Why Art Matters

Dismantling Dominant Narratives through Art and Digital Feminist Activism

Laura Sherwood, Final Oral Review

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Committee Acknowledgments
Esteemed Scholar Practitioners

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Thank you for being here today and sharing this journey!

My research investigates the Intersections between Art and Activism

❑ 15 min PPT Presentation

❑ Dissertation Documentary 25 min edited version of the data analysis and findings presented in a digital documentary format

❑ Committee Feedback

❑ Community Feedback

Overview of the study

• Research Questions

• Background

• Conceptual Framework

• Participants

• Significance

• Literature

• Methods

• Data Collection

• Data Analysis
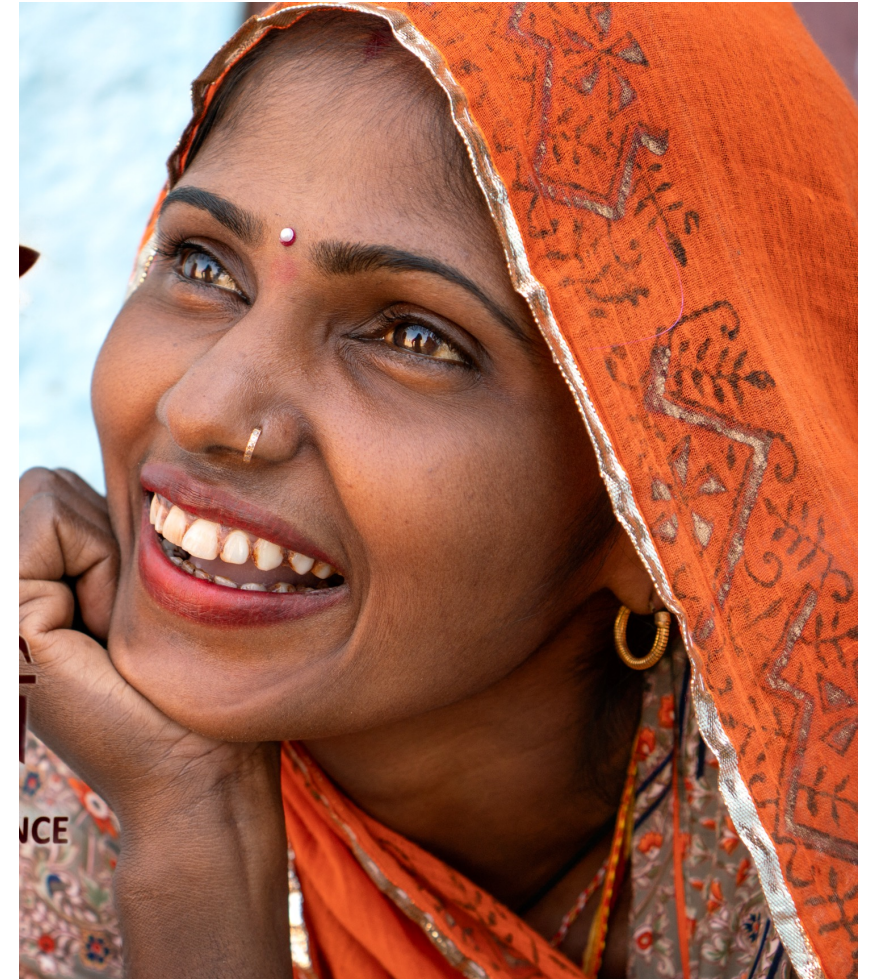
• Findings

• Conclusion

• 25 Minute video

Introduction

*Data presented today is an outline of key elements of the study

Research Question

RQ1. How are female Activists using visual art and social media to address gender inequality in rural India?

RQ2. How can arts-based methods address critical social issues in both community and scholarship activism?

Background

This study examines the intersections between art and activism through the lived experience of two female activist using visual art and feminist digital activism to address gender and social inequality in India.

The purpose of this study is to understand how female activist are raising consciousness on critical social issues and elevating the voices of marginalized communities through art.

To understand this phenomenon, I spent four years observing and engaging with each activists to understand how they utilize visual art and social media as a method to amplify the voices and lived experiences of two of India's most vulnerable communities.

Cultural Context of Communities

This study focuses on two female activists who are working with communities that experience systemic and cultural oppression because of intersecting identities of gender, caste, class, social economic status, and sexual orientation

Gender inequality in India is influenced by multiple systemic issues perpetuated by the caste system, classism, cultural norms, and gender stratification (Bhattacharyya & Basu, 2018).

Women from the Dalit caste and Hijra/Transgender communities experience the highest rates of gender inequality in India (Nanda, 1998; Arya & Rathore, 2019).

Gender stratification in India is a critical issue that makes it difficult for marginalized communities to elevate their status in society…

Oppressive social constructs are deeply embedded in culture, history, religion, and politics… Minimal access to resources and support (Goel & Husain, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted in the ideology of research through praxis and implements elements of feminist theory which recognizes induvials are experts of their own lives, the researcher is an outsider observing and learning from their lived experience.

Invites participants to be partners and co-creators of knowledge throughout the research process
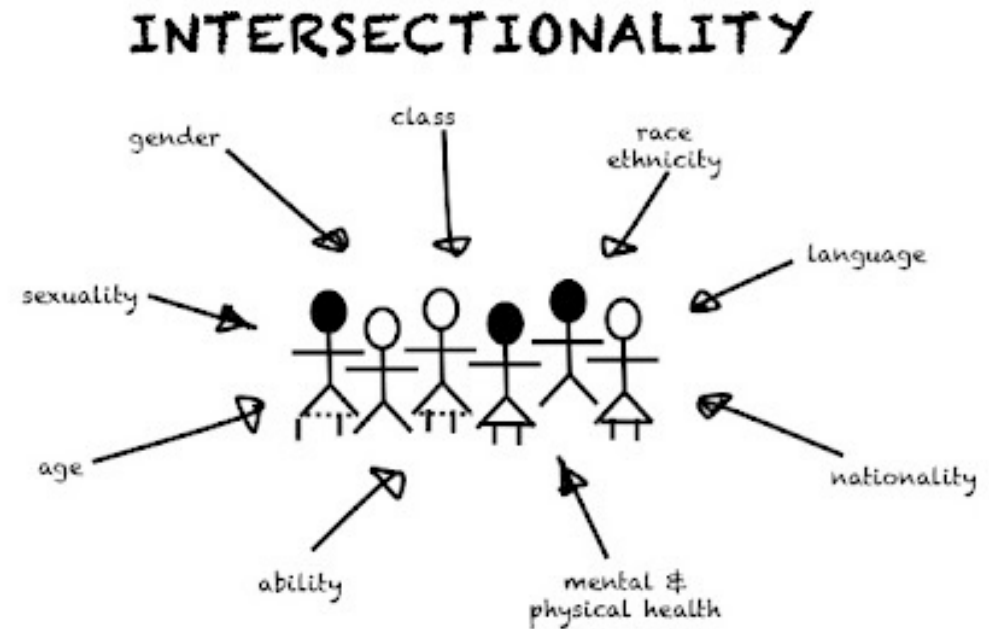
" Scholars that informed this study:

- Caroline C. Wang (1997), Photovoice, PAR
- Sarah Pink (2017), Visual Ethnography,
- Laura Lorenz (2018), Photovoice Praxis
- Patricia Leavy (2018), ABR, Feminist Intersectionality

Theoretical Framework

Arts-Based Methods

Arts-based research "involves the systematic use of the artistic process, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies." (Chamberlain et al., 2018, p. 133).

INTERSECTIONALITY

gender class race ethnicity
sexuality language
age nationality
ability mental & physical health

Feminist Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that looks at how race, class, gender and other social, cultural, identities equate to an induvial or group experiencing oppression or privilege (C.C. Williams et al., 2017; Leavy, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991).

Participants
Co-Creators of Knowledge

Observation + Engagement + Honor Knowledge + Expertise = Rapport

Kalki Subramaniam

Artist Activist Poet Author Actress

In 2018, I traveled to South India to observe Kalki Subramaniam in her community. Kalki self-identifies as a South Indian Transgender woman working endlessly to break social stigmas attached to the Transgender/*hijra* community in India.

In 2008, she founded the Sahodari Foundation in Tamil Nadu, India, to address the needs and to elevate the social status of the Transgender community in this area, she has spoken all over the world and provides diversity/sensitivity trainings for universities and corporations.

From the onset of the pandemic we met daily creating art, writing and dancing for over six months without missing a day.
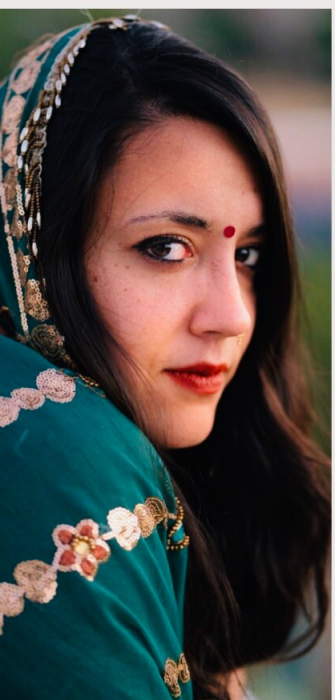
Danielle Khan Da Silva

Activist Storyteller Photographer Documentary Filmmaker

I engaged in a two-week in-depth Ethical Storytelling training with PWB, facilitated by Danielle Khan Da Silva in Jodhpur India in 2018

Danielle Founded Photographers Without Borders in 2009 in response to the injustices she witnessed while volunteering with an organization providing medical care to the Dalit community. Since this time, PWB has worked with hundreds of grassroots organizations worldwide, using photography and ethical storytelling to support local communities and organizations in reaching a larger audience of supporters

Onset of pandemic weekly webinars, Storytelling for Change

Significance

This study addresses how art can elevate the status and voices of marginalized communities and identifies how scholars and activist can benefit from implementing these methods

The purpose of this study was to examine how each activist utilizes visual arts and digital activism to address gender and social inequalities in India.

This issue is particularly relevant, for it will help us understand which unique strengths and weaknesses arts-based methods and digital feminist activism bring to the social agency in marginalized communities, particularly in emerging societies such as India.

The findings may be relevant to other countries where locally originating and "first world" NGOs serve local communities and populations that experience cultural and societal marginalization

Contributions to Scholarship

To date, the literature shows numerous arts-based projects that have proven successful in identifying social inequities, building capacity, and impacting policy change (Catalani et al., 2009; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000).

Still there is a lack of substantial research that addresses the impacts visual participatory methods have on organizations and community members.

The goal of this study was to contribute to the body of growing knowledge that recognizes arts-based methods as a reliable research method for those seeking to understand social phenomena and bringing the voices of participants to the forefront of research studies.

Literature

Photovoice

Feminist Intersectionality

Feminist Digital Activism

Artivism

Visual Storytelling

Multi-Site Ethnographic Study

Online PV . London PV . Madurai . Pollachi . Jodhpur . Pandemic . Digital Ethnography

Methods

Visual and Digital Ethnography embedded under the umbrella of Arts-Based Research

Observation In person and Online Engagement with each activist

Arts-Based Methods used

Data Gathering Dissemination

and Analysis

Data Collection

Informal and semi structured interviews

Digital Images

Video

Field notes

Participant Observation

Data Analysis
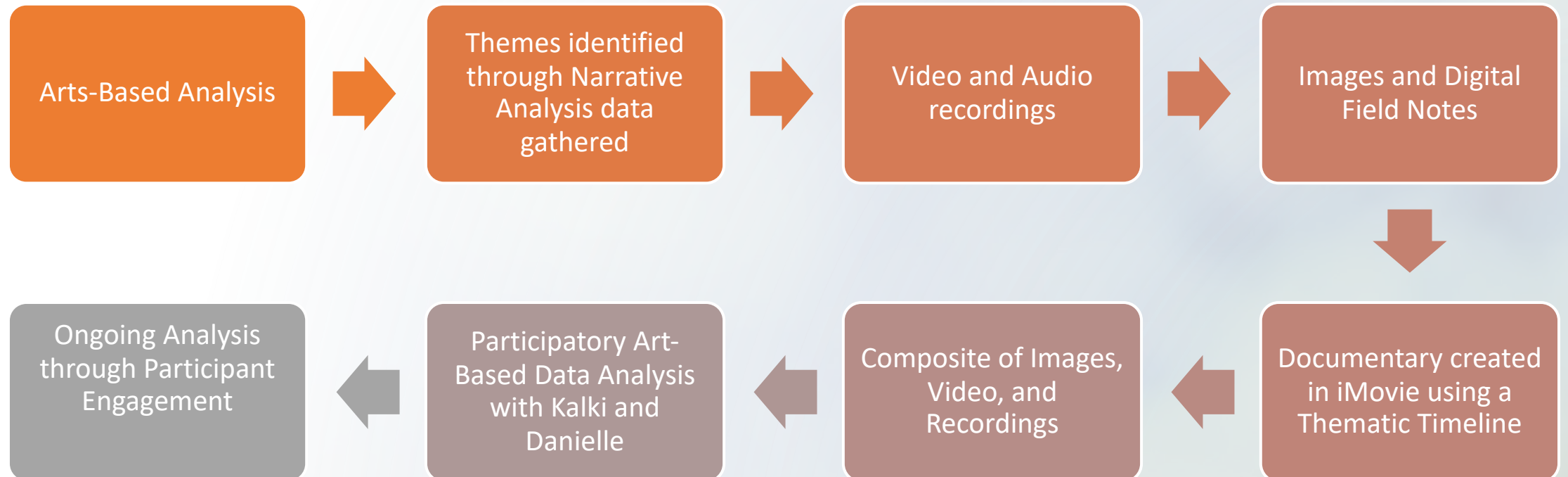
Arts-Based Analysis → Themes identified through Narrative Analysis data gathered → Video and Audio recordings → Images and Digital Field Notes

↓

Ongoing Analysis through Participant Engagement ← Participatory Art-Based Data Analysis with Kalki and Danielle ← Composite of Images, Video, and Recordings ← Documentary created in iMovie using a Thematic Timeline

The purpose of this study was to examine **how** each activist utilizes visual arts and digital activism to address gender and social inequalities in India

Findings
Themes that Emerged

- ❏ Feminist digital activism
- ❏ Visual Storytellers
- ❏ Community centered
- ❏ Motivated by injustice
- ❏ Servant leadership
- ❏ Charismatic
- ❏ Daily commitment

Interested in changing local hearts and minds and policies

Photographers, videographers, storytellers tell stories & raise awareness and funding about local organizations and needs

Reach

Servant Leader

Identify local nonprofit organizations interested in strengthening their visual storytelling skills in partnership with outsiders

Dedicated to empowering local individuals and elevating their self-perception, skills, and bringing their voices to the forefront (willing to share the spotlight)

Education and Training

Train local trangender community to create art, buid marketable skills and to present to the public

Train international photographers seeking to do work with local nonprofits and build allyship

Local Community-Based Organizations

International Organizations

This study suggests digital activism and visual storytelling can impact social change and raise consciousness. Art-Based Methods can provide both activist and scholars the opportune impact social change and dismantle dominant narratives

Table. 1
Social Media Usage

Social Media Following	PWB	Danielle	Sahodari	Kalki
Facebook Followers	48,097	4,900	12,854	50,688
Facebook Reviews	48		39	
	22,300	12,300	985	5,330
Instagram Followers	2,185	2,356	104	522
Instagram Posts				

how each activist utilizes visual arts and digital activism to address gender and social inequalities in India

Conclusion

art-based methods are multidimensional and have the capacity to reach the hearts and minds of society in ways words alone cannot (Pink, 2007).

Arts-Based Methods

Digital Ethnography

Visual Ethnography

Agency

Visibility

SOCIAL IMPACT

Consciousness

Allyship

Visual Storytelling   Feminist Digital Activism

HOW: Activist are Dismantling Dominant Narratives by sharing the voices and lived experiences of communities through art/visual storytelling, resulting in counter narratives that disrupt hegemonic narratives.

"Change the storyteller change the story"

Implications for Policy and Practice

Research and Policy Practices that ensure vulnerable populations are included in the decision-making process

Ensuring the voices of participants are heard throughout the research process

Creating community arts-based programs that encourage ongoing dialogue between policy makers and vulnerable communities

Including Arts-Based Research methods in higher education curriculums

Quantitative data anyisis on significance of arts-based methods in community and research

Personal Takeaways

Relationships

Reflexivity

Positionality

Clarity

Next Steps

Non-Profit

Future Praxis
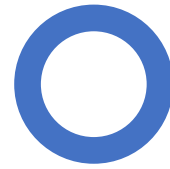
Why Art Matters

"The artivist (artist +activist) uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression – by any medium necessary. The artivist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination. The artivist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation." ~ M. K. Asante (2019)

Dissertation Documentary

This is an edited version for the sake of time

omitted committee introductions

personal connection to the arts

Included is

- Data (video & images gathered while in the field)

- Thematic timeline

- Introduction to art as a method for social change and scholarship

- Co-creators of knowledge

- Participatory Arts-Based analysis

Thank You Fielding Family!