What are the effects of mobile phone promotion on the empowerment of girls in developing countries? A case study of NGOs.

Thesis

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Contents

Introduction

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are either specifically aimed at empowerment of women and girls or feature this as a key part of policy, as increasing their rights are often viewed as the most widely beneficial way to promote development in an area. Thus we find that women in the workforce increase productivity and generate resources; increased health and knowledge of reproductive rights leads to lower infant mortality rates and helps to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases; better education allows women to break the cycle of poverty and participate directly in development processes. These processes begin in childhood and so development NGOs often aim to empower girls as a long-term investment within their specific geographic or developmental area of focus.

As NGOs have increasingly tended to shift from aid to empowerment, simultaneously, mobile phone penetration, globally, has soared. According to the largest association of mobile operators in the world, the GSM Association, approximately one fifth of the human population had access to a mobile phone subscription in 2004; yet by the end of 2015, this number stood at 4.6 billion with an additional billion predicted by 2020.[1] Within this figure, the United Nations reports that mobile phone penetration – the proportion of the population with access – in Africa went from 1% in 2000 to 54% in 2014, with 67% of phones now internet-enabled.[2] Total penetration is highest in Europe, at 85%, and fastest growing in Asia Pacific, where it stands at 62%.[3]

These figures indicate the importance of mobile technology as a facet of increased globalisation. First and foremost, mobile phones allow communication both on an individual level and with society at large through the ability to share and receive information. However, mobile technology has developed beyond this capacity and now encompasses a range of other functions, including banking, health and education. The potential benefits of these uses, particularly in developing nations, has not been lost on NGOs working in the development sector.

Mobile phones, with their multitude of applications, are an emerging avenue through which NGOs seek to promote their ideas of empowerment. As a result, many of the largest organisations have embraced them as a tool. Examples include how the Bill Melinda Gates

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[1] The GSM Association, "The Mobile Economy 2016", in: *GSMA Mobile Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, p. 2.
[2] Jocelyne Sambira, 2013. *Africa's mobile youth drive change* [online] (updated May 2013) Available at: http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-mobile-youth-drive-change [Accessed 6 May 2016].
[3] The GSM Association, "The Mobile Economy 2016", in: *GSMA Mobile Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, p. 10.

Foundation promotes mobile banking with the stated goal "to help people in the world's poorest regions improve their lives and build sustainable futures by connecting them with digitally-based financial tools and services"[4]; how UNAIDS is collaborating with telecommunications operator Orange to produce a mobile platform for health services to maintain easy contact with patients afflicted with HIV and AIDs[5]; and how World Vision International has created a hotline application for people to report human trafficking in Albania.[6]

There are several things to note about these examples and countless other incidents of mobile technology promotion by NGOs. First, notions of empowerment are not universally understood. A critical analysis is required to understand what NGOs mean when they discuss their methods of empowering girls in development contexts. Significantly, the formulation of such methods may or may not involve the girls whom they seek to address and may be taken from a standpoint that neglects the variety of conditions and constraints that these girls may be experiencing. Equally important is the motivation behind these ideas – as discussed earlier, empowerment of girls is an effective way to promote development in an area, but other factors, including profit, may be at play with regard to what type of empowerment is pursued.

Secondly, as referenced before in the statistics on growth in mobile usage, access to this technology is still by no means universal. Even under current growth trends, the GSM Association estimates that 41% of people in the developing world remain without the ability to reach mobile networks.[7] This is a fundamental issue as NGOs do not typically promote mobile purchasing nor do they frequently provide mobile phones to a target population due to the impracticalities and costs of doing so. Instead, they target those who already possess mobile phones and encourage new or different ways to use them. From the outset, this creates a divide between those with the resources for phones and those without, as only the former are available for the types of empowerment that these NGOs are offering.

These two issues are at the heart of this thesis, which will examine what empowerment means in the context of development and the effects that NGO promotion of mobile phones

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[4] Bill Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016. *Financial Services for the Poor: Strategy Overview* [online] (updated 2016) Available at: http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Financial-Services-for-the-Poor [Accessed 8 May 2016].

[5] Sophie Barton-Knott, 2016. *UNAIDS to collaborate on new mobile technology platform to improve data collection and advance the response to HIV* [online] (updated 8 Mar 2016) Available at: http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2016/march/20160308_mobile [Accessed 6 May 2016].

[6] Elda Spaho, 2014. *New smartphone app, hotline make reporting human trafficking possible for more Albanians* [online] (updated 24 June 2014) Available at: http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/human-trafficking-app-albania [Accessed 6 May 2016].

[7] The GSM Association, "The Mobile Economy 2016", in: *GSMA Mobile Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, p. 10.

can have upon this. I have one overarching main question and three sub-questions with which to evaluate these issues:

What are the effects of mobile phone promotion on the empowerment of girls in developing countries? A case study of NGOs.

1. What does 'empowerment' mean in these development contexts?
2. How is the connection of mobile phone technology to empowerment of girls in development contexts understood?
3. How do ideals about phone-based empowerment by NGOs work out in practice?

The specific focus on girls is because the narrative of empowerment is most frequently applied to them in terms of NGO 'investments' in an areas of development, such as health or economics, as mentioned earlier. This thesis will be split into four chapters and a conclusion. Following this introduction, I will summarise the present state of academic knowledge relating to empowerment and mobile phone technology, including a review both of current literature and research alongside an examination of differing fields of thought about technology for development.

After this, I will provide a methodological-theoretical framework for my own analysis, including details of the research that I have conducted as an exploration of these themes. This research took the form of interviews with five leaders of development NGOs in different countries, on the subject of implementing mobile phones for the empowerment of girls. This will lead into a discussion and analysis of this research combined with the current state of knowledge, addressing the three sub-questions in turn. Finally, I conclude by showing how all of these things come together to answer my main question and with my own suggestions on changes that can be applied as a result of this research.

The research I present in this thesis makes a valuable contribution in several ways. To the academic field of Gender Studies, it is an opportunity to reflect on how themes of empowerment, agency and representation take new forms in digital environments, in emerging development contexts, and in the intersection of these two areas. Under the processes of globalisation and increasing technologisation of societies, these are important considerations for which Gender Studies theories can be updated and expanded upon. Furthermore, critical analysis is vital to NGOs as a means of questioning the power structures they embody and ensuring as much as possible that their actions contribute directly and beneficially to the lives of the girls without engaging in processes of othering. This thesis can therefore prove useful to

NGOs as an indicator of how programmes can be structured to utilise mobile technology without perpetuating social, technological or cultural divides.

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>**Background and Theory**</center>

1.1 Theories of Empowerment

Much has been written on the meaning of empowerment and how (or if) an individual can become empowered, dependant on a variety of situations and factors. Before it is possible to consider the effects of mobile phone promotion by NGOs on the empowerment of girls, an analysis of the various definitions of the term must be conducted, as these different definitions have diverse outcomes when implemented in NGO programmes. A need to understand the impact of the theoretical definitions also relates to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on the subaltern, as detailed in her 1988 article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in which she criticises an assertion by Gilles Deleuze that "there is no more representation; there's nothing but action".[8] Such a viewpoint, she argues, severs the link between theory (of representation but perhaps also empowerment) and practice, which implies that there is, in fact, no practical use for theory. Without theory to back up a definition, its meaning can become ambiguous and thus potentially meaningless when attempted to be put into practice. This, Spivak argues, is a "position which valorises the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual", and is thus destined not to make the change it seeks.[9]

There are a number of ways in which being empowered can be considered. The first step is to examine a theoretical version of what empowerment means: one in which it is synonymous with possession of agency and specifically with having the capacity to self-represent. It should be noted that, according to Saba Mahmood in *Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,* we should "think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create".[10] When considered alongside Spivak's arguments against solely 'practical' thinking, it becomes apparent that agency should not be thought of singularly in terms of fighting against systems of power but as a reflection of how 'freedom' is not a universal concept and situations which seem oppressive to one party may be considered liberating to another. It is through this that

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[8] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in: R. C. Morris (ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press 2010), p. 28.

[9] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 27.

[10] Saba Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival", in: *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2001, p. 203.

different versions of empowerment come to exist, which will become especially relevant when later discussing the various concepts of what development work should be aiming to achieve.

The linking of agency to action is crucial to Spivak's theory on the subaltern, which posits that if an individual is excluded from dominant power structures within a society, they are denied the possibility for action – the possibility to share their discourse and history in their own words. This is what it means to be in a position of subalternity, which could be understood as the antithesis of empowerment. Spivak's approach is a postcolonial one, in which she considers how cultural practices can be misrepresented by those outside of the culture. However, being a member of a minority group or postcolonial does not inherently make one subaltern. "That word", Spivak states, "is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of the decolonised space" in which only certain narratives are afforded space to exist.[11]

When a line of communication is opened up between the subaltern and the homogenous dominant structures, the othered individual has begun a process of being inserted into "the circuits of citizenship or institutionality" and, as Spivak argues, "this is absolutely to be desired" as to romantically preserve subalternity is to remain willingly powerless.[12] The 'line of communication' should not be interpreted as the dominant hegemony simply starting to listen to the subaltern, but instead represents a process of structural change to the power dynamics that were constraining the subaltern, allowing them to find a space in the new power structures that are created.

Under this concept, an individual can be considered empowered when it is possible for them to speak for themselves instead of being spoken for; it is therefore connected to choosing for oneself how to be represented – something which is dependent on structural dynamics that may seek to constrain options for representation or instead offer a route out of subalternity. This connects Spivak's theory to the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, specifically the argument documented in her 1984 article *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. Mohanty speaks to the issue, in academia but applicable in development contexts, of generalising the experiences of others across different contexts and thereby offering "a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy…which can be applied universally and cross-culturally".[13] Her examples relate to a trend in feminist discourses of the 1970s and 1980s to designate the category of 'Third World Feminists' in opposition to

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[11] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 65.
[12] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 65.
[13] Chandra Talpade Mohanty: "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", in: *Boundary 2*, Vol. 12/13, No. 3/1, 1984, p. 337.

'Western Feminists', in which a power relation is generated as the former are implicitly labelled as powerless and the latter as "secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives".[14] Accordingly, Mohanty argues that the so-called Western Feminists are defined by their self-identified empowerment, but it is this action – one form of the structural dynamics previously mentioned – that serves to obscure the individual stories of the supposed Third World Feminists and to render them as subaltern. A person can be considered empowered when they possess the agency to represent themselves according to their own experiences rather than as part of a universalised group, perhaps even countering their previous representations by a dominant hegemony.[15]

Mohanty's observations on universalisations run almost parallel to Kimberlé Crenshaw's late 1980s development of intersectional theory as a means of examining how structures of oppression correspond to intersecting identities, such as between race and gender. Crenshaw's justification for this mode of analysis was because of the fact that as, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women [or the subaltern] are subordinated".[16] This approach is one that engages in the deconstruction of umbrella categories and is thus crucial to standpoint theory, which describes how an individual's social experiences shape, in a multifaceted rather than universal fashion, their perspectives. As Nancy Hartsock notes in *The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism,* if lives are categorised in fundamentally opposing ways for different groups, "one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse".[17] This in turn will shape their actions, with potentially damaging repercussions, towards the non-rulers and obscure the voices of the groups who are on the receiving end of these partial and perverse representations.

Intersectionality and standpoint theory are relevant for two reasons. Firstly, they complete the definition of empowerment set out in this section. Spivak and Mohanty show how

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[14] Mohanty: "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", p. 353.

[15] A dominant hegemony in the contexts of this thesis can be understood as a group of people, a set of meanings, or both.

[16] Kimberlé Crenshaw: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", in: *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1989, p. 58.

[17] Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism", in: Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1983), p. 285.

the process of becoming empowered is individualised because of its focus on one's own personal story and an opportunity to represent oneself differently from the universalisations of dominant hegemonies; however, empowerment realistically cannot occur in a bubble and will be dependent on structural dynamics, as it is via hegemonic constructions that some potential for the subaltern to speak can arise. Intersectionality and standpoint are crucial counters to the universalising process of representation as they draw attention to the fact that no two stories will be the same.

Secondly, these two theories connect to Mohanty's assertion that "strategic coalitions construct oppositional political identities for themselves which are based on generalization".[18] These 'strategic coalitions' are what Mohanty names the self-organisation of people or groups based on similar motivations and interests. This can refer to the arrangement of NGOs, as they operate as part of a wide network of donors, development agencies and partner organisations. NGOs are undoubtedly involved in an embodied power relation with the populations on the receiving end of development aid due to their control over funding and, in many cases, programming of schemes and how these schemes are depicted to wider audiences. It is important that those in control of development schemes recognise this standpoint of power to avoid characterising themselves in the oppositional manner described by Mohanty, Crenshaw and Hartsock, amongst others.

Now that we have a theoretical definition of empowerment, the next step is therefore to analyse the conceptions of empowerment from the perspective of development NGOs and how this relates to these theoretical approaches just discussed. Understanding the differences between versions of empowerment – made possible by understanding agency as a path to individualised actions and not a universal view of what is liberating – is necessary to understand possible disparities between the ideals discussed in this section and the realities in the development field.

1.2 Empowerment in the Development Context

NGOs do not operate in a vacuum, but instead work with funders who may be other NGOs, sympathetic donors, or governmental aid departments. Three types of international aid organisation will be referenced in this thesis: funders, who distribute grants and funds to make development programmes possible; organisations which receive funds and run the development programmes, usually in their location of operation; and re-granters, who may

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[18] Mohanty: "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", p. 349.

receive funds and distribute them to partner programmes as an intermediary between the other two types of organisation. In terms of funders, those in the category of governmental aid departments generally make the largest contributions to the overall amount of overseas aid in circulation. For example, the Development Assistance Committee, a coalition of 29 member states, provided 131.6 billion US dollars of development aid in 2015 alone.[19] It is therefore likely that these departments will have a considerable sway on the processes and policies of NGOs.

The second biggest governmental funder worldwide is the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), which offers its own definition of empowerment for women and girls that relates to "breaking the chains of dependency".[20] In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, Justine Greening, the Secretary of State for International Development, defined modern oppression as being reliant on others, for instance, "if you can't own your own land, if you can't even set up a bank account or – if in the 21st Century – you can't even own a mobile phone"; conversely, "if we can break these chains of dependency…then I [Greening] believe girls and women will do the rest themselves".[21] Dependency in these terms is tantamount to lacking control over one's life. Thus, breaking the chains of dependency refers to the granting of agency, the situation in which an individual has the capacity to make choices for themselves and act upon these choices.

DFID's concept of empowerment, however, is implicitly different to the theoretical ideas discussed previously. The process Greening describes, in which girls are externally provided with access to material benefits such as mobile phones, is not the same as Spivak's process by which citizenship and institutionality are extended from the dominant hegemony to the subaltern by means of structural changes towards inclusion. While there is similarity in that both concern the idea of something being extended from a dominant power to a disadvantaged group, development NGOs are not the hegemony within any society and their promotion of such things cannot not occur independently of a shift in perceptions of the actual hegemony. Spivak's version of empowerment includes structural changes, as these are necessary for the citizenship and institutionality to be extended to a group who were previously denied it. An

[19] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016. *Development aid rises again in 2015, spending on refugees doubles* [online] (updated 13 Apr 2016) Available at: http://www.oecd.org/dac/development-aid-rises-again-in-2015-spending-on-refugees-doubles.htm [Accessed 11 May 2016].

[20] Justine Greening, 2015. *Empowering women and girls around the world* [online] (updated 26 Sep 2015) Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/empowering-women-and-girls-around-the-world [Accessed 11 May 2016].

[21] Greening, *Empowering women and girls around the world* [Accessed 11 May 2016].

individual who was previously othered cannot tell their story if there is still societal opposition to it and so this must be removed for the conditions of Spivak's process to be achieved. DFID's version, on the other hand, lacks an addressing of the root issues. Instead, it focuses on material development as a universal solution to individual problems.

In specific terms of empowerment through mobile phone technology, I contacted DFID directly and received a letter and information pack clarifying the development stance. The current view is that "DFID is interested in using mobile phones in improving people's access to financial services as well as improving health outcomes in our work to strengthen health systems" and that "within this general guidance DFID country offices and HQ work on the business case model of funding" in which money received by an NGO corresponds to their output.[22] As indicated in the information pack I received, titled *Mobile phone and social media interventions for youth development outcomes*, NGO promotion of mobile technology is twofold: first, it "contributes to equitable and sustainable economic growth in both developing and developed markets" and, second, mobile phones "provide means of communicating with and providing basic services to disadvantaged populations".[23]

This report echoes, and indeed explicitly references, the viewpoint of the GSM Association, an economic coalition that openly benefits from mobile phone promotion. In a chapter from their 2015 annual *Global Mobile Economy Report*, in a chapter titled 'Mobile empowering people and society', the importance of a connection between mobile penetration and economic development is highlighted as it states there that "mobile technology has had a profound impact on national economies worldwide, particularly in the areas of job creation and economic growth".[24] As with the definition provided by DFID, empowerment here is tangibly linked to economic and material progress in a population, rather than as a process allowed through structural changes and individually unique instead of resting solely on finances.

The issue with this is that mobile phone promotion does not typically involve the actual granting of the phones. Funding is a major difficulty for many NGOs and so this becomes impractical due to huge costs in acquiring and distributing phones and because they necessitate further costs to the individual for making calls and texts, rendering it effectively futile to distribute mobile phones to poorer areas where affordability does not exist. It is more cost-effective for NGOs to target those who already possess mobile phones and encourage new or

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[22] (S. Hardie, personal communication, March 21, 2016).

[23] William Robert Avis: "Mobile phone and social media interventions for youth development outcomes", in: *GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 1317, 2015, p. 2.

[24] The GSM Association, "The Mobile Economy 2015", in: *GSMA Mobile Economy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2015, p. 22.

different ways to use them, in spite of the divide this generates between those with the resources to own and afford phones and those without. The 'new or different uses' in question are usually mobile-based applications. In reference to DFID's two ideal reasons for NGOs to promote mobile phones – economic growth and basic services provision – I have looked at case studies related to mobile banking and the burgeoning sector of mHealth.

M-banking is the use of microfinance mobile applications which allow money transfers, depositing, saving and payment transactions. These applications are used mostly by people without access to conventional banks, either because they do not operate in their (possibly rural and remote) areas or because they are excluded by circumstance from opening a regular account. M-banking's connection to empowerment for girls is in the fact that better organisation of family finances can lead to better opportunities for their daughters; for instance, in paying for their further education or because they may no longer have to work and can instead attend school.

mHealth, on the other hand, is education-based and refers to applications which distribute health information to people on a very wide range of subjects, including sexual health and reproductive rights for girls. By 2015, there were more than 500 mHealth projects being conducted worldwide, used collectively by approximately 500 million people.[25] The heterogeneity of mHealth applications is indicative of the current state of development technology in general, which is often disjointed. In Uganda alone, there were over 80 mHealth pilots being conducted simultaneously, until early 2016 when the Ministry of Health finally called a moratorium on them because of the duplication of information and difficulty in aggregating data without communication between the projects.[26] The issue is that this encourages development schemes to operate independently and compete with one another, instead of looking for problems across both geographical areas and fields of development, and making the technology adaptable to these multiple situations.

The reasons for elaborating in such detail on the background behind the motivations and practices of NGOs, funders and developers will be discussed in the following section. This will extend from the previous theoretical section to focus more specifically on mobile phones for empowerment. With reference to several schools of thought on the effects of the roles of

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[25] P.S. Sousa, D. Sabugueiro, V. Felizardo, R. Couto, I. Pires, and N.M. Garcia, "mHealth Sensors and Applications for Personal Aid", in: Sasan Adibi (ed.), *Mobile Health: A Technology Road Map* (New York: Springer International Publishing 2015), pp. 266-267.
[26] Kelli Rogers, 2016. *There are 9 principles for digital development. Now what?* [online] (updated 1 Mar 2016) Available at: https://www.devex.com/news/there-are-9-principles-for-digital-development-now-what-87812 [Accessed 12 May 2016].

digital technology in development, such as m-banking and mHealth, I will go into further detail on the intersection of these schools of thought and the practices of NGOs.

1.3 Theories on the Effects of Technology-Based Empowerment

Distinct from the development process, there are key questions about whether mobile phones constitute a gender-equitable technology in and of themselves. Feminist critique has examined how gender construction occurs due to an array of influences, of which media technologies and their meaning-making capacities are examples. Teresa de Lauretis, writing in *The Technology of Gender*, suggests that gender construction is a product of "the various technologies of gender (e.g., cinema) and institutional discourses (e.g., theory) with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and 'implant' representations of gender".[27] de Lauretis, however, was writing about traditional forms of media which are consumed without the possibility for two-way communication and representation between producers and receivers.

In *Women on the move: the mobile phone as a gender technology,* Carla Ganito builds on de Lauretis' ideas but argues that mobile phones represent a new paradigm in this relationship between gender construction and representation, as "through the mobile phone, women are building up more intimate relationships with technology…and are becoming producers; indeed, they are performing new cultural meanings".[28] In terms of empowerment, this could represent a method through which girls seek to bring about structural change or self-represent. This discussion can be extended to girls to show how mobile phones provide options for Mahmood's concept of agency – in which it is based on one's own standpoint and perspective on 'freedom' – that they may not otherwise have, such as how to represent themselves on social media, discovering non-traditional activities (in relation to their circumstances) in which to participate, or gaining a better understanding of their reproductive rights through mHealth and choosing to say no to unwanted sex.

These ideas surrounding the potential of mobile phones, for certain changes in behaviours that can have social effect, also inform the work conducted in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D). Based upon the notion that enhanced communication and access to information inherently leads to advancement within a society, this refers to any usage of information and communication

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[27] Teresa de Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender", in: F. Rakow and L. A. Wackwitz (eds.), *Feminist Communication Theory: Selections in Context* (London: Sage 2005), p. 18.
[28] Carla Ganito, "Women on the Move: The Mobile Phone as a Gender Technology", in: *Comunicação & Cultura*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 2010, p. 82.

technology in development sectors. A major thrust of this has been towards empowerment of women and girls, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – a specialised development agency within the United Nations – hosting an annual International Girls in ICT Day and former ITU General Secretary Hamadoun Touré dubbing girls' interest in technology a way of "challenging their teachers and parents...to cast aside outdated attitudes".[29]

Connecting ICT4D to Ganito's earlier comments is the theoretical domain which is commonly referred to as Feminist Technoscience. Deborah Johnson offers several possibilities for what could constitute *feminist* technology, including the criteria, quite simply, that they are good for women (and girls) and that they "constitute social relations that are more equitable than those that were constituted by a prior technology or than those that prevail in the wider society".[30] This is the reason for the more specific concept within ICT4D of Mobiles for Development (M4D). A reoccurring theme of literature in this vein is the possibility that mobiles can be used to 'leapfrog' traditional communication technologies. This is an attractive alternative to the expensive process of broadband wiring coupled with the poor electrical infrastructure of some developing countries.[31]

The issue in this desire for 'leapfrogging' is its suggestion that communication technology inherently advances a society, therefore more developed mobile networks equate with a more advanced society. Criticism can therefore be levelled against M4D on the grounds that it can attach utopian values to mobile phones as a symbol of modernity, presenting a linear view of development that masks the voices of those who do not yet have access to the requisite technology. This is the same issue discussed earlier in the universalist approaches of NGOs and suggests that they have to some degree been informed by M4D literature or the ideas as they operate more broadly. In her 2002 book *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, Lisa Nakamura notes that a "lack of access to the Internet – often found along raced, classed, and still, to a narrowing extent, gendered lines – continues to cut particular bodies out of various histories in the making".[32] Since the time of Nakamura's writing, with 2.4 billion individuals worldwide using them to access the Internet by 2014, mobile phones have reached

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[29] Hamadoun Touré, 2012. *Speech by ITU Secretary-General, Dr Hamadoun I. Touré* [online] (updated 26 Apr 2012) Available at: http://www.itu.int/en/osg/speeches/Pages/2012-04-26.aspx [Accessed 13 May 2016].

[30] Deborah Johnson, "Sorting out the Question of Feminist Technology", in: Linda Layne, Sharra Vostral, and Kate Boyer (eds.), *Feminist Technology* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press 2010), p. 6.

[31] Tracy Cull and Katharine Vincent, ""Ten Seeds": How Mobiles Have Contributed to Development in Women-Led Farming Cooperatives in Lesotho", in: *Information Technologies & International Development*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2013, pp. 37-48.

[32] Lisa Nakamura, "Introduction", in: *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge 2002), p. xii.

a large enough level of permeation to also participate in this process of othering when access is uneven.[33]

Nakamura further notes that the Internet's capacity to cut groups of people out of communication processes also allows for coding of these groups by those with access; her term 'cybertype' refers to "the images of race that arise when the fears, anxieties, and desires of privileged Western users are scripted into a textual/graphical environment that is in constant flux and revision", for which mobile phones can be a vehicle.[34] Building on these notions, the theoretical field of Postcolonial Digital Humanities posits that pre-existing biases – including racial and gender-based assumptions – persist unrecognised within digital cultures. Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh, refer to their field of inquiry as "disrupting salutatory narratives of globalization and technological progress", such as those appearing in literature taking ICT4D and M4D perspectives that serve to obscure economic (and perhaps gendered) divides.[35] Risam and Koh argue that the promotion of mobile technology thus serves to simultaneously promote a series of embedded power relations. An example would be the implication that 'modern' is a substitute word for 'Western' – along with the raced or classed meanings embodied in this – and is in opposition to a kind of technological backwardness.

To return to the actions of NGOs, three things are worth noting. First, as previously discussed, NGO funding is dominated by a business-structure in which success (and therefore future financing) is based upon tangible output, such as number of girls reached by the promotion of a mobile-based application. Second, NGO concepts of empowerment tend to be non-individualised, instead being focused more on measurable provisions, such as banks. As a result, they may fail to instigate structural changes necessary for an individual or group to be able to make their own choices and to self-represent without excessive constraint, both of which are necessary for true empowerment. Finally, NGOs engage in promotion of independent applications which are profit-motivated and compete with one another instead of seeking mutual co-operation. The microfinances application M-Pesa is an example of the latter: in March 2015 alone, over 80 million British pounds' of revenue was exchanged via the service,

[33] The GSM Association, "Mobile delivering digital inclusion to the still unconnected populations", in: *GSMA Mobile Economy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2015, p. 32.

[34] Lisa Nakamura, "Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction", in: *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge 2002), p. 14.

[35] Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh, 2012. *Mission Statement* [online] (updated 2012) Available at: http://dhpoco.org/mission-statement-postcolonial-digital-humanities/ [Accessed 13 May 2016].

from which the mobile network operators Safaricom and Vodacom took a percentage of profit on each transaction.[36]

The effects of these three considerations are that they risk creating tiers of access to 'empowerment'. With an approach that views empowerment as aimed at entire populations without attention to the specific situations of individuals within those populations and the structural changes needed to no longer constrain them, the processes of othering and subalternity are simply recreated or proliferated further. Instead of granting a voice, as is crucial to real empowerment, singular voices are stifled. This issue is also apparent in the commercialisation of the supposed empowerment-delivering applications because it can lead to the development of a technological divide: some individuals can afford paid apps whereas some will have to settle for less reliable but cheap or free options, and subsequently may receive inaccurate information or less consistent services. These factors are contradictory to the aims of NGOs and must be addressed to prevent further perpetuation of divides within the populations they aim to assist.

To address these tensions, as a driving component of this thesis, in the following section I will detail the methodologies and motivations in my research and analysis of the issues discussed in this chapter. In doing so, I will discuss the theoretical framework through which I will be analysing the question of how mobile-phone technologies push for girl's emancipation in development spaces and what impacts it may have.

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[36] Vodafone Group Plc: "Sustainable Business", in: *Annual Report 2015*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, p. 32.

Chapter Two
Methodology

2.1 Motivations for Research

In the previous chapter, I discussed tensions that appear to exist between the ideals of empowerment from a theoretical perspective versus the social divides which can be perpetuated by NGO promotion of mobile phones for empowerment. My broad motivation for an examination of these issues was a desire to improve upon the actions of NGOs and my ambitions for the forms these improvements would take were twofold.

Primarily, I wanted to address the utopian values attached to mobile phones and the linear narrative of modernity which can lead to the promotion of a technological divide. Instead of empowering girls more universally as intended, NGOs that follow ICT4D approaches can potentially engage in a process of othering some of the girls they seek to empower. This research could thus form a basis for NGOs to reconsider their concepts of empowerment with a greater understanding of the impacts that their approaches may have, which are reflected through various theoretical notions. Recognising the intersectional nature of societal oppression – as well as how one's own background informs understandings of oppression – draws attention to how universalised development schemes based on categories, such as gender or location, cannot actually address problems universally. Instead, it results in an obscuring of problems for those who do not fit into these categories. Empowerment could be revised as a process that also involves Spivak's view of it being the capacity to share one's own story, with the benefit being largely in self-perception. Teaching girls to view themselves as leaders, for instance, gives them an understanding of their rights and gives them the self-worth to make sure these rights are not ignored.

Nonetheless, I am persuaded by some of the arguments made by Feminist Technoscience, ICT4D and M4D literature about the potential benefits of mobile phones for girls and do not wish to characterise mobile technology as inherently averse to empowerment. Instead, I also hope my research can locate new ways for mobile phones to be used that do not constitute an othering process, thus streamlining NGO processes and enhancing their capacity to have a positive impact on girls in developing countries. This could take the form of a categorical change to policies such as, for instance, the introduction of free-to-call emergency hotlines for girls on programmes or the cessation of promotion of paid applications. These are economically-driven ideas, but that operate from and promote structural changes.

My two motivations could therefore be summarised as a mutually inclusive improvement to the lives of individuals who are part of marginalised groups that have so far been neglected by conventional development processes and improvement to the organisations which provide these processes. Subsequently, I will use this chapter to outline both my research procedure and the methodologies utilised as a key component of this research.

2.2 Research Practices

My research itself was undertaken with the assistance of the organisation Women Win, with whom I was conducting an internship from February to July 2016. Women Win is a sports for development NGO which holds the empowerment of girls as its primary aim, specifically, "to equip adolescent girls to exercise their rights through sport".[37] Between their founding in 2007 and the year 2018, their goal is to reach two million adolescent girls through the schemes they operate with partner organisations around the world. By the year 2014, 1.24 million girls had already benefited from their work and the target is almost certain to be reached by 2018.[38]

My role as a Communications Intern with Women Win was what generated the basis for the research. Like many NGOs, Women Win are interested in the uses of various technologies for development and how their programmes could benefit from them. My research was originally envisioned an investigation into the potential benefits of numerous technologies, including laptops and television, before developing a specific focus on the role of mobile phones in the empowerment process, due to their increasing prominence and multitude of uses in development contexts. To this end, Women Win facilitated five interviews with the leaders of partner NGOs, with whom I could discuss how their organisations are using mobile technology – referring to the handsets themselves, applications, and infrastructure such as hotlines – on their programmes and their opinions regarding further implementation. These organisations were BRAC[39] in Bangladesh, Football For All Vietnam (FFAV), Moving the Goalposts (MTG) in Kenya, the Naz Foundation in India, and the National Organisation for Women in Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation (NOWSPAR) in Zambia.

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[37] Women Win, 2014. *Visions and Values* [online] (updated 2014) Available at: http://womenwin.org/about/vision-values [Accessed 20 May 2016].
[38] Women Win, 2014. *Annual Report 2014* [online] (updated 2014) Available at: http://womenwin.org/files/WW%20Annual%20Report%20May%2022%20FINAL_12June%20WEB.pdf [Accessed 20 May 2016].
[39] Initially this stood for the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee, then the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee. Due to the developing nature of the organisation, BRAC no longer represents an acronym.

Connecting these organisations is their focus on using sport to empower adolescent girls and their established and prominent position with the international development field, as well as their long-standing collaboration with Women Win. As they are larger and more established, they have greater resources to both implement mobile phones – in terms of finances that may be needed, such as for establishing hotlines, and staff to manage the process – and to reach a large number of girls. This also made it easier to communicate with them as they have access to Skype and WhatsApp (through which the interviews were conducted) and reliable Internet connections, which is not the case for some other partners. Simultaneously, they are diverse in their specific methods and in the populations they serve, which allows for comparisons of how experiences of both mobile phone usage and empowerment may differ. BRAC and MTG work predominantly in rural areas, the Naz Foundation and NOWSPAR work predominantly in urban areas, and FFAV works with different communities in both rural and urban areas.

The reason for choosing interviews as the method of research was necessity, but it proved desirable in its own right. To understand the realities of NGO programmes and their views on the situation, direct communication was required. Partners have not collected data previously on mobile phone promotion and so there were no archives from which to first gather the background. Only the leaders of programmes would be able to provide me with information on this. As my third sub-question relates to the impact of this promotion, it would have been desirable to contact the girls who have participated in the programmes to learn more about their opinions of the experience. Unfortunately, this was immediately shown to be impossible due to issues with translation, gaining consent from families and the girls themselves, and the lack of available resources (in terms of both time and materials) that the partner organisations would need to devote to this.

All five interviews followed the same format, beginning with my own introduction to my position at both the University of Utrecht and Women Win, followed by my reasons for wanting to speak with the interviewee. Twenty questions were asked in total, split broadly into three parts. The initial set dealt with the background of their organisation and area served, including whether or not they use mobile phones on their programmes, how mobile usage has developed in their communities and the local opinions on this, and whether access to mobile phones has a gendered element. By this, I refer to questions of whether girls have less access than boys and differing perspectives on if or how girls should be using mobiles. Following this was a discussion of their opinions on the effects of mobile phone implementation and considerations on how it could be developed in the future. In this section of each interview, I

brought in examples of microfinance, mHealth and possible uses relating to safety when travelling to and from programmes. For microfinance, we specifically discussed M-Pesa as this is by far the most prominent. Developed by the British company Vodafone, it boasts over 19.9 million active users in several countries in Africa, Asia and Europe, notably including 68% of Kenyan adults.[40] Finally, we discussed the technical aspects of mobile technology, such as processes of acquiring a SIM card, local operators and charges, and mobile phone popularity versus other communication technologies such as television. Including time at the end for interviewees to ask me any questions or leave further comments, each interview lasted approximately just over one hour. A full list of the questions asked can be found in Appendix A.

As mentioned, the interviews were conducted over Skype or, in the case of Zambia, WhatsApp. The latter was due to a poor Skype connection at the NOWSPAR office, although there was also trouble connecting to WhatsApp and subsequently that interview took upwards of half an hour more than the average to complete. There was also some technical difficulty in connecting to Vietnam as well as disturbances due to the communal office space at FFAV, but ultimately this did not interfere with our ability to conduct the interview. Apart from this minor issues, the interview process ran smoothly throughout the period between the 3rd and the 22nd of March 2016. Each interviewee was highly friendly and keen to participate in the research, as well as being critical and self-reflective on their own organisation. The work was considered by all to be of mutual benefit to myself and to their respective NGOs.

The co-operation and ease with which interviews were undertaken, however, would be irrelevant without a critical accountability in which my own standpoint was recognised both in formulating the research and in analysing the results. The next section will detail the overarching methodological framework that guided the choice of method and the analysis of the interviews, and through which I sought to understand my own position within the research.

2.3 Methodological-Theoretical Framework

As referenced in the previous chapter, it is not possible to independently examine 'girls' as a homogenous category in terms of empowerment, mobile phone technology, or development. An intersectional approach is required, as this, in the words of Crenshaw, "entails that gender is always furnished with ethnic and class significance and that 'race'/ethnicity always already

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[40] Vodafone Group Plc: "Financial Inclusion", in: *Sustainability Report 2014/15*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, p. 25.

has a gendered and class content".[41] To disregard this would potentially result in the generation of research that perpetuates the universalisations discussed by Mohanty, albeit in terms of 'Third World Girls' instead of 'Third World Feminists'. Intersectionality responds to universality with the idea of 'specificity', defined by Gust A. Yep as the "exploration of the complex particularities of individuals lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, sexuality, and national locations by understanding their history and personhood in concrete time and space".[42] Specificity is the inversion of the universalisations presented by Mohanty in that they focus on particularities and localities that indicate difference.

Furthermore, because of the diversity of the organisations combined with the similarity of ideas across organisations regarding the forms that mobile promotion could take, there was the concern that I would make recommendations for all girls without considering cultural or economic differences. An intersectional approach is the necessary methodological-theoretical framework to avoid this, as it affords a recognition of how power and social relations work at an embodied and relational level. Crenshaw speaks power structures that create a double burden when one is both black and a woman, with the greater marginalisation and fewer privileges offered at this intersection than with other types of women; likewise, myself and NGOs are players who hold power and therefore our work can potentially marginalise if proper attention to our status of power is not considered.

It is worth noting that intersectionality has developed beyond Crenshaw's initial analysis that revolved around gender, ethnicity and class. Nira Yuval-Davis, in *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics*, takes a critical view of Crenshaw's approach, suggesting it is limited because narratives restricted only to gender, race and class "often reflect hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible experiences of the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct a homogenized 'right way' to be its member".[43] This is remarkably similar to the issue of universalisations discussed by Mohanty, in that oppression takes an assumed and non-static form under this model. There must be a recognition of the variety of forms and intersections of marginality, to avoid categorisations in themselves from being dominated by certain meanings that will silence and exclude further

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[41] Gloria Wekker, "The arena of disciplines: Gloria Anzaldúa and interdisciplinarity?", in: Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin (eds.), *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (Oxon: Coutinho Publishers 2007), p. 63.
[42] Yep A. Gust., "Toward thick(er) intersectionalities: Theorizing, researching, and activating the complexities of communication and identities", in: Kathryn Sorrells and Sachi Sekimoto (eds.), *Globalizing Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Sage 2015), p. 89. FOR BIB – 86-94
[43] Nira Yuval-Davis: "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics", in: *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2006, p. 195.

forms of oppression. Within this research, there is obvious potential for other axes, such as age-based discrimination or familial pressure, but equally important is to be aware that experiences may not fit any neatly defined and immediately recognisable categories, such as 'gendered racism'.

At the heart of intersectionality is the concept of reflexivity and the impossibility of absolute objectivity in research. According to Olena Hankivsky in *An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework,* reflexivity "acknowledges the importance of power at the micro level of the self and our relationships with others, as well as at the macro levels of society".[44] Simultaneously it is about recognising the existence of "multiple truths and a diversity of perspectives, while privileging those voices typically excluded from policy 'expert' roles".[45] Reflexivity, as a facet of intersectionality, highlights that power relations are not always simply a case of an oppressor and a victim, but manifest in many ways; Mahmood calls this a "reconceptualization of power as a set of relations that do not simply dominate the subject, but also, importantly, form the conditions of its possibility… insomuch as the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent".[46] A simple oppressor-oppressed narrative does not allow for this.

A key word here is 'modify'. Within this research, there are numerous variations on this theme: NGOs hold power over their beneficiaries because they have the capacity to modify programmes which seek to aid them; the leaders I interviewed hold the power to represent the girls they discussed, allowing the leaders to place them in categories based on their own interpretations; power relations of some kind are likely to exist between girls on the programmes, perhaps through unequal access to technology; and I am in a position of power as a researcher in how I would interpret and present my findings, potentially modifying the results. Without reflexivity, there is the possibility of presenting my findings as pure objective truth rather than a representation of my own standpoint and situated knowledges, the form of objectivity suggested by Donna Haraway that accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and the object of study, as "only partial perspective promises for objective vision".[47]

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[44] Olena Hankivsky et al., "An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework", in: Olena Hankivsky (ed.), *An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework* (Vancouver: Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy 2012), p. 36.

[45] Hankivsky et al., "An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework", p. 36.

[46] Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent", p. 210.

[47] Donna Haraway: "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", in: *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1998, p. 583.   FOR BIB – 575-599

The major difficulty with my interviews, as referenced earlier, was the lack of access to the girls themselves. As my overarching question relates to empowerment through self-representation and whether mobile phone promotion can constitute a path to this, the obvious problem is that the girls are not able to represent themselves within my research in spite of this theoretical and methodological priority. Instead, their experiences were summarised by leaders of programmes who are English-speaking, better educated and more technology-savvy than the girls on the programmes. This corresponds to Spivak's theory on the subaltern, as the girls lack a voice to share their discourse and instead rely on a dominant group to summarise their experiences. "It is important", Spivak argues, "to acknowledge our complicity [as those in a position of power] in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run".[48] It must be recognised that the standpoints of the leaders are likely to shape their understanding of mobile technology and empowerment in different ways, influencing their responses in the interviews.

Equally vital was acknowledgement that I was talking to NGO leaders themselves. Their visions of empowerment may align more with non-theoretical development concepts, instead of my own approach which investigates empowerment in connection with agency. It is important to place these leaders within the context of the debate between ICT4D and Postcolonial Digital Humanities, and to what extent this informs their interest in mobile phone promotion. An ICT4D slant which values mobile phones as inherently beneficial may bias an assessment of whether they should be introduced to programmes, and at the same time may not accurately reflect the opinions of beneficiaries. In hand with this, my investigations risk involving myself in the process of reproducing gender and racial biases by allowing the girls in these development contexts to be spoken for by these development representatives.

There is no way to avoid this situation in which the girls cannot specifically control how they are represented, but via an intersectional approach these representations are recognised as being informed by a *standpoint*. This embeds in the research process some sort of awareness of the situated production of knowledge taking place here, an acknowledgment that both researchers' and the interviewees' social experiences have shaped their perspectives. These perspectives will be represented in the knowledge statements that this study delivers, thus cancelling any claim to objective and value-neutral inquiry. With the critical lens turned upon the researcher, other considerations come to the fore. For example, my interest in finding ways for mobile phone use without engaging in a practice of othering the subjects of my

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[48] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 64.

research was informed by my own background in an environment in which mobile technology is normalised and near-universally available. By remaining aware of this privilege, I can attempt to avoid a certain hierarchizing that attends it, along with my position as a researcher. That is, I could try to avoid thinking of myself as intrinsically more knowledgeable on the issues of implementing mobile phone usage. Without this awareness, there is the risk that I would inadvertently attempt to promote ideas of my own without understanding how they connect to the lived realities of the programmes. This is epistemic bias, a process by which forms of 'knowledge' can be generated about a subaltern group by those with little or no understanding of their experiences; in Spivak's words, it explains how "the account of *one* explanation and narrative of reality [can be] established as the normative one".[49] It is this form of bias I have proposed to open up in this research, and this naturally extends to my own role and position within it.

These methodological considerations relate to the formation and conduct of the research, which was also limited by practicalities. The precise meanings of an intersectional approach take on a further dimension with regard to the analysis of the results. Once it has been accepted that the results of the interviews are simply representations of one or more 'truths' based in individual experience, rather than identical reflections of an autonomous reality (in the mode of positivism), then it is possible to examine how the connection of mobile phone technology to the empowerment of girls in development contexts is understood.

According to Gemma Hunting in *Intersectionality-informed Qualitative Research: A Primer*, there are three considerations to bear in mind when examining research conducted with different cultural groups: (1) "one's assumptions or knowledge behind why culture is an important category of analysis (and how this has been shaped)"; (2) "how culture will (or will not) be addressed in light of this knowledge"; and (3) "how this might influence the research agenda, findings or research uptake".[50] In other words, I must critically consider at all stages of my analysis if any connections made are due to a connection based on pre-conceived notions of cultures – an assumption, for instance, of cultural similarity between India and Bangladesh would influence me unconsciously to find connections between those programmes, in which case my own 'knowledge' of culture should again be acknowledged. Returning to Hankivsky's earlier notion that a facet of the intersectional approach is "privileging those voices typically excluded from policy 'expert' roles", this can be done by drawing attention to the fact that

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49 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 36.
50 Gemma Hunting, "Framing the Research", in: *Intersectionality-informed Qualitative Research: A Primer* (Vancouver: The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, 2014), p. 3.

some voices were excluded from the research.[51] A balanced analysis can examine both the perspectives shared by those interviews and what is indicated by the fact that not all could share a discourse.

In sum, taking an intersectional approach in this research involves acknowledging that my interviews tell narratives from the standpoint of NGO leaders and that their representations of the girls on their programmes are informed by their own experiences. Furthermore, I can identify that certain forms and relations of power operate within this knowledge generating process, which suggests that results should be approached critically and also examined for what they do not say. The forms and relations of power that operate here also involve my position as the researcher and demand that I recognise my standpoint in epistemic and relational terms. This involves a recognition of that my biases may be unknown and naturalised as the normative frameworks with which I approach knowledge making practices. My privilege as a researcher is something that I should be aware, with critical thought needed regarding what kind of knowledge I am producing and whether it appears to be the result of previously unseen biases. The analysis is based on looking at commonalities and differences between the interviews, then comparing the reoccurring and unique features against the situations of the NGOs, in order to put many voices and levels of interpretation into conversation with each other.

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[51] Hankivsky et al., "An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework", p. 36.

Chapter Three

Analysis of Research

3.1 Interview Process

Having previously discussed in some depth the process by which my research was conducted, I will now briefly reiterate the key points of the interview process, before moving onto my analysis. Five organisations were approached, all of which are NGOs working for empowerment of adolescent girls. They are located in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Vietnam and Zambia, but receive funding from other NGOs in other countries. Each interview was with an individual involved in the leadership and management of their respective organisation. It constituted a discussion headed around twenty questions in three sections: current uses of mobile phones by the organisation and girls in its programmes; potential uses of mobile phones; and the technical aspects of mobile technology in the area.

As discussed, an intersectional approach is the most relevant methodological framework through which to analyse the results of these interviews. This is partially because it avoids universalising girls into broad categories that may not correspond to their lived experiences and their access to, and use of, mobile technology. Instead, it recognises that the interpretations of their experiences are informed by the differing standpoints of the interviewees and myself. With this in mind, I began the process of analysis by comparing the interviews for reoccurring themes shared across the organisations' programmes and for unique features, as a means of examining how shared experiences are differently affected by other factors that make such universalisations impossible. My observations will be elaborated upon in this chapter.

3.2 Interview Observations

As anticipated, the issue of technological divides came up frequently in interviews, with three of the organisations mentioning that there was no access to smartphones for some or all of the girls on their programmes and MTG stating that there is "almost no access to individual mobile phones at all".[52] Only NOWSPAR, referring to a more financially privileged urban area of Zambia's capital city Lusaka, stated that smartphones were "very common".[53] This seemed to

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[52] (M. Uddin, personal communication, March 3, 2016); (C. van de Hoorst, personal communication, March 4, 2016); (P. Van Trong Nguyen, personal communication, March 17, 2016); (V. Menachery, personal communication, March 22, 2016).
[53] (M. Kaunda, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

partially inform a series of doubts held about my suggestions on uses of mobile implementation, along with other factors specific to the context of each organisation. Mobile uses on programmes were clearly not a new consideration for any of the interviewees, but rather had been considered and largely not pursued due to an expectation that they would make programmes less effective in various ways.

mHealth was the key example of this, with every interviewee expressing concerns about introducing it to programmes. For BRAC, this was because of the requirement that the application be in Bengali and a belief that girls would ignore the information if sent via text; MTG and FFAV did not wish to introduce something that would be unevenly accessible and create tiers of healthcare; NOWSPAR believed it would not be an effective substitute for face-to-face communication and could only be used as a supplement; for the Naz Foundation, the possibility of inaccurate information and a cultural barrier to teaching certain topics, such as contraception, made it infeasible.[54]

Reservations on mobile technology were similarly expressed on the subjects of microfinance and safety applications, again for a variety of reasons. For instance, BRAC and the Naz Foundation mentioned that some parents wanted girls to have mobile phones so they would be safer while travelling, whereas MTG suggested that girls are "less safe if they have a phone" as this would make them the target of violence and robbery due to the high value of mobile phones in the area.[55] BRAC, MTG and FFAV had all previously promoted hotlines which girls could phone to receive information or contact help services; none were frequently used due to various factors, including lack of phone access and the speculation that girls "would rather not get help alone", instead wanting the assistance of people they knew.[56] NOWSPAR, on the other hand, reported that their helpline had been successful, again suggesting that only when mobile phones have become extremely commonplace can they be effective at reaching girls on a large and even scale.[57]

The attention given by interviewees to stratified mobile access and cultural sensitivities is worth drawing attention to because of its apparent clash with the position of NGOs I established in chapter one. Through the interviews, it became evident that I had engaged previously in a universalisation of the development field as I had been examining material which was produced by Western sources ('Western' to be understood to refer to North

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[54] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016); (C. van de Hoorst, March 4, 2016); (M. Kaunda, March 11, 2016); (P. Van Trong Nguyen, March 17, 2016); (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).
[55] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016); (C. van de Hoorst, March 4, 2016); (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).
[56] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016); (C. van de Hoorst, March 4, 2016); (P. Van Trong Nguyen, March 17, 2016).
[57] (M. Kaunda, March 11, 2016).

American and Western European contexts) and biased towards a certain narrative regarding mobile technology. An intersectional approach therefore became important in a way I had not expected prior to conducting the research, as I became aware of embedded power relations between different areas of NGO work. The narrative and power structures will be elaborated upon in greater depth shortly.

Despite these uncertainties and differences in response, mobile phones were not viewed as inherently negative by any of the interviewees. On the contrary, four of the organisations remained positive about the benefits of mobile growth in general for increased communication and access to information resources.[58] Both BRAC and the Naz Foundation commented that they could see a potential future use for mobile technology once it becomes more universal; for BRAC this would be a general helpline for girls to talk directly to staff they know instead of strangers, and for the Naz Foundation this would be the replacement of paper surveys with digital ones, providing an easier way for girls to communicate their opinions and the changes they would like to see on their programmes.[59]

The main contention, instead of with mobile phones in and of themselves, was with the values attached to them as a universally empowering technology regardless of context. This viewpoint was most explicitly expressed by Corneel van de Hoorst[60] of MTG, who was highly critical of the commonly-made assertion that "everybody in Kenya has a mobile phone".[61] While there are good ideas behind the promotion, she argued, they are not realistic and the true stories are not in the limelight. Instead, Western sources (again, here defined as European and North American) focus on success stories palatable to their more-privileged audience. This serves to mask the experiences of the most disadvantaged sectors of societies even further, as, van der Hoorst pointed out, mobile usage is growing amongst the urbanised middle class at a much higher rate than in poorer communities. In chapter one, it was established that a commonly-held ideal of mobile technology from an ICT4D perspective is that it could hypothetically bring about social change, whereas van de Hoorst's statements indicate that this social change would come to those who are already in a comparatively privileged position by being in possession of a mobile phone.

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[58] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016); (M. Kaunda, March 11, 2016); (P. Van Trong Nguyen, March 17, 2016); (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).
[59] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016); (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).
[60] Pseudonyms have been used for each of the interviewees referenced in this thesis as a means of protecting their identities.
[61] (C. van de Hoorst, March 4, 2016).

It is important, when working with an intersectional approach, to recognise that statements regarding the usage of applications and hotlines are likely to be speculations or extrapolations based on talking to some of the girls, as lack of usage was sometimes framed as a choice – such as BRAC's difficulty in making girls interested in a microfinance scheme – instead of looking at the structural factors, including specific cultural factors, that inhibit such usage.[62] This could potentially be used to argue a viewpoint in which mobile phones are indeed a source of empowerment, but are just not being embraced correctly; in line with the arguments of Mahmood established in chapter one, this would imply that all girls should be working towards the same version of empowerment, whereas liberation "needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations, and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject".[63] Mahmood's view of agency, in itself very similar to Spivak's take on empowerment, is contrary to the idea that there is any one correct way to embrace mobile technology.

Ideas of empowerment were discussed implicitly and explicitly by all interviewees as being beyond simple material provisioning. The Naz Foundation, for instance, stated their own definition of agency for girls as "being in control of their own finances" – a view echoing the earlier definition of empowerment from DFID – but that m-banking does not allow this as the girls' expenses are too small to make it an effective platform.[64] Furthermore, even when smartphones are available, there are barriers: NOWSPAR and FFAV reported, in the words of FFAV's Phan Van Trong Nguyen, that "elders set limitations so not to affect schooling", regardless of the girls' desired choices on the matter.[65] These are further examples of how values are moulded by cultural, historical and social location, meaning so too must concepts of empowerment and agency.

There appears, then, to be a gulf between the realities of development work and background literature in the ICT4D and M4D vein. This is on two levels. Firstly, there is the division between the ideas expressed by ICT4D and M4D proponents, in which 'societal advancement' comes hand in hand with increased communication technology in an area, and the issue demonstrated in the interviews that the increasing communication technology is unevenly distributed and advancing only certain sectors of populations. On top of this is the apparent divide between concepts of empowerment within the development field. The

[62] (M. Uddin, March 3, 2016).
[63] Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent", p. 223.
[64] (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).
[65] (M. Kaunda, March 11, 2016); (P. Van Trong Nguyen, March 17, 2016).

viewpoint linking empowerment to technology was widely expressed by aid development agencies, such as DFID, whereas the interviews showed that the NGOs who are working on a ground level are actively disputing this notion and arguing in favour of alternatives to developing empowerment, such as their sports programmes and face-to-face health classes.

The second of these tensions seems to be informed by the structure of international aid in general. As mentioned earlier, the five NGOs I interviewed were recipients of funding from other NGOs and governmental departments in more economically-developed countries. The relationship between these different facets of international development will be elaborated on in the next section as a means of understanding how the views and conclusions expressed in the interviews were informed by a larger system beyond the control of the interviewees.

3.3 The Structure of International Development

Although the harshest critic regarding the portrayal of development aid in Western sources, my interviewee for MTG conceded that the "ideals behind mobile promotion are good but too grandiose and disconnected from reality".[66] The issue of a disconnect is central to the themes discussed in the methodology chapter. Essentially, it is indicative of a non-awareness of standpoint theory, by which those in a privileged position do not recognise that their perspectives are shaped by their status of power. Funders are to be found largely in industrialised countries with prominent information economies and outsourced manufacturing processes – the effect being that while the raw production of mobile technology occurs in less economically developed countries, the creative design processes remain firmly within more economically developed countries. This one-sided relationship ensures that there will never be a scarcity of new and innovative forms of mobile technology in the Western nations that produce them. The same will not be true of the developing countries, which will have to wait for technology to become out-dated within the West before it becomes affordable within their own country for the majority of people and struggle to set up their own creative industries without the relevant economic infrastructure available to industrialised nations.

This is the standpoint from which funders are examining the issue. Within the West, mobile phones wield an incredible influence and so the technology involved can proliferate rapidly; an example of this would be the mobile operating system Android, which launched in 2008 and was present on over half of all smartphones globally by 2011.[67] This can only happen

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[66] (C. van de Hoorst, March 4, 2016).

[67] International Data Corporation, 2015. *Smartphone OS Market Share, 2015 Q2* [online] (updated 2015) Available at: http://www.idc.com/prodserv/smartphone-os-market-share.jsp [Accessed 31 May 2016].

in areas of almost total permeation of mobile phones, which in 2008 was far more predominantly in the West. Under these circumstances, mobile technology can indeed have a huge impact. It would therefore be too simplistic for funders to assume that mobile phones are inherently responsible for developments that occur through them, when in fact it is a combination of their usefulness, dominance or popularity. Under an intersectional analysis, there cannot be a single axis point of explanation or basis for social change initiatives. With such significant value nevertheless being placed on mobile phones, possession of one becomes viewed as a form of empowerment in and of itself, with little examination of how the phone will actually provide opportunities for empowerment when there are various other intersecting factors that may impact or prevent this.

There is also a question of influence from parties who benefit from the lack of critical analysis devoted to global mobile usage. In chapter one, covering background literature and theory, I mentioned that the GSM Association – a powerful trade association of mobile operating companies – connect empowerment to national economies and material progression. Additionally, M-Pesa, the mobile banking application, was mentioned for its high turnover of profit in developing nations. This is not to say that the GSM Association nor M-Pesa, as well as others like them, do not have positive effects, as undoubtedly the spread of mobile access and microfinance applications has been and can be hugely beneficial to many populations. However, they are organisations that financially gain from mobile phone promotion and so they are naturally biased towards producing literature that reflects a utopian portrayal in which all benefit universally. This literature is likely to be an influencing factor on promotion of mobile technologies by funders who do not recognise the investments behind the information. To not critically evaluate this bias is to accept a skewed perspective on mobile phones that could be changed by greater interaction between funders and programmes, and with an awareness of the sorts of issues that a stratified analysis, such as the one presented in this thesis, brings to the promotion of technology-driven development solutions.

These problems, in which funders remain disconnected from the realities of the programmes they supply with funding, present a seemingly unwinnable situation for both the NGOs and the girls these NGOs service. Difficult realities on the ground can easily impede the various ideological considerations, such as their views on empowerment, which guide programmes. International development funding works on a business case model in which future financing is based upon successes, with the intention that growing organisations will be allotted the necessary funding to expand, while ineffective or corrupt programmes will not receive money that will be misused. The difficulty is in measuring a tangible output upon which

to base success. As shown, funders have an overwhelmingly favourable view of the potential of mobile phones for development, including within this a sense of 'empowerment' defined by material possession and assumptions about use that are not sensitive to context and cultural differences. Mobile phones and their applications are therefore viewed as indicators of successful empowerment, encouraging their promotion.

While the NGOs I interviewed disagreed with this opinion on mobile promotion, it can be difficult for them to provide other forms of practical data regarding empowerment, meaning that indicators of social change are not readily available to display. The reason for this was indicated by the Naz Foundation in their suggestion that a future use of mobile phones could be the introduction of digital surveys so that beneficiaries can directly communicate their opinions, shaping the allocation of funding to things that the girls deem as most important to their own development – and an opportunity to disagree, if necessary, with the prevailing view of what would be empowering for them.[68] Such a system is not yet in place because mobile access is currently uneven and the surveys would therefore not reflect the opinions and experiences of all girls. However, the emphasis on mobile technology present in developed countries, both by aid organisations and profiting businesses, becomes a self-perpetuating cycle: within developing countries, the already-advantaged sectors of society, such as individuals in urban centres, become more privileged while the problems of the subaltern continue and are further obscured. Under this system, the universal access required for the Naz Foundation's suggestion cannot take place, although it and other similar suggestions are required for the system to be changed.

In the final chapter, I will use these interview observations to return to my original overarching questions, to show how they intersect with the literature and theory. This will take the form of a discussion around the effects of mobile phone promotion on the empowerment of girls in developing countries, based around the understanding of differing versions of empowerment across development contexts. In it, I will also look for possibilities to resolve the tensions caused by these contrasting understandings.

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[68] (V. Menachery, March 22, 2016).

Chapter Four
Discussion

4.1 Concepts of Empowerment

One clear result of the research process was its further demonstration of the merits of an intersectional approach, as the interviews would have been futile if I had summarised all of the various systems of international development into one homogenous sector. Instead, it highlighted the power structures present within the broad contexts of development and how this hierarchy, with the differing standpoints reflected within it, can lead to a disparity in understandings of some of the core concepts of development itself.

Within this thesis, three sections of the development hierarchy have so far been examined: organisations which fund, organisations which receive funds and re-grant them onwards, and organisations which receive funds to put into use on programmes. Examples previously mentioned for each have been DFID (the overseas aid funding department), Women Win (my internship, which receives funds and distributes them to partners), and the five NGOs I interviewed (as the partner recipients of external funding and in this sense part of the development context). There are key differences at all of these levels. In particular, a gulf was indicated between the funders and interviewees, caused in part by their distance from one another in both physical and experiential terms, in understandings of empowerment.

The perspective often taken by Western funding sources was delineated in previous chapters as based around a material notion of empowerment, in which development of technology serves as a universal solution to individual problems, regardless of context. This view is informed by and echoed in sources that promote mobile technology for empowerment because it is beneficial to these sources, giving empowerment a wholly economic dimension. In this view, if a girl on a programme is provided with tools, such as a mobile phone, to make her less dependent on others, she has been granted agency to make her own choices and is therefore inherently empowered. The issue with this line of thinking is that it does not address structural barriers and the root causes of why the girl was in a positon of subalternity, which will be dependent on a myriad of intersecting factors unique to her, for instance, cultural pressures not to interact with boys, as would be difficult for her parents to enforce if the girl has unlimited access to a mobile phone.

This reality is apparent to the organisations who work directly with disadvantaged girls, as these organisations explicitly reject notions of mobile phones as a viable solution to positions of subalternity: girls have different levels of access, from smartphones to non-digital mobiles

to no access at all, and so 'solutions' using mobile technology cannot be applied universally. The promotion of these technologies, such as microfinance, mHealth and helplines, would at best create tiers of empowerment and at worst perpetuate the already-present divides and mask the difficulties being faced by the most disadvantaged of the girls.

To return to the theoretical background discussed in chapter one, the results of the interviews signify some shared perspectives of the NGO leaders with the views of Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty and Kimberlé Crenshaw. A natural consideration for NGO leaders is the idea that a recognition of one's own standpoint is crucial to how different organisations or individuals perceive empowerment. This is indicative of an intersectional approach – conceived not as a theoretical framework but as a logical conclusion from observations of how development projects work effectively in practice. Support for Mohanty's arguments against universalisation is a component of this, as intersectionality critically opens, in the words of Crenshaw, "subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis".[69] These categories, the universalisations of experiences that Mohanty describes, are discarded simply by the recognition by NGO leaders of different tiers of mobile access.

While the interviewees did not frequently express their own views on a coherent definition of empowerment, their statements can be extended to reconcile with the arguments of Spivak. It was established in chapter one that Spivak's version of empowerment is a process of specificity by which a dominant hegemony extends the "circuits of citizenship or institutionality" to those who were previously denied the opportunity to self-represent and to share their discourse and history.[70] This requires structural change away from forms of societal oppression, such as the denial of girls' sexual rights, for instance. Some development programmes, such as health classes and sports initiatives, were described by interviewees as either superior to mobile schemes or, at best, possible only to be supplemented by mobile technology; these programmes share the theme of teaching girls to understand their own rights, which encourages them to demand an extension of civil liberties from the dominant hegemony and to create paths out of subalternity. These actions correspond to Spivak's theoretical empowerment in that they represent the spark required to bring about structural changes. Power structures do not willingly shift without prompting.

Because of the unevenness in mobile access, some of the tensions between previously discussed schools of theory, such as whether mobile phones qualify as feminist technology and

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[69] Crenshaw: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", p. 57.
[70] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 65.

if mobile phones perpetuate pre-existing biases in digital cultures, become irrelevant to NGO leaders' considerations of mobile technologies for empowerment. However, it can be concluded from the discussions that mobile phones do not inherently match Deborah Johnson's criteria for feminist technology, that they are good for women and girls and that they "constitute social relations that are more equitable than those that were constituted by a prior technology or than those that prevail in the wider society".[71] In the development contexts discussed in this thesis, mobile phones in fact represent an antithesis of these two criteria: they are good only for some girls who are already in a comparatively privileged position and, because of this, they are non-equitable. Even if we selectively take parts of Johnson's definition to present feminist technology as "technologies that favour women [and girls]", the issue of perpetuated biases in digital cultures means that the case cannot be made for mobile phones meeting this criterion.

Based on the concept of 'cybertypes', as discussed by Lisa Nakamura, mobile technology cannot be said to favour women nor any individual who does not belong to the dominant hegemony – which may be a group of people or a collection of ideas – in a community. The system of cybertypes, the biased images that arise when the fears and desires of privileged users are placed in the shifting online environment, is in many ways the digitalised version of Spivak's subalternity model. Some groups are cut out of the communication processes by a sheer lack of accessibility and are free to be coded as 'other' by those who are active in digital communities. It could be argued that the theoretical structures of the subaltern versus the hegemony become irrelevant in a digital context because of Internet technology's capacity (realised largely in developing countries through mobile phones) to create dialogue between individuals who would otherwise never interact. This does not refute the comparison of subalternity and cybertyping when not all individuals can share their discourse in the digital context. This non-equitableness indicates why mobile phones are not inherently a feminist technology and theoretically extends the argument against mobile phones as empowering.

A conclusion can now be drawn on one of the versions of empowerment from a development perspective. Like Mahmood's view of agency as "actions that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create", NGOs in developing countries regard empowerment as enabling girls to make their own choices, including in self-representation and sharing of their individual discourses.[72] Specific positions of subalternity and universalisations are therefore challenged. In doing so, pathways should be facilitated into the respective

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[71] Johnson, "Sorting out the Question of Feminist Technology", p. 6.
[72] Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent", p. 203.

dominant hegemonies of a location. Mobile technologies are currently rejected as a viable vehicle for these actions of self-representation because, while there are beneficial uses of them, these benefits cannot be evenly distributed to all girls on a development programme and so subalternity remains in place or even be perpetuated both in reality and in exclusionary digital environments. This, in reality, constrains the power of NGOs to offer the circuits of institutionality to the girls, given the strong focus on mobile phones by ICT4D funders.

One important facet to bear in mind is that this previous analysis has looked only at one version of empowerment. Within this research, the various perspectives from the girls on the programmes remain unknowable. Under Mahmood's definition of agency, because of its argument against the "universality of desire…to be free from relations of domination", it is not possible to know whether some of the girls disagree with the notion that the work being done by development NGOs is in their favour.[73] Nonetheless, it becomes clear through the research that mobile promotion currently brings us no closer to a solution on the matter of funders (and myself) not being able to speak directly to the girls to allow them to self-represent. Due to the deadlock described previously, girls cannot make their voices heard by funders except through mobile means, but mobile means cannot be embraced by NGOs because they create technological divides. It is a problem in my research that I did not speak to the girls, but a biased view of the girls' opinions would have been presented by using mobile technology to only talk to some of them.

In the following section, the analytic lens will be turned on a contrasting view of empowerment from NGO funders, as a means of answering my sub-question regarding why mobile phone promotion persists despite the problems I have thus-far described. This will be used to demonstrate what might be the effects of ideals about phone-based empowerment being put into practice in developing communities.

4.2 Ideals in Practice

It would be unfair to portray Western aid departments and international development funders (whether they are NGOs themselves, government agencies, or other types of organisation) as malicious entities with deliberate intentions towards participation in the process of othering girls. It would also be incorrect to assume that they constitute a homogenous entity, all with the same practices and perspectives. Because of these two factors, the contrasting angle on mobile-based empowerment presented here is an indication of trends in the promotion of

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[73] Mahmood: "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent", p. 206.

mobile phones in the Western development sector, informed by a lack of critical attention to the standpoints from which these organisations are approaching empowerment: from a position of privilege in which mobile access is almost universal and mobile technology is constantly evolving with a strong potential to shape society.

In chapter one, a link was established between concepts of Feminist Technoscience and the fields of ICT4D and M4D. Technologies considered to be feminist are linked to the assertion that technological advancement is always of benefit to developing communities, as was demonstrated by Carla Ganito's assertion that mobile phones are a feminist technology because they can provide new modes for gender construction and opportunities to challenge existing social structures which may oppress women and girls. Mobile technology therefore represents a linear path to 'modernity', considered from a Western perspective and as a universal goal for all within developing countries. Organisations that fund development work tend to subscribe to ICT4D narratives that suggest mobile phones are a tool for 'leapfrogging' past other stages of technological development. This suggests that there are a series of steps towards an area being considered 'developed' that follows the growth of communication technologies as they generally occurred in Western nations, for instance, the progress of dial-up access to broadband to wireless technology.

With utopian values being attached to communication technology, it becomes easy for funders to consider mobile phones in line with Johnson's definition of feminist technology as being good for women and girls. This interpretation leads them to consider mobile phones as a tool of empowerment simply by possession. There is a linear analysis that all individuals in developing countries are working towards a goal of becoming 'modern'; this presents the idea that an area can be considered developed when it comes to resemble the West in terms of a technology saturation and infrastructure. Funders therefore promote mobile technology with this in mind. This materially-measured approach suggests that granting a girl a mobile phone allows her to self-represent and make her own choices, regardless of the structural barriers through which she lacks access to a dominant hegemony and is therefore in a position of subalternity. As it has been established that mobile phones do not constitute a feminist technology when applied in the development contexts examined in this thesis, we can see again how the universalist outlook can only serve to obscure the experiences of the girls.

The effects of promoting mobile technology – through literature and on development programmes – have been discussed at length, but to reiterate: NGOs do not have the power to provide mobile phones equally to populations of any size, nor would this be effective in ensuring that all girls can freely use those mobile phones due to a mixture of economic, cultural

and social factors that differ from girl to girl and from community to community; promotion of new or previously-unknown uses of mobile phones therefore takes the forefront and favours girls who are already in a comparatively privileged position, preserving positions of subalternity for others. This preservation of positions of subalternity occurs in two ways – both through the varied access to mobile-led initiatives for empowerment and through the issue of whose interests get represented in the production and implementation of these programs. This is the creation and perpetuation of power structures, which impedes the capacity of NGOs to effectively reach all of the girls they seek to empower evenly. It also demonstrates that, while being in a position of power over these girls, NGOs are subject to the power structures of development hierarchies, through which funding must be acquired, and are mostly limited in their ability to confront and change these problems.

4.3 Final Considerations

Three sub-questions were established at the start of this thesis:

1. What does 'empowerment' mean in these development contexts?
2. How is the connection of mobile phone technology to empowerment of girls in development contexts understood?
3. How do ideals about phone-based empowerment by NGOs work out in practice?

Each of these questions has now been answered. Empowerment is a concept which has different meanings at different levels of the development hierarchy: organisations which are involved in the daily running of programmes are more inclined to view empowerment as an individualised process by which girls gain the capacity to make their own choices and share their unique discourse, whereas organisations removed from the realities of programmes are less aware of their own standpoint and tend to view empowerment as universally synonymous with gaining independence. Mobile phones are therefore considered very differently by each. For the latter group, mobile technology represents a means for girls to break the chains of dependency. The former group, conversely, recognises that benefits to mobile promotion certainly can exist but that empowerment is contextual and so mobile phones cannot be viewed as a universal solution to every conceivable difficulty for girls on development programmes.

In practice, it becomes clear that the model of subalternity, which has been used to describe how the experiences and discourses of some girls are hidden or obscured by dominant hegemonies, is also relevant as a description of the overall trends in international development.

While there is value to be had in critically examining the effects that mobile promotion and technological divides can have on the ability for development programmes to effectively empower girls, the NGOs responsible for these development programmes have a limited voice to do so. These NGOs are likely to rely on Western funders for their programmes and therefore these funders hold power over them. This means that the preferred narrative of funders, in which Western concepts of mobile technology informs an ICT4T approach to development, is highly difficult to challenge. This in turn can become a self-perpetuating cycle as the overwhelmingly utopian view of mobile technology will be solidified by mobile phones frequently being identified as a tool for 'modernising' other parts of the world.

As discussed in chapter three, there are further flaws with the economics-based model of empowerment that extend beyond the technological divide. Currently, there is the fact that mobile penetration and the continued development of the technology relies on the creative processes being grounded in industrially developed countries while the manufacturing processes remain in less economically developed areas. If the goal of ICT4D is to allow these less economically developed areas to follow the steps of technological development previously undertaken by industrialised countries, either some areas must remain 'undeveloped' to allow this system to remain in place or the system must be changed. The latter is not in the interests of mobile developers, who have a strong influence on the perception of the usefulness of mobile phones in all contexts, and the former is contradictory to the aims of the development sector. Change to this system is therefore required.

As this thesis has identified a flawed system and urged for it to be modified, I wish to offer a closing suggestion. The power dynamic between funders and development NGOs is unsolvable if they are the only two agents involved within the system; however, it was earlier noted that there exists the third category of re-granters, which are organisations responsible for taking grants from funding departments – such as DFID – and distributing them to partner organisations who are working at a ground level on development schemes. Women Win is an example of a re-granting organisation. Re-granters, who typically work in close contact with their partners and thus have a greater understanding of their issues, can embrace the theoretical and individualised version of empowerment established in this thesis. From there, they can take a mediated standpoint on mobile technology which seeks to work out development uses for it which do not involve universalisations or the perpetuation of the technological divide.

The effect of this, in the long-term, could be to limit some of the power of large funders to control how mobile technology is perceived. At best, this may cause these funders to reflect on their own standpoints and take a more critical lens to the ICT4D approach. There are outside

factors involved in this, such as the influence of economic coalitions like the GSM on how mobile phones are viewed by funders, but theoretically informed work from re-granters would be a step in the right direction towards minimising the harm of blindly promoting mobile technology regardless of context. While mobile phones do have a vast potential in the empowerment of girls and in international development work, as this thesis has shown, this potential can only be fully tapped when we also recognise their shortcomings.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an effort to answer one overarching question: what are the effects of mobile phone promotion on the empowerment of girls in developing countries? It has been shown that there are plenty of potentially beneficial uses for mobile phones: mobile banking could allow girls to take control over their finances; mHealth could spread awareness of sexual health and reproductive rights; dedicated helplines could give girls a discrete way to report abuse. It is therefore not a question of how mobile phones can be beneficial but for whom. As shown by my research, the benefits afforded by mobile phones are not universally accessible and their promotion by NGOs can result in the perpetuation of subalternity for those who are already most disadvantaged within a society.

Partially, the reason for this is because empowerment is a concept that is relative to one's own standpoint. From the perspective of many Western NGO funders, empowerment naturally follows from material possession of certain objects that are perceived to grant agency, understood as the capacity to make choices for oneself. This value is placed on mobile phones because of the Western standpoint from which mobile technology saturates society and develops rapidly due to the creative processes existing firmly in post-industrial nations. This contrasts with the view of NGOs working on empowerment-based programmes in developing countries, coinciding with a more theoretically-considered approach based on intersectionality, in which positions of subalternity are individually unique and therefore cannot have a solution based upon a single axis, such as gender or class. This means that mobile phones cannot be a universal source of empowerment.

The system of international development is in a difficult position because of its own power structures. Western organisations are inclined towards mobile promotion, but cannot provide mobile phones themselves to populations, so this promotion can only serve to create or enhance a technological divide and implies that empowerment is reserved for the privileged section who already had access to a mobile phone. While this is unacceptable to the organisations in developing communities, the trend towards technologisation means that they do not have the capacity to share the opinions of the girls on their programmes – the ones who are affected by the technological divide – on what they believe constitutes empowerment and what they would like to see funded.

My advice is for further research to be conducted into the possible role of re-granting organisations in breaking this deadlock. More can be done to work out how the theoretical and individualised concept of empowerment can be adapted into development contexts, including

alternative uses for mobile technology which do not have to be part of an othering process. Re-granters, being a direct link between funders and programmes, can help to make the concerns and standpoints of each of these groups understood to the other. While certainly not an overarching or universal solution – as has been established, such a thing cannot exist – this can be the first step towards a more critical approach to mobile technology that is necessary to close the technological gap and make heard the voices and needs of many girls.

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Appendix A

Interview questions:

- Do you use mobiles to interact with girls in your programme?...How?...What have been the effects of this implementation?

- What kinds of phones are used?...Smart phones?

- Have you noticed if there are any differences between boys and girls using mobile phones in your local area?...For instance, if girls have less access to mobiles.

- Are families and the greater community hesitant about allowing girls to do sports?

- How do people in the community feel about the use of technology, particularly older generations?

- How has the use of mobiles in daily life changed in recent years?

- What about how mobiles are used by girls on the programme?

- What is your opinion on the growth of mobile phones?

- What reasons can you imagine for promoting mobile usage to girls on your programme?

- How does safety influence your programme…For instance, are girls at risk of violence when traveling to and from sports areas?...Mobiles can be used to protect girls, through keeping in contact and reporting incidents of violence, to using apps to share information on preventing and avoiding such violence. How do you think this could this be added to your programme to increase the safety of girls and attract new participants?

- How do family finances affect girls on the programme?...For instance, families being unable to pay for kit or wanting girls to work instead of doing sport…Mobile technology, such as M-Pesa, can be very beneficial in helping people to learn financial management and improve their economic stability…Can you imagine promotion of such technology being useful to your programme?...How?

- How is promotion of good health (nutritional, sexual, mental, etc) part of your programme?...Mobile technology apps, called mHealth, are effective ways to spread knowledge of these issues…Can you imagine this being a useful addition to your programme?

- How many mobile operators are available in your local area?

- Which operators are most popular?...What do you think are the factors in their popularity? …Coverage, price or another factor?

- How do citizens go about acquiring a SIM card?

- Is there a 3G network? Easy internet availability?

- How do the ways people use mobiles compare to different technologies, such as computers, television or radio?

- Are there mobile social networks that make it cheaper to send a group SMS?

- How much do people pay for a text message and for calls per minute?...How affordable do you think this is for a young person?

- Do you have any other ideas on using mobile phones on your programme?