

## Collecting Cultural Feedback on Ethiopian Views on Girls, Sport, and Voice

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*This qualitative study used data collected from five interviews conducted to gather cultural and linguistic feedback on a 21-question instrument created for a future study focused on Ethiopian girl athletes. Participants met the following criteria: (a) native to Ethiopia (b) at least 15 years old and (c) proficient English reading and speaking skills. Participants did not complete the questionnaire, rather, they read it and provided cultural and linguistic feedback on its content. Participants provided feedback via interviews both in person and over the phone during a two-week period. The instrument was designed to collect data from members of Girls Gotta Run Foundation, a non-profit organization in Ethiopia that uses sport to promote gender equity. It consists of questions that focus on girls' perceptions on the constructs of gender, sport, and voice empowerment. Findings demonstrated the importance of providing greater flexibility in questions that related to age and career goals, while the impact running has on Ethiopian culture was reinforced. Conducting this pilot study demonstrated the importance of testing cross-cultural instruments prior to final instrument administration to gain the most culturally accurate data possible. Keywords: Ethiopia, Girls, Sport, Capability Approach, Open-Response Questionnaire*

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An increase in the number of girls participating in sport parallels studies demonstrating that girls' self-efficacy, academic success, and professional advancement opportunities have simultaneously improved (Peckham, 2008; Stevenson, 2010). In the last 40 years, gender-based research conducted on voice has emerged at the same time as the rise of gender-based sport research, though thus far, the intersectionality of the two has yet to be researched. As such, there is a deficit in research connecting girls' self-agency, empowerment, and voice particularly in non-U.S. contexts. In this study, the term *voice* refers to having the confidence and ability to speak to others. What is known from the existing research is that girls who participate in sport experience improved self-esteem, increased graduation rates, and better professional opportunities than females who do not participate in sport (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 2001; Fejgin, 1994; Hanks, 1979; Miller, Farrell, Sabo, Barnes, & Melnick, 1999; Troutman & Dufur, 2007). To discover whether sport has also impacted voice in girls, the author, a white, female U.S. researcher, created an original questionnaire to better understand the perceptions of members of Girls Gotta Run Foundation (GGRF) located in Ethiopia. GGRF provides scholarships for over 150 girls on a yearly basis (*Girls Gotta Run Foundation: 2018 Annual Report*, 2018). The scholarships finance academic, athletic, nutrition, and health care opportunities for girls in two Ethiopian communities.

This study was conducted in the U.S. with native Ethiopians prior to a larger study conducted in Ethiopia with girl athletes to improve the validity of future research results (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010). Participants in this pilot study would not be participating in the larger dissertation study in Ethiopia and had no personal connection to any members of the GGRF. Therefore, participants in this pilot study did not complete the

questionnaire because the questions were intended for a specific group of teenage girl runners living in Ethiopia. What they did do was read each question and provide verbal feedback on whether questions would be culturally appropriate for native Ethiopians. The original questionnaire was developed exclusively for GGRF participants to study how they perceive their agency, sense of empowerment, and voice in public and private spaces. Prior to its distribution in Ethiopia, the questionnaire was created by the author. Piloting the questionnaire in this study allowed the author to address cross-cultural issues between the researcher's Western cultural background and the Global South nation of Ethiopia (Brock-Utne, 1996). The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which questions would translate culturally with native Ethiopians upon its distribution in a larger study two communities in Ethiopia. Given that the researcher had never traveled to Ethiopia and had found limited academic literature specific to Ethiopian sport culture, it was imperative to collect data using culturally-appropriate materials and methods (Au, 2019) with native Ethiopians. To achieve cultural competency, five native Ethiopians who currently reside in the U.S. read the questionnaire and answered qualitative questions relating to its content, language, and structure. After analyzing the data collected from the five participants in this pilot study, a revised version of the questionnaire demonstrating greater cultural sensitivity was administered to GGRF members in Ethiopia in May and June 2019 as part of a larger dissertation study.

The researcher is native to the U.S. who had never traveled to Ethiopia prior to conducting her doctoral work. She came to this project through her experiences as a teacher, coach, and lifelong athlete. She felt that her ability to effectively use her voice was influenced by the efficacy skills she cultivated during her years as an athlete. As a teacher and coach, she saw parallels between herself and the female athletes with whom she was working. Her interest in the GGRF in Ethiopia resulted from a global search to find an organization that not only promoted opportunities for more girls to participate in sport, but also actively encouraged the development of other skills such as efficacy that can lead to greater academic and professional success. The final product is a questionnaire adapted by the feedback and analysis of the pilot study that will be directly administered to members of GGRF in Ethiopia. The goal of this pilot study was to inform her dissertation study to be conducted in Ethiopia later in the spring of 2019.

### Literature Review

Many girls living in Ethiopia do not have equal access to the same education, athletic, and professional experiences as their male classmates, which impacts the overall national economy. About 57.2 percent of males are literate while just 41.1 percent of females are, reflecting school life expectancy statistics – nine years for males and eight years for females (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). School life expectancy refers to the number of years the average student will spend in formal school. Some patriarchal societies believe that investing in girls' education is not a wise expense because they will most likely marry during their teenage years and serve their husband's families (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004; Stromquist, 2012). Girls who do have access to education and athletics may face gender-biased curricula (Logan & Beoku-Beta, 1996) or greater chances of experiencing assault for disrupting patriarchal beliefs (Hayhurst, MacNeill, Kidd, & Knoppers, 2014). Patriarchal systems that do not consider females equal to males limit a nation's ability to be a part of contemporary global economies (Hickling-Hudson & Klees, 2012). General research on African women has established that females have a higher likelihood of working in low-wage, low-status agricultural posts than males because of the lack of educational opportunity, thus slowing national economic progress (Abraham, Ohemeng, & Ohemeng, 2017; Narayana & Shongwe, 2010).

Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration demonstrates a recursive relationship between identity, agency, and voice, and their interaction with social and cultural factors that comprise local and national communities (Cooky, 2009). Structuration theory recognizes that individuals function within the context of rules created by social structures, and that these social agreements reinforce such structures (Dumay, 2010; Giddens, 1984; Suzuki, 2017) thus perpetuating long-standing cultural norms and traditions that may negatively impact certain populations. Gender-based research on youth voices identified a link between girls who lack confidence in speaking and their overall self-worth and depression (Boone & Leadbeater, 2006; Raudsepp & Neissaar, 2012). As a result of U.S.-based research, it can be inferred that girls' voices are impacted by gender role socialization (Theran, 2009) and are less likely to use their voices in public space (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998). There are four reasons why girls lose their ability to express their opinions: (a) recognition that they must adopt a "good woman stereotype" that includes being caring, dependent, and quiet (b) accept that women's voices are not appreciated in society (c) follow their mother's own suppression of voice, and (d) fear rejection if they speak their honest opinions (Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 1989). The researcher applied these four reasons within the context of physical public and private space in the questionnaire to attempt to identify whether GGRF members suppress their voices for the same rationale. In this study, physical space refers to places where Ethiopian girls spend most of their days such as home, school, practice, and at the market.

Originally, the researcher intended to test a previously used instrument created for U.S. audiences; however, a review of existing literature revealed that utilizing a western-focused instrument demonstrated a lack of cultural understanding and failed to identify the uniqueness of individual cultures (Baker, 2009; Harter, 2012; Kenny, 2009; Watkins & Regmi, 1999). Although patriarchal cultures are not unusual, to what degree it influences girls' probability of attending school or receiving proper health care varies widely from one country to the next (Namasivayam, Osuorah, Syed, & Antai, 2012). Furthermore, studies that use country as a proxy for culture may be ignoring secondary features that comprise a nation's multi-dimensional culture (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). In this study, some of those features were limitations of age and gender due to the scope of the study, reasons for leaving Ethiopia, and regional representation. One study participant also noted differences of gender equity between northern and southern Ethiopia due to border influences of Eritrea and Somalia. Another participant noted that girls living in large, metropolitan areas like Addis Ababa most likely have more opportunities to attend secondary school and continue their practice of sport than girls living in rural areas. Collecting varied opinions on Ethiopian culture, some in agreement while others in opposition to each other, demonstrated that selecting just one country to conduct this research on girls' self-perceptions on gender, sport, and voice will result in diverse viewpoints. With that in mind, the researcher pursued defining her own understanding of the complexities of Ethiopian culture, framing her findings with the notion that there is no single representation or interpretation of Ethiopian culture. Therefore, general data on Ethiopia is presented with the understanding that regional perspectives have not been addressed.

## Methods

Using Amartya Sen's capability approach (Robeyns, 2003) as the evaluative framework assisted in creating the questionnaire and evaluating participants' responses with the mindset that people experience a unique and successful life regardless of their economic or social status. The capability approach is a normative framework that measures an individual's ability to utilize their resources and turn them into capabilities (Robeyns, 2003). The capability approach promotes identifying growth and strengths within individual's social and cultural context, instead of recognizing differences between nations and cultures (Sen, 1999). Capabilities are

defined as abilities that individuals can achieve (Sen, 1987). The researcher decided upon the capability approach to avoid making direct cross-international comparisons that might ignore how the global economy has differentially impacted individuals depending on where they live and what access they have to education, health care, and economic opportunity. This approach was critical in designing this questionnaire for a population that, historically, has not had access to the same freedoms and opportunities as their national male counterparts, nor its western female counterparts. This framework was applied in the open-ended design of most of the questionnaire to avoid providing multiple choice options that may not apply to girls living in rural Ethiopian communities. In addition, the questions were limited to the locations of home, school, sport, and the market, which is where most rural Ethiopian girls associated with the GGRF spend their time.

**Table 1**

*Using the capability approach, each question was organized within one of the five capabilities*

Capability	Life, Health and Play – Being able to have good health, including nourishment and shelter	Space – Being able to move freely from place to place without fear of assault.	Education and Thought – Being able to imagine, to think, and to reason as a result of a valuable education.	Reason – Being able to reflect upon past, present, and future events in one's life.	Community – Being able to safely and confidently live with others, especially family.
Questionnaire organized within capability set	What are some skills and traits necessary to be successful in school, sport, and in life?	Do you believe having the confidence to speak when you want is important to your academic and professional goals? Please explain your answer.	Has your academic performance improved since you began participating in sport? If so, please explain.	Have you noticed you speak more or less since participating in sport? Please explain your answer.	In your community is it more valued to be a good speaker or to be a good listener? Explain your answer.
	Has your view on what it means to be a girl changed since you began participating in sport? Please explain your answer.	Please rank your comfort level in using your voice with the following seven groups (1 – most comfortable, 7 – least comfortable): Family, Teachers and Coaches, Teammates, Classmates, All girls, All boys, Mix of boys and girls	Circle one: Are (GIRLS or BOYS) more likely to talk in class?	Do you think you are viewed as a leader amongst your friends? If yes, please provide an example of a time when you took on a leadership role.	Is it more acceptable for males or females to speak in your community? Or, are males and females equally encouraged to speak? Explain your answer.
	Would you describe yourself as a competitive person? If so, provide an example to explain your answer.	Have your career goals changed since you began participating in sport? If so, please explain.	Are you more likely to speak in class since you began participating in sport? Why or why not?	If you believe your confidence has grown, can you describe an example of how this confidence allowed you to voice your ideas or opinions in ways that girls who are not participating in sport do not?	Are there members in your community who value sport the most? Why do you think they value sport?
		Please rank your comfort level in using your voice in the following four spaces (1 – most comfortable, 4 – least comfortable): Home, School, Sport, Market	Are there different academic or behavior expectations for boys and girls in school? If so, please explain.		Are there members in your community who value sport the least? Why do you think they do not value sport?

The national Ethiopian government made a commitment to provide more equitable opportunities for females in public education in the last 20 years, though much of it has been focused at the primary levels (Karippai & Kassa, 2010). Many Ethiopian secondary female

students have limited access to opportunities such as education, which can lead to a bleak economic fate that begins at birth (Ethiopia Education and Literacy, 2018). Thus, making direct comparisons between different populations, in this case the researcher's U.S. experiences and those of Ethiopian girls, exposes inherent inequalities influenced by their respective cultures. Regarding inequalities, a unique capability set was designed for this pilot study to explore the constructs of self-agency, empowerment, and voice for girls living in developing nations. Perhaps more importantly to this study, this evaluative framework will help the U.S.-based researcher identify predetermined assumptions in understanding Ethiopia's unique cultural aspects (Robeyns, 2003). The capabilities selected for this pilot study are rooted in Sen's (1998) belief that individuals have the potential to lead lives that have reason to be valued. A limited number of Nussbaum's (Nussbaum, 1999) capabilities were also included. More specifically, the selected capabilities listed in Table 1 identify whether empowerment of voice is critical to girls' academic and potential for economic success.

### Design

In preparation for the interviews, three key elements needed to be addressed, which included deciding what theoretical methods to apply, identifying the population, and determining the number of participants needed to meet the study's goals (Doyle, 2004). Employing a framework like Sen's and Nussbaum's capability approaches in this pilot study encouraged the researcher to consider how social, cultural, economic, and political contexts could impact the participants' and their personal views about Ethiopian culture (Ball, 2009). A culturally sensitive approach allows the researcher to decrease power imbalances between interviewers and interviewees (Jamshidi et al., 2014). Eliminating power imbalances may also promotes a conversational style dialogue where there is no dominant participant, and all participants are on equal ground. Conversational dialogue can further encourage authentic cultural logics that dictate the actions and interpretations of people representing different cultures (Au, 2019). It is important to note that cultural logic depends on existing stereotypes that individuals may draw upon to understand other's motivation (Enfield, 2000). With this goal in mind, "fluid design" and "mixed-theory" approaches were used because they allowed the researcher to tailor the interview experience to the unique needs of her participants (Koro-Ljungberg, 2004; Koro-Ljungberg & Bussing, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). Following a script of questions not only provided structure but proved critical to organizing and comparing data during the analytical stage. The researcher recognized opportunities to connect with each participant, nonetheless, by asking unique follow-up questions so that participants could clarify or elaborate upon their statements.

### Participants

After making one connection with the Ethiopian community in Boston, Massachusetts, the researcher identified two other native Ethiopians identified using a snowball effect where one participant asks acquaintances or friends who meet study criteria to participate (Chacko, 2003; Noy, 2008). The other two native Ethiopians were identified through personal connections, though the researcher did not know them before the study. To be considered for the study, interviewees had to: (a) identify as adults who were native to Ethiopia (b) have confidence in their English speaking and reading skills and (c) be at least 15 years of age. Originally, participants were going to participate in a focus group, however, many participants were late or did not show on the designated date. As a result, some of these interviews were only between the researcher and one participant, while others involved the researcher and multiple participants at the same time. Of the five pilot study members, three were interviewed

in person, and two were interviewed individually over the phone. Of the three interviewed in person, one participant answered questions by himself because he was the only one to arrive on time, while the other two face-to-face participants answered questions together.

Composites of the participants was created to protect their identity, especially given that one participant stated he was a political refugee. Willis (2019) suggests researchers be as transparent as possible when using composites in research to build trust with readers. The researcher created two composites based on two factors: (a) length of time since each participant had last visited Ethiopia (b) age. These distinctions were created after data analysis was completed when there was an obvious divide between the five participants. Two participants regularly visit Ethiopia and had done so within three years of their interview with the researcher. The other three participants had not returned to Ethiopia in at least a decade. The two participants who regularly visit Ethiopia are both 20 years younger than the other three candidates. The first composite is “Haile,” who was formed from three of the interviews of male participants who had not returned to Ethiopia in over 10 years. These three participants were all interviewed in-person on March 8, 2019. The second composite is “Derartu,” who was formed from the youngest two participants – one female and one male – who have traveled to Ethiopia in the last three years. These two participants were interviewed on the phone on March 11-12, 2019. Haile and Derartu are popular Ethiopian names. Each quotation in this article comes from interview transcripts to maintain as much transparency as possible (Willis, 2019).

### Data Collection

Consent was collected in-person and remotely. Haile signed in-person at the Boston community center, while Derartu signed an online consent form and emailed it back to the researcher. Once consent forms were reviewed and signed, participants were provided a copy of the GGRF questionnaire in English with the instructions to read through it, making note of any questions that might be considered culturally or linguistically inappropriate to native Ethiopians. Participants read and provided feedback on a questionnaire that had a total of 21 questions (Table 2). The questions were categorized under four headings: (a) background (b) school (c) community voice and sport and (d) personal. Once participants finished reading the questionnaire, the researcher took note of any immediate concerns they had about the survey and then asked seven questions that were specific to the questionnaire and to overall Ethiopian culture (Table 3).

The first round of interviews took place in person at an urban Ethiopian community center and the second and third rounds were conducted over the phone on separate dates. The benefit to in-person interviews was that the researcher could watch the mannerisms of participants, reading their facial experiences and physical responses. At times, the in-person participants would support their responses with vigorous head-nodding if they agreed with the researcher. They also talked with their hands to emphasize importance of ideas. In contrast, the researcher did not know what her phone interviewees looked like; relying on vocal and linguistic data to read their emotions to know when to follow up for clarification and when to move onto another question. Although she could not know for sure whether it was due to the anonymity of the telephone, sport experience, or an age or gender factor, the two phone interviewees responded with more emotion to the specific gender equity questions and shared their personal experiences with sport in Ethiopia. These two participants may have felt a greater need to use the power of their voice, knowing that the researcher could not see their physical responses. Differences in monosyllabic responses with head-nodding by in-person participants as compared with much longer responses were noted during data analysis.

**Table 2** *Questionnaire analyzed by study participants*

- Background:**
- 1 Age:
  - 2 Hometown in the U.S.:
  - 3 Hometown in Ethiopia:
- School:**
- 4 Have your career goals changed since you began participating in sport? If so, please explain.
  - 5 Has your academic performance improved since you began participating in sport? If so, please explain.
  - 6 Circle one: Are (GIRLS or BOYS) more likely to talk in class?
  - 7 Are you more likely to speak in class since you began participating in sport? Why or why not?
  - 8 Are there different academic or behavior expectations for boys and girls in school? If so, please explain.
- Community Voice and Sport:**
- 9 Please rank your comfort level in using your voice with the following seven groups (1 – most comfortable, 7 – least comfortable):
    - \_\_\_ Family
    - \_\_\_ Teachers and Coaches
    - \_\_\_ Teammates
    - \_\_\_ Classmates
    - \_\_\_ All girls
    - \_\_\_ All boys
    - \_\_\_ Mix of boys and girls
  - 10 Please rank your comfort level in using your voice in the following four spaces (1 – most comfortable, 4 – least comfortable):
    - \_\_\_ Home
    - \_\_\_ School
    - \_\_\_ Sport
    - \_\_\_ Market
  - 11 In your community is it more valued to be a good speaker or to be a good listener? Explain your answer.
  - 12 Is it more acceptable for males or females to speak in your community? Or, are males and females equally encouraged to speak? Explain your answer.
  - 13 Are there members in your community who value sport the most? Why do you think they value sport?
  - 14 Are there members in your community who value sport the least? Why do you think they do not value sport?
- Personal:**
- 15 What are some skills and traits necessary to be successful in school, sport, and in life?

- 16 Would you describe yourself as a competitive person? If so, provide an example to explain your answer.
- 17 Do you think you are viewed as a leader amongst your friends? If yes, please provide an example of a time when you took on a leadership role.
- 18 Have you noticed you speak more or less since participating in sport? Please explain your answer.
- 19 If you believe your confidence has grown, can you describe an example of how this confidence allowed you to voice your ideas or opinions in ways that girls who are not participating in sport do not?
- 20 Do you believe having the confidence to speak when you want is important to your academic and professional goals? Please explain your answer.
- 21 Has your view on what it means to be a girl changed since you began participating in sport? Please explain your answer.

The researcher, a native English-speaker, was aware that all participants were not responding in their native language. In addition, she was wary of walking the line between empathizing with her participants who were not happy with gender equity problems in Ethiopia while ensuring that she did not provide commentary that might put them on the defensive, or worse, insult them. One way she maintained this balance was to explain that the study is rooted in her own experiences as a female athlete in the U.S., sharing that she understood gender equity issues were not isolated to Ethiopian culture. The researcher shared this information at the beginning of each interview to remove potential cultural barriers between her and the participants. By sharing this information, the researcher hoped to convey to participants that she did not believe her native U.S. culture was better than Ethiopian culture, specifically in terms of gender equity.

Participants in this study had no connection to participants in the dissertation study set in Ethiopia and did not actually answer any of the 21 questions. They did, however, read the questionnaire and verbally identify any cultural issues they had. In addition to providing open feedback, participants also verbally answered a set of open-ended questions relating to the questionnaire seen in Table 3 to further help the researcher ensure the cultural competency of the questionnaire. Because all documents and questions were in English, the researcher asked each participant if they felt comfortable speaking and reading in English prior to their consent and participation in this study.

**Table 3** *Follow-up questions for study participants*

- 1 Were there questions that were confusing to you? If so, which ones? What was confusing about them?
- 2 Were there any words that would not make sense to someone living in Ethiopia? If so, which ones?
- 3 Do you identify any major issues for when a version of this questionnaire is translated into Amharic or another language native to Ethiopia?
- 4 Do you believe that Ethiopians make decisions based on what is most important to the group vs. what is more important to the individual?



- 5 Do you agree that there are gender equity issues in Ethiopia? Can you provide an example?
- 6 How is sport viewed in Ethiopia? Is running more important than other sports?
- 7 Do you believe that teenage girls living in Ethiopia will feel comfortable self-reflecting on their role in society? If not, what will hold them back?

### **Data Analysis**

Data can be transformed by three methods – description, analysis, or interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). To use the rich details provided by participants to inform cultural outcomes, an analytical approach that expands data “beyond a descriptive account” transformed collected data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9). In this case, cross-examination of the five participants’ responses to each question found that while several questions raised a high degree of interest from all participants, there was also at least one question that each participant provided in-depth feedback on that no other participant had. These in-depth responses provided opportunities to identify commonalities in order to create composites that shared commonalities. Some of those responses are reflected in the direct quotations shared below.

Following completion of the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher and uploaded into NVivo 12 for analysis for an initial word frequency query. Word frequency queries assume that significant words are used more often than others (Carley, 1993; Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). It can help to identify patterns and support analytical integrity (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). The words “sport/athlete,” “girls,” and “community” were selected as starter nodes. The researcher made note of how the three in-person interviewees all made monosyllabic comments on which questions they felt were particularly relevant to Ethiopia, most likely because they read the questionnaire in front of the researcher and had little time for reflection. This was different from the two phone interviewees who got to read the questionnaire before the set interview time. Those participants prepared notes to address issues they identified from the start of the conversation. For instance, the two younger participants described in detail how gender inequities impacted their Ethiopian athletic experiences. In contrast, the three older, in-person participants rarely referenced their athletic experiences in Ethiopia.

Broad-brush nodes or open codes were created to classify the differences between the behaviors and opinions of the five participants, and their suggestions on revising the questionnaire (Bonello & Meehan, 2019). For example, the two phone participants focused their attention on questions relating to school probably because they were decades younger than the in-person participants. The older, in-person participants focused more on the Ethiopian government’s decades-long drive to catapult Ethiopian runners on an international level. These three participants had worked in the government and had witnessed major political changes in Ethiopia’s government. By making this distinction, the researcher found patterns between gender and age amongst the participants. Even though there were only five participants, there was a very clear divide between the three older participants who had left Ethiopia decades ago, compared with the two younger participants who frequently visit their native country. Understanding these patterns helped the researcher make better decisions when participants did not agree. For example, there were two younger participants who regularly return to Ethiopia to visit family, where the three older participants have not been to Ethiopia in several decades. Therefore, the researcher tended to trust the younger participants when such disagreements happened because their knowledge of Ethiopian culture was the most current. This “constant comparative method” aided in developing a greater understanding of the commonalities and differences among the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 126).

The researcher maintained a separate analytical memo each time she used NVivo to analyze the data. Writing daily memos encouraged the researcher to use a multi-layer approach suggested by Richards (2015) whereas descriptive coding is completed first, followed by topic codes, and then analytical coding. The researcher started each analytical session by reviewing the most recent memos, allowing her to build new perspectives from her previous coding (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Through this process she was able to separate the two larger goals of this study: (a) edit and finalize a culturally-appropriate original questionnaire and (b) reflect upon the study's methods to improve her research skills. Given that she had intended to collect data from a focus group but ultimately ran separate interviews due to unplanned circumstances, the researcher conducted further research on the similarities and differences between the two (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Much of the memos include links and analysis of additional research on Ethiopian culture based on suggestions made by participants. For example, while Derartu often had specific suggestions for how to rephrase questions that would be more appropriate for girls living in rural Ethiopia, no other participant did. Derartu had also attended Ethiopian schools within the last 10 years, while Haile had not attended school in Ethiopia in over 25 years. As a result, Derartu's suggestions routinely outweighed Haile's when there was conflict. Participants had ideas on what made for culturally appropriate questions that required the researcher to conduct additional research on contemporary Ethiopian culture in relation to age and gender-appropriate career options for females. Such feedback and analysis supported identifying any topics that might be sensitive for GGRF members and contributed to clarifying the construction of several questions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

### Findings

The surprisingly varied perspectives on the state of gender equality in Ethiopia demonstrated a wide variety of attitudes that may or may not have been influenced by age, gender, hometown, personal experiences, or reason for leaving Ethiopia. Haile was a political refugee, while Derartu had been born into a large family, and was adopted by a U.S. family when famine wiped out her native Ethiopian family's finances. Sharing personal information that went beyond the scope of the interview indicated a level of trust between interviewer and interviewee that enforced the need to ask broad questions in future studies for the sake of understanding each participant's rationale. Such surprises underscore the importance of conducting pilot studies prior to collecting data with a larger population (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010). The researcher did not become aware of the magnitude of these limitations until the data analysis phase. In another example, Derartu had spent a significant portion of her life living in rural Ethiopia, while Haile based his responses on his experience in larger, urban areas like the capital city of Addis Ababa, and so the issue of gender equity was secondary to him:

Professional women, they do not care (how people view women speaking in public), but rural women, they are not modern. Mostly, this is Africa, it is the middle and the rural areas. Urban – they don't mind. But in the rural [areas], it is the male. (Anonymous, personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Given that this participant has not been to Ethiopia in over 10 years, his statements may or may not be true for all rural women, and all professional women in contemporary Ethiopia. In contrast, Derartu, who had lived in rural Ethiopia, placed herself into the perspectives of rural children, removing the "other" viewpoint in her responses. In responding to a question on the different school experiences of boys and girls she said, "I would definitely say that academic

or behavioral expectation for a guy is totally different than their counterpart in a lot of cases” (Anonymous, personal communication, March 11, 2019). More weight was eventually given to her statements because her experiences growing up in rural Ethiopia are most likely like GGRF participants, though regional influences may later prove this theory wrong. Derartu suggested digging deeper into the homelife of girls to understand how their domestic responsibilities influence their ability to focus on academics and athletics.

Her suggestion pushed the researcher to provide more opportunity for Ethiopian girls to speak for themselves about how their unique situations influence all facets of their lives. Derartu’s belief that the female participants who would eventually take the questionnaire would feel emboldened to share their perspectives fit into Sen’s capability approach. The researcher added two more questions that provided the Ethiopian girl participants opportunities to opine about themselves and about Ethiopia’s prowess in distance running. The first question asked participants to share the best advice their coach ever gave them. This question could potentially provide insight into the relationships between Ethiopian coaches and girl athletes. The second question asked why participants thought Ethiopia has so many successful runners, giving participants a chance to talk about their country while also reflecting on the unique insights of training in Ethiopia, which has the unique benefit of being located two miles above sea level. Training at higher altitudes where there is less oxygen benefits runners when they compete at sea level where there is more oxygen.

Derartu encouraged the researcher to find out more about the size of households from which each girl came because she felt that the number of children had the potential to either positively or negatively impact the academic and professional support each girl received. She further explained that many Ethiopian girls who come from big families often have many house-bound responsibilities, prohibiting them from exploring their academic and personal pursuits to the fullest. Derartu’s suggestions aligned with current research where Ethiopian children in both urban and rural locations identify childhood as a state of being indebted or “obligated” towards adults in their families, regardless of gender (Kassa, 2017). Children in rural locations are more likely to be valued for the socioeconomic contributions towards their families (Abebe, 2013). Ethiopian girls ages 5-14 spend 40 percent more time on unpaid household chores compared to their male counterparts, depleting their time to socialize and study (UNICEF, 2016). Said UNICEF’s Principal Gender Advisor, Anju Malhorta, “As a result, girls sacrifice important opportunities to learn, grow, and just enjoy their childhood. This unequal distribution of labor among children also perpetuates gender stereotypes and the double-burden on women and girls across generations” (UNICEF, 2016, parra. 4).

Derartu prompted me to construct a question for the questionnaire for GGRF members, using the idea that home-grown self-esteem mixed with gender can influence levels of empowerment and agency in public spaces for GGRF participants (Baker-Sperry, 2006). The basis of the rationale – that more children equals less attention – could be applied to any family, wealthy or poor, or even any classroom. It was not the goal of this study to push beyond its boundaries, so the researcher did not ask whether Derartu felt the size of her family had impacted her childhood, though she seemed to speak from experience based on the depth and emotion instilled in her response. Regardless, her point was made given that the development of girls’ self-esteem is rooted in home life, where parental beliefs are subject to local and national culture (Croll, 2001). In the final questionnaire, participants were asked how many children lived in their household.

## Age

The researcher assumed that asking each participant’s age on the questionnaire was one of the less stressful questions, but Derartu exercised concern on this matter. She explained that

many people living in Ethiopia, especially those living in rural areas, do not know how old they are because they do not know when they were born. Birth certificates have only been issued to about seven percent of Ethiopian citizens (*One in three children under-five does not officially exist*; UNICEF, 2013). Many immigrants migrating from east Africa and other regions around the world who do not have a specific birthday often select January 1, sometimes resulting in several family members with the same birthday (Hirsi, 2017; Ocbazghi, 2017). UNICEF states that children with unregistered births experience societal inequities including equal access to education, health care, and social security (*One in three children under-five does not officially exist*; UNICEF, 2013). In Ethiopia, birth registration often correlates to a mother's education level. For example, children whose mothers have no schooling have a four percent chance of being registered by the government as compared with children whose mothers have completed a secondary education or higher; they have a 33 percent chance of being registered. When thinking about how advantageous registration is to a child's life it is important to note that "birth registration – and a birth certificate - is vital for unlocking a child's full potential," said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rao Gupta (UNICEF, 2016, parra. 8). "All children are born with enormous potential. But if societies fail to count them, and don't even recognize that they are there, they are more vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Inevitably, their potential will be severely diminished" (UNICEF, 2016, parra. 8). This rationale reflected the study's frameworks in that potential is different from one culture to the next. Therefore, the suggestion to provide age ranges to ensure that participants feel comfortable and confident was applied to the final version of the questionnaire. Those age ranges were in two-year increments between the ages of 13-18 (ex. 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18).

## Career

One word that jumped out at Derartu was "career," explaining that the concepts of "career planning" and "career goals" may be typical to American teenagers, but are most likely foreign concepts to Ethiopian teenagers. She further explained that it would be a "broad term for them" (Anonymous, personal communication, March 11, 2019). She suggested providing career options for future Ethiopian participants such as "teacher" or "doctor" to give them direction on this question. By taking the time to explain the potential confusion and stress that career question could bring to Ethiopian girls by not giving them career options, Derartu expressed passion and care (Manuel & Kendall-Taylor, 2009) for her home country and gender equality issues. The researcher provided more familiar terms in the final questionnaire by using the following: teacher, entrepreneur, scientist, professional athlete, and a space for "other." When delving into the concept of what a career could mean in relation to typical female Ethiopian jobs v. typical female American jobs there is a concern that providing specific career goals limits female participants. Additionally, it also takes away from what makes qualitative data so valuable, in that it encourages participants to think and be unique and honest. The notion of removing the question altogether had to be considered given that career choices may be more heavily influenced by structural and cultural aspects such as family and community, thus decreasing the level of individual choice for some teenagers (Nilan, 2011; Tomanović & Ignjatović, 2006). In keeping with Sen's capability approach, would it be culturally appropriate to suggest the teenage girls have a choice in their future careers when their agency might be more limited than the researcher anticipated (Tomanović & Ignjatović, 2006)? Including agency in the question, on the other hand, would provide valuable insight to the global viewpoints of female Ethiopian teenagers. After much debate, a heavier reliance on participant feedback led to including typical female jobs in addition to "runner" with an "other" option for those whose future goals are out of the gender norm.

## Education

One question that raised flags with participants was the one that addressed talking in class. The exact phrasing from the questionnaire was, “Are you more likely to speak in class since you began participating in sport? Why or why not?” Participants expressed confusion on the timing of talk, did it mean when students were directed to answer their teacher’s question, or was it a reference to distracting side conversation? Said Derartu, “Yeah, I was thinking of the question was put like, distractive talking, like out of turn” (Anonymous, personal communication, March 11, 2019). She went on to explain how her Ethiopian school experience was stricter than her experience in the U.S., stating that, “It is a very, very stern environment where you show up to school, you do your stuff and, you talk when you're called. And you don't really have the side conversations like in other places that you would see” (Anonymous, personal communication, March 11, 2019). In following the qualitative intent, the question was deliberately designed to be open-ended to see how varied the answers could be. After reviewing other participant points, the strongest consideration needed to be given to the youngest participant, Derartu, who could speak first-hand on Ethiopian schools. In re-imagining this question, the researcher eliminated the notion that males and females compete for teacher attention with this new version in her questionnaire: “Are you more likely to ask your teacher a question in class since you became an athlete? Why or why not?” In a strict classroom the researcher imagined that it is an expectation that students respond to direct teacher questioning. If asking the teacher questions is allowed, however, it is possible that not every student does due to a variety of reasons, including having the ability to self-advocate. The researcher also added in a question that asks if participants recognize different behavioral expectations between males and females to find out if Derartu’s experiences are like those of GGRF participants.

## National Culture

One question that emerged during conversation with all participants is whether Ethiopia is a nation of people who make decisions that are best for the individual, or decisions that are best for the greater good of all Ethiopians. In discussing gender equity issues, some participants felt female economic prosperity has been improving, and its potential to increase was strong. Participants based their beliefs on a recent shift in the nation’s economy as a growing private sector has influenced hiring practices. Haile shared his perspective on the relationship between Ethiopian individuals and their government:

Society is changing. There was a time when the government was always in charge. When the government would assign you to work in different areas. There was no democratic right. But now because of the private sector expanding and the way people are hired... [employers are] looking for the best candidates. (Anonymous, personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Qualitative interviews can directly benefit participants by providing space for participants to talk, self-reflect, and to encourage them to emotionally cleanse themselves of experiences that may be weighing on them (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). For some participants, being interviewed about sport and voice may also be empowering, allowing them to advocate for a specific community or help somebody in a similar situation (Carter et al., 2008; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). There was one issue that all participants agreed upon and that is the importance running has on Ethiopian culture, emphatically explaining that it is a way out of poverty. The ability to rise out of poverty may not mean signing million-dollar contrast for

sneakers and clothing like it does for some western professional runners, but it does mean being able to train full-time with teammates and a professional coach. This is true for both female and male professional runners in Ethiopia, who aspire to escape from poverty not through academics, but through athletics. Haile stated that Ethiopians believe running can change their economic status:

Over there (Ethiopia), the farmers, the family, they study and then they run. And they know great runners get rich. Very rich. And their families get rich, too. Then these farmers, they knew, they understood how running is important in the rural areas. And they are encouraged to run. (Anonymous, personal communication, March 8, 2019)

He went on to describe how hundreds of females and males run the streets of the capital city of Addis Ababa in the morning, often relying on themselves or private coaches for guidance. He added there are some individuals who forsake their education to become a wealthy professional runner. Overall the point was made that running is ingrained in Ethiopian culture not only because of the geographic advantage of being located in high elevation, but also because the government and individual constituents understand its financial potency in a land where 74 percent of people do not complete upper secondary education (Trines, 2018).

All participants demonstrated a general sense of pride in being Ethiopian (Chacko, 2003), and Ethiopia's success in international running was evident amongst all participants. Haile fondly recalled watching professional Ethiopian runners dominate distance running at the Olympics and other world championship meets. He proudly described gold medals won by Ethiopians, but warned about the pressure that comes with coming home with anything but a first-place finish. Haile said with a grin, "That's why we called it the 'green flood.' 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... Because we wear the green [demonstrates putting on a track singlet], all the green flag. I don't understand why we don't like the number 2 or the number 3" (Anonymous, personal communication, March 8, 2019).

Derartu equated Ethiopia's running prominence as a way of explaining Ethiopia's prominence in world affairs, stating:

You were in the war and you won, you know what I mean? The feeling, everybody has that feeling. It is like patriotism and that it's like, it's ours, running is ours. Every time they (Ethiopia) won, it's like a big victory for the country. I remember when I was little I was like, very appreciated, the running, because they still won the war, like the people, like, they think soccer is for pride but running is for patriotism. Do you know what I mean? (Anonymous, personal communication, March 21, 2019)

It has been years since she has lived in Ethiopia, and yet the sport that Derartu loved so much as a child but that she was essentially shamed into quitting, still brings her great joy.

## Discussion

Conducting this pilot study was critical to the success of a secondary study in Ethiopia for two reasons. The first is that it provided invaluable insight into how native Ethiopians would most likely receive the questionnaire. Phrases and ideas that might not be familiar or appropriate to native Ethiopians were removed or reconstructed with the understanding that Ethiopia is a large and culturally complex nation, and that no questionnaire would meet all needs. The revised questionnaire (Table 4) had a greater chance of yielding honest, thoughtful

responses, however, due to the cultural feedback received by this study's participants. Most importantly, it gave the researcher greater confidence in understanding general Ethiopian culture by interviewing native Ethiopians. The passion for their home country and pride in their nation's running champions demonstrated the value Ethiopians put on their athletes – both females and males. The stories that Haile and Derartu shared painted a more vivid picture of what she could expect while in Ethiopia in terms of getting comfortable with the culture as quickly as possible to collect quality data.

#### Table 4

##### *Ethiopian Girls, Sport, and Voice Empowerment Questionnaire*

The goal of this questionnaire is to learn more about the impact sport has had on your life. Sport involves physical activity, skill, and individual or team competition. The word “voice” in this questionnaire refers to having the confidence and ability to speak to others. This questionnaire is asking you to reflect on times when you use your voice, or speak, in public (school, community, market, practice) and private (home) spaces. If there are questions that do not apply to you, please feel free to not answer them.

#### Background

1. Age (circle one):      (13-14)      (15-16)      (17-18)      (19-20)
2. Hometown: \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many children live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Since you became an athlete, have you thought about becoming a doctor, teacher, business woman, professional athlete, or something else? If so, please explain.
5. Have your academics improved since you became an athlete? If so, please explain.
6. Are you more likely to ask your teacher a question in class since you became an athlete? Why or why not?
7. Are there different academic or behavioral expectations in schools for boys and girls? If so, please explain.

#### Community Voice and Sport:

8. Please rank your comfort level in using your voice with the following seven groups (1 – most comfortable, 7 – least comfortable):
  - \_\_\_ Family
  - \_\_\_ Teachers and Coaches
  - \_\_\_ Teammates
  - \_\_\_ Classmates
  - \_\_\_ All girls
  - \_\_\_ All boys
  - \_\_\_ Mix of boys and girls
9. Please rank your comfort level in using your voice in the following four spaces (1 – most comfortable, 4 – least comfortable):
  - \_\_\_ Home
  - \_\_\_ School
  - \_\_\_ Sport
  - \_\_\_ Market

10. In your community, do you think it is more valued for females to be good speakers or good listeners? Are there different expectations for males? Why or why not?
11. From your perspective, are adult males and females equally encouraged to speak? Explain your answer.
12. Are there members in your community who value female athletes the most? Explain your answer.
13. Are there members in your community who do not support female athletes? Explain your answer.
14. What is the best advice your coach ever gave you?
15. Why do you think Ethiopia has so many good runners?

Personal:

16. What skills and traits necessary to be successful in school, sport, and in life?
17. Would you describe yourself as a competitive person? If so, provide an example to explain your answer.
18. Do you think you are viewed as a leader amongst your friends? If yes, please provide an example of a time when you demonstrated leadership.
19. Have you noticed you speak more or less since becoming an athlete? Please explain your answer.
20. If you believe your confidence has grown, can you describe a time when confidence allowed you to voice your ideas or opinions in ways that girls who are not athletes do not?
21. Do you believe having the confidence to speak when you want to is important to your academic and professional goals? Please explain your answer.
22. Has your view on what it means to be a girl changed since you became an athlete? Please explain your answer.
23. Why do you think Ethiopian runners are so successful?
24. Who is your role model? Why do you admire them so much?

There were two major limitations in this study. The first was that the interviews were not conducted in their native language. The researcher wanted to conduct the interviews without the assistance of a translator to make deeper personal connections with participants. Although it did not appear that any of the participants were unable to express themselves in English, it is possible that their self-expression was hindered because they were not speaking in their native Amharic (Gee, 1990; Squires, 2009). Future researchers would also need to find out whether participants have maintained their native tongue since moving to another country. Finally, despite the focus on Ethiopian females, only one female decided to participate though three others initially agreed to participate but never responded to the researcher's follow-up solicitation. This meant that four out of five participants were male. Although the focus of the questionnaire was on teenage girls, no teenage girls participated in the study due to availability issues. Teenage girls who had attended school in Ethiopia before moving to the U.S. could have made valuable contributions to this study if they were able to remember their Ethiopian experiences. Even with their inclusion, whether they grew up in rural or urban Ethiopia would need to be factored into analyzing their interviews.



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**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to Dr. AJ Angulo, whose guidance and support during this project was instrumental in its ultimate success.

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### Article Citation

Ralls, K. (2020). Collecting cultural feedback on Ethiopian views on girls, sport, and voice. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(12), 4224-4244. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss12/3>

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