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Article Title: 'Once my relatives see me on social media… it will be something very bad for my family': The Ethics and Risks of Organizational Representations of Sporting Girls from the Global South

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Running Head: Ethics of organizational representations of SfD

Abstract:

This paper explores the ethics of representing girls and young women from the global South in Sport for Development (SfD) organizational campaigns via the case of Skateistan—an international SfD organization with skateboarding and educational programmes in Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa. Focusing particularly on Skateistan's representations of skateboarding girls and young women in Afghanistan, we draw upon interviews with staff members as well as digital ethnography and organizational curriculum materials, to reveal some of the nuanced power relations within such media portrayals. In so doing, we also draw attention to some of the unintended risks of 'positive' representations of sporting girls from the global South, and some of the strategies employed by Skateistan to navigate such issues.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been a 'turn to girls' and a 'girl powering' of development (Koffman & Gill, 2013). Originally coined by the Nike Foundation in 2005, the 'Girl Effect' has been taken up by a wide range of governmental organisations, charities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the global South. Underpinning this movement is the belief—endorsed by an alliance of multi-national corporations, charity and NGO leaders and governmental representatives—that "when given the opportunity, women and girls are more effective at lifting themselves and their families out of poverty, thereby having a multiplier effect within their villages, cities, and nations" (Shain, 2013, p. 2). The Nike Foundation repeatedly deploys the slogan "invest in a girl and she'll do the rest", while the UN Foundation purports that "[w]here there's a girl, there's a way" (cited in Koffman & Gill, 2013, p. 88). Over the past decade, Sport for Development (SfD) initiatives have increasingly included girl-focused programs to latch onto this current cultural moment (Chawansky & Hayhurst, 2015) and many of the sensibilities of the Girl Effect are evident in these SfD projects (Hayhurst 2011, 2013, 2014). Such developments are far from unproblematic. As McDonald (2015) argues, too many of these programmes assume a "taken-for-granted liberatory character" focusing on "sport's allegedly progressive role in supporting gender equality" without considering the complexities of creating long-term, sustainable changes for the lives of girls and women in local contexts (p. 1).

In this paper we draw upon a growing body of feminist scholarship that is critically considering not only the politics of girl-focused SfD organizations, but also the communication strategies associated with their activities. With the rise of the Girl Effect, many NGOs are incorporating so-called 'positive' representations of girls and young women from the global South as part of their organizational campaigns. Yet, such media

portrayals demand a "close[r] examination of who represents whom, for what purposes and with what results" (Sensoy and Marshall, 2010, p. 309). Focusing specifically on how UNICEF uses Instagram to frame policy contexts of girls' education, Anderson (2016) identifies some of the "ethical complexities of imaging girls in digital policy spaces" (p. 89). Accompanying the rise of the Girl Effect there has also been a growing visibility of sporting girls and young women from the global South, yet questions about the power relations and ethics involved in such representations have yet to be given indepth critical consideration in the field of SfD.

We explore the ethics of representing girls and young women from the global South in SfD organizational campaigns via the case of Skateistan—an international SfD organization with skateboarding and educational programmes in Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa. Focusing particularly on Skateistan's social media representations of skateboarding girls and young women in Afghanistan for audiences in the global North for the purposes of fund raising, we draw upon interviews with staff members, and social media and organizational curriculum materials, to reveal some of the nuanced power relations within such media portrayals.[1] In so doing, we also draw attention to some of the unintended consequences of 'positive' representations of sporting girls from the global South, and some of the strategies employed by Skateistan to navigate such issues.

This article consists of four main parts. We begin by contextualizing this case within the broader literature relating to the Girl Effect and recent shifts in humanitarian communication strategies. Here, we focus particularly on the power, politics and ethics of representing sporting girls from the global South, and consider such issues in relation to existing literature on sport media and feminism in the global North. Secondly, we offer a brief discussion of our methods, and thirdly we present our case study with key findings

concerning the ethics and risks of media representations of sporting girls in Afghanistan. Ultimately, we argue that media representations of sporting girls from the global South can have serious implications for the safety of female staff and participants, yet the ethics of representation and the subsequent risks to participants are highly specific to the cultural and political contexts within which such programmes operate. We conclude with suggestions for moving towards more ethical representations of participants within SfD programmes.

Humanitarian Communication, SfD, and the global South

Our analysis of the ethics and risks of representing sporting girls and young women from the global South is located at the intersection of multiple bodies of liteature. In this section we frame our paper within current literature on 1) Humanitarian communication, the Girl Effect, and the ethics of representation, 2) SfD communication, and 3) Feminist analyses of representations of active women across the global North and South. We use this literature to examine and identify how organizations, staff and participants are negotiating and responding to the various risks associated with such representations. In so doing, this paper identifies gaps in the existing research and reveals the potential of working at the intersection of these three bodies of literature to rethink the ethics of representing sporting girls and young women from the global South. In the following sections, we focus particularly on the emergence of the "representational regime" of the Girl Effect and some of the ethics, risks and consequences of the so-called 'positive' portrayals of girls and young women from the global South.

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in studying the communication strategies and aesthetic properties of humanitarian and development campaigns, including the Girl Effect (Koffman & Gill, 2013; Shain, 2013; Switzer, 2013;

Wilson, 2015). According to Dogra (2007), the representations of humanitarian agencies, social movements and community organizations, including visual imagery, are worthy of deeper critical consideration precisely because they "influence policies, practices and discourses of 'development' and connect cultures globally" (p. 161). Continuing, however, she notes that the images NGOs choose to project are "not based on unmediated or 'free' choices":

> For instance, there are limitations of charity laws, tug of multiple stakeholders, specific 'organizational subjectivity', and the very nature of visual images and their myriad interpretations. However there is still a choice which is deliberately exercised by the NGO when it selects one image over another and uses it publicly (Dogra, 2007, p. 170).

Drawing upon the work of Hall (1993), we recognize that images can be decoded in a variety of ways and such readings are often informed by one's life experiences. While 'oppositional' readings are always possible, NGOs tend to use images with a 'preferred', 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' reading intended by the organization (Dogra, 2007). While much of the existing humanitarian communication literature focuses on the strategies being employed by organizations and the 'preferred' (and often assumed) readings of audiences from the global North, it is also imperative to consider how the images and narratives may potentially act as a "space where those dominant representations can be challenged and contested" (Cameron and Hannstra, 2009, p. 1476) within organizations, and/or by local and international audiences. In this article we focus on one SfD organization's visual representations of girls from the global South because we recognize that the visual materials produced by NGOs are implicated in complex relationships between "representation, knowledge and power" (Wilson, 2011, p. 319). Moreover, we argue that representing the female sporting 'Other' involves a number of ethical considerations, which have yet to be critically explored in the SfD literature.

Humanitarian communication styles and strategies have undergone considerable change over the past four decades. Often termed "poverty porn", victim-orientated representations have been critiqued for "constructing a public image in the North of 'others' in the South as passive, helpless and sub-human victims", thus decontextualizing their suffering, removing their agency, and reinforcing "already widespread perceptions of cultural and intellectual superiority among Northern publics, as well as the belief that benevolent donors in the North are the primary source of solutions of the 'problems' of the South" (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1478). In her critique of such visual strategies, Chouliaraki (2010) described these campaigns focusing on "the distant sufferer as the object of our contemplation", and in so doing, establishing a "social relationship anchored on the colonial gaze and premised on maximal distance between spectator and suffering" (p. 110; Hall, 2001 [1992]). Focusing particularly on the gender politics of such representations, Win (2007) writes that the development industry promoted a rather trite depiction of the 'global South girl' – constructing her as "always poor, powerless and invariably pregnant, burdened with lots of children, or carrying one load or another on her head" (p. 79).

In response to widespread critique of the racist imperialism underpinning such campaigns, many humanitarian organizations and NGOs set out to deliberately represent the global South through positive images of "self reliant and active people, or at least to avoid using images that depicted people in the South as completely helpless victims" (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1478). A key difference between 'negative' and 'positive' campaigns is that the latter reject the imagery of the sufferer as a victim, focusing instead on their agency and dignity (Chouliaraki, 2010). While positive imagery may appear to "avoid the ethical problems associated with pornographic representations of poverty"

(Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1485), it is far from being unproblematic. According to

Dogra (2007), such positive imagery remains a "lazy way out", suggesting "it is time to

question the purpose of 'positive' imagery":

> Does an idealized 'happy' image show the achievements of the INGO
> thereby representing a post-intervention scenario? Is it just the safest way
> out of the strong criticism of 'negative' imagery? Or is the trend of
> 'positive' imagery merely in tune with some currently acceptable
> marketing studies that indicate that appeals sent to potential donors with
> a 'positive' image fetch more donations compared to the ones with
> 'negative' images? (p. 168).

For Chouliaraki (2010), criticism against 'positive image' appeals centres

precisely on this "ambivalent moral agency that their imagery makes possible" (p. 113).

Chouliaraki (2010) has made a particularly valuable contribution to our understandings

of these changes in humanitarian communication styles, moving beyond the simple

dichotomy of 'negative' and 'positive' campaigns and focusing instead on a more nuanced

discussion that "move(s) from emotion-oriented to post-humanitarian styles of appealing

that tend to privilege low-intensity emotions and short-term forms of agency" (p. 108).[2]

Others have asked similarly critical questions about the development industry's

neoliberalization of agency and choice (Wilson, 2015). In this context, we also need to

pose questions as to the ethics of representation, in particular who is producing

representations of those from the global South and for what purposes, and who are the

'owners' of these images?

For many, the turn towards so-called 'positive' representations of girls from the

global South may seem an improvement. Yet, a growing number of feminist scholars are

arguing that this new positive imagery paradigm is "fraught with tensions and

unintended consequences" (Koffman, Orgad & Gill, 2015, p. 159; Calkin, 2015; Wilson,

2011, 2015). In particular, Wilson (2011) examines the "specific and gendered ways" in

which "more recent visual productions are racialised", exploring, in particular, "parallels and continuities between colonial representations of women workers and today's images of micro-entrepreneurship within the framework of neoliberal globalisation" (p. 315). Others have located such trends at the intersection of neoliberalism and postfeminist discourses (of female empowerment and girl power), arguing that the 'girl' in these visual representations is in fact always understood in relation to, and in contrast with, her already empowered Northern counterpart (Calkin, 2015; Koffman & Gill, 2013; Switzer, 2013; Wilson, 2015). For example, Switzer (2013) draws upon the work of postfeminist media scholars such as McRobbie (2009) and Gill and Scharff (2011) to present a "(post)feminist development fable of adolescent female exceptionalism seeded in representations of young female sexual embodiment" that has come to "define expert and popular knowledge about the inter-dynamics of girls' education, gendered social change, and economic growth" (p. 350). In so doing, the Girl Effect has become a "regulatory representational regime" that works to reinforce binaries between empowered girls and women in the global North and those needing their help in the global South, explicitly racialising, depoliticising, ahistoricising, and naturalising global structural inequities and legitimising neoliberal interventions, all "in the name of girls' empowerment" (Switzer, 2013, p. 347).

Similarly, for Koffman, Orgad and Gill (2015), the new and intensified focus upon the figure of the girl in global humanitarian and development communications is revealing of a "distinctive, neo-colonial, neoliberal and postfeminist articulation of girl power" (p. 157). They argue that the rise in postfeminist discourses and the turn towards posthumanitarian communication styles that move away from emotion-oriented campaigns to the privileging of low-intensity emotions and short-term forms of agency

(Chouliaraki, 2010; also see Calkin, 2015), have "come together in the emerging 'girl powering' of humanitarian discourses—a cocktail of celebratory 'girlafestoes' and 'empowerment strategies' often spread virally via social media, celebrity endorsements, and corporate branding" (p. 158).

Koffman, Orgad and Gill (2015) and Wilson (2011) both locate the rise in 'positive' representations of girls and women from the global South within the "depoliticization, corporatization, and neoliberalization of humanitarian communications" (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015, p. 158). Yet, Wilson (2011) offers a more critical consideration of the consequences of such representations. According to Wilson (2011), contemporary 'positive' visual representations of girls and young women in the global South produced by development institutions are "rooted in a notion of 'agency' consistent with—and necessary for—neoliberal capitalism" (p. 328). In so doing, rather than challenging the racialized and gendered power relationships inherent in development, this focus on the agency of girls (of both the global South and global North) has "decisively shifted attention away from both material structures of power and gendered ideologies" (Wilson, 2011, p. 317):

> …agency, like empowerment, is projected as a gift to be granted by the consumer of the images—and potential donor—implicitly reaffirming the civilising mission. Thus the notion of victims to be saved, which these images supposedly challenge, is not in fact eradicated but reworked. … Like their colonial predecessors, today's images work to silence or obscure multiple forms of resistance to contemporary imperialism (Wilson, 2011, p. 329).

In this paper we are calling for greater consideration of how SfD organizations may similarly be 'reworking' historical victim-based representations of girls and young women from the global South for the purposes of raising funds from the global North, and also a recognition of the efforts by some NGOs to provide local staff and participants

opportunities to create their own images and narratives. Wilson (2011) asks a series of questions that we feel are pertinent to our analysis of SfD representations of athletic girls and young women from the global South, particularly: "What desires—licit and illicit—are being produced within the consumer of 'positive images' of women in the global south?" (p. 320); "What are the implications of the kinds of 'positive' images of women which are produced?" and "In what ways are these images gendered and racialised?" (p. 322). Despite the increasing visibility of sporting girls and young women from the global South, neither the ethics of such representations or the (unintended) risks of so-called 'positive' portrayals have been given due consideration. In the following section, we suggest that such oversights may be influenced by the tendency for feminist sport media research to focus largely on sportswomen (and audiences) from the global North.

Various scholars have examined the communication strategies employed by SfD NGOs, with a particular focus on the growing prevalence of digital campaigns. For example, research has revealed how the Internet enables sport-related NGOs by attracting funding and donor support (Wilson & Hayhurst, 2009; Svensson, Mahoney & Hambrick, 2015; Hambrick & Svensson, 2015) and supporting collaboration and competition amongst organizations (Hayhurst, Wilson, & Frisby, 2011). To date, few have focused specifically on representations of girls and young women in such campaigns. However, McDonald (2015) has observed the increasing 'positive' representations of girls and young women in SfD programmes in the global South, noting that "most of the programme images feature women in physical activity positions, or engaging with fellow participants and friends" and thus "stand in stark contrast to some poverty reduction campaigns that show the devastation that poverty ravages on the human body in order to play upon sympathies from potential donors and corporate sponsors" (p. 10). For some

scholars and practitioners from the global North, it might be assumed that representations of active girls and young women from the global South that focus on their physical abilities and sporting achievements signifies a positive trend in media portrayals. Here, however, we feel it is important to rethink some of the assumptions that have become hegemonic in feminist analyses of the sports media and the portrayal of sportswomen in the global North.

For over two decades, feminist sport sociologists have engaged in extensive media analyses of female athletes in the global North, identifying the various ways their participation is marginalized, trivialized and (hetero-) sexualized (see Bruce, 2015, for an overview of this research). In so doing, they have argued strongly for increased quantity and better quality of representations of sportswomen in media. Critically reflecting on this call for better 'quality' of media coverage for sportswomen, Toffoletti (2016) suggests a need for expanding the conceptual boundaries by including sensibilites of postfeminism (Gill, 2007). In this call, Toffoletti (2016) works to disrupt the current understandings about what quality media coverage of sportswomen is, but she does so primarily with a global North sportswoman in mind. Indeed, we would suggest that most of the academic literature on media representations of sportswomen fails to consider the needs and context of the global South female athlete. Not surprinsgly then, Samie and Sehlikoglu's (2015) analysis of Western (France, US, Canda and Australia) media coverage of Muslim female athletes who competed in London 2012 found that coverage consistently presented them as "strange, incompetent, and out-of-place." While we do not wish to conflate Muslim female athletes and athletes from the global South, what we do seek to highlight with this case of Muslim young women who participate in Skateistan is that

increased coverage of physically active girls and women from the global South does not necessarily yield better results.

This article plays an important role in challenging hegemonic assumptions that increased coverage is unquestionably positive for sportswomen and girls. For, despite a growth in so-called 'positive' representations of girls and women participating in sport in the global South, there has been little focused attention on the ways the physically active global South girl are being represented. As we argue, the power and politics of representation are highly place specific, and thus NGOs should give careful consideration not only to their international audiences but also to the local and national contexts from which representations are created.

Context and Methods

Before detailing the methods informing this project, we briefly locate our case within the national and organizational contexts of Afghanistan and Skateistan, respectively. Following decades of internationalized civil strife, earthquakes and drought, Afghanistan remains the poorest country in Asia (Carmichael, 2016). During the late 1990s and 2000s, Afghanistan became a key focus for much international aid and development, and by 2006 there were more than 800 international and indigenous Afghan NGOs operating humanitarian, reconstruction, development and peace-building programmes to "aid recovery efforts after decades of war" (Olson, 2006, p. 1). Two areas that have gained particular attention have been the struggles of Afghan children and youth, and women. Of the 33.3 million living in Afghanistan, 41 per cent are under the age of 14, with many living in poverty and without access to education or other basic human rights. Gender relations and women's rights in Afghanistan are also in the spotlight. Afghanistan is a highly patriarchal society with a "history over the centuries of women's

subjugation" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003, p. 1). The recent situation of women's status under Taliban rule has been particularly controversial, and has come to symbolize to "Western military powers a justification of war in the name of freedom of women" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003, p. 1). A considerable body of scholarship has examined how "Afghan women were held hostage by… the persistence of a particularly entrenched form of patriarchy and a tribal-based social structure in which only men have rights, equality, and unlimited access to public space" (Moghadam, 2002, p. 19). However, others are arguing against portrayals of Afghan women as victims, instead focusing on how "women organized around gender-related survival strategies… [and] worked together in groups and organisations, generating networks, norms, and trust in their communities" (Rostami Povey, 2004, p. 172; also see Abu-Lughod, 2002). More recently, there has also been a rise of young Afghan women using social media to amplify their voices and for political purposes (Hermann, 2015). While many NGOs in Afghanistan are focused on children, youth, and women's development, there remains a tendency to view these groups as victims requiring versions of aid and support derived in the global North.

Skateistan began as an "independent, neutral, Afghan NGO" providing skateboarding tuition, and art and language education, to "urban and internally-displaced youth in Afghanistan" (www.skateistan.org). [3] Founded in 2006 by Australian skateboarder Oliver Percovich, Skateistan has continued to grow with two Afghan facilities, one in Kabul and the other in Mazar-e-Sharif (northern Afghanistan), and has recently expanded to offer programmes in Cambodia and South Africa and the opening of HQ in Berlin. Skateistan receives the bulk of its funding from three main sources—governmental agencies (75%), foundations (18%), and individuals and corporations (15%)—with 66 per cent of its US$1.255 million operational budget in 2015 and 2016

spent on the Afghanistan projects (Skateistan Annual Report, 2015). The rapid growth and diversification of Skateistan has seen significant changes in staffing structures, with the day-to-day management of facilities increasingly being passed over to local staff.[4]

In this paper we focus primarily on the two Afghan facilities that provide for more than 1000 Afghan children and youth per week in their various programmes (i.e., 'Skate and Create', 'Back to School'—primarily for displaced and street working children—and 'Youth and Leadership') more than 30 per cent of whom are street working children and almost 50 per cent of who are girls.[5] In contrast to many SfD programs that add offerings for girls and women almost as an afterthought, Percovich proclaims that the needs of girls and young women have always been a central focus for Skateistan. In his own words: "I was inspired to start Skateistan because I didn't see women playing an active role in civil society in Afghanistan and wanted to see if that could be legitimately challenged with a locally acceptable solution". He remains adamant that the investment in female-specific skateboarding and educational programmes was authentic: "we're not really chasing donor money, this is *really* where the idea came from in the first place" (interview with first author, 2011). Despite international recognition for their efforts to develop innovative approaches towards understanding and respect for the unique value systems, etiquette and practices within the Afghan context, it is important to note that the origins of Skateistan are based in some of the same neo-colonial underpinnings of many other SfD programmes operating in the contemporary neoliberal context (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013; also see Darnell, 2009; 2010; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

Methods

In the remainder of this paper we focus on Skateistan's marketing and communication strategies, particularly as they relate to their usage of social media and representations of Afghan girls. In so doing, we draw upon interviews conducted (in-person and via Skype) by the first author between 2011 and 2016 with 12 Skateistan staff (of past and present), including nine international staff (of recent past and present) and three Afghan staff.[6] While these interviews were part of a larger project of the first author, a key line of questioning was their role in the documentation and production of imagery associated with Skateistan over the past 10 years and/or their understandings of the issues associated with representing Afghan girls in such materials. Interviewees included eight women and four men (pseudonyms will be used throughout) whom had held a variety of roles within the NGO, including paid and volunteer positions ranging from Communications Manager to multi-media coordinating assistant, and thus the interviews offered a wide array of perspectives and critical understandings of such processes. Although interviews are the primary method informing this paper, ongoing observations of Skateistan's use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, organizational website and blog) conducted by the first author also provide important contextual insights. At the time of writing this article, Skateistan had almost 11,000 Twitter followers, 45,000 Instagram followers, and with over 125,000 Facebook 'likes'. Audience responses to images and stories on these platforms proved insightful for understanding the production and consumption of Afghan girls and young women. In the remainder of this paper we engage with recent feminist humanitarian communication scholarship to critically contextualize the insights offered from both interviews and digital ethnography

to consider how Skateistan's strategies are informed by broader trends in posthumanitarian communication and postfeminist culture.

Findings and Discussion

In this section we draw upon our multi-method approach to present the following four themes; 1) The power and ethics of digital representations of Afghan Girls on skateboards, 2) The risks of representing Afghan girls on skateboards, 3) Organizational negotiations of the risks of representation, and 4) Local staff and participants' representations of Afghan girls.

The Power and Ethics of Digital Representations of Afghan Girls on Skateboards

Working at the intersection between skateboarding media and NGO communications, Skateistan is very proactive and efficient in their use of social media. Since the early days of the organization, Skateistan has invested in a well-designed website featuring regular updates, videos, photos and a variety of other media content. During an interview in 2011, Percovich acknowledged that the Skateistan website has always been an important tool for garnering global support and recognition: "Even when the organization was very very basic. . . there was the Skateistan website that had photos on there that connected with people". Continuing, he described the ability to "document and share" their work in Kabul with a global audience via the website and other visual media as "just as important as the activities [on the ground]. . . because not everybody can come and see with their own two eyes what we were doing". Today, social media campaigns play a key role in Skateistan's fundraising efforts, contributing approximately 12% (US$150,600) to their annual income.[7] According to Skateistan's Communication Manager, their three main objectives for using social media platforms are "raising awareness, maintaining credibility and raising funds." Continuing, she explains that

despite the importance of social media to Skateistan's fundraising efforts, "we do no have a social media budget": "Our strategy does not include a high investment into paid social media" but rather "relies on organic reach and growth" and "work[ing] creatively to use the platforms and find new ones." Skateistan's sole investment in their social media campaigns is the "time of our communications and development teams to work on campaigns and implement them." However, in contrast to many sporting NGOs, this investment in social media-focused staffing is significant, including two full time communications staff at their headquarters in Berlin dedicated to producing and disseminating content via their organizational website and blog, and Twitter, Instagram and Facebook profiles, with at least one local staff member at each of their sites focused on the role of communications and content production. Content from the local sites is sent to HQ where images and text are ultimately selected, edited and posted by the Communication Manager.

Skateistan's use of social media is firmly located in the recent turn to 'positive' humanitarian communication strategies. Skateistan staff interviewed for this project were largely attuned to stereotypical representations used in development work that potentially "produce and sustain knowledge of the helpless cultural Other" (Darnell, 2010, p. 399). As Renee states, "We are always focusing on portraying things positively, putting the kids first and their voices first", and Andrea adds:

> One of the most important policies around the media we produce is that we… don't want to use any images of our students looking tragic. We don't want to exploit them and make you [the reader] feel sorry for them to try to generate interest or revenue, which is what a lot of organisations do.

Similarly, Tina noted that "Skateistan has guidelines for social media and media in general", such that "we're always focusing on the positive aspects and never doing poverty porn style photographs".

Skateistan iconography has been particularly dominated by images of Afghan girls in headscarfs and traditional clothing either riding on skateboards, learning to skateboard, or standing confidently on or with skateboards (see Figures 1 and 2). As Andrea notes: "we definitely do focus on the Afghan girls—they're skateboarding, they're empowered, they're excited. [We focus on positive representations of Afghan girls] because it's ethical…" Another senior communications staff, however, suggested that despite their programmes catering for boys and girls, the organizational communications continue to be "a bit heavier on the female content because we'll get more off it" (Amanda), thus suggesting an explicit market awareness and the 'effectiveness' of such images in a saturated humanitarian mediascape. Yet, as Magno and Kirk (2008) take care to remind us, such images are more than effective marketing devices, they are also "powerful tools used in the construction of gender relations, ethnic/racial difference and power relations as well as conceptions of development, underdevelopment and overdevelopment" (p. 360).

Elsewhere we have considered what makes these images so powerful at this particular historical conjuncture (Thorpe, Hayhurst and Chawansky, In Press). In so doing, we argued that these images sit at the intersection of hegemonic discourses of 1) Afghanistan as a site of ongoing conflict and female oppression, and 2) skateboarding as an activity dominated for many years by young, white men (see Beal, 1996), as well as 3) the rise of the Girl Effect and postfeminist media culture. The following comments from Amanda are insightful of this broader context within which such imagery have found traction:

> These images [of Afghan girls skateboarding] were challenging so many stereotypes all in one. They're challenging the stereotype of the negativity towards Afghanistan, and towards a female's place in society there. But also from a skateboard perspective… in western culture, often skateboarding is seen as a thing just for men… There are just so many double negatives going on [in these images]. Also, I think with so much going on in the news about Afghanistan that's negative, to see these positive images, which are so rare and for it to be something that is not expected of Afghan girls, it's very inspiring.

Indeed, for more than a decade media from the global North has repeatedly stressed the oppressive, patriarchal culture of Afghanistan (as some have argued, this has been important in justifying such longterm international military involvement, see Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Working to connect with audiences in the global North in an Afghanistan saturated media context, Skateistan has been able to largely avoid commenting on the conditions in Afghanistan, instead presenting 'positive' portrayals of Afghan girls while audiences in the global North themselves fill in the background based on their own (often misundertood or stereotypical) understandings of the lives of girls and women in Afghanistan. As one international staff member comments:

> I think those images of Afghan girls really challenge people's expectations of what an Afghan girl likes to do. You don't have to post a picture of someone sitting on the street looking down and out because people have this assumption in their head that that's what it is to be an Afghan woman. So when we have these images of them not just doing a sport or studying but also doing a sport that's traditionally very male dominated [in the global North], I think it really hits people because it's two things they never thought they would see together (Janet).

Observing the power of imagery associated with the Girl Effect, Koffman, Orgad and Gill (2015) note that "the contrast between girls powerlessness and their potential is highlighted and used as a rhetorical device across policy documents, campaign materials, and media texts" (p. 16). Indeed, it is this "dual construction" of the Afghan skater girl as "victim and agent of potential" that works so effectively as a rhetorical device for Skateistan: she is "at once a victim of oppressive patriarchal culture and a couragoues,

resilient agent refusing to be silenced, embodying the feisty, girl-power inflected mode of (post)feminist (post) humanitarianism" (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015, p. 161). Elsewhere we have examined the appeal of such images for global North audiences in the context of postfeminism (see Thorpe, Hayhurst & Chawansky, In Press). In the remainder of this section, however, our focus is on the intersection of the ethical and market-driven considerations informing such photographs—who takes them and for what purposes—as well as the unintended consequences of such images.

When Skateistan first started producing imagery associated with their programmes with Afghan youth in 2007, the organization had a clear understanding of their intended audience. The organizational website and online videos were produced for audiences in the global North for the purposes of raising awareness of their work and fundraising. While the Skateistan website offered Western consumers an unlimited flow of information—stories, photos, videos, and art (and commodities)—featuring and/or produced by Skateistan participants, the media consumption by Afghan youth was carefully controlled. In an interview in 2011, Percovich explained that while the marketing and branding of Skateistan was being used to "connect with western audiences and western youth and to raise money" for their projects in Afghanistan, it remained "an overseas activity". Continuing, he critically reflected: "we can't pretend that we're not influencing them [programme participants] culturally at all, but we're trying to minimize that because. . . if [the children] start taking what is seen as western cultural cues they'll be stopped from coming here very fast".

Over the past five years, however, Afghan youth have increasingly gained access to social media via cheap smartphones, and thus the flow of information is progressively two-way. Observing such changes, Percovich noted in a more recent interview:

> I think a big thing that has changed between when we last talked [2012] is just the increase in use of smart phones, and simply photography, and just sharing of images on the social media; compared to even a year ago, Facebook plays such a big role in Afghanistan right now! Even just taking a photo four years ago was a huge taboo somehow and now everybody is taking photos simply because everybody has a camera on their smart phone, and just about everybody has a smart phone.

Continuing, he clarified that even "street working kids… are buying themselves $40 smartphones brand new from China" (2015). An Afghan staff member supported such observations: "Social media is something very big between the young people and putting their pictures up. They go to school and then back home and they have nothing to do except check their Facebook".

Arguably, the increasing access Afghan youth have to new media technologies is an important step in the democratization of digital knowledge. However, such changes also have significant ethical implications for how SfD organizations represent their participants of SfD organizations and to whom. With Skateistan media and marketing materials no longer exclusively reaching audiences in the global North, the organization needs to take even greater care to ensure their participants are represented in ways that are culturally appropriate and that they feel are representative of their experiences: "Half of our students are also our Facebook followers now, and they're liking every single thing that we post. So you want it [the photos and stories] to be something that they're excited to be a part of" (Natalie). Simply put, with an increasingly two-way flow of such images and narratives, Skateistan has become even more accountable to their participants, as well as participants' families and communities, in terms of how they are representing their programmes and participants. As Anderson (2016) notes, in contrast to old media—including print communication—"new media enables users to be active participants in what they see, hear, and share with others in digital spaces", and this has important

ethical implications for how organizations engage with new media (p. 88). Continuing, Anderson (2016) suggests that the ethics of digital representation must be at the fore when considering the ways in which organizations "select and disseminate images of protected and vulnerable populations—like girls" (p. 91). While some scholars are examining the ethics involved in organizational digital representations of girls from the global South, the risks of such portrayals have yet to be considered.

The Risks of Representing Afghan Girls on Skateboards

With the popularity of social media has come considerable academic and public concern about the "gendered risks" posed to girls and young women in digital spaces (Ringrose & Baraja, 2011). Yet it is important to note that such concerns—verging on moral panic at times—have focused almost entirely on the possible risks for girls and young women in the global North (e.g., online predators, cyber bullying, the unintended consequences of sexting, body image issues; Dobson, 2015; Hasinoff, 2012; Salter, 2016), with little critical consideration of the gendered risks digital technologies may pose to girls and young women from the global South. [8] Moreover, most of the feminist scholarship critically examining the Girl Effect and shifts in humanitarian communications has been largely theoretical, focusing particularly on the contradictions and inequitable global power relations evident in such campaigns. Yet, our interviews with Afghan staff revealed that the combination of increasing access to social media among Afghan youth and 'positive' representations of Afghan girls can have serious implications for the safety of female staff and participants. The following comments from an Afghan female staff member are revealing here:

> When Skateistan [staff] post pictures of females, there is a chance that the boys will copy those pictures and then they're presented in a way like 'I know this girl' and it gets very bad. That's one of the things. The other thing is some of the girls… don't like their pictures to be on Facebook.

Continuing, she highlights the challenges for SfD organizations that have been using such images 'effectively' (in terms of their ability to attract interest and fundraise) in their marketing and fundraising campaigns, but may not consider the implications for some of their participants:

> These images are good for Skateistan, but sometimes I think it could create bad problems for the girls if they appear in the media. That's tricky! Also I can understand Skateistan too, that they want to share positive images but sometimes it could be difficult for the girls. If you go to the Skateistan website, you won't find any pictures of some of the Afghan female Skateistan staff… because they don't want to be shown.

During this interview, the first author prompted further to better understand the female Skateistan participants and staff concerns, to which she confirmed: "Oh yeah, they fear that their photos might be copied by the boys and then they would create problems for them. The boys photo-shop them [the images] and it can create a big problem". While her own family are "very supportive… and so caring and loving", she added that they have also warned her to "be aware of your pictures putting them on Facebook… that could create problems for you or that could make us look very bad in our community". Another Afghan female staff member admitted that "my husband doesn't like my photo on Facebook", and for many of their female students "their brothers don't like their sisters on Facebook or television or any other media". In response to a question regarding the fears Afghan girls and women have about their images appearing in social media, she explained "they fear of them getting in the wrong hands, yes… fears of the Taliban". Similarly, a male Afghan staff member involved in media production for Skateistan explained:

> They [female students] worry that these photos will be seen by the Taliban… yes, a small percentage of our students think like this! But there is also a traditional thing… like they're wondering… I'm skateboarding here and when I become in the photo and then Skateistan posts it on Facebook and once my cousins or my relatives see me on social media or on the Internet, it will be something very bad for my family.

Continuing, he added "they're a bit scared of the camera", before recalling a situation the previous year when a group of 50 new female 'Back to School' students did not return the following day, and when the community relations officer asked their families why, she received the following response: "Oh, there was a boy doing photography and videoing them, so they're not going there". As this example suggests, feminist critiques of Girl Effect related communications would do well to pay further attention to the local contexts in which social media portrayals of girls (particularly portrayals of sport and education) may carry a unique set of risks and consequences.

Organizational Negotiations of the Risks of Representation

Recognizing such concerns, Skateistan has taken various measures to ensure participants and staff always have the option not to appear in photos: "We ask students who wants to be in the photograph, and who doesn't want to be. When a person doesn't want to be in a photograph we tell them to come to the front of the class so they won't be in the photograph. We are careful with those things" (male Afghan staff member). These concerns are explicitly written into the Skateistan communications policy documents and, in November 2016, an Afghan staff member updated this document, adding eleven items to the section 'Afghanistan specific guidelines' to ensure that all involved in media content production recognize the cultural complexities of photography in this context and are aware of the organizational guidelines that seek to minimize any risks to female participants. Examples of items from these guidelines include: "Do not take photos outside. Taking photos of students outside can create questions for parents", "Do not take

inappropriate photos of [sic] girls, e.g., up skirt, down blouse, short sleeves or without scarf. These photos will create problems for her in community and also will create problems for us"; and "Try to only take photos of girls over the age of 10." During interviews, international and local Skateistan staff also described various strategies to try to minimize risks to the programme, staff and participants, including carefully controlling who has access to the Afghanistan facilities and the types of images and narratives that result from any media visits. At times of heightened risk, they do not allow international media visits, and have tried to minimize media coverage in Afghanistan. Local staff also develop on-the-ground strategies to implement Skateistan's broader policies in a locally-specifica and culturally appropriate manner. For example, one Afghan staff member described subtly placing red stickers outside classrooms in which female students had chosen not to be photographed. The purpose of the red sticker was to ensure that no photographs are accidentally taken by any staff or visitors.[9]

More recently, with the aim towards more sustainable and safer programmes, the Afghanistan facilities have been passed over to local staff with international staff relocating to the headquarters in Berlin, and offering ongoing support to the local programmes via daily communications and short-term visits. In the lead-up to this transition, local staff were trained in taking photographs and video content of the everyday programming and events. While local Afghan staff embraced the new opportunities to take ownership of creating media content, some admitted tensions and struggles negotiating two different sets of cultural expectations. For example, while the international staff at HQ are asking for particular images and stories (that they know 'work' for the purposes of fundraising or reporting), the Afghan female students remain cautious and occasionally accuse the local communications staff of 'spying' or 'doing

business'. According to an Afghan male staff member, he often faces questions from female participants such as the following: "Why are you doing this [taking photos]? You're doing business on me?" Continuing, he admitted, "It's very challenging doing my job, especially doing photography or videoing or making documentaries. Like when I'm doing photos, we have 25 students in one class, and many of them will be covering their faces and hiding from the camera. I'm telling them don't worry, I'm not taping you". As this comment suggests, local staff must work at the intersection of expectations from their international colleagues who are trying to create a particular set of images and narratives for the purposes of fundraising, and local participants' cultural concerns about photography, surveillance and their personal safety.

Local Staff and Participants' Representations of Afghan Girls: Negotiating Agency within Organizational Structures

Concluding their visual analyses of the pictures that UNICEF uses and of the policy framing of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), Kirk and Magno (2009) and Magno and Kirk (2008) argued for the importance of humanitarian and development organizations including girls in both image production and message dissemination (also see Anderson, 2016). A growing number of NGOs, and various SfD organizations, are increasingly providing opportunities for participants to document their own experiences, with some suggesting that these new forms of "communicative intervention" signal an important shift "from rescuer to facilitator of people's own representations of their own lives, and to a polyphony of voices and versions that can engage all in the critical acts of interpretation and interruption" (Cornwall, forthcoming, p. 13). Skateistan also provides opportunities for its students to take photographs, and produce videos and blogs for the organizational website. For example, as part of their curriculum in both Kabul and Mazar-

y-Sharif, they host a yearly Global Citizens in Action course that involves the creation of various media items "for communication purposes". One example from this class was a film titled 'Afghan Youth Leaders Fight Against Street Harassment' available on YouTube (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqTtZK0Jn8c). This film was produced by Skateistan students from the Mazar-y-Sharif facility and reveals the process of Afghan boys and girls working together to produce a short film that seeks to challenge gender-based harassment on the streets. Furthermore, in the Youth Leadership programme, participants at the Kabul facility engage in communication and media training, which involves critical thinking about "knowing who your audience is", "choosing who you are messaging to", and "what the demand for that is" (male Afghan staff member). In an interview with one Afghan staff member involved in running these classes, he explained that while participants in this programme "loved what international staff are doing" with media representations of Skateistan, they are focused on "being innovative in ways that match our national and cultural contexts". When asked specifically about what participants in this programme are taught about representing girls and women, he noted: "It is very important in Afghanistan to be looking after girls and women, and our culture. In class we explain that if you're taking photos of girls, you need to ask her, and you can't show her like in a fashion magazine as that's just not right in Afghanistan". In this programme, Youth Leaders also have opportunities to experiment with new media technologies, including Go Pro training sessions as seen in Figure 3 below.

The opportunities for Skateistan participants and staff to be involved in their own narrative constructions, and the cultural considerations being given to representing Afghan girls and women, are to be applauded. However, our findings suggest that it is also important to consider the (unintended) influence international staff and dominant

organizational representations and narratives may have on the ways local participants and staff might choose to represent their own lives and experiences. As a male Afghan staff member admitted, "most of our students do focus on the stories of female staff and students… because their stories are very interesting and very important… they're very brave to teach here". With further prompting about how such images and stories where received among local audiences, he admitted that there has been a change in recent years with Afghan people becoming more accepting of girls doing sport. Moreover, there is a small but growing group of young Afghan women who are "activists" and are "using social media to raise their voices".[10] Just a few years ago, it was "very shocking to see girls doing sport, but now people are getting used to it", and while about "30% of people say that these images and stories are very bad and not from our culture…. about 70% of people are reading them as good; they make them very happy and sometimes they look at them with tears". In the Youth Leadership programme, many Skateistan participants focus on producing content related to female students and staff because they're "really inspired by what the international staff have done, and they want to do that. They're also inspired by photos like the famous National Geographic image [of Sharbat Gula, an Afghan girl with strikingly green eyes gazing at the camera]", but they are also encouraged in class to "think locally—what we need to do inside our own country and also for international audiences".

In the process of international staff working with and training local staff, however, the local communications staff (and students) have learned what types of images and narratives are most likely to be selected by those at HQ, thus shaping (even limiting) the representations they ultimately create themselves. In so doing, the processes of NGOization are impacting the representations that local staff and participants imagine for

themselves. Furthermore, the communications staff in Berlin "set weekly content collection tasks" for local staff, that suggests some openness to locally specific forms of representation but always within a framework informed by the demands of the highly competitive development market. For example, one international staff member proclaimed:

> We're really lucky with the staff being very understanding to us. They will be like 'we will fulfil this brief', because they're very devoted and they're a great bunch of workers and very talented content producers, and that's including photographers and even with words as well and video. … I think it's very much a mutual relationship where there's understanding on both points creatively, where they're putting their creativity in and they'll also fulfil what we need creatively, and then we put our creativity in. It's amazing how much they're learning, and we're learning at the same time (Amanda)

Whereas some staff proclaimed a creative and productive relationship between communications staff in HQ and local sites, others were somewhat ambivalent, with one international staff member referring to local content producers as becoming "like our personal journalists who will interview the kids [and] collect that kind of data" (Sarah).

In sum, while the current trend for humanitarian and development organizations to encourage participants to become involved in "image production and message dissemination" and the creation of opportunities for local staff and participants to tell their own narratives, might seem like signs of positive change, we need to be aware of how previous and ongoing unequal power relations and interactions with international staff and media content may be limiting the content they feel they are able to create, and/or the content that they have learned will ultimately be used (or not) by the organization for marketing and fundraising purposes. Such modes of representation are never free from broader power relations, and as we have seen in the case of Skateistan, even when images are captured by local staff and participants themselves, such

representations remain heavily influenced (either purposefully or inadvertently) by discursive regimes originating from the global North.

Final Thoughts and Future Directions

In the context of the 'Girl Effect' in development, an array of Sport for Development (SfD) programmes focused on girls and young women are utilizing social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Twitter) to garner international attention and raise funds for their initiatives.[11] In so doing, we increasingly see girls from the global South in action—playing soccer, climbing walls, and engaging in an array of other sports. While such visual representations suggest a positive move away from what some have termed 'poverty porn' that tends to victimize those from the global South, in this article we have called for a more nuanced critical understanding of the power relations and ethics involved in the representation of girls and young women from the global South (Cornwall, forthcoming; Wilson, 2011). Located at the intersection of postfeminist, neoliberal and posthumanitarian discourses, many such representations are culturally complex and thus somewhat intriguing to audiences in the global North, and thus highly effective in garnering the attention of potential donors. But as Sensoy and Marshall (2010) suggest, if we view such initiatives and representations as "a political text mired in its social context and tied to historically bound colonial discourses and material power relations, then we can ask a different set of questions around 'whom do activists [and organizations] represent and how far the right to represent extends'" (p. 309). In this paper, we engaged specifically with recent feminist considerations of shifting humanitarian communication styles and strategies to critically discuss the ethics and risks of NGOs representing girls from the global South in SfD campaigns. In particular, we examined the case of the skateboarding-focused NGO, Skateistan, and their social media

portrayals of Afghan girls. In so doing, we suggest that postfeminist discourses of agency and empowerment – as well as neoliberal and colonial assumptions – are reproduced in the production of such imagery, and highlighted some of the unintended risks (i.e., dangers from Taliban; family shame and social and physical risks of having a daughter associated with sport, education and/or an international NGO) of such portrayals for local female participants and their families.

To date, much of the feminist and post-humanitarian communication scholarship has focused on the representational strategies employed by aid and development campaigns with the aim of gaining attention, and ultimately funding, from international audiences and donors. However, more research is needed that considers how audiences in the global North and South make meaning of such representations, and the responses from different groups. There is also some research that is beginning to recognize the potential agency that social media and new media technologies may offer to local participants for creating and disseminating their own representations (see, for example, Thorpe & Ahmad, 2015). While this article was located primarily in the former, we do recognize that the power of representation is not simply a top-down or one-way process. In fact, local staff and participants also have some agency to inform, and even challenge, representational styles and strategies. For example, adopting a postcolonial feminist approach, Darnell and Hayhurst (2013) argue that targeted beneficiaries do have some "agency or ability to resist, change or challenge the ways they participate and are represented in SDP programs" (p. 47), particularly through participatory approaches to research or monitoring and evaluation, visual representation such as photovoice or digital storytelling (Wijnen & Wildschut, 2015). Here, SfD participants may have the ability to capture their own photographs and images. Darnell and Hayhurst further

contend that sport may be a unique means through which targeted beneficiaries may emphasize identity and agency, and where "actors in post-colonial spaces are increasingly using the Internet and new media to disseminate visual images and texts that *they have created*, so that the local is privileged, and resistance to stewardship is (potentially) mobilized" (Darnell and Hayhurst, 2013, p. 47). This is not to suggest that more participatory approaches to visually representing SfD participants will serve as a panacea for addressing the inherent risks in posthumanitarian communication strategies as outlined in this paper. Certainly, and as we have discerned elsewhere (e.g., Author 2, under review), concerns abound related to the underlying power dynamics and potential for misappropriation of images taken by participants to showcase their experiences in a given project. Indeed, these images may still be (mis)appropriated for unintended purposes. In the 'digital era', it remains challenging to control and protect sensitive information, despite the best efforts of both action researchers and NGOs to abide by ethical agreements to do so. In this light, we suggest that scholars conducting future research would do well to explore the intersections of risk, participatory visual research methods, the ethics of representation (for both research and organizational purposes) and SfD programming further.

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Figure 1: An example of the 'positive' imagery of Afghan girl skateboarders common in Skateistan communication campaigns, particularly the type of images that appear on Facebook, Instagram and the organizational website. Used with permission of Skateistan.

Figure 2. A screen grab of the BBC documentary 'Skate Girls of Kabul'. Image taken by first author.

Figure 3. Two Afghan female participants in the Skateistan Youth Leaders programme participate in a media training session. In this image we see the young woman with the black helmet filming her peer with a Go Pro in her right hand.

[1] Although not the focus of this paper, we acknowledge that further research is needed that examines how such representations are read and responded to by audiences in the global North and South, and especially by participants in such programmes.

[2] While we do not have the space here to offer a detailed discussion of post-humanitarian communication, elsewhere we have drawn upon her argument that new humanitarian campaigns are increasingly focused on "triggering reflexivity in the spectator" to examine how recent development campaigns featuring girls from the global South are connecting with young women from the global North (see Thorpe, Hayhurst & Chawansky, In Press).

[3] Of course, no SfD organization is ever 'neutral'. For a critical analysis of Skateistan within the broader neoliberal context, see Thorpe and Rinehart (2013).

[4] In 2017, the management team at the International Office consists of the Executive Director, deputy executive director, development director, programs director, HR/projects director, and managers of development, finance, and communications. Women currently make up 50% of the management team, and 50% of the full time staff in the Berlin office. At the two Afghan facilities, the organizational structure has four levels, with the local management team consisting of a general manager, and finance, programs, and development and communications officers. Across the two facilities in Afghanistan, women constitute just under 50% of staff (21 of the 45 positions). Due to cultural restrictions in Afghanistan, all guard and driver positions are held by male staff (10 of the 45 positions).

[5] For more information on the reach and impact of these programmes, see Skateistan Annual Report (2015).

[6] Skateistan supports participants into volunteer positions, with some being offered paid positions and a few provided opportunities in management. Recently a few specific positions (e.g., financial officer) have been advertised within Afghanistan. In interviews conducted with the first author, local staff mentioned the risks associated with working for a foreign NGO, but explained that they feel such risks have been minimized with less international presence. For those interested in the experiences of international female staff working for Skateistan in Afghanistan, see Thorpe and Chawansky (2016).

[7] According to Skateistan leadership, "Given that Skateistan spends almost nothing on off-line fundraising (e.g. phone calling, snail-mail send outs, etc) and focuses almost all fundraising resources on online fundraising, it's fairly accurate to say that this amount is almost entirely generated via social media. In saying that, we do not currently use a specific platform or measurement tool that allows us to track this. We can however gain insights from the platforms themselves about clickthrough rate to our donate page."

[8] Such risks gained global attention in July 2016 when Pakistani model, actress, women's rights activist and social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch was murdered by her brother after taunts from his friends that her social media usage was dishonoring his family.

[9] More research is needed to understand programme participants individual desires, fears and competing motives to be included or excluded from organizational media and marketing materials.

[10] Recently there has been a rise of young Afghan women using social media to amplify their voices and for political purposes (Herman, 2015).

[11] The focus of this paper has been organizational use of social media, but of course, local and international staff and participants use social media as well. In so doing, their sharing of images is less associated with fundraising and more about self-representation. This connects with the notion of 'selfie-humanitarianism' (Koffman, Orgad & Gill, 2015) which is further evidenced in social media sites dedicated to humanitarian workers, such as: http://humanitariansoftinder.com/