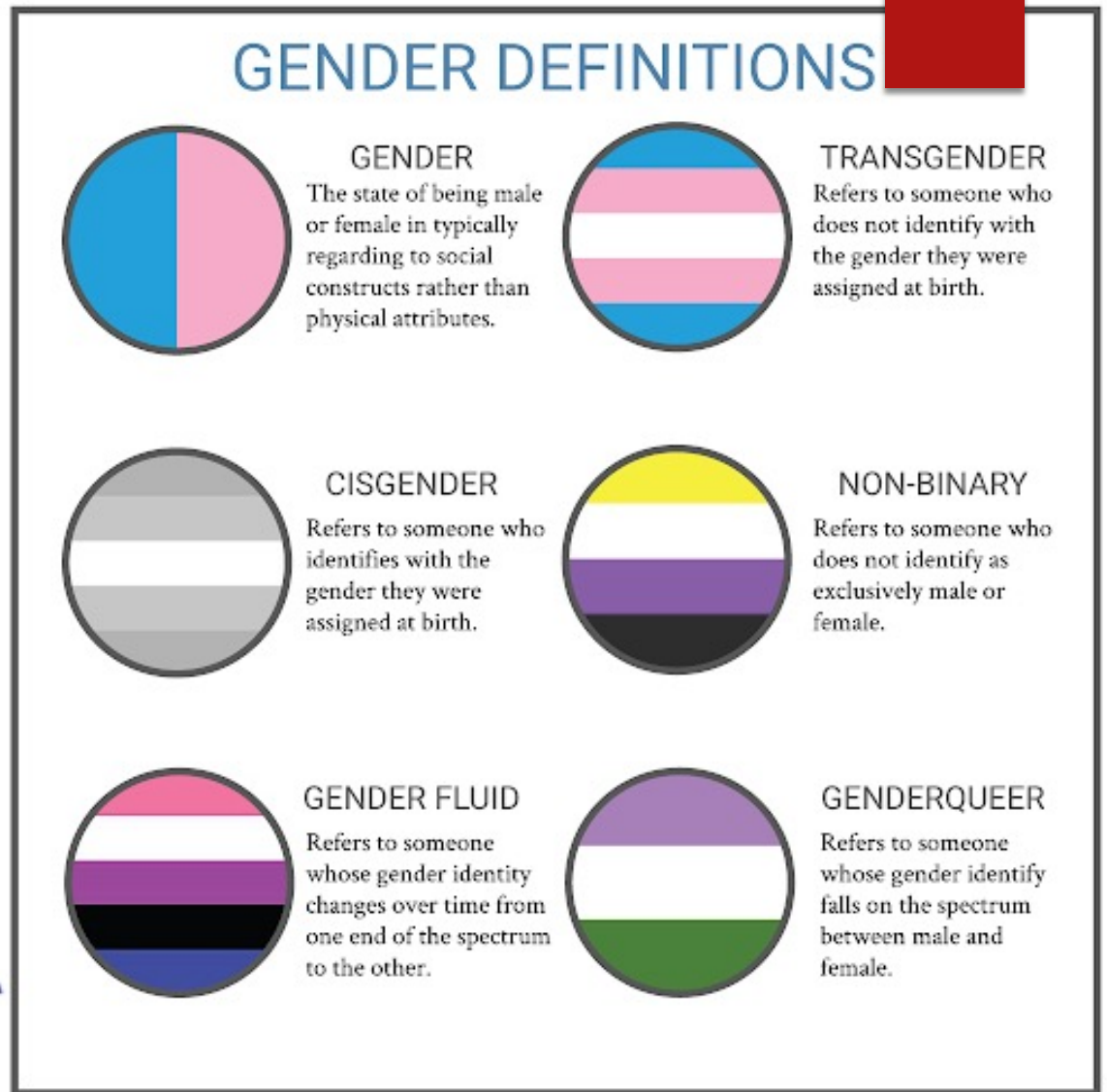
# Gendered Society

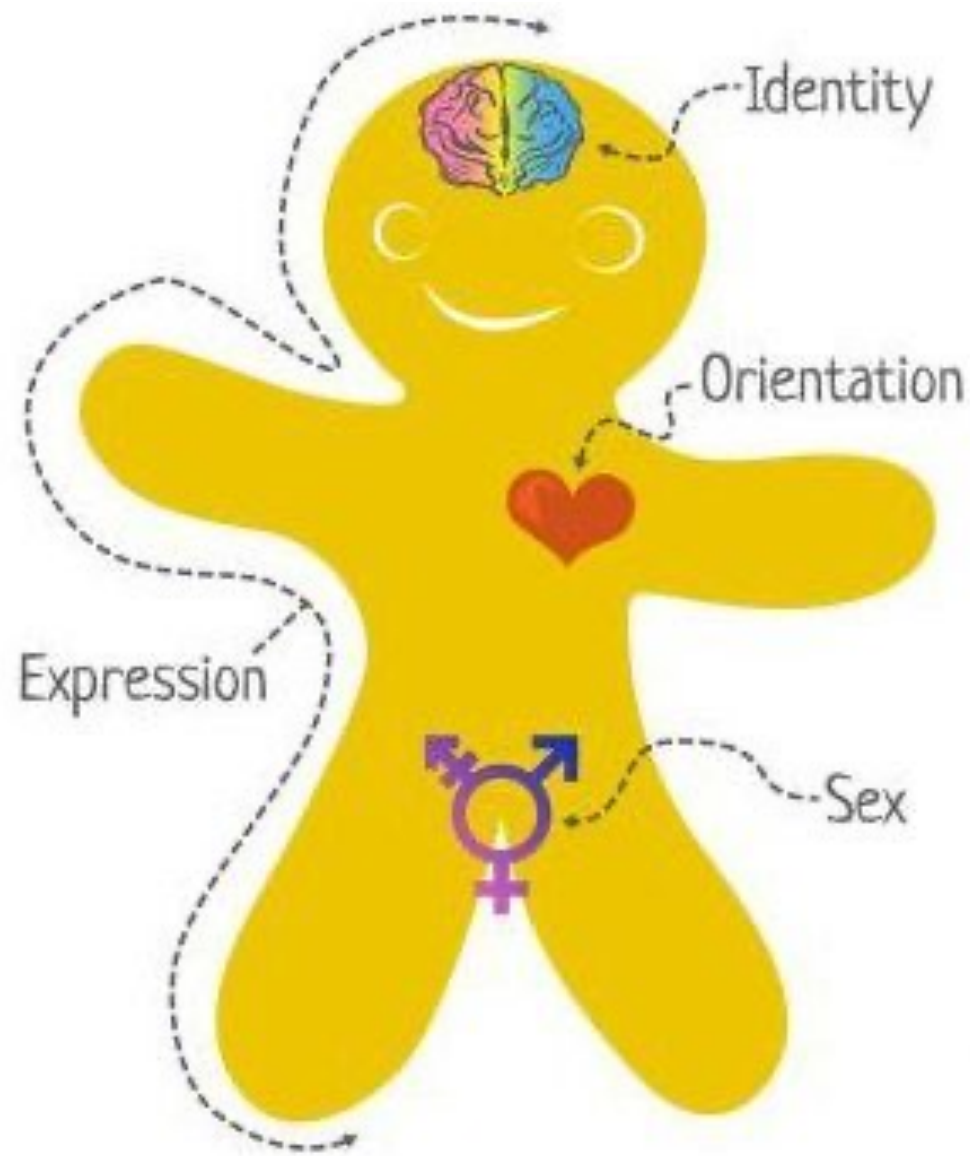




# Privilege through the looking glass

- ▶ How do you define and express your gender identity?
- ▶ What types of gender stereotypes do you encounter in your country?
- ▶ How do you perceive masculinity? Femininity? How do these perceptions inform your gender?
- ▶ Do these perceptions inform the assumption you make of others' genders? (Leavy, 2017)





### Gender Identity

Woman Genderqueer Man

Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.

### Gender Expression

Feminine Androgynous Masculine

Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.

### Biological Sex

Female Intersex Male

Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes, male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; Intersex = a combination of the two.

### Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual Bisexual Homosexual

Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.





## WHY NARRATIVE CHANGE?

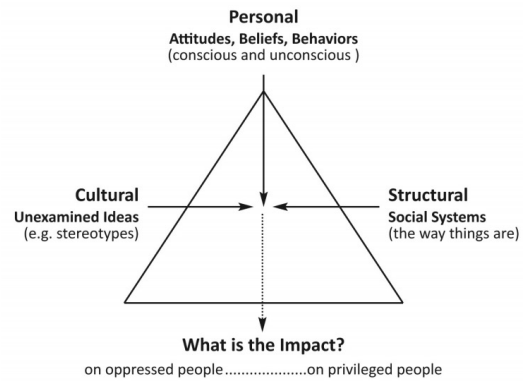
- Dominant and available narratives of LGBTQIA+ experience are usually determined by the most populous and powerful subgroup, lesbians and gays. Because many transgender experience narratives do not conform to the available narrative, they become untellable.
- When studying narratives of transgender experience, it is also important to consider tellability and available narrative (Brown, 2018)

## Social Construct

- A social construction is something that doesn't exist independently in the "natural" world, but is instead an invention of society.
- Cultural practices and norms give rise to the existence of social constructs and govern the practices, customs, and rules concerning the way we use/view/understand them.
- In other words, we all act as if they exist, and because of our intersubjective agreement, they do

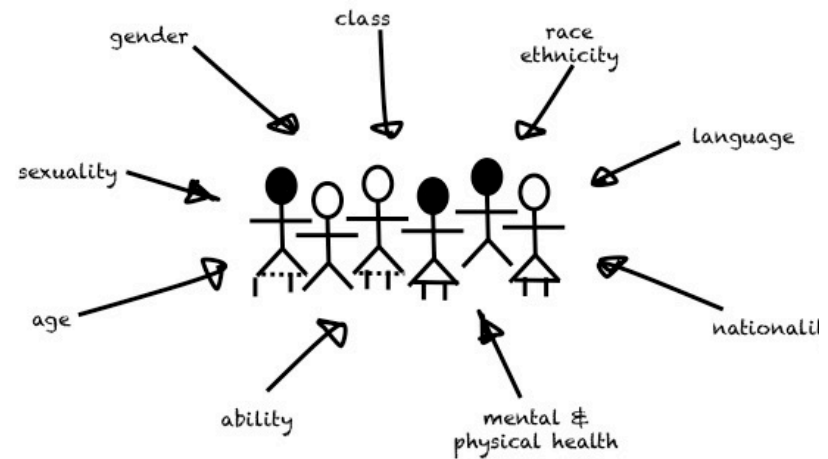


The Triangle of Oppression:



Use the Triangle of Oppression to analyze social injustice so that you can make a more informed choice about what to do about it. In social justice, we are all part of the problem and we are all part of the solution - by committing to the life-long process of becoming effective allies.

## INTERSECTIONALITY



# Coming Out Narratives

- ▶ Coming out is encouraged by many LGBTQIA+ political organizations, who began to emphasize the importance of queer visibility in the late 1960s as a strategy of the Gay Liberation Movement. The Gay Liberation Movement was heavily influenced by Second-Wave Feminism's idea that "the personal is political," and members of the LGBTQIA+ community were encouraged to come out to counter homophobia and dismantle harmful stereotypes



LGBTQIA+ individuals have frequently argued that one problem with the dominant narrative about coming out is that it portrays coming out as something that an individual must only do one time.

Parents  
Family  
Friends  
Society  
New

# Coming Out vs Transitioning

- ▶ Transgender people often feel as though the dominant narrative does not accurately represent their experiences.
- ▶ For them, coming out is generally more difficult, dangerous, and prolonged than the coming out experiences of most cisgender individuals with non-hegemonic sexualities.



# Coming Out Gay

- ▶ So I knew—it kind of struck me in fifth grade, like I've always known that I liked girls and such. But like I guess I just put it off until fifth grade, when it actually just hit me [ . . . ] My mom and I usually sit under the stars, and we'll just stare up at them. So one day, we were just sitting there, and I was like “mom, I think I'm gay. I think I'm bisexual.” And she just goes “I know.” And I'm like “What?” And she goes “I've already known this. I'm your mother, I know this.” And I was like “Oh. I would've appreciated if you would've told me this sooner and let me know.” And she goes, “Congratulations, that's nice.” And that was it . . . my mom pretty accepting . . . so that was it (Interview, October 11, 2016).

# Coming Out Transgender

- ▶ Alright, well, a few weeks ago, I came out to my mother through a letter. I called her and told her there was a letter hidden in the bottom drawer—in my room. . . about an hour later, she calls me back. And it's obvious she's been crying. And she's very angry. And she tells me not to tell anyone else in my family, that it would break their hearts like it broke hers, that she feels like she's lost a part of her soul. And, basically, she calls me mentally ill. She says that I shouldn't lie like that, that I'm just making it up. She doesn't believe I felt that way since third grade, as I described in the letter . . . So it's kind of been an ongoing process. She wants me to get therapy and stuff to try to figure out what's wrong with me. So, that's my story (Interview, August 18, 2017).



# Counter Narratives

One way in which members of marginalized communities attempt to dismantle dominant narratives is through the use of personal stories – of counternarratives.

Art has proven to be effective in sharing marginalized peoples voices and lived experiences





# Method Meets Art

Arts-Based Research Practice

**T H I R D E D I T I O N**



Patricia Leavy

## Participatory Arts Based Methods

Use art to share stories and empower communities. Part of my research examines Photovoice and asks if projects have been successful in empowering vulnerable communities

And critiques ways photovoice has "~~given~~ elevated voice" to marginalized communities (or not), as well as identifying ethical issues raised by scholars.



# What is Photovoice

Photovoice is an interdisciplinary method with theoretical frames rooted in feminist theory, critical consciousness, and documentary photography.



PERGAMON

Social Science and Medicine 52 (2001) 279–292

www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed

SOCIAL  
SCIENCE  
&  
MEDICINE

## Capacity building to improve women's health in rural China

Virginia C. Li<sup>a,\*</sup>, Wang Shaoxian<sup>b</sup>, Wu Kunyi<sup>c</sup>, Zhang Wentao<sup>d</sup>, Opal Buchthal<sup>a</sup>,  
Glenn C. Wong<sup>e</sup>, Mary Ann Burris<sup>f</sup>

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<sup>d</sup>Yunnan Province Bureau of Public Health, People's Republic of China

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<sup>f</sup>Ford Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya

### Abstract

The Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program (WRDHP) is an ambitious attempt to operationalize two important tenets of health development thinking within a rural reproductive health context. First, it is important for communities to participate in decisions about the services and programs that affect them. Secondly, the complex nature of healthcare is best addressed by intervention processes which call for a multi-functional approach to planning and coordination. In both planning and intervention approach, the WRDHP recognizes the social, cultural and economic realities that affect women's efforts to secure the health and well-being of themselves and their families.

The focus of the WRDHP is on capacity-building within a rural reproductive health environment, in this case Yunnan Province in rural China. Rather than using international donor funding to provide a specific intervention, the WRDHP used Ford Foundation funding as a lever to encourage community investment in environmental resources that affect health, to improve the technical skills of individuals within the existing health bureaucracies, and to promote structural changes within existing health and development bureaucracies to support interagency collaboration and community empowerment within the region's health and development agencies. This article describes how the WRDHP created new methods for provincial and local agencies to overcome obstacles and work with one another to improve women's health. It also describes the processes used in the rural areas of Chengjiang and Luliang counties to assess local conditions and needs, and the supported and expanded local efforts in improving woman's reproductive and family health that resulted from the processes. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Capacity-building; Community development; Women's health; Rural health; China

### Introduction

Interest is growing in international program designs that address health within the social and economic context of people's lives. At the same time, there is a need for programs that can be integrated into the client country's own health system, and that enhance the

capacity of the local system to better serve their own people. The hope is that such programs can become fully institutionalized and self-sustaining by the end of donor funding.

Developing programs that address these issues requires a new emphasis on collaboration and flexibility in program design. Local agencies must be involved in the design process to the point where they feel that the program's goals are their goals, and significant efforts must be made to incorporate the program's resources (funds, material, and personnel training) into the local health system. This approach requires that as much

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E-mail address: vcl@ucla.edu (V.C. Li).





# What is participatory Photography?

Collaborative  
process  
between  
facilitator  
and  
community

Learning about  
the issues  
and helping  
develop solutions  
to the  
community

UNDERSTANDING  
OTHERS' STORIES  
THROUGH THEIR  
OWN PERSPECTIVES  
(AND VOICES)

NARRATIVE  
OWNERSHIP

Inclusive

PARTICIPANT  
OWNERSHIP

EXPLORING  
FORMS OF COMMUNITY  
PARTICIPATION

A level of  
communication to  
enable unheard  
voices, or  
marginalized voices  
to be heard  
(and shared)

Level of platform  
(can you help?)  
= photo  
Quality?

CO-RESEARCH  
(PARTICIPATORY)

TOOLS TO  
TELL STORIES  
FROM OWN  
PERSPECTIVE

EMPOWER-  
MENT

Co-creation of  
knowledge

Underrepresented?

Photovoice utilized photography (and sometimes videography) to facilitate dialogue with communities.

The aim is to amplify the voices and lived experiences of marginalized communities



# Photovoice has three main goals:

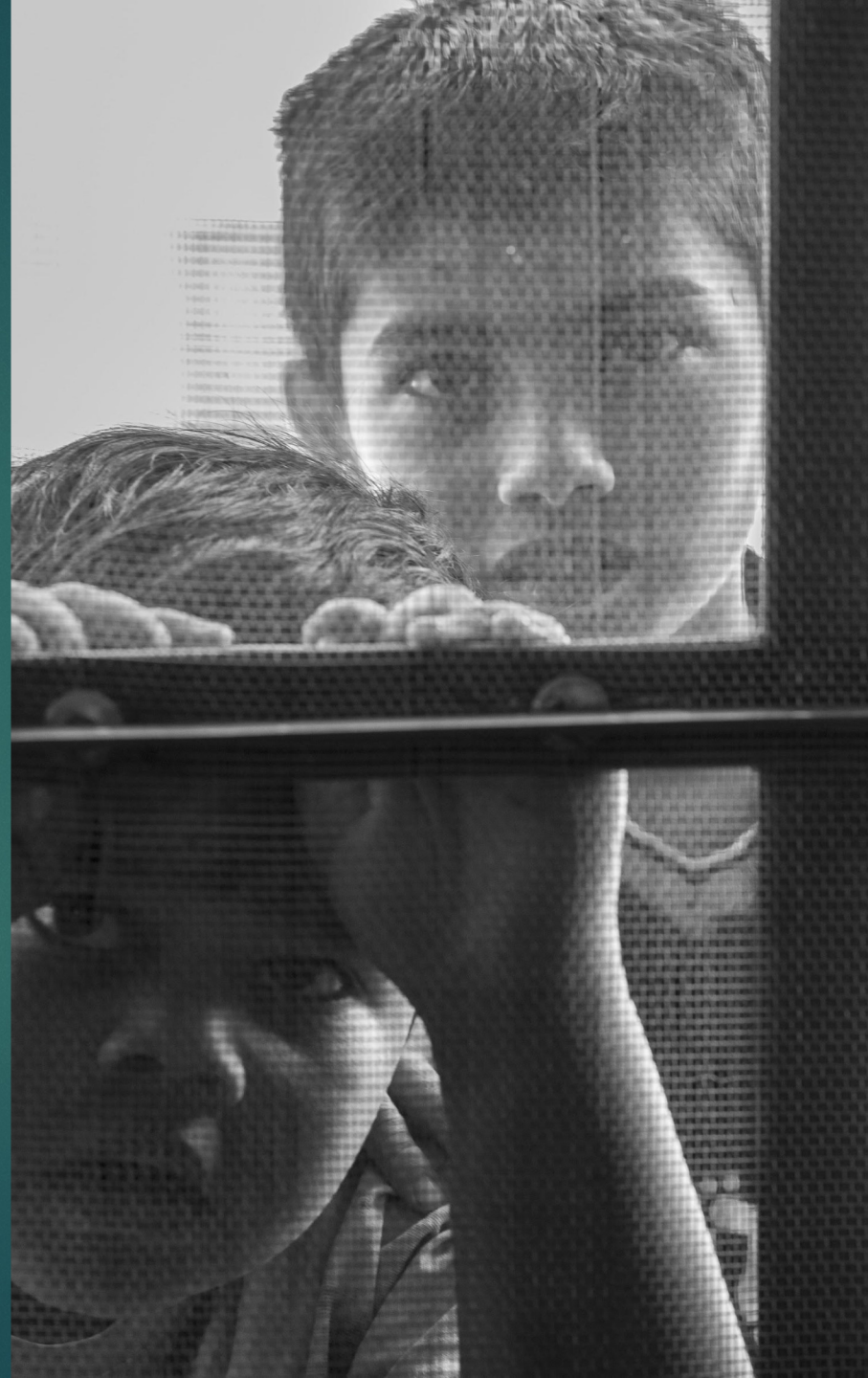
1. to enable people to record and reflect their concerns, as well as those of their community
2. to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues of equality and social justice through large and small group discussion of photographs and narratives
3. to influence change- and reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997).







*"Photovoice can create an opportunity for society's most vulnerable members to speak from their own experience and can change the quality of discussion among themselves and those who advocate their well-being" ~ Wang*





# How is Photovoice Empowering

Photovoice can help people, whose needs are often ignored, gain control of their story, i.e. counter narratives.

Individuals gain the confidence and skills to tell their own stories directly to the people who can make a difference.





# Transgender Ally

- ▶ The 2016 presidential election was a pivotal time for trans people across the country. During the election, there was an increase in anti-LGBT rhetoric
- ▶ Donald Trump's proposed transgender military ban, along with a reversal policy on the ability of transgender students to access school bathrooms,.







September 18, 2017

Dear Kalki

I am a doctoral student interested in doing my doctoral research on the hijras. I hope to highlight the intersections of other cultures that celebrate gender diversity.

I greatly appreciate this opportunity and look forward to supporting and highlighting your work as an activist and social change agent.

Warm regards,



# Artist

A person who uses art to address political and social oppression







# Art show Shut Up

A hundred transgender people from across the country tell their stories of pain through art at "Shut Up" a show by transgender activist Kalki Subramaniam







MAY 17

INTERNATIONAL  
DAY AGAINST  
HOMOPHOBIA  
TRANSPHOBIA  
AND BIPHOBIA

# READING FROM THE REDWALL PROJECT

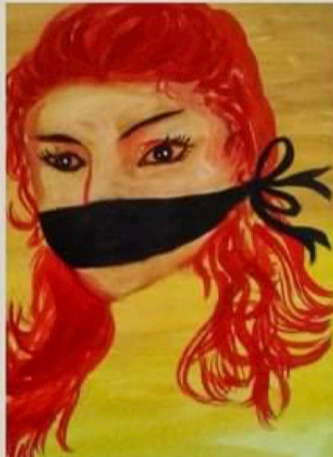
17.05.20 at 10:00AM

Instagram Live!

@Kalkionline

**Read by:**

**Kalki Subramanim**



Breaking down Siamization and  
challenging the narratives  
biases  
unconscious  
Social Construct  
New narrative

Humanizing  
Question where did this narrative start  
and who does it benefit and harm

Decolonizing

Who's story and who should tell it  
Art breaks down the class gender  
educational barriers



“I’m on a mission to empower India’s Transgender community, one painted palm at a time”

► <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/kalki-subramaniam-opinion/index.html>











Additional text on a poster in the top left corner, partially obscured.

Additional text on a poster in the top center, partially obscured.

**SHUT UP!**  
The Transgender Model Act  
Additional text on a poster in the middle center.



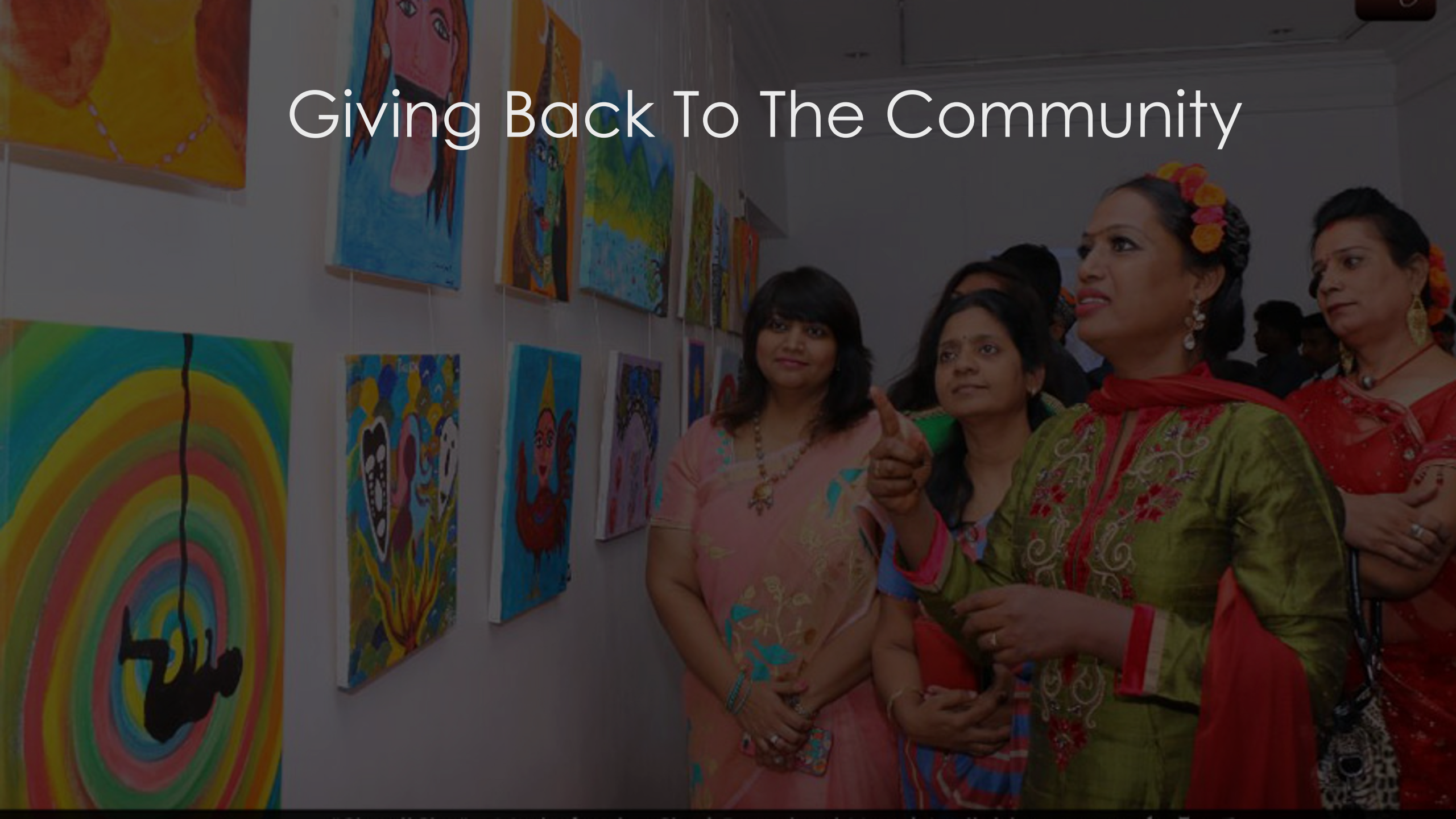




# Walls of Kindness



# Giving Back To The Community





## Dismantling Dominant Narratives of Transgender People through Art

Poetry ~Performance ~Paintings ~Exhibits

When the dominant culture is introduced to individual stories - biases can be dissolved allowing them to see transgender people as part of their community – as individual who deserve respect and dignity -to be who they are without judgment or ridicule.

Transgender people are creative and gifted, having the ability to embody both masculine and feminine energies.





# WE ARE NOT THE OTHERS

TRANS ART & STORIES CURATED BY  
**KALKI SUBRAMANIAM**

# NOT THE OTHERS



TRANS ART & STORIES CURATED BY  
**KALKI SUBRAMANIAM**





# TAMP

Arts

TRANSFORMATIVE

Project

[www.transformativearts.org](http://www.transformativearts.org)

Transformative Arts Project is a nonprofit created to provide empowering art-based programs that amplify the voices of vulnerable communities.

- Partnering with other programs
- Serving marginalized communities





# Thank you!

*Feel Free to contact me if you have any questions or to learn more about photovoice or how to utilize arts based methods*

*Photovoiceempowerment.com*

*Email: [laurasbsherwood@gmail](mailto:laurasbsherwood@gmail.com)*

*Website: [transformativeartsproject.org](http://transformativeartsproject.org)*