Narrative Activism:

Strategic Storytelling for Women's Advocacy

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For the women whose stories remain untold

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically widened existing spheres of gender inequality, increasing disparities related to poverty, forced marriage, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, economic vulnerability, and illiteracy. For organizations aiming to rectify these areas of inequality, storytelling is a powerful tool for advocacy. This thesis investigates the intersection of storytelling and advocacy, focusing on the writing strategies utilized by leading gender-equality-oriented organizations. Utilizing Grounded Theory (GT) methodology, this thesis explores the emerging patterns and themes that arise in organizational storytelling strategies across differing contexts. An introduction chapter provides insights into the subject matter, highlighting existing knowledge gaps and rationalizing this study's contribution to modern scholarship. A comprehensive literature review provides insights into contemporary gender inequality, advocacy, and storytelling, highlighting existing research relevant to this investigation. The methodology chapter outlines the implementation of GT, including research design, data collection, and coding, while the results chapter presents the key findings emerging from this study: a Storytelling Framework for Gender Equality. The discussion section offers both a narrative explanation and theoretical application of this framework and a discussion of research limitations and avenues for additional scholarship.

Keywords: storytelling, gender inequality, advocacy

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender inequality, an enduring injustice in contemporary society, has increasingly gained attention as a widespread threat to public welfare. Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, gender injustice was violently exacerbated, widening existing inequalities at alarming rates. Present-day gender inequality is characterized by disparate rates of poverty, forced marriage, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, economic vulnerability, and illiteracy (World Food Programme, 2022; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017). As time passes, the urgency of addressing these injustices becomes more pronounced, demanding comprehensive strategies and solutions at individual, community, and national levels.

Thus, in the contemporary context, women's advocacy emerges as an extreme imperative. Advocacy can involve an array of individual or collective actions geared towards affecting social change, but it often originates as a means to counter injustice (Macindoe, 2010; Henderson & Pochin, 2001). For the purpose of this project, I define advocacy as "a deliberate, strategic effort to speak or act on behalf of individuals and groups in order to advance their interests, uphold their rights, or effect social change related to their experience." While advocacy can occur at various levels within society, it boasts distinct advantages when occurring through organizational outlets (Macindoe, 2010). Of advocacy organizations, those with the nonprofit or nongovernmental status are consistently characterized by their pursuit of the public good (Heaslip, 2023; Martens, 2002). These organizations play a fundamental role in societal advancement, positioning them as powerful actors for achieving change related to gender inequality.

For nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, storytelling is a powerful, strategic method for influencing public discourse, facilitating audience comprehension, attention, and

engagement with social issues (Austin & Connell, 2019; Dahlstrom, 2014). In particular, stories that represent the lived experiences of individuals effectively resonate with audiences (Slovic, 2007). Furthermore, storytelling is a powerful medium for communicating organizational strategy, mission, and purpose (Mitchell & Clark, 2020). The correlation between advocacy outcomes and storytelling is verified through primary scholarship, specifically in the realms of violence prevention, inequitable gender norms, and maternal health improvement (Mwaba et al., 2021; Dichter et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2014; Holicky et al., 2014). Thus, for organizations seeking to address and eradicate gender inequality, storytelling is a strategic method for engaging with audiences to effect change.

Purpose

The existing body of research demonstrates the irrefutable influence of storytelling as a catalyst for social change. However, despite this recognition, there remains a significant gap in practical guidance or prescriptive strategies for crafting narratives that effectively advance gender equality, posing a challenge for organizations operating in this sphere. In response, this thesis seeks to contribute to the closure of this gap in literature.

While this study did not aim to provide a definitive blueprint for the composition of women's stories for advocacy purposes, its goal was to lay the foundation for the eventual development of such best practices. Through a preliminary investigation of the current landscape of gender-equality-oriented storytelling, this thesis provided an understanding of the myriad of writing techniques utilized by organizations operating in the gender equality realm of public welfare. As a result, this thesis positions itself as a stepping stone for future research that seeks to develop concrete strategies and recommendations for strategic storytelling in the context of women's advocacy.

Research Questions & Methodological Framework

To accomplish the objectives listed above, this study delved into two central research questions: First, how do organizations employ women's individual stories to represent broader instances of gender inequality? Second, what patterns emerge in the storytelling strategies used to convey these inequities across differing contexts?

To address these areas of inquiry, I relied upon Grounded Theory (GT) as a methodological framework. GT is a research methodology that allows a systematic approach to qualitative investigation (Birks & Mills, 2015). This methodology is particularly helpful in research scenarios wherein there is limited existing knowledge on a topic, as it facilitates the composition of explanatory theories substantiated by data. Relying upon the contemporary explanations of this framework provided by Chun et al. (2019) and Birks and Mills (2015), I applied the sequential components of GT in my study. After identifying inclusion criteria, my data collection involved the purposeful sampling of textual representations of women's stories from the websites of gender inequality-oriented nonprofits and NGOs. Then, constant comparative analysis facilitated the development of theory through successive phases of coding (initial, intermediate, and advanced) with each phase increasing in conceptual abstraction. Throughout these investigative processes, memoing served as an analytic method for the recording of observations and insights throughout the research process, ensuring consistent connection between the emerging theory and the analyzed data. Overall, GT methodology provided an effective, systematic framework for addressing my research questions and ultimately, contributed to the closure of the aforementioned gap in scholarship.

Biblical Rationale

The modern world grapples with uncountable injustices. From systematic inequalities to pervasive human rights violations, society wrestles with realities of profound inequality in an array of spheres. In confronting these injustices, the field of advocacy presents a powerful tool for affecting change and progressing toward a more equitable society. For followers of Jesus, countering injustice is a significant responsibility, rooted in a call to compassion, justice, and mercy. Proverbs 31:8-9 instructs believers to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011). Thus, advocacy efforts represent a tangible means for Christ-followers to combat inequality in a broken world. Through the implementation of GT, this thesis presents findings that can inform organizations' efforts to compose more effective, resonant stories for advancing gender equality. Prayerfully, this endeavor aids in the ultimate eradication of gender-related injustice, advancing efforts toward realizing a future "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Thesis Contents

This thesis is organized into 5 chapters: an Introduction (1), Review of the Literature (2), Methodology (3), Results (4), and Discussion (5). Chapter One identified the problem, a gap in scholarship, justifying this thesis' contribution to contemporary research. This chapter also briefly delved into the relationship between storytelling and organizational advocacy, particularly in the context of gender inequality. Chapter Two will offer an extensive review of the literature related to this topic, delving into the current landscape of gender inequality, providing a comprehensive definition of advocacy, examining the integration of advocacy and storytelling, and reviewing primary scholarship verifying the connection between narratives and social change. Chapter Three relays the methodology employed in this thesis, focusing on the

implementation of grounded theory. Chapter Four presents the essential findings of this research,

identifying the collected data and the results of my analysis. Finally, Chapter Five presents a

narrative discussion of my findings, providing a theoretical application of my resulting theory.

Additionally, the final chapter discusses the significance of my findings, the limitations of my

research methodology, and relevant endeavors for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores scholarship relevant to my GT study, with a focus on contemporary gender inequality, a comprehensive understanding of advocacy, and an exploration of the role of storytelling within advocacy efforts. In order to highlight topics relevant to my research question, I first present an explanation of the context within which my study is situated, giving a thorough overview of gender inequality. Additionally, I identify the intention of advocacy efforts across various scales and scopes, focusing specifically on organizational advocacy efforts. Finally, I explore the significance and efficacy of storytelling as a tool for advocacy, reviewing the success of this practice in an array of humanitarian spheres. Through this review of the scholarship, I aim to provide necessary background information that illustrates the significance and focus of my study.

Contemporary Gender Inequality

In their most recent Evaluation Report, the World Food Programme (2022) describes the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on women:

> Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the effects of COVID-19. Since the pandemic, women and girls face an increased risk of hunger and malnutrition; school closures have affected girl children particularly; and the risks of early marriage, adolescent pregnancies and maternal mortality have increased significantly. Gender-based violence surged worldwide amid lockdowns. Economic vulnerability has intensified acutely, with the informal economy particularly badly affected, a sector in which many women are employed . . . (p. 3)

The effect of the pandemic in widening existing gender disparities was initially recognized in mid-2020, yet ongoing efforts are still inadequate in altering the status quo. The following sections illustrate this exacerbation of gender inequality.

Poverty & Food Insecurity

From 2019 to 2021, the number of people experiencing extreme poverty increased by 97 million. The economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened this reality, particularly as it relates to women and girls, forcing an additional 47 million women into poverty (World Food Programme, 2022). Tragically, this represents the reversal of decades of advancement in combatting gender inequality. In addition to the economic challenges posed by the pandemic, changing global climates are interfering with systems that produce and process food. Climate interference has resulted in increased travel requirements for scarce resources like water or fuel, which in turn, increases the burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities for women and girls (World Food Programme, 2021b).

In their 2021 Global Report, the World Food Programme (2021a) also illustrated that an estimated 270 million people were experiencing urgent food insecurity. Of these individuals, nearly 45 million were categorized as experiencing acute levels of hunger, while an additional 500,000 were reported as facing conditions of famine. Across these groups, the WFP found that 10 percent more women were experiencing food insecurity than men, which demonstrates a significant rise from the 6 percent gap reported in 2019. This disparity, too, has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Food Programme (2021a), "the global coverage of nutrition services for women, children and adolescents declined by nearly 40 percent at the start of the pandemic" (p. 24). Additionally, the pandemic also exacerbated conflict-related hunger, furthering rates of extreme hunger experienced by vulnerable individuals. The disparate

rates of poverty and food insecurity and the subsequent lack of adequate humanitarian services call for immediate intervention.

Education

Despite the potential of education to repair global gender inequalities, education parity is still desperately lacking in many regions of the world. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2016) demonstrates that, despite strides made over the past 20 years, girls are still more likely than boys to lack educational opportunities. Specifically, 15 million girls will never have the prospect of gaining literacy through primary school, compared to 10 million boys. Of the 750 million illiterate adults in the world, approximately two-thirds of this count are women. This ratio has remained consistent since 1976, at which point the earliest index of illiterate adults was recorded (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017).

The lack of education parity is aggravated by other global injustices like humanitarian disasters, child labor rates, child marriage, and gender-based violence. In refugee contexts, girls face a significant disparity, being merely half as likely as boys to access secondary education (UNHCR, 2018). Additionally, 650 million girls and women experience forced marriage before the age of 18, which often abruptly terminates their educational pursuits (UNICEF, 2018). Gender-based violence is also a persistent opponent to education equity, impacting 246 million children in or around schools each year (UNESCO and UN Women, 2018).

As a result of education inequity, nearly 1 billion women and girls do not receive the skills necessary to achieve success in evolving job markets (Malala Fund, 2019). This creates gaps in the workforce, contributing to the instability of developing economies. UNESCO (2017) data shows that currently, women compose merely 35% of institutions of higher education programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This causes a detrimental stall in

endeavors toward sustainable global development. Yet, when women receive education, their lives are drastically altered (World Bank, n.d.). They are empowered to better the livelihoods of their families' communities, and nations. Education leads to improved health, social engagement, economic opportunity, leadership possibilities, and a reduced susceptibility to poverty, disease, exploitation, and violence.

Employment and Agency

UN Women (2023a) has outlined "women's equal participation in political and public life" as an essential component of sustainable development (para. 1). Yet, data persistently demonstrates women's underrepresentation at all levels of decision-making on a global scale. As of January 10, 2024, only 28 women served as Heads of State and/or Government in 26 countries. This status quo is progressing at an alarmingly time-consuming rate, as an estimated 130 years would be needed to achieve parity in women's governmental representation. Furthermore, a mere 13 countries boast parity in Cabinet Ministers (Inter-Parliamentary Union & UN Women, 2023). Rates of female representation in national parliaments are also astoundingly disparate, with only six countries reporting equivalent rates of women in parliament in single or lower houses. At this rate, gender equity among national legislative bodies will not be realized until 2063 (UN Women, 2023a).

Alongside lessened agency due to a lack of opportunity for political leadership, women are subject to an extreme gap in participation in the labor force. The UN Commission on the Status of Women (2022) reports that gender inequality in labor force involvement has remained consistent from 1998 and 2018, at a rate of 31 percent. This gap is even larger among women and men aged 25-54, at 43 percent, though it varies significantly by region. Nearly all men in this age group participate in the labor force (95 percent) compared to only 52 percent of women of

the same age. This disparity is attributed primarily to the unpaid care and domestic work often carried by women, influenced by both marriage and childbearing. Before the pandemic, women were tasked with unpaid care and domestic work three times more often than men, but this rate has increased greatly over the past two years. Among women in domestic working positions, the pandemic has caused devastating economic adversity through heightened poverty, food insecurity, asset reduction, and indebtedness, threatening to reverse progress made toward equitable women's economic participation. Women's economic agency and participation in spheres of social decision-making are foundational components of their empowerment (UN Commission on the Status of Women, 2022).

Personal and Maternal Health

In addition to decreased economic, educational, and vocational outcomes, gender inequality permeates areas of personal and maternal health. The pandemic has devastated health services infrastructure, affecting women's ability to access reproductive health services (United Nations, 2022). In less developed countries, the rates of adolescent births remain incredibly high, at 94 births per 1,000 adolescents. This rate is more than double the global average of adolescent births. Furthermore, maternal mortality rates remain unacceptably high. In 2020, nearly 800 women perished each day from preventable complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Nearly 95% of these deaths transpired in low- or middle-income nations (World Health Organization, 2023). This reality demonstrates inequitable access to necessary health services among women in developing nations. Despite strides to improve women's health outcomes, the average woman's life expectancy has decreased by 1.6 years from 2019 to 2021. In some regions, this decrease has been recorded up to 4.3 years (United Nations, 2022).

Gender inequality also infiltrates areas of individual health. Recent years have demonstrated that the HIV epidemic affects girls and women at disproportionate rates (UNICEF, 2022). In 2021, nearly 120,000 girls aged 10-19 contracted HIV, compared to only 40,000 boys of the same age range. On a global scale, girls comprised three-quarters of newly recorded HIV infections in adolescents. The pandemic has drastically exacerbated issues of inequitable healthcare access for women and girls, highlighting an urgent need for intervention.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Perhaps the most pervasive evidence of contemporary gender inequality is the harrowing rampancy of gender-based violence (GBV). Describing this reality, the UNHCR (n.d.) writes:

Gender-based violence can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. This can take many forms such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour crimes'. (para. 4)

Despite global efforts to combat these manifestations of GBV, WHO (2021) estimates that around the world, approximately 30% of women have been exposed in their lifetimes, amounting to nearly 736 million women. The majority of this violence is characterized as intimate partner violence (IPV), with 27% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 reporting experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. In 2022 alone, around 48,800 women and girls were murdered by their partners or another family member (UNODC & UN Women, 2023). This quantity demonstrates that each hour, over five women are killed by a member of their family. According to UNODC & UN Women, 55% of female homicides occur in private contexts, compared to only 12% of male homicides.

Sexual violence also persists at alarming rates, with 6 percent of women reporting having experienced sexual violence from an individual other than a partner (WHO, 2021). Furthermore, around the world, fifteen million adolescent girls have experienced rape (UNICEF, 2017). Human trafficking also remains a predominant catalyst for sexual violence. The UNDOC (2020) reports that for every 10 victims of trafficking around the globe, five are women and two are girls. Furthermore, the women and girls ensnared in human trafficking are vulnerable to physical or extreme violence from their captors at rates three times higher than men (UNODC, 2023).

The pandemic has vastly worsened the prevalence of violence against women and girls, intensifying existing structural inequalities that perpetuate violence, and, ultimately, nullifying years of progress in achieving gender parity (UN Women, 2021). Since the onset of the pandemic, 45 percent of women identified the occurrence of violence in their own relationship or in the relationship of a woman they knew. Violence in any form causes extreme detriment to women's physical, mental, and sexual health, necessitating focused efforts to eradicate structural inequalities that perpetuate the prevalence of violence (WHO, 2021).

Defining Advocacy

To better understand the role of advocacy in combatting gender inequality, it is necessary to formulate a synthesized definition of the term. However, advocacy is a multifaceted concept with diverse utilizations across professions and contexts (Reid, 2000). The word encompasses a vast array of individual and collective actions. In a general definition of the word, the American Psychological Association (2018) concisely posits advocacy as the act of "speaking or acting on behalf of an individual or group to uphold their rights or explain their point of view" (para. 1). This definition provides a basic understanding of the intention of advocacy, to communicate on behalf of another. Macindoe (2010) extends this definition to include participation in social

change, defining advocacy as "an attempt by individuals, groups, or formal organizations to effect social or political change concerning a particular issue" (p. 155). These expressions may take the form of public education, collective action, lobbying, or other activities. This definition furthers an understanding of the intention of advocacy, tying it to communication that seeks social change.

In *A Right Result? Advocacy, Justice and Empowerment*, authors Henderson and Pochin (2001) suggest that an adequate understanding of "advocacy" is informed by asking the question, "What is advocacy for?" (p. 65). In order to define advocacy by its output, Henderson and Pochin outline a generalized "inventory of outcomes" (p. 66): choice, access, justice, social development, support, empowerment, and prevention. "Choice" refers to an outcome of advocacy that results in increased agency among individuals who lack personal efficacy. "Access" refers to the provision of information that empowers individuals to make educated decisions. Additionally, "Justice" refers to the righting of wrongs inflicted upon members of society. It is upon this outcome, Henderson and Pochin suggest, that the very origin of advocacy rests: "is the recognition that injustice can and often does occur that has brought organised advocacy into being" (p. 72). Furthermore, "Social Development" references the increase of resources dedicated to combatting injustice, while "Support" references available social systems of encouragement and assistance. While difficult to measure, "Empowerment" refers to a long-term goal of immediate advocacy outcomes: the increased capacity, dignity, and autonomy of individuals. Finally, "prevention" refers to the deterrence of risk or harm encountered by individuals. Thus, advocacy is best defined by an understanding of the outcomes which it seeks to promote.

Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, advocacy will be defined as a deliberate, strategic effort to speak or act on behalf of individuals and groups in order to advance their interests, uphold their rights, or effect social change related to their experiences. This definition could encompass a range of activities like public awareness initiatives, protest facilitation, political lobbying, activist mobilization, community service, or financial support. In this sense, advocacy serves as a broad mechanism for combatting injustice. In addressing my research question, my study operates with this definition of advocacy, specifically exploring this understanding of the term as it relates to gender equality.

Advocacy Scale & Scope

Alongside variances in individual and collective expression, advocacy efforts can diverge in both scale and scope, incorporating community, state, national, and international aims (MacIndoe, 2010). For instance, an individual might engage in advocacy by publicly supporting specific policies or political candidates, while a group of individuals might come together to organize a demonstration in favor of an issue that is important to them. Both individual and collective engagement in advocacy are fundamental components of a well-functioning democratic society.

Organizational Advocacy

Alongside expression from groups and individuals, advocacy is often perpetuated organizationally. In fact, MacIndoe (2010) suggests that organizational advocacy efforts have a distinct advantage over individual or other informal groups. MacIndoe (2010) claims this advantage is considerable, stemming from an organization's economic capacities:

Organizations can raise funds specifically to support an advocacy campaign. In addition to economic resources, advocacy organizations have the ability to leverage the expertise

of professional staff and volunteers, as well as their involvement in organizational

networks, to bring issues into the public consciousness and onto the political agenda. (p.

155)

Thus, the capability of organizations to mobilize financial and professional resources amplifies

their ability to engage in advocacy effectively. As MacIndoe suggests, organizational advocacy

employs institutional provision and resources that are instrumental in fostering transformative

social discourse.

Advocacy organizations play a pivotal role in societal advancement, informing and

shaping public dialogue on an array of issues. Many forms of organizations participate in

advocacy, including citizen, public interest, or social movement groups, alongside nonprofits and

grassroots organizations (MacIndoe, 2010). Presenting a synthesized definition, Andrews and

Edwards (2004) define advocacy organizations as "organizations that make public interest claims

either promoting or resisting social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social,

cultural, and political or economic interests or values of other constituencies or groups" (p. 485).

This definition illustrates the broad scope of social focuses that might constitute organizational

advocacy. Furthermore, organizations vary not only in the focus of their advocacy but also in the

beneficiary (MacIndoe, 2010). In some cases, the beneficiaries of organizational efforts include

specialized groups of individuals; in others, these efforts benefit society as a whole. Additionally,

organizational advocacy may even seek to benefit the organization itself.

An additional variation among advocacy organizations is their legal distinction

(MacIndoe, 2010). Advocacy organizations may take the form of for-profit, nonprofit, or non-

governmental organizations, each of which maintains adherence to varying regulations and

restrictions. Private (for-profit) organizations may encounter fewer restrictions, especially in

lobbying, and they participate in advocacy in support of their shareholders. However, the endeavors of for-profit advocacy organizations raise some ethical concerns. For example, a pharmaceutical company might enlist a lobbying firm to promote reduced regulations related to drug testing. These advocacy efforts might incorporate an array of social or political activities, but ultimately, yield financial gain for the organization and its shareholders, potentially compromising the pursuit of public welfare.

Nonprofit organizations, however, are motivated by different concerns than private organizations. Unlike private organizations, nonprofits receive a tax-exempt status from the IRS due to their commitment to furthering social welfare (Heaslip, 2023). Ultimately, nonprofit organizations are marked by their pursuit of the public good. To maintain its status as a nonprofit, the organization is restricted from the dissemination of financial gains to staff members or related parties within the organization (MacIndoe, 2010). Nonprofit organizations face specific restrictions that ensure their accountability to social welfare pursuits and ethical organizational behavior.

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) are also characterized by the pursuit of designated communal goals (Martens, 2002). Because they often operate internationally, they do not fall under the 501(c)(3) code that recognizes tax-exempt nonprofit organizations operating within the United States. However, NGOs are also not profit-oriented, instead seeking to operate in uncompromised pursuit of public welfare. Martens concisely posits a definition: "NGOs are formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level" (p. 282).

Whether operating at the national or international level, NGOs are private organizations composed of "individuals, or local, regional, national branches of an association (which, again,

are composed of individuals)—and usually do not (or only to a limited extent) include official

members, such as governments, governmental representatives, or governmental institutions" (p.

282). NGOs work to bring about common goals in the interest of the public good, impacting both

the public and their members. Generally, NGOs are operated by compensated, specialized staff,

but without for-profit intentions. International NGOs (INGOs) are often characterized by

delivery of services, advocacy, or humanitarian relief work (Yanacopulos, 2015). In fact, recent

years have seen an increase in INGO involvement in transnational advocacy campaigns in

pursuit of global development.

       Thus, of the organizations involved in advocacy, nonprofits and NGOs engage in

advocacy for the purpose of maintaining or improving social welfare. While technically

maintaining some distinction, these organizations demonstrate a shared commitment to societal

development and progress, and they each help shape social discourse on global issues.

Nonprofits and NGOs thus operate with a shared philosophy, functioning as organizational

advocates with genuine dedication to social advancement. This dedication to welfare posits these

organizations as effective subjects for analysis on the integration of storytelling and women's

advocacy.

Advocacy in the Digital Age

       Over the past few decades, developments in informational and communication

technologies have reoriented daily life, particularly in the global north. These technological

advancements have redefined the networking capacities of individuals and organizations,

Yanacopulos (2015) writes:

       The digital landscape provides both an information source and a platform for expression

       for its users. Having a variety of internet-enabled devices at their disposal, users can

generate and upload content to various platforms, extend their social networks, voice

their views and opinions, and even interact and protest in virtual worlds. (p. 132)

As digital spaces have evolved, interactivity between organizations and individuals has

increased, with supporters now able to interact with organizational content virtually. The advent

of the internet enabled progression in transnational advocacy unprecedentedly, and these

developments pose substantial considerations for organizational advocacy.

According to Yanacopulos (2015), "with respect to INGOs, the new digital spaces that

have been created by such technologies and the ways that INGOs are negotiating and utilising

these spaces in order to engage, advocate and facilitate activism amongst northern publics is

worth exploring" (p. 133). The advent of digital spaces is developing transformative avenues for

organizations seeking to facilitate public change (Yanacopulos, 2015). These spaces dismantle

the boundaries between audience and organization, posing a redefinition for user interaction with

organizational media. Furthermore, interactive media helps to blur the lines between public and

private space, detaching public discussions from a physical location and making them accessible

in virtual realms. Yanacopulos writes, "Such technologies shape and intersect with an

organisation's capacities to frame particular issues and develop particular financial, political or

other links with their publics" (p. 147). Ultimately, the increasing relevance of digital

technologies has empowered NGOs with the capacity to operate massive campaigns, influence

public perception, distribute information, and encourage action among their viewers.

Storytelling in Advocacy

Storytelling is a powerful tool for advocacy that organizations frequently employ in their

efforts to affect social change. In a recent literature review on behalf of Living Proof Advocacy,

authors Austin and Connell (2019) sought to understand the role of storytelling in organizational

advocacy. Their resulting review identified a plethora of source material on the efficacy of

storytelling and advocacy, which greatly informed this study's rationale.

Austin and Connell (2019) argue that storytelling is an incredibly strategic method for

influencing public discourse. Whether representative of factual accounts or fictional experiences,

stories promote increased comprehension, attention, and engagement (Dahlstrom, 2024).

Additionally, stories promote audience recall significantly more than texts composed of solely

empirical information. Stories also promote audience empathy and understanding in a way that is

not accomplished by the communication of facts alone.

Additionally, storytelling provides a platform for compressible depictions of complex

systemic or social issues (Hancox, 2017). Stories may illustrate not only a system in itself but

also the impact of that system on people's lived experiences, illustrating problems or proposed

solutions. Boswell (2013) posits that stories are a fundamental component of functioning

democracy, as they effectively prompt social change by encouraging collective action. Such

stories also increase the accessibility of complex topics, providing both experts and nonexperts

with digestible means for engaging with social issues.

Furthermore, storytelling often decreases an audience's resistance to a stated idea,

preventing the development of counterarguments (Green, 2006). Unlike fact-based text, stories

prompt readers to submerse themselves in information less critically, likely due to the perception

of the story as entertainment. Thus, the audience's initial formulation of a counterargument is

often undermined. Dahlstrom (2014) describes this phenomenon:

Additionally, because narratives are not subject to the same truth requirements as logical-

scientific communication, they are not easily countered. In fact, accepted narratives are

trusted so much that individuals rarely allow evidence to contradict the narrative;

evidence is altered to fit their narratives. (p. 13615)

Thus, stories resonate effectively with audiences and can ultimately, draw them to conclusions

that bypass their preconceived beliefs or opinions.

In their review, Austin and Connell (2019) also highlight the profound success of

individual's stories as effective methods of advocacy, suggesting this form of storytelling may be

superior to the publication of stories about groups of individuals. These individual narratives

may be more effective in resonating with the public, as stories about multiple people may lead to

"psychosocial numbing," a phenomenon outlined by Slovic (2007). Slovic argues that while

most people are prompted to care for the welfare of individuals, they become "numbly

indifferent to the plight of individuals who are "one of many" in a much greater problem" (p.

79). Slovic also writes the following:

The statistics of mass murder or genocide, no matter how large the numbers, fail to

convey the true meaning of such atrocities. The reported numbers of deaths represent dry

statistics, "human beings with the tears dried off," that fail to spark emotion or feeling

and thus fail to motivate action. (p. 79)

Drawing from these findings, Austin and Connell (2019) suggest that individual stories are

generally capable of evoking more compassion and engagement, which helped shape the focus of

my GT study. Finally, in their review, Austin and Connell highlighted a need for additional

scholarship. They argue that while an understanding of the efficacy of storytelling is evident in

their review, it is still necessary to research effective story construction.

Organizational Storytelling

In an exploration of storytelling in the nonprofit context, Mitchell and Clark (2020) present findings as to the communication of organizational strategy through story. In their exploration of the topic, the authors analyzed one hundred stories from ten nonprofit organizations, finding that storytelling was an effective measure for organizations to illustrate their ultimate mission or purpose. They write, "in the nonprofit context, storytelling has the potential to shed light on the way the organization believes will best achieve their social mission, their reason for being" (p. 143). Storytelling also serves as a method for nonprofits to differentiate themselves and their efforts from other organizations, allowing their focal issues to resonate more deeply with the audience.

Mitchel and Clark (2020) analyzed stories from nonprofit organizations in an array of sectors, including healthcare, animal welfare, and more, seeking to identify the underlying strategies within storytelling by nonprofits. Ultimately, the authors provided an understanding of the importance of storytelling in the nonprofit sphere, but they also outlined a key limitation: their research limited scope to a single organizational form, "large service delivery charities" (p. 155). This limitation led the authors to suggest that there is a need for additional research into alternate organizational forms. Additionally, the authors reported that their findings demonstrated varying story structures across the different organizations, suggesting organizations with different focuses employ storytelling differently. Mitchell and Clark (2020) write, "the research identifies that story classification, how the story is told, is an important element of the construct of storytelling and reveals clear differences in the way organizations employ story typology to engage with a wide range of audiences" (p. 152). This finding informs the authors' suggestion that additional research should focus on organizational storytelling in new areas of public welfare, which rationalized the focus of this study.

Successful Advocacy Through Storytelling

After identifying the efficacy of storytelling for advocacy in a broad sense, it is helpful to review primary scholarship that further verifies this correlation. The following sections review scholarship that depicts the positive impact of storytelling in women's advocacy work, specifically related to violence prevention, inequitable gender norms, and maternal health improvement. While this thesis will primarily evaluate gender-oriented realms of social welfare, several additional articles examine storytelling related to racial justice, norm translation, and colonialism, which inform an understanding of the integration of storytelling in advocacy as a whole.

Violence Prevention

Mwaba et al. (2021) examine the utilization of personal storytelling as a method of activism to prevent the murder of women and girls in Turkey. The study analyzes 20 interviews with women who have experienced interpersonal violence, ultimately finding that storytelling is a powerful tool in empowering women to contribute to anti-violence activism. In a similar endeavor, Dichter et al. (2022) present the results of analyzed interviews of individuals who have experienced interpersonal violence, illustrating the significance of storytelling in raising awareness and promoting collective action. The results demonstrate that storytelling offers robust therapeutic benefits for violence survivors, as well as acting as a tool for inspiring social change. These two studies highlight the immense potential of storytelling in advocacy related to gender-based violence prevention.

Inequitable Gender Norms

Ibrahim (2014) analyzes the methodologies implemented in the "I am the Story" Storytelling for Change Project, which sought to address inequitable gender norms in Egypt.

Ultimately, the author proposes that creative writing and storytelling are empowering advocacy tools in advancing issues of gender equality. This study illustrates the positive influence of storytelling in social discourse related to harmful gender norms.

Maternal Health

Holicky et al. (2023) present findings from a project facilitated by the University of Illinois at Chicago and StoryCenter. This project seeks to address the maternal health crisis in the United States through the dissemination of women's stories related to pregnancy. This resulted in the development of 10 digital stories, which, when used in tandem with existing maternal health materials, aided the understanding and efficacy of clinicians and patients. This study demonstrates the success of storytelling in advocacy regarding women's health.

Racial Justice & Legislative Advocacy

Moyer et al. (2020) demonstrate the utilization of storytelling in grassroots advocacy, specifically presenting findings from a case study of Voices of Youth in Chicago Education. The authors demonstrate the success of storytelling in advocacy, specifically in countering the school-to-prison pipeline. In their discussion, Moyer et al. highlight the power of storytelling in countering adverse narratives, building support networks, and creating a sense of "moral urgency" for legislators (p. 172).

Norm Translation

Lu (2022) explores the utilization of storytelling in human rights advocacy, focusing on the work of the United Nations Development Programme's LGBT project in China. Lu found that, in LGBT rights promotion, storytelling helped maintain the advocacy's focus on the individual by "turning demands for rights into recognizable and familiar faces" (p. 97).

Ultimately, the authors suggest that this study reveals the power of stories to reinforce the universality of human rights while still engaging with the subjectivity of local belief systems.

Justice for Aboriginal Women

Behrendt (2021) examines the impact of storytelling in advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. Behrendt presents the stories of three Australian individuals impacted by child removal, using their personal accounts to counter inaccurate narratives perpetuated by other sources. Behrendt also notes the importance of personal storytelling, suggesting that "advocacy is not just about speaking for people who are marginalised and don't have voice; it's also about making space for those voices to be heard in their own words, so they can be the powerful agents of change" (p. 205). Overall, Behrendt demonstrates the success of storytelling in empowering Australian Aboriginal families to convey the devastating consequences of colonialism.

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Chapter Summary

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This review of the literature has demonstrated a glaring exacerbation of gender inequality after the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a disproportionate impact of poverty, hunger, violence, inequitable education access, and a lack of economic agency. These dire realities demonstrate the pressing need for immediate efforts to mitigate widening global disparities and address the multifaceted challenges faced by women worldwide. Additionally, this review illustrates the role of advocacy in strategically, deliberately advancing the rights of individuals and groups. In exploring advocacy in its various scales, the review provides a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which advocacy can manifest in a society. Furthermore, the review demonstrates the immense potential of storytelling as a tool in advocacy efforts across humanitarian spheres.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The following section presents a detailed overview of the theoretical framework guiding my study, Grounded Theory. Before discussing my implementation of GT, I provide an overview of the framework's background and development. Then, I delve specifically into my utilization of GT, describing research design, research questions, data collection, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, constant comparative analysis, memoing, and coding.

Grounded Theory Background

The advent of the Grounded Theory framework is attributed to the academic contributions of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Straus, both American sociologists (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Together, Glaser and Strauss studied the relations between staff members and terminally ill patients in a hospice setting, which became the backdrop of their eventual composition of Grounded Theory. Glaser and Straus' exploration into staff-patient interaction was termed the *Awareness of Dying* study (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). During this research endeavor, both sociologists began criticizing academia's apparent overemphasis on confirming existing theories, which hindered the process of actually composing theory in itself. Glaser and Strauss (1999) describe this phenomenon in their seminal publication on Grounded Theory, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*:

> Previous books on methods of social research have focused mainly on how to verify theories. This suggests an overemphasis in current sociology on the verification of theory, and a resultant de-emphasis on the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research. (p. 1-2)

According to Glaser and Strauss (1999), the field of sociology should place equal emphasis on both the generation and verification of theory, yet this approach was not always the case in their academic context.

Alongside their frustration with verification's precedence, Glaser and Strauss (1999) also disapproved of the scarcity of social theory that could actually be tied to empirical findings:

> The biographies of scientists are replete with stories of occasional flashes of insight, of seminal ideas, garnered from sources outside the data. But the generation of theory from such insights must then be brought into relation to the data, or there is great danger that theory and empirical world will mismatch. (p. 6)

Glaser and Strauss argued that this reality hindered the generation of valid theory. They suggested that social research would be further aided by theories that originate from empirical data rather than relying on preconceived ideas. Describing the peril of this misplaced emphasis on theory verification, they write "for many colleagues, our position will be at best a hypothesis, to be tested in the years to come; while for many others it is proven fact, and for still others an article of faith" (p. 6).

To combat their frustrations with the current scope of sociological exploration, Glaser and Strauss posed a new framework: Grounded Theory. Its name illustrates Glaser and Strauss' (1999) perspective that theory ought to be closely *grounded* in empirical exploration. This approach, suggests the authors, aids the purpose of theory within social research: "a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining" (p. 3). The purpose of grounded theory is to allow the generation of theory from a systematic data analysis, which allows the researcher to form a hypothesis aimed at theorizing a phenomenon relevant to the focus of the study. Describing this approach, the authors write,

"generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (p. 6). Thus, in generating grounded theory, researchers must proceed inductively, abandoning preconceived perceptions of confirming or rejecting ideas. Instead, they must seek to discover and conceptualize the phenomena under study.

In an article tracing the development of Grounded Theory, authors Kenny and Fourie (2014) suggest that this approach insinuates that the researcher must not predict the outcome of exploration or the resulting hypothesis. The authors suggest that Glasser and Strauss' position demonstrates a significant shift from previously accepted approaches to sociological research. In the implementation of Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss present several unique methodological approaches, coining procedures like theoretical sampling, coding, constant comparison analysis, theoretical saturation, and memo writing, which will be thoroughly extrapolated in the coming sections. These processes allow the generation of theory from data analysis and categorization, which "ensures that the increasing abstraction of concepts is unequivocally substantiated and grounded in the research itself" (Kenny & Fourie, 2014, p. 2).

As aforementioned, Glaser and Straus' development of Grounded Theory occurred in relation to their *Awareness of Dying* study in 1965 (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Two years after this study, the authors published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* a seminal text in illustrating the Grounded Theory methodology they'd composed during their study. This work became a "handbook" to guide the pursuits of further researchers.

Credibility

In the context of Grounded Theory's emergence in the 1960s, qualitative research was decreasing in status among academics, being considered incapable of verifying theory (Kenny &

Fourie, 2014). Glaser and Strauss argue that this criticism originates from the perspective that credibility is achieved through "rigorous quantitative verification" (Glasser & Strauss, 1999, p. 224). However, in rationalizing Grounded Theory's applicability to social research, the authors suggest that these standards for precision cannot be considered the sole criteria for assessing the credibility of theory that emerges from disciplines of flexible exploration. Instead, they suggest "that criteria of judgment be based instead on the detailed elements of the actual strategies used for collecting, coding, analyzing, and presenting data when generating theory, and on the way in which people read the theory" (p.224). Additionally, Glaser and Strauss suggest that Grounded Theory provides validity to the field of sociological exploration by firmly rooting theory in empirical data. They argue that this "grounding" ensures that a developed theory cannot be dismissed or refuted because it is too intricately connected to empirical information. This ensures both the longevity and accuracy of the theory.

However, despite critical perspectives of social research in the 1960s, the composition of Grounded Theory became foundational in the development of the field of qualitative research, providing a means for its furtherment despite criticism of its validity (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Over two decades, Grounded Theory began growing in acceptance and acclaim. Eventually, the theory transcended the discipline of sociology entirely, becoming a staple framework in the explorations in an array of disciplines.

Grounded Theory Methodology

To inform the implementation of grounded theory in addressing my research question, I relied on the contemporary explanations of the framework provided by Chun et al. (2019) in their article, "Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework for Novice Researchers" as well as a

more thorough guide provided by Birks and Mills (2015) in their book *Grounded Theory: A*

Practical Guide. Figure 1 illustrates the sequential components of GT methodology:

Figure 1

Components of Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded Theory Methodology

Purposive Sampling → Data Collection → Initial Coding → Intermediate Coding → Advanced Coding → Theory

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical Sampling

Constant Comparative Analysis

Memoing
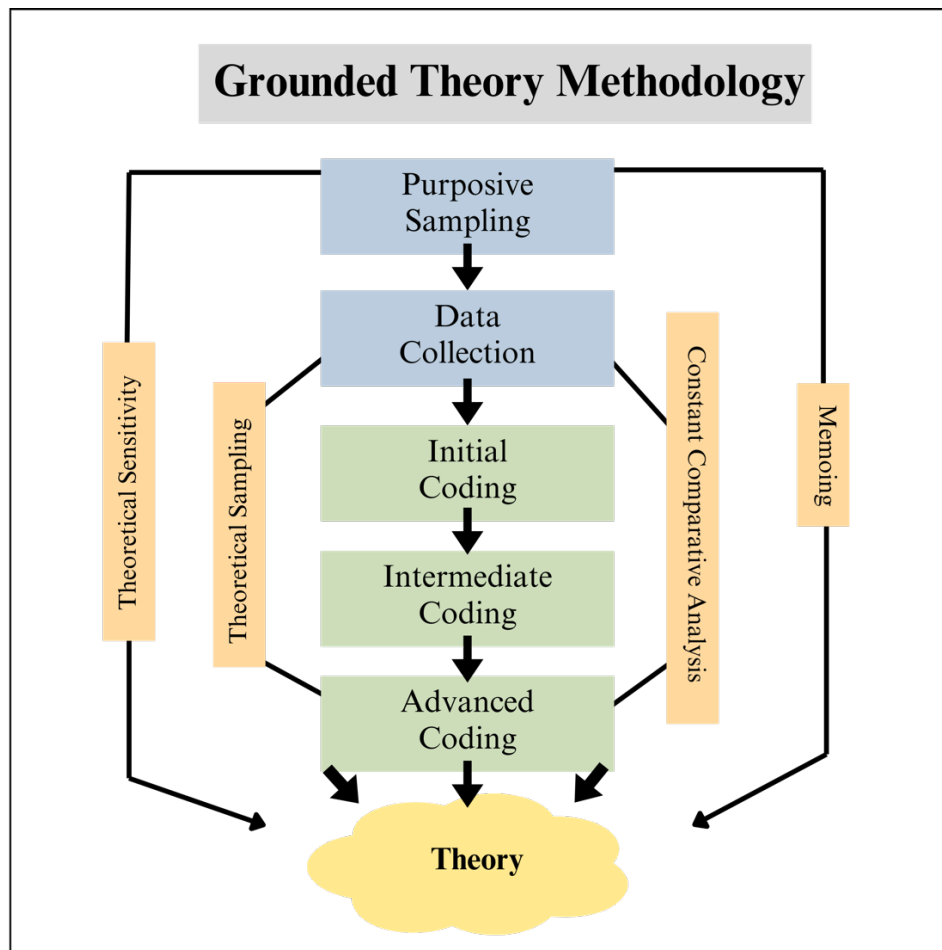
Note. This figure illustrates the interconnected nature of grounded theory methodology, as

presented in the contemporary explanations of Birks and Mills (2015).

Design

This research focuses on an exploration of storytelling in the field of women's advocacy,

with particular interest in the storytelling strategies employed by gender-equality-oriented

organizations. A grounded theory methodology provided a strong framework for my study

because it delivered a systematic process for analysis. Using GT, I analyzed publications of women's stories by nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations. Despite both the prevalence of published women's stories and the literature demonstrating storytelling's efficacy in achieving social change, there appears to be a gap in identifying the particular storytelling strategies that these organizations employ. A grounded theory design allowed me to systematically analyze the collected data (women's stories) to generate theory.

Research Questions

This grounded theory study addressed two primary research questions:

- How do organizations employ women's individual stories to represent broader instances of gender inequality?

- What patterns emerge in the storytelling strategies used to convey these inequities across differing contexts?

These questions seek to fill the gap in the literature by examining the writing strategies that organizations use in communicating women's stories to illustrate systemic gender disparities.

Data Collection

Data refers to the material collected or generated for the purpose of research (Birks & Mills, 2015). Collected data in GT research can derive from an array of sources, like interview transcripts, fieldnotes, surveys, scholarly publications, novels, articles, videos, music, artwork, and more. Birks and Mills suggest that while the most frequently utilized data source in GT research is interview transcripts, it must not be measured as the standard for data in this theoretical framework. This assertion confirms the validity of my selected form of data: textual representations of women's stories pulled from the websites of gender-inequality-oriented nonprofits and NGOs.

Purposive sampling refers to my processes in collecting data, which ensured I selected data that had the potential to answer my research question. Thus, the data collection process for this study involved purposeful sampling to identify and select stories from organizations focused on gender equality. Inclusion criteria were selected to ensure relevance and consistency within the data, defined as the following:

- Articles were published on the websites of nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations that presented a primary focus of combatting gender inequality

- Articles were published and accessible in English

- Articles presented the story of an individual woman, rather than a group or a collective

In order to identify articles for inclusion, I initially utilized specific search terms to conduct general web searches. The initial strategies I utilized included search terms such as "women's stories," "women's advocacy", or "women's accounts." I combined these keywords with the operator "site:org", which limited results to websites with the ".org" domain extension frequently assigned to nonprofits and NGOs. However, this strategy did not prove entirely useful, resulting in several issues. First, it did not account for variability in article titles or keywords and thus, did not return stories that were relevant to my criteria. Secondly, these terms did not always ensure that the organization sites resulting from the search were gender-equality-oriented.

However, reconfiguring this search strategy to identify relevant organizations rather than individual stories proved helpful. To accomplish this, I utilized search terms like "gender equality" or "gender inequality" with the operator "site:org," which began resulting in the home pages of relevant organizations. From here, I sifted through the resulting websites, identifying organizations that met my inclusion criteria. After identifying organizational sites, I conducted hand searches within the individual websites to identify relevant stories for inclusion. Each

selected article then underwent assessment of its alignment with my inclusion criteria and research objectives. I considered content relevance, ensuring the article related to the organization's focus on gender inequality, as well as ensuring the selected articles focused on the experiences of an individual woman. This gathered a representative sample of articles that would facilitate a comprehensive analysis through the GT framework.

Theoretical Sampling

Alongside the initial data collection, theoretical sampling facilitated the collection of more data by allowing me to pursue leads and sample additional articles. Theoretical sampling is fundamental in my utilization of GT, as it helped develop the evolving theory as well as ensure that the theory was maintaining grounding in the data (Chun et al., 2019). The intention of theoretical sampling in this study was not to gain additional population representation in the stories but to saturate the development of categories that were arising from data analysis. As I identified emerging clues from data analysis sought out the inclusion of additional stories that would saturate the categories under development.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a foundational component of GT, and it influenced the entirety of my research study. This concept refers to my ability to discern when a segment of data is relevant to theory development. In my study, theoretical sensitivity guided the process of data collection and analysis, enabling me to identify patterns and relationships within the women's stories. This sensitivity not only the inclusion of relevant data but also the refinement of the developing theory as a whole.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is a general research method often utilized in the fields of social and anthropological research, which formed the backdrop of my GT study. In my implementation of GT methodology, comparative analysis was used to facilitate the development of theory. Glaser and Strauss (1999) describe this intention:

> While verifying is the researcher's principal and vital task for existing theories, we suggest that his main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research. Of course, verifying as much as possible with as accurate evidence as possible is icquisite while one discovers and generates his theory—but not to the point where verification becomes so paramount as to curb generation. (p. 28)

My systematic process of generating theory occurred through comparative analysis, which sought to utilize explicit analytic methods to derive theory from data. In GT research, constant comparative analysis is used specifically in the processes of coding and category development. This process began at the initial collection of data, and it continued throughout my implementation of the framework. This technique required both deductive and inductive reasoning and, alongside theoretical sampling, aided the direction of my data collection.

Constant comparative analysis occurred throughout my study in the following progression: First I compared incidents with other incidents within the data, which eventually encouraged the development of individual codes. After codes were developed and assigned to the data, I compared future incidents to the current codes, compared the codes with each other, and grouped codes into categories. In subsequent data collection, I compared codes to the emerging categories. Finally, I compared emerging categories with each other. Ultimately, this technique aimed to identify similarities and differences within the data, encouraging the refinement of theoretically significant concepts or categories. Constant comparison occurred throughout the

progressing levels of analysis and conceptual understanding, ultimately causing the formation of abstract categories with ample meaning and properties.

Memoing

Memoing was a critical component of maintaining quality within my GT research study (Chun et al., 2019). Birks and Mills (2015) define memoing as, "the recording of thoughts, feelings, insights, ideas, and actions in relation to a research project" (p. 73). Ultimately, memoing functioned as an analytic method that operated as a container for all my observations, ideas, and intuitive contemplations occurring throughout data interaction. I implemented memoing throughout my study to ensure that the developed theory could be comprehensively traced back to the analyzed data. Specifically, memos provided a means for the detailed recording of my intentions for theoretical sampling, identification of relationships between codes, collapsing or splitting of identified codes, and initial observations about emerging categories. These individual memos ensured that I maintained a record of documented thoughts or ideas related to the data, which later allowed reflections on intuitive observations I'd documented throughout the analysis process.

Coding

In alignment with the contemporary presentation GT methodology presented by Chun et al. (2019), I analyzed data through three phases of coding. Coding is an analytical procedure that facilitates the identification of concepts, connections, or repetitive elements within the data. In my application of GT, coding served as the fundamental connection between data collection and theory generation. In my study, coding occurred in three analytical phases: initial, intermediate, and advanced. In each phase, the degree of conceptual abstraction that I established increased incrementally. Birks and Mills (2015) explain, "initial, intermediate, and advanced coding

procedures correlate with and feed into low-, medium- and high-level conceptual development"

(p. 169). These iterative phases eventually fueled the development of an intricate conceptual

framework grounded in data analysis.

Initial Coding

The first step in my data analysis was initial coding. In this phase, I began fracturing the

data (stories) in order to compare incidents. I searched for connections, similarities, or emerging

patterns, which facilitated code generation. As I began inductively generating codes from the

stories, I labeled them as keywords or descriptors. This process is in congruence with Birks and

Mills' (2015) description of a code as, "a form of shorthand that researchers repeatedly use to

identify conceptual reoccurrences and similarities in the patterns of participants' experiences"

(165-166). Essentially, initial coding facilitated the fracturing and labeling of the data.

The processes of initial coding are inherently reflexive (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Throughout the processes of initial coding, I consistently examined my own analytical thought

processes to maintain this reflexive approach. As I scanned stories, I employed a line-by-line

approach, and I considered the following questions to prompt code generation relevant to my

research question:

- What is the overall tone of the text?

- From whose point of view is the text communicated?

- What language choices are employed?

- What emotions does the text evoke from the reader?

- How does the text engage the reader or promote interest?

- How is the text organized?

These questions guided my early analysis of each article as well as the generation of an initial

code bank, which formed the foundation of subsequent phases of analysis.

As Birks and Mills (2015) posit, line-by-line coding allowed me to examine the text in

depth until I received a sense of conceptual understanding of the data. It also prevented me from

progressing prematurely toward an overview perspective, which may have prohibited me from

noting important concepts that would only be identified from a more concentrated approach to

analysis. Finally, initial coding allowed me to identify directions for further theoretical sampling.

I proceeded with initial coding until I began to see the emergence of categories within the data.

Intermediate Coding

As aforementioned, the phases of coding increasingly attain higher levels of conceptual

analysis. Thus, building on the results of initial coding, I began the processes of intermediate

coding, defined by Birks and Mills (2015) as "the identification of properties, dimensions,

patterns, and relationships during the process of category development" (p. 172). During

intermediate coding, I began identifying core categories within the data. Theoretical sampling

(the inclusion of additional articles) yielded the saturation of these emerging categories. Thus,

upon reaching theoretical saturation, no additional codes were generated to include within these

emerging categories. Birks and Mills define theoretical saturation as, "the point at which

categories are sufficiently developed that no new concepts are introduced through the process of

concurrent data generation/collection and analysis" (p. 177).

Intermediate coding built on the efforts of initial coding, but this phase allowed me to

convert early observations into more abstract concepts, beginning to facilitate the emergence of

theory. As I reached a greater conceptual understanding, I began grouping associated codes into

categories. Throughout the process of grouping and regrouping codes, I continuously memoed

my intuitive thought processes and decision-making for later reflection. Ultimately, the processes

of grouping codes provided the foundation for the eventual composition of explanatory patterns

within the data.

These developed categories displayed common properties, which indicated similar

characteristics shared by the codes grouped into each of the categories. Furthermore, the

properties demonstrated minor variations, referred to as dimensions (Birks & Mills, 2015). In

considering the properties and their dimensions, I reviewed developing categories and examined

which could be subsumed within one another. This facilitated the refinement of the emerging

concepts and categories, which was aided by memoing and early diagramming.

Advanced Coding

According to Birks and Mills (2015), advanced coding is defined as the following:

"Advanced coding is the final phase of a grounded theory study during which the analysis is

taken to the point of theory. Advanced coding employs various techniques for the purpose of

integrating a grounded theory" (p. 178). This phase of data analysis was foundational in ensuring

that my methodology produced a theory grounded in the original data. During this phase, I

delved deeper into the data, continuing my identification of themes and patterns that emerged

from the initial and intermediate coding phases. Through these processes, I utilized strategic

tools outlined by Birks and Mills like diagramming and mapping. I progressed further in my

conceptual understanding of the emerging concepts, refining the core categories identified during

intermediate coding.

After finalizing my analysis, I presented the resulting core categories as an interrelated

framework. To aid the coherence of these categories, I developed explanatory statements that

explicitly linked each of the concepts to the core category. Additionally, I crafted visual

demonstrations of the resulting framework, yielding a more comprehensible understanding of the theory. Ultimately, advanced coding allowed me to extract theory from my analysis of the collected data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodology employed by this study, which was guided by the implementation of GT. Through a thorough description of GT background, research design, questions, data collection, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, comparative analysis, memoing, and coding, I provided a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework guiding this inquiry. The following chapters delve into the results and discussion of my findings.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter delves into the results of my application of GT methodology, in which I explored the storytelling strategies employed by gender equality-oriented organizations in their efforts to highlight contemporary injustices. The focus of this study revolves around an exploration of stories that detail women's lived experiences, which demonstrate structural, societal, or individual barriers that prevent an equitable existence. This exploration involved the application of GT, which asserts that theory emerges from data. Thus, my immersion in the intricate stories of individual women sought to understand the writing strategies utilized by organizations seeking to create a more equitable world for women. The following sections present the findings derived from my systematic analysis of stories sourced from various organizational websites. Through a rigorous method of data collection, coding, and theoretical refinement, I present insights into these organizational storytelling strategies.

Collected Data

In the following section, I present a brief description of each of the stories analyzed in this GT study. These stories are sourced from 15 different gender equality-oriented organizations, and their compilation offers a broad illustration of women's experiences, demonstrating the complex, multifaceted nature of modern gender inequality. This data set is comprised of 15 separate stories, each meticulously selected from a unique organization to provide a comprehensive range of experiences and topics.

After the initial inclusion and analysis of 10 unique stories, I sought five additional stories to saturate the emerging categories identified during initial coding. This selection process allowed for a more thorough analysis of the storytelling techniques apparent in the narratives. The examined stories are numbered 1-15, with stories #1-10 identified for initial coding, and

stories #11-15 included to reach saturation within the emerging categories. As insight, it's worth

noting that in this analysis, I encountered narratives communicating focal issues or agendas with

which I did not personally align. However, to accurately capture the writing strategies used by

mainstream gender-equality-oriented organizations, I did not filter my data collection by

personal bias or moral alignment. Each of the narratives is unique and represents the lived

experiences, whether triumphant or tragic, of women around the world.

Story 1: Esita

Esita's story was shared on the website of Womankind Worldwide (WW), a women's

rights organization committed to empowering feminist movements, influencing political

agendas, funding changemakers, and decolonizing feminist practice (Womankind Worldwide,

n.d.). As recounted by WW, Esita faced unexpected eviction from her home and land, forcing her

family into a displaced persons camp in Uganda (Womankind Worldwide, 2018). This eviction

destroyed Esita's community, robbing her family of basic necessities like potable water, shelter,

safety, and education. Finally, WW details Esita's connection with one of their partner

organizations, which provided her with the means to communicate her story over a radio

program.

Story 2: Alia

Alia's story was recounted by the Global Fund for Women (GFW). This organization

aims to provide funding to activists who are promoting gender equality around the world (Global

Fund for Women, n.d.-b). GFW tells Alia's story, highlighting the issue of forced marriage.

After Alia's parents passed away, she was subjected to marriage at age 13 in order to care for her

siblings (Global Fund for Women, n.d.-a). Shortly after, the marriage became abusive, and Alia

was imprisoned at age 14 after being falsely accused of a crime. This story describes Alia's

eventual involvement with a GFW partner organization and her ensuing determination to become an advocate for women's rights in Iraq.

Story 3: Beatriz

Beatriz's story was published by Girls Not Brides, an organization aiming to eradicate child marriage by amplifying girls' voices, raising public awareness, coordinating between advocacy organizations, and mobilizing financial and political support (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Beatriz was an El Salvadorian woman who passed away after failing to access reproductive health services (López, 2023). Girls Not Brides argues that Beatriz's experiences represent systemic challenges faced by women across Latin America and the Caribbean, positioning her story as an illustration of the consequences of restrictive abortion laws.

Story 4: Mala

Mala's account was shared by SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), an organization providing empowering services like financial assistance, healthcare, childcare, legal assistance, or communication services to impoverished women in India (SEWA, n.d.). SEWA tells Mala's story, a woman who recently began working as a waste collector in Bihar, India (SEWA, 2024). Through involvement with SEWA, Mala received a sustainable income source and vocational skills, empowering her agency and ability to care for her family. SEWA utilizes Mala's story to demonstrate the community improvement that accompanies vocationally empowered women.

Story 5: Safa

Safa's story is told by UN Women, a sub-organization of the United Nations, which advocates for gender equality through comprehensive programs and policies that encourage female empowerment (UN Women, 2024). Safa's story offers a glimpse into the struggles faced

by pregnant women amidst conflict and humanitarian crises (UN Women, n.d.). Her encounter with the challenges of displacement—lack of prenatal healthcare, shelter, and food— highlights her resilience and ultimately successful delivery despite impossible circumstances.

Story 6: Suzan

Suzan's story was published by Women For Women International (WFWI), an organization seeking to empower female survivors of war and conflict, and ultimately, rectify existing gender inequality around the world (Women for Women International, n.d-b). Suzan endured devastating hardships caused by war and loss, and she was tasked with providing for her family on her own (Women for Women International, n.d.-a). Despite the threat of the conflict around her, Suzan persevered, and through counseling and training from WFWI, she was empowered to care for herself and her family.

Story 7: Fatima

Fatima is a Gazan woman currently displaced due to conflict (Plan International, 2023). Her story is related by Plan International, an organization fighting for equitable education, gender-based violence prevention, reproductive health rights, youth and child empowerment, financial agency, and women's protection during crisis (Plan International, n.d.). 23-year-old Fatima grapples with extreme challenges due to the Israeli/Palestine conflict, but despite her circumstances, she desires to share her experiences and advocate for the end of the war (Plan International, 2023).

Story 8: Mina

Mina's story is recounted by Women's Refugee Commission (n.d.), an organization seeking to aid women impacted by humanitarian crises through need identification, program implementation, and legislative advocacy. Mina grew up as a refugee, fleeing to Iran with her

family and eventually moving between asylum centers across Europe (Women's Refugee

Commission, 2016). In light of her own experience, Mina grew up with a desire to support

refugee women, and she now works as a project coordinator through the Starpoint Project in

Brussels.

Story 9: Dorcas

Dorcas is a Kenyan woman whose life was changed after encountering an organization

called Solar Sister. Solar Sister aims to empower women's financial independence, education,

social standing, and agency by enabling them to act as entrepreneurs who bring clean energy to

their communities (Solar Sister, n.d.). Originally working in a risky position as a security guard,

Dorcas began selling solar lights, a vocation that provided her financial independence while also

providing her with the time to care for her young daughter (Solar Sister, 2024).

Story 10: Paula

Paula's story is narrated by Soroptimist (n.d.-a), an organization that seeks to educate

women, ultimately reducing human trafficking, domestic violence, inadequate healthcare, and

poverty. Paula was born into an impoverished, violent home in Brazil (Soroptimist, n.d.-b). After

her mother was murdered, Paula fled from her home, eventually dropping out of school to work

and care for her siblings. Eventually, she received financial assistance from Soroptimist which

enabled her to return to school and pursue entrance into a medical program.

Story 11: Asma

Asma's story is recounted by WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and

Freedom), an organization with the broad goal of mobilizing activists, partners, coalitions, or

organizations in the fight against gender inequality (WILPF, n.d.). Asma was an Afghan woman

who dedicated two decades of her life to providing education to girls in Afghanistan (WILPF,

2021). However, after the Taliban assumed control of the nation, girls were banned from school attendance, causing Asma to lose her position as an educator. After facing this discrimination, Asma tragically took her own life in 2021.

Story 12: Christine

Christine's story is told by Days for Girls (n.d.), an organization seeking to eliminate cultural and social stigmas around menstruation. In this story, Christine recounts her experience starting her period in rural Kenya, where she had no access to appropriate menstrual health materials (Days for Girls, 2024). Later in life, Christine was forced into sexual relations with an employer as a transaction for obtaining menstrual health materials. After becoming pregnant, she was fired and eventually became homeless. However, now, Christine works alongside Days for Girls to ensure that Kenyan girls do not encounter the same injustice.

Story 13: Zehra

Girls Education International (GEI) is an organization seeking to increase education attainment opportunities for women in developing contexts (Girls Education International, n.d.). As an illustration of their endeavors, GEI (2022) tells Zehra's story. Zehra is a Pakistani woman who, due to her family's poverty, thought herself unable to receive secondary education. Despite efforts to attain the funds to continue her education, it seemed every opportunity fell short. Yet, thanks to support from a GEI partner organization, Zehra received a scholarship that allowed her to pursue education, enabling her to achieve an empowered future.

Story 14: Hekima

OXFAM International seeks to end global poverty and injustice through gender-equality-oriented action (OXFAM, n.d.). In a blog publication for the organization, Noor (2023) tells Hekima's story, a 19-year-old mother who, after war in Sudan, fled her home to pursue asylum.

Hekima and her children journey with other displaced people, working together to ensure safety and provision. Despite the intensity of her situation, Hekima helps other displaced families care for their children by cooking meals and cleaning.

Story 15: Rani

Rani's story is voiced by Women's World Banking (n.d.), an organization seeking to better women's economic empowerment through financial inclusion. Rani, an unmarried woman, faced prejudice based on her gender and appearance (Kashf Foundation, 2014). To support herself, she began a cow milking business; however, she was worried she would not make a sustainable living. To expand her business, she took a loan from a Women's World Baking partner, which empowered her to expand her client base and gain financial independence.

Data Summary

Table 1 illustrates each collected story, its organizational source, and the areas of gender inequality highlighted in the narrative:

Table 1

Summary of Collected Stories, Source Organizations, and Covered Topics

Story	Organization	Topics of Gender Inequality
#1) Esita	Womankind Worldwide	displacement, food insecurity, education access
#2) Alia	Global Fund for Women	forced marriage, domestic violence,
#3) Beatriz	Girls Not Brides	reproductive rights, child marriage, poverty, violence
#4) Mala	SEWA	employment barriers, economic disparities
#5) Safa	UN Women	displacement, maternal health, poverty
#6) Susan	WomenForWomen	displacement, violence, education, economic empowerment, forced marriage

#7) Fatima	Plan International	displacement, violence
#8) Mina	Women's Refugee Commission	sexual violence, displacement
#9) Dorcas	Solar Sister	economic opportunity
#10) Paula	Soroptimist	gender-based violence, education, economic empowerment
#11) Asma	WILPF	gender norms, education, economic empowerment, gender-based violence, poverty
#12) Christine	Days for Girls	reproductive health, economic empowerment, sexual exploitation, poverty
#13) Zehra	Girls Education International	gender norms, economic empowerment, education
#14) Hekima	OXFAM	displacement, conflict
#15) Rani	Women's World Banking	economic empowerment, gender norms

Initial Code Bank Development

Following the systematic data collection characteristic of GT research, I gathered a diverse range of textual representations of women's stories for analysis. Through purposive sampling and theoretical sensitivity, I curated a representative sample of articles for initial coding: stories 1-10.

Upon analyzing these stories through initial coding, I identified conceptual reoccurrences and similarities within the writing strategies illustrated in each narrative. After assigning codes to each of these observations, I composed an initial code bank, illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2

Initial Code Bank

Code	Description

First Person Narrative Perspective (**FPN**)	Includes segments written in first person voice
Narrative Perspective Switch (**NPs**)	A swap between points of view
Descriptive Language (**DL**)	Vivid, expressive language, imagery, sensory experiences, or emotional charge
Loss Framing (**LF**)	Emphasizes losses and negative outcomes evident in woman's circumstances
Hope Framing (**HF**)	Emphasizes positive outcomes and potential gains evident in woman's circumstances
Humanization Framing (**HuF**)	Portrayal of woman as a representation of a broader concept/issue
Contrast (**C**)	Highlights differences in circumstances or before/after experiences
Hopeful Conclusion (**HC**)	Concluding statements within narrative insinuate potential for a positive resolution
Chronological (**Ch**)	Some elements/experiences within narrative are presented chronologically
Personalized Destruction Impact (**PDI**)	Depiction of women's individual experiences in light of a larger context of inequality
Women's Agency/Empowerment (**WAE**)	Explicitly or implicitly references the concept of women agency/empowerment in a broad sense
Implicit Call to Action (**ICA**)	Implied prompting for the audience to take action in response to the woman's story
Empowering Language (**EL**)	The woman is described as empowered/capable regardless of her circumstances
Image (**I**)	Inclusion of a photo

Emotional Appeal (**EA**)	Language designed to elicit an emotional response from the audience
Third Person Narrator (**TPN**)	Includes sections written in third person perspective
Inclusion of Direct Quotes (**DQ**)	Includes direct quotations from woman represented in the story
Statistics and Facts (**SF**)	Presents empirical evidence relating to the context of the narrative
Indication of Impact Outcomes (**IO**)	Explicitly or implicitly describes the impact/outcomes of social change endeavors (advocacy, policy changes, increased public awareness, shifts in societal attitudes, etc.)
Organization Highlight (**OH**)	Statement drawing attention to the organization's influence, efforts, programs, stance, or perspective
Explicit Call to Action (**ECA**)	Explicit prompting for the audience to take action in response to the story
Expert Quote Integration (**EQI**)	Inclusion of a quotation from an expert on a topic illustrated by the narrative
Organizational Point of View (**OPV**)	Includes segments written from the perspective of the organization
Victimizing Language (**VL**)	Language describing the woman as a victim, incapable of changing her circumstances, etc.
Headings (**H**)	Headings included for story organization and flow
Connecting Issues (**CI**)	Presents areas of inequity as interrelated

These codes represent a comprehensive list of my observations during initial coding. While fracturing the data in my earliest phrase of conceptual understanding, these 26 codes emerged as indicators of my observations. As I progressed through additional phases of analysis,

I did not identify any additional codes to incorporate into this code bank. However, theoretical sampling and concurrent phases of analysis aided my identification of categories and patterns within the stories.

Intermediate Coding and Initial Category Development

As I progressed in conceptual understanding of the data, the iterative process of constant comparative analysis guided my identification of reoccurring elements and thematic categories within the analyzed stories. Theoretical sampling enriched my dataset, which allowed for my exploration of additional patterns within the narratives. During intermediate coding, I sought the addition of five more stories (#11-15) from five new organizations to saturate the developing categories. This inclusion also sought to account for organizational variance in storytelling.

After fracturing the data, I sought to identify connections between the codes and transform these observations into more abstract concepts. This process initially resulted in two tables, which sorted the codes and listed their frequency of appearance within analyzed stories. The first table demonstrates the codes identified within and assigned to each story:

Table 3

Summary of Codes Assigned to Each Analyzed Story (Color-Coded)

Story	Assigned Codes
#1) Esita	FPN, NPs, DL, LF, HF, HuF, C, HC, Ch, PDI, WAE, ICA, EL, EA, I, OH, TPN, CI, IO
#2) Alia	TPN, DQ, SF, OH, I, DL, LF, HF, HuF, C, HC, Ch, PDI, WAE, ECA, EL, EA, IO, CI
#3) Beatriz	TPN, DL, EQI, LF, HC, ECA, CI, OPV, VL, EA, SF, IO, OH, HuF, PDI, WAE, H

#4) Mala	DL, I, DQ, HuF, HF, C, PDI, EL, WAE, CI, EA, IO, SF, HC, ICA, OH, TPN, Ch, H
#5) Safa	DQ, TPN, LF, I, VL, DL, EA, Ch, ICA, SF, CI, HuF, PDI, HC, EL
#6) Suzan	EA, I, TPN, NPs, FPN, OH, DL, EL, Ch, C, ICA, CI, HC, PDI, HF, HuF, IO, H, WAE
#7) Fatima	ICA, SF, OH, HuF, PDI, WAE, OPV, H, NPs, FPN, DL, EA, LF, IO, HC, TPN, HF, C, Ch, CI, EL
#8) Mina	DL, HuF, HF, I, CI, TPN, EA, PDI, WAE, C, EL, OH, Ch, ECA, IO, HC, DQ
#9) Dorcas	OH, DQ, Ch, EL, HuF, HF, TPN, DL, C, WAE, HC, IO, ICA, I
#10) Paula	I, CI, HuF, HF, TPN, C, EA, DL, Ch, H, DQ, OH, HC, ICA, IO, EL
#11) Asma	OH, I, TPN, HuF, C, PDI, Ch, SF, DL, LF, EL, CI, WAE, EA, ECA, IO
#12) Christine	TPN, DQ, DL, HF, HuF, Ch, PDI, WAE, EA, SF, HC, OH, ICA, CI, EL
#13) Zehra	DQ, DL, EA, EL, OH, C, HF, HuF, Ch, PDI, ICA, CI, OPV, IO
#14) Hekima	DQ, DL, LF, EL, SF, C, ICA, EA, OPV, HF, HuF, PDI, CI
#15) Rani	TPN, DQ, HF, HuF, C, HC, Ch, WAE, ICA, EL, I, OH

Table 4 demonstrates the frequency of each code's appearance within the stories:

Table 4

Code Frequency Within Analyzed Stories (Color-Coded)
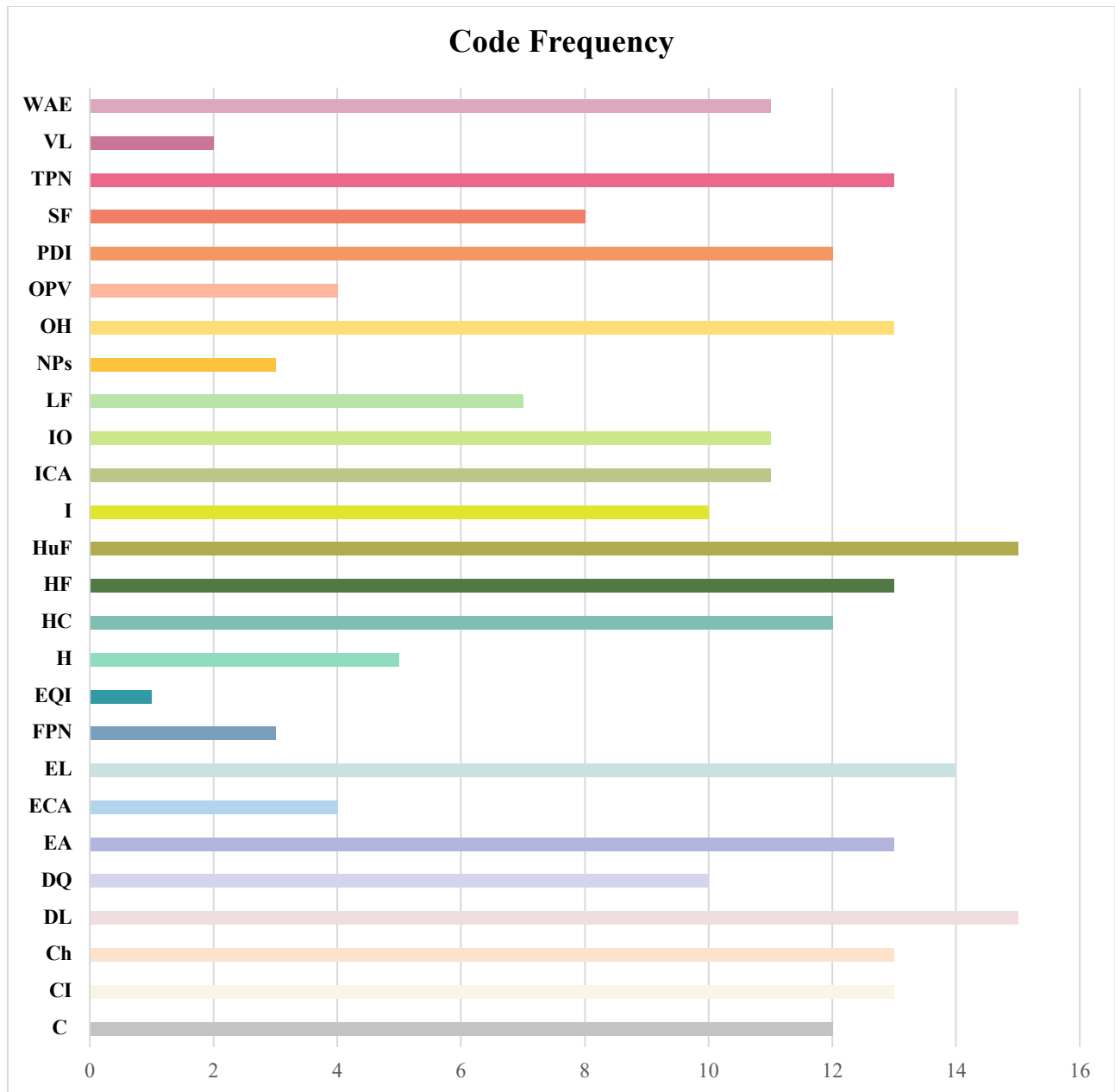
Code Frequency

From these observations of emerging patterns and connections in the data, I identified code frequency, compared instances of each code within the stories, and considered similarities between codes. After this analysis, I grouped similar codes and identified the emergence of four developing categories.

- Category 1: Strategies to Promote Audience Engagement and Action

- o   Included Codes: HC, ICA, ECA, OH, IO, EA

- Category 2: Broadened Scope of Impact

  - o   Included Codes: CI, SF, HuF, WAE, PDI, EQI

- Category 3: Description Techniques

  - o   Included Codes: DL, C, Ch, LF, HF, HuF, HC, EL

- Category 4: Women's Self-Expression

  - o   Included Codes: TPN, FPN, OPV, DQ, NPs

These initial categories do not represent my final theory, but they demonstrate the results of my

analysis during the intermediate coding phase.

Final Theory Development

After sorting the codes into emerging categories, I refined these categories and collapsed

similar codes into single concepts. I also refined the names associated with each code, presenting

the underlying concept in more accessible terms. Finally, I added clarified definitions to the

categories and concepts, aiding the comprehension of my findings. After refining these

categories, I noticed that some categories shared similar concepts, illustrating the dynamic nature

of the emerging theory.

The theory that emerged from my grounded theory study is represented as four

interrelated categories. This interconnectivity of this theoretical framework is especially

comprehensible when represented graphically, illustrated below in Figure 2.

Figure 2

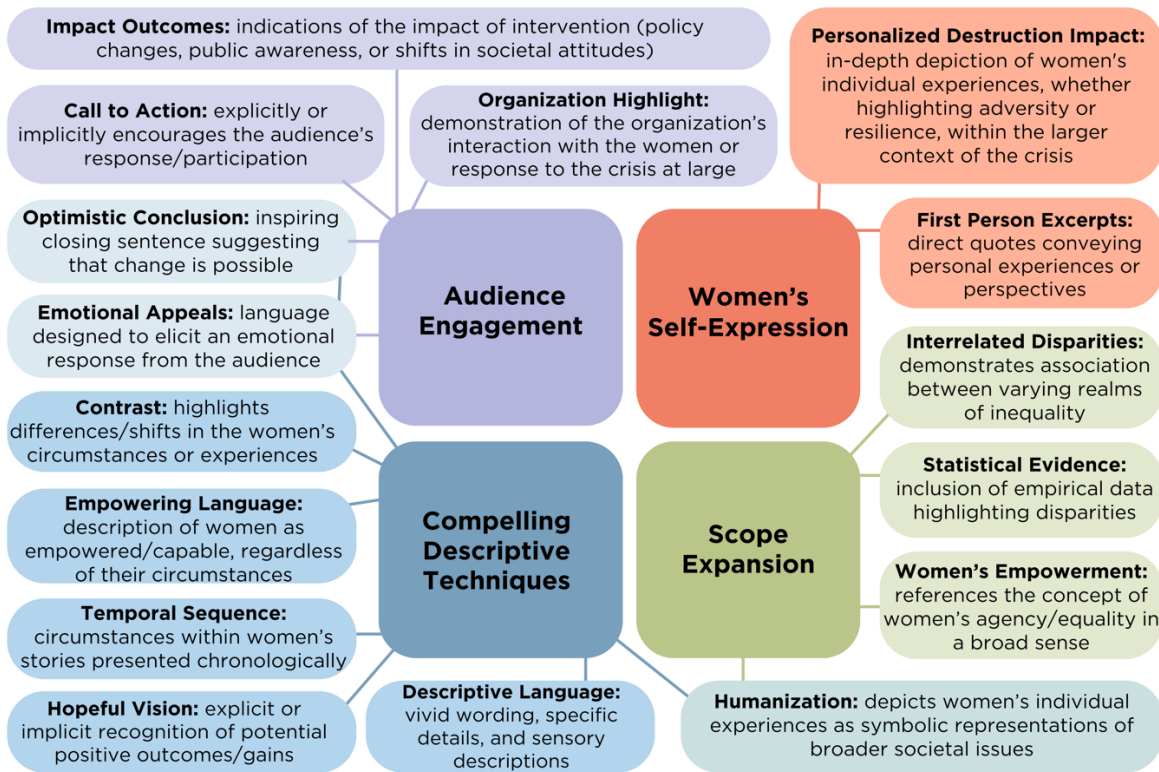*Graphic Representation of the Storytelling Framework for Gender Equality*

Figure 2 concisely illustrates the strategies that organizations use to tell women's stories as representations of broader instances of gender inequality. A thorough, narrative explanation of these findings is presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

The findings of my GT study revealed that gender-equality-oriented organizations utilize multifaceted strategies when communicating women's stories. Through a systematic analysis of these narratives, I identified four distinct categories: Audience Engagement, Compelling Descriptive Techniques, Women's Self-Expression, and Scope Expansion. Together, these categories provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study in my research question.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter presents a narrative explanation of my findings, illustrating their

significance to contemporary scholarship. Additionally, the following section provides a

practical illustration of my results framework, an explanation of the limitations of this study, and

a presentation of suggested areas for additional research.

Results Framework: Strategic Storytelling for Women's Advocacy

The following section presents a narrative description of my final theory: A Framework

of Strategic Storytelling for Women's Advocacy. Figure 2, located in Chapter 4, presents an

effective rendering of the interrelated categories present in this theory. The following description

further elaborates on each category identified, providing clear, specific examples of each concept

from the analyzed stories themselves. Because several of the identified strategies fall into more

than one of the framework's four core categories, several of the following descriptions are

illustrated twice (Optimistic Conclusion, Emotional Appeals, and Humanization).

Audience Engagement

In the analyzed stories, organizations frequently utilized strategies for garnering audience

engagement, seeking to mobilize their audience toward addressing gender inequality.

Collectively, these strategies garnered audience engagement by instilling hope, describing the

organizations' fight against gender inequality, offering calls to action, and indicating the

potential for positive change.

Call to Action

Within the analyzed stories, organizations often used calls to action to mobilize their

readers toward a specific response, action, or method of participation. Whether explicitly stated

or implied, these statements urged individuals to take personal steps toward addressing gender

inequality. For example, in Asma's story (#11), WILPF (2021) presses for immediate action from the international community, including the maintenance of human rights, the dissemination of funding, legislative support, and education promotion.

Organization Highlight

To establish credibility with the audience, stories often demonstrated the organization's work against gender inequality. After reading about the organization's direct involvement in the betterment of women's lives, the audience is encouraged to view the organization as dedicated, capable, and worthy of support or partnership. For example, in Fatima's story, Plan International (2023) describes their "She Leads consortium," a program that supports the rights of girls living in the Middle East (para. 1).

Impact Outcomes

Stories often indicated the impact of positive change, which instilled hope in the reader by granting them a glimpse into the potential of a better, alternative reality. These impact indications encouraged the audience to believe that change is attainable and its pursuit worthwhile. In Beatriz's story, Girls Not Brides suggests that adequate reproductive health services aids women's experience: "...guaranteeing access to comprehensive sexuality education, and access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for girls and adolescents contributes to generating more and better opportunities for them" (López, 2023, para. 9)

Optimistic Conclusion

Organizations often closed narratives with an optimistic tone, insinuating that change is achievable. This might occur through a woman's direct statement of her ambitions or dreams, or a third-person description of her resilience, agency, or courage in the face of hardship. In closing Alia's story, Global Fund for Women (2016) includes an optimistic quote from Alia, "I am proud

to help women and women's rights. I am proud about these issues and about my work. My house is always open for them" (para. 7).

Emotional Appeals

Analyzed stories often leveraged language designed to elicit an emotional response from the reader. Through this tactic, they instilled empathy, connection, or a sense of urgency about the presented injustices. For example, analyzed stories often vividly described a woman's encounter with injustice, causing the audience to feel a sense of shock, devastation, or outrage. In Asma's story, WILPF (2021) explicitly ties a description of gender inequality to the reader's sense of outrage, writing, "The routine discrimination, exclusion, abuse, violence, and outright violation of human rights that Afghan women experience daily, and particularly following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, should outrage all of us" (para. 9).

Compelling Descriptive Techniques

Organizations utilized a range of compelling descriptive techniques to compose impactful stories. For example, organizations highlighted contrasts in women's lived experiences, used empowering language to affirm women's agency, presented narratives chronologically for aided clarity, described events through vivid wording, or evoked an emotional response from the reader.

Descriptive Language

Through the description of rich, vivid sensory details, organizations ensured that the reader was immersed in the story. Descriptive language allowed the reader to receive a clearer picture of the circumstances in the story, making the narrative more engaging and memorable. For example, in the opening lines of Mala's story, SEWA (2024) writes, "A saree-clad woman

driving an electric garbage collection vehicle on the streets of Jamalpur, a city in Bihar state of

India, makes for an usual picture" (para. 1).

Hopeful Vision

Through the deliberate use of language and narrative devices to evoke optimism,

organizations instilled a sense of hope in their audience. Often, analyzed stories provided vivid

accounts of women's resilience, courage, perseverance, or other elements that help to frame

heavy topics in an optimistic light. As an illustration, Women's Refugee Commission recounts

Mina's fear of sexual violence during her experience with displacement; yet, this description is

immediately followed by an optimistic description of Mina's determination despite these

circumstances: "Pretending to be asleep, the young Mina listened to refugees from Bosnia,

Somalia, and Rwanda tell their horrific stories of rape and domestic violence . . . Mina grew up

determined to fight for the rights of all refugee women" (paras. 2-3).

Temporal Sequence

Organizations frequently presented events in the stories chronologically, and this strategy

enhanced readers' understanding. By structuring narratives sequentially, authors encourage the

audience to follow the trajectory of a woman's experience throughout the passage of time. This

casts a clear picture of the impact of events, whether positive or negative, on the woman's lived

experiences. For example, Kashf Foundation (2014) traces Rani's experience as an entrepreneur,

from her initial business, to securing a loan, and ultimately, to the expansion of her client base

and livelihood.

Empowering Language

The analyzed stories frequently described women as empowered and capable, affirming

the dignity of women whose stories were recounted. Through honoring language and affirmation,

organizations recognized women's agency despite their circumstances, rather than frame them as helpless or incapable of achieving change. For example, when describing Susan, WomenForWomen (n.d.-a) highlights both the injustice Susan encounters and her resilience despite the chaos around her: "War has taken so much from Suzan – loved ones, financial security, stability – but she has always fought to protect her children" (para. 1).

Contrast

Stories often highlighted drastic differences or shifts in a woman's circumstances, which helped to convey the magnitude of gender quality illustrated in her experiences. Often, narratives contrasted women's struggles with their dreams and aspirations, which clearly illustrated the barriers and disparities evident in their circumstances. For example, in Esita's story, Womankind Worldwide (2018) contrasts Esita's livelihood before and after eviction: "Before the sudden eviction from her home and land, Esita Turyahebwa was a proud business woman . . . Esita now lives with her husband and seven children in an internal displaced persons camp near Kigyayo in Uganda" (para. 1)

Emotional Appeals

As aforementioned, organizations often utilized emotional appeals to bring about a reaction from the audience. This was often accomplished through imagery, emotive wording, or personal stories that evoked feelings of compassion, hope, outrage, or inspiration. In Safa's story, UN Women (2024) vividly describes the state of living conditions in Gaza, prompting an emotional response from the reader: "Constructing a tent from materials scavenged on the streets, Btah and her family huddled together in a makeshift shelter. . . Improvised tents offer little relief, get sodden with rainfall, and lack heat or electricity" (para 5).

Optimistic Conclusion

Through positive, hopeful, or encouraging concluding sentences, the reader was left with a sense of closure that inspired action. In many cases, organizations used this writing strategy not only to inspire optimism but also to reinforce the voice of the woman at the focus of the story. For example, after highlighting Christine's experience with a lack of menstrual health resources, Days for Girls (2024) closes the article with her optimistic statement: "'It is very different now from when I was a girl,' said Christine. 'There is much more awareness [about menstrual health], and change is being made'" (para. 10).

Humanization

This technique involved the composition of stories that depicted a conflict, event, or area of injustice through the experiences of an individual. This was accomplished through descriptive language which illustrated settings, people, interactions, or thought processes, as well as the incorporation of dialogue and personal statements. Many stories intensely described women's experiences with injustice, and then offered explicit acknowledgment that these experiences were common for women in a certain context. For example, UN Women writes of Safa's experience, "[Safa's] story underscores the harrowing reality faced by pregnant women in conflict zones" (para. 13).

Women's Self-Expression

Women's self-expression was a central theme in the analyzed narratives. Organizations utilized stories as platforms for women to directly recount their experiences, which allowed an authentic and credible rendering of their lived experiences. This strategy was illustrated through the inclusion of direct quotations and individualized depictions of injustice.

First Person Excerpts

By including direct statements from the woman at the focus of the story, organizations amplified women's voices and centered narratives around their experiences. Additionally, by allowing women to speak for themselves, the organizations maintained authenticity and credibility within each account. For example, in Paula's story, Soroptimist (n.d.-b) includes Paula's own description of her aspirations, "My dream is to become a good doctor and help other women understand the great value of their bodies and health" (para. 7).

Personalized Destruction Impact

Stories often included in-depth depictions of injustice, destruction, or adversity faced by the woman at the focus of the narrative. This individualized approach ensured that issues of gender justice were not generalized or oversimplified, and were instead, highlighted in all their complexity and devastation. This technique provided a platform for women's accounts to be authentically portrayed and heard. For example, in Hekima's story, Noor (2023) writes, "Separated from their loved ones and homes by the conflict in Sudan, hundreds of thousands of people have become refugees seeking solace in foreign lands . . . Among them, we meet a 19-year-old Hekima Mousa, a mother of two who fled her home after the war started" (paras. 1-2)

Scope Expansion

Organizations utilized women's individual stories as a means to highlight the broader reality of gender inequality. This strategy was accomplished through the presentation of interconnected inequalities, the inclusion of empirical evidence, arguments promoting women's empowerment, and a humanized approach to depictions of injustice.

Interrelated Disparities

Organizations frequently used stories to present areas of gender inequality (education access, gender-based violence, poverty, forced marriage, etc.) as interrelated. Rather than injustices as

isolated accounts, this approach demonstrated the complexity of oppressive gender norms and the urgency with which injustice must be addressed. For example, in Beatriz's story, Girls Not Brides alleges there is a connection between abortion restrictions and gender inequality: "At *Girls Not Brides*, we believe that these restrictions on the health of girls and adolescents are closely related to the issue of Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions" (para. 7).

Women's Empowerment

Analyzed stories frequently referenced the concept of women's agency, equality, or empowerment beyond the scope of the story. These implicit or explicit statements encouraged the reader to consider the implications of the narrative beyond the life of the woman in focus. This strategy guided the reader to maintain a perspective of gender justice that is grounded in the firsthand accounts of the women being highlighted. In Dorcas' story, Solar Sister (2024) writes, "Dorcas's experience illustrates the broader benefits of empowering women with income-generating opportunities, as it elevates their social standing and provides a safety net during challenging times" (para. 7).

Statistical Evidence

By including empirical data that supports the assertions within the story, organizations provided a credible basis for their illustration of the realities of injustice. Additionally, this strategy provided a numerical illustration of the scope of an issue beyond an individual's experiences. For example, after describing Safa's experience with pregnancy during displacement, UN Women (2024) writes, "UN Women reports that two mothers have been killed in Gaza every hour since 7 October. UNICEF has reported that at least 17,000 children have been orphaned or separated from their parents amid the conflict" (para. 12).

Humanization

By depicting women's individual experiences as realistic representations of broader social issues, organizations familiarized audiences with the realities of injustice. Stories illustrated the impact of a broad concept, systemic inequality, on the lives of a specific individual, a woman, by blending personal narratives with discussions of larger issues. For example, Plan International (2023) opens Fatima's narrative with a broad description of the crisis in Gaza, "In Gaza, women and children are bearing the brunt of the escalation of violence" (para. 1). A few sentences after, the story transitions into an illustration of Fatima's experience within the larger crisis: "Currently displaced in Gaza with her family, Fatima shares a little about her situation and her hope for an end to the conflict" (para. 3).

Theory Application and Illustration

Thus, after analyzing stories from 15 different gender-equality-focused organizations, I uncovered the preceding framework of writing strategies employed in the communication of women's stories. These findings provide valuable insight into the narrative techniques utilized by nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations seeking to leverage storytelling in the fight against gender-related injustice. To delve into a discussion of these findings, I explore the application of this framework in practice, using an originally composed story as a case study. This original composition serves as an illustration of how the theoretical framework translates into real-world storytelling practices, which provides valuable guidance for those seeking to tell stories in a manner that reflects the practices used by leading gender-facing organizations. By presenting this integration of both theory and practice, I hope to illustrate the potential for practical utilization of my results.

Thus, to illustrate my findings, I composed an original narrative, which provides a practical illustration of each of the writing strategies I identified in my analysis. To garner

content for this story, I utilized legitimate information from the work of an organization called

Orphan Voice. Orphan Voice (n.d.) is a "Christian development ministry devoted to children

with special needs, children at risk for trafficking and sexual abuse, orphans, and widows in

Vietnam and Southeast Asia" (para. 1). While this organization is not explicitly woman-oriented,

they maintain extensive anti-trafficking prevention and restoration programs, an endeavor

primarily impacting young women. Although my capacity to interface directly with prominent

gender-oriented organizations was limited, a personal connection with Orphan Voice facilitated

permission to compose a story reflective of their organization's mission. By focusing on the

organization's programs impacting young women, the account in this narrative seamlessly

exemplifies my theoretical framework. The information in the story is pulled from Orphan

Voice's YouTube archive. The events, direct quotations, and descriptions represent the

information communicated in a video ministry update published in 2020, titled "Hanh's Story for

September 2020 Ministry Update" (Orphan Voice, 2020).

The following story demonstrates the Strategic Storytelling for Women's Advocacy

framework, offering a tangible representation of the storytelling practices employed by leading

gender-equality-focused organizations. Through this theoretical narrative, readers will gain a

more thorough understanding of how the identified strategies manifest in practice, which

provides a tool for conceptualizing the theoretical framework in realistic contexts. Each writing

strategy detailed in the results framework is included in this composition, with explanatory

statements provided in the footnotes.

Hahn's Story: Resilience and Hope in the Face of Sexual Exploitation

In the heart of Vietnam, where vibrant tradition merges with bustling industrialism,[1] Hanh's story is a powerful reminder of the darkness that lurks beneath a society's surface.

Industrialized and developing contexts alike are characterized by barbaric exploitation of the vulnerable. Often, girls bear the brunt of humanity's perversions, becoming subject to sexual abuse and exploitation at the hands of the adults around them.

Hanh was one of these girls.[2]

Hanh tells of her experience falling prey to exploitation, an encounter all too common for girls in Vietnam[3]:

> *"All my life, I am one small girl with small dream. I met a boy; he told me I am lovely girl. He said I am like flower. I feel like a princess . . . I did not know his terrible plan*.[4]"

Believing she would spend a beautiful day with a boy in the city, Hanh instead awoke in confinement, kidnapped and drugged by a man she'd trusted. Hahn was soon exploited, violated, and denied her autonomy and freedom.[5,6]

> *"It is my prison."* She describes, "*Men come, they hurt me and use me. I do not love them. I do not know them. I cry, but no one cares. Inside I scream, but no one hears me.*"

Hahn's encounter with sexual exploitation represents a reality impacting 4.8 million people globally, with 71% of this total being women and girls.[7]

Eventually, Hanh courageously took a phone from her captors[8] and contacted her mother, who called the police. While Hanh was soon free from the immediate threat of exploitation, she still wrestled with the aftereffects of her experience, dealing with illness from abuse and constant fear that her captors would reappear.

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[1] Descriptive Language

[2] Personalized Destruction Impact

[3] Humanization

[4] First Person Excerpt

[5] Temporal Sequence

[6] Connecting Issues

[7] Statistical Evidence

[8] Empowering Language

Then, Hanh encountered Orphan Voice.

Orphan Voice works to provide restorative care to women and girls who've been harmed by exploitation,[9] empowering them to begin again. When Hanh was connected to Orphan Voice, they provided her with medical care, safety, and asylum.

> *"Orphan Voice buy a house for me and my mother, far away from my village. Our house is named Nhà Hy Vong, House of Hope. I can go to school and be a girl again."*

Despite the darkness that once threatened her, Hanh now lives in freedom.[10] With the resources provided to her by Orphan Voice, Hanh pursued a better future. Today, she is happily married and the mother of a beautiful child.

Yet, Orphan Voice's work to eradicate trafficking and exploitation continues.

Orphan Voice provides preventative and restorative care to girls in Vietnam, affirming their right and capability to decide their own future.[11] Ultimately, their effort empowers those who have experienced exploitation to start anew and prevents future generations from ever encountering the darkness of exploitation.[12]

With your support,[13] Orphan Voice will continue in this mission, seeking to realize a future where girls like Hanh live in a world free from the danger of trafficking.[14,15]

> *"I am Hanh. I am still one small girl with a dream, but now I think it can come true.[16]"*

Significance of Findings

The findings of this GT study contribute to the context of existing knowledge surrounding storytelling and advocacy for gender equality. A plethora of previous scholarship

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[9] Organization Highlight

[10] Contrast

[11] Women's Empowerment

[12] Hopeful Vision

[13] Call to Action

[14] Impact Outcomes

[15] Emotional Appeal (exhibited throughout)

[16] Hopeful Conclusion

has acknowledged the power of storytelling as a tool for affecting social change. Notably, authors of existing scholarship call for additional research in two key areas related to this study. After analyzing one hundred stories from organizations in an array of disciplines, Mitchell and Clark (2020) found that organizations in different spheres of public welfare utilized differing storytelling strategies. This finding informed their appeal for additional scholarship that analyzes organizational storytelling in specific areas of social discourse. This thesis contributes to this aim, focusing on storytelling strategies utilized in a specific area of public welfare: gender equality. By systematically analyzing narratives from a range of organizations with similar missions, this study helps fill a critical gap in the research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the narrative techniques utilized to amplify the voices of women and advocate for gender equity.

Additionally, in their review of storytelling for advocacy, Austin and Connell (2019) call for scholarship that examines effective organizational story construction, highlighting a need for practical guidance for the utilization of storytelling in advocacy. In response, this GT study examines the current scope of storytelling related to women's advocacy, which elucidates the varying mechanisms by which narratives may catalyze social change.

While my study does not seek to offer a prescriptive guide for crafting advocacy narratives, its findings serve as a crucial foundation for the eventual development of practical storytelling best practices. This study acts as a preliminary exploration of the landscape of gender-equality-oriented storytelling, providing vast insight into the myriad of techniques employed by organizations seeking social change in this sphere. In doing so, this study positions itself as an integral stepping stone for future scholarship seeking to develop concrete guidelines and recommendations for specialized storytelling across advocacy contexts. In a world riddled

by inequity, this study presents insights that can inform efforts to compose more impactful, resonant narratives for advancing gender justice.

Limitations

In considering the contributions of this study to modern scholarship, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in my methodology. The following paragraphs provide insights into the potential constraints of this research, which provides insight into future areas of inquiry.

This GT study presents comprehensive findings on the utilization of storytelling in the context of gender equality-oriented advocacy. While these findings present rich contextual implications, the specialized focus of the analyzed articles may not represent diverse storytelling practices across other contexts of advocacy, which could limit a broad application of the findings. However, this does underscore areas for future research, which are identified in subsequent sections.

Additionally, the focus of this study focused on the analysis of storytelling strategies. However, this approach did not yield the direct measurement of the outcomes associated with storytelling, for example, measuring tangible shifts in audience attitudes or their participation in social discourse. While the strategies identified in this study will be helpful in additional research seeking to measure storytelling impact, my findings stop short of this aim.

Finally, conducting a GT study requires significant time and resources, as the data collection and analysis process are inherently iterative. The consistent refinement of codes and categories, repetitive theoretical sampling, and maintenance of theoretical sensitivity may prolong or increase the load of the research process. Thus, the load of this undertaking is amplified by this study's solitary authorship. With additional collaboration or assistance in the

research process, the load of responsibility might be shared, allowing a distributed workload. Additionally, the coding process is inherently intuitive, relying on the researcher's interpretation of the data. Thus, collaborative authorship would minimize the potential for subjectivity in the coding process by allowing room for additional interpretive or intuitive perspectives.

Future Research

To advance an understanding of the utilization of storytelling in advocacy, it is important to acknowledge additional avenues for further scholarship and targeted exploration. By proposing novel areas of inquiry based on my findings, I aim to inspire future scholarship that will continue to inform the utilization of stories as a tool for promoting public welfare. While my research primarily encourages this practice, I also outline several concerns and areas of caution, highlighting the need for additional studies evaluating the ethical use of narrative activism.

Echoing the findings of Mitchell and Clark (2020), additional research should target the integration of storytelling as a tool for other methods of advocacy. As these authors noted, writing strategies vary across stories from a range of organizations. While this study specifically examined the writing strategies exhibited by gender-equality organizations, the narrative techniques within the expanse of alternate social issues must still be identified. Further research could extend the focal topic of organizations beyond gender equality, for example, racial justice, environmental sustainability, healthcare, and more. Research of this nature may uncover unique writing practices that are tailored to specific social issues, offering further insight into the efficacy of storytelling in diverse contexts of advocacy. From these findings, perhaps a comparative analysis of writing strategies across advocacy domains would yield a comprehensive understanding of the overarching writing principles pertinent to social welfare organizations.

Furthermore, an additional area for future research could involve the examination of alternative mediums of storytelling beyond the form of written narratives. While this study collected a dataset from textual communication of stories, the advent of digital platforms, social media usage, and multimedia technologies have opened near-limitless possibilities for the communication of stories. Future scholarship could investigate the efficacy of storytelling in forms like social media, video documentaries, podcasts, or radio. In addition to the identification of strategies for these mediums, research might demonstrate the unique benefits offered by each medium in engaging and resonating with audiences. The evaluation of additional storytelling mediums could yield further channels for achieving social change through stories. In this case, too, comparative studies might examine the strengths and limitations of various mediums for communication, which might demonstrate the most effective medium(s) for disseminating narratives.

An additional area for research lies in the examination of the long-term effects of activism or social change spurred by storytelling initiatives. To assess the enduring efficacy of storytelling in advancing social issues, researchers must first examine the effects of narrative activism over time. For example, studies tracking the achievements of advocacy campaigns or social movements sparked by stories might illuminate the means by which narratives shape public discourse, policy outcomes, or social norms. By examining how stories resonate with audiences to drive collective action, researchers may evaluate the lasting success of stories in effecting systemic change. This avenue for research, too, could be stratified by domains of public welfare, yielding focused findings for specific areas of advocacy.

Another area for future scholarship could involve examining the utilization of storytelling within Gospel-centered organizations. In spheres of public welfare, many organizations operate

within faith-based frameworks, using storytelling as a means to convey their mission, values, and impact. While this study did not evaluate the utilization of narratives by Christian organizations, future scholarship might identify how stories often integrate storytelling with a gospel-oriented mission. An organization's unique integration of a social mission and a faith-based mission presents a distinct avenue for exploration. This research might yield unique areas of persuasion that are unique to circles of faith, for example, appeals to audience action grounded in theological principles. Scholarship on the utilization of storytelling by Christian organizations could inform not only an understanding of advocacy but also of the efficacy of storytelling in fulfilling the Great Commission.

In addition to the aforementioned areas for expanding the scope of this research to other mediums of story, domains of advocacy, or perspectives of faith, I also identified two areas of research pertaining to the ethical use of storytelling. Ethical considerations are significant when composing advocacy narratives, as the analyzed stories inherently involved the representation of women's lived experiences and struggles. To investigate ethical dimensions of storytelling, in any realm of public welfare, future research should target areas of authenticity, representation, consent, tokenization, and cultural awareness.

As an illustration of ethical storytelling particularly relevant to this GT study, research should examine the considerations for storytelling when consent cannot be directly obtained from the individual in focus. In two of the stories collected and analyzed in this story, narratives detailed the account of a woman who had tragically passed away. This represents a critical area for inquiry into advocacy-oriented storytelling, as the imperative of respecting women's autonomy must extend beyond their lifetimes. Thus, while these stories represent issues of injustice that certainly inform needed social conversations, they also raise complex questions

about posthumous consent and dignity. Particularly, when women's stories are used as bastions for advancement on a particular social issue or organizational goal, questions of consent and ethical persuasion arise.

Additionally, as Dahlstrom (2014) noted, stories often inform an audience's perception more influentially than scientific or empirical evidence. Stories are powerful, holding the potential to bypass criticism and inform beliefs or opinions. Thus, it is important to reconcile the reality that stories can be used as potentially misleading or manipulative representations of social issues. Considering this actuality is particularly important in instances where organizations disseminate stories as a means to garner funding, social participation, or support for controversial social topics. Because stories are powerful tools for influencing social opinion, it is of paramount importance that the issues represented in a story are authentic, credible, and factual. Furthermore, it is also imperative that any calls to action posed by the organization as a result of a narrative be reliable and beneficial. Ultimately, by examining the ethical dimensions of this tool for advocacy, future scholarship can inform the development of ethical guidelines, practices, or training for organizations, ensuring that narrative activism is both impactful and ethically sound.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insight into the intersection of storytelling and women's advocacy. Through the examination of writing strategies used by gender-equality organizations, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the power of narrative activism in ushering social change. While vast research illustrates the potential of storytelling as a tool for advocacy, modern scholarship does not provide practical guidance for crafting effective narratives to advance gender equality.

An extensive review of relevant scholarship illustrated the vast gender inequalities present in the contemporary sphere, highlighting disparities related to poverty, forced marriage, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, economic vulnerability, and illiteracy. Finally, this review delved into the integration of organizational advocacy and storytelling, providing a comprehensive background for this study. The methodology employed in this study, GT, facilitated a systematic analysis of the data, textual representations of women's stories. This led to the identification of key themes, patterns, and categories within the storytelling strategies used by organizations. The implementation of initial, intermediate, and advanced coding, guided by theoretical sensitivity, ensured the resulting framework was thoroughly grounded in the analyzed data. This analysis resulted in a comprehensive presentation of the storytelling practices employed by leading gender-equality-oriented organizations in their communication of women's stories. A discussion of these results provided a narrative explanation and theoretical application of findings, as well as an illustration of potential limitations and research implications.

In conclusion, this study underscores the profound impact of storytelling as a catalyst for combatting gender inequality. By shedding light on the storytelling strategies employed by gender-focused organizations, it encourages the utilization of storytelling in driving substantive social change. As a broken world continues navigating the complexities of gender inequality, this thesis serves as a bastion for future research that explores the intersection of advocacy, storytelling, and gender equality. Moreover, this study encourages organizations and advocates alike to acknowledge storytelling as more than a source of entertainment, and instead, as a powerful tool for global change.

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