



Proving “The Girl Effect”: Corporate knowledge production and educational intervention



Kathryn Moeller*

University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Girls' education
Adolescent girls
Corporations
Nongovernmental organizations
Development
Poverty

ABSTRACT

The Nike Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Nike, Inc., seeks to prove the “The Girl Effect,” its theory of change, through investments in adolescent girls in the Global South. The foundation defines it as the “unique potential of 250 million adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world.” This article examines the elaborate, yet continually contested processes of attempting to prove “The Girl Effect.” It draws on ethnographic research in the U.S. and Brazil (2009–2010) to analyze how the Nike Foundation funds, produces, and distributes knowledge on the purported potential of particular adolescent girls to end poverty. It focuses on how the monitoring and evaluation practices of one grantee in Brazil were informed by and contributed to the foundation’s broader project of proving “The Girl Effect.” The analysis explains how this occurred through processes of knowledge production and educational intervention that were predicated on an epistemological understanding of the trope of “Third World girl.” It provides insights into how the foundation extends its power and authority over new bodies, institutions, and geographies by asserting itself as an expert on adolescent girls and by influencing the development agendas of more powerful global institutions.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Early one afternoon in 2009, I sat down alongside six adolescent girls who were being interviewed to enter the second session of an “economic empowerment” program for adolescent girls in Brazil. The informal educational program was administered by a Brazilian nongovernmental organization (NGO), the affiliate of a U.S.-based international NGO. It was funded by the Nike Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Nike, Inc., the world’s largest maker of sporting goods and apparel. Two other adolescent girls were standing with Susanna, a senior staff member, at the front of the classroom.¹ Susanna explained to the interviewees that she had invited two participants who were completing the program to share their experiences. She exclaimed, “Who better to talk about the program than them?” She introduced the participants as Luciana, age 16, and Luiza, age 15.

Luciana spoke with certainty and confidence in a straightforward manner. She described the long selection process she and her colleagues completed before they entered the program. At the end

of this description, she told the interviewees about the questionnaire they would complete before beginning the program. She explained, “They ask you about *everything*.” She repeated emphatically, “Prepare yourselves, they ask about *everything, everything*.”

“Everything,” as emphasized by Luciana, refers to the data the NGO collected to prove the Nike Foundation’s theory of change, “The Girl Effect.” The Nike Foundation defines it as “the unique potential of 250 million adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world.”² Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, this article examines the Nike Foundation’s processes of attempting to prove “The Girl Effect.” It does so by focusing on how the Nike Foundation funded and produced knowledge on adolescent girls or, more specifically, the racialized trope of “Third World girls” through its relationship with one grantee. By carefully examining the Nike Foundation’s investment in adolescent girls in Brazil in a particular time and place, I seek to elucidate the Nike Foundation’s broader investment logic, its practices, and, ultimately, the intended and unintended effects of these practices. It is by analyzing how these investment practices occurred in a specific place and time that a particular part of the Nike Foundation’s investment strategy and practices can elucidate a broader whole.

* Correspondence address: 217 Education Building, 1000 Bascom Mall, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, United States. Tel.: +1 415 624 5385.

E-mail address: kmoeller2@wisc.edu

¹ All of the names in this article are pseudonyms.

² The Girl Effect Media Kit. Accessed 23.03.2011. http://www.nikefoundation.org/files/The_Girl_Effect_Media_Kit.pdf.

While it is not expected that the experiences of Nike, Inc., the Nike Foundation, and their institutional partners in any specific geography will be exactly replicated by another set of actors focused on “The Girl Effect,” this study places these investments within a larger constellation of discourse and practice in order to understand the emergent practice of investing in “The Girl Effect.”

As this article will show, attempting to prove “The Girl Effect” is an elaborate and well coordinated, yet continually contested process. More specifically, it is a recursive process of knowledge production and educational intervention predicated on a particular epistemological understanding of “Third World girls.” On one level, the knowledge funded and produced on adolescent girls through “The Girl Effect” informs and is informed by the educational interventions funded by the foundation. On another level, the knowledge the Nike Foundation produces on adolescent girls through its programs is disseminated to multiple audiences to educate them on particular adolescent girls’ purported potential to end poverty. These include the corporation and its foundation’s own employees, the foundation’s partners and potential partners, and virtual public audiences in the Global North and South. Through strategies on these two levels, the foundation extends its power over new bodies, institutions, and geographies by asserting itself as an expert on adolescent girls and by influencing the development agendas of more powerful global institutions.

2. A corporate foundation’s theory of change

On International Women’s Day, March 8, 2005, Nike, Inc. announced it was transforming the Nike Foundation to focus exclusively on “the lives and well-being of adolescent girls” (Nike Inc., 2005). These adolescent girls are geographically located in “emerging” markets, such as Brazil, India, and China, and “frontier” markets, such as Paraguay, Kenya, Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. It linked its new philanthropic investments in their “human capital” to the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals on poverty alleviation and gender equality (ibid). To support its work, the foundation developed partnerships on different scales with NGOs, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and global forums.

Approximately three years later, in 2008, the Nike Foundation officially launched “The Girl Effect” brand with the financial support of the NoVo Foundation.³ As a theory of change, “The Girl Effect” is predicated on the following hypothesis, as articulated in a document from the Nike Foundation’s partnership with the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID):

The ‘girl effect’ theory of change hypothesises that by investing in an adolescent girl, we not only transform her life chances, but also the life chances of her future children and her community. If we invest in enough girls, we can unleash the potential of whole nations. (Nike Foundation & DFID: 11)⁴

This transformation purportedly occurs as a result of the multi-generational, multi-scalar “ripple effect”⁵ that investing in adolescent girls generates across various development indicators, including alleviating poverty, promoting economic growth, reducing fertility rates and population growth, controlling the

spread of HIV/AIDS, and conserving environmental resources. In order to catalyze this “ripple effect,” the foundation promotes the following principle:

The *Girl Effect Theory of Change* is based around the principle that small amount of targeted resource can have a major impact on delaying first pregnancy and age of marriage, on getting girls through school and on improving girls’ control over economic assets. Simply put – investing more in good quality interventions targeted to adolescent girls represents good value for money. (ibid)

Based on its “good value for money,” the Nike Foundation promotes investing in adolescent girls as a “high return investment.”⁶ Maria Eitel, the first President of the Nike Foundation and Vice President of Nike, Inc., illuminates this when she says, “I’ll never get tired of saying it: Girls are the world’s greatest untapped resource for economic growth and prosperity.”⁷ Within this conceptualization, girls are to be invested in as a government or corporation would invest in another natural, physical, technological, or human resource.

Yet, this approach has not been without contestation. The first public critique of the foundation’s efforts came in March 2012. The U.K.’s Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) issued a report on the Nike Foundation’s partnership with DFID to create the Girl Hub,⁸ “a catalyst for expanding the ‘girl effect.’” The report issued an “Amber-Red” assessment of the Girl Hub, defined as a warning “The program meets some of the criteria for effectiveness and value for money but is not performing well. Significant improvements should be made.”⁹ While the report is concerned that the messaging about girls “fails to reflect the complex social context and puts undue pressure on vulnerable girls,” the report does not systematically analyze the underlying logic of “The Girl Effect” and its implications for girls nor the ways in which the foundation’s girl-focused programs extend the power and influence of the Nike Foundation and Nike, Inc.¹⁰

2.1. “She’s an Economic Powerhouse”: the Nike Foundation’s “Economic Empowerment” portfolio

The NGO program I observed in Brazil was funded by the foundation to generate proof of economic change resulting from its investment in adolescent girls. It was part of the foundation’s philanthropic portfolio, “She’s an Economic Powerhouse: Economic Empowerment Models for Girls,” funded in collaboration with the NoVo Foundation. I will refer to the portfolio as the Economic Empowerment Portfolio. The Request for Proposals (RFP) explains the theory behind this focus:

We see girls as economic powerhouses. She’s powerful today as the backbone of her family’s economic and social health. She could be even more powerful tomorrow, if her role as an economic actor is shifted. The potential impact of this approach will complement ideals of gender equity and basic human rights. That’s what this set of RFPs is all about.¹¹

The foundation directly linked this economic focus to its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy. As further laid out, the

³ NoVo Foundation’s co-chairs are Peter and Jennifer Buffett. Peter is the son of financier Warren Buffett whose investments provide the financial basis for the NoVo Foundation’s \$ 15 million annual contribution to the Nike Foundation. See the Nike Foundation’s (2008–2012) U.S. Federal Government’s 990 form for documentation of the NoVo Foundation’s contributions. Accessed 23.05.13, <http://990s.foundationcenter.org>.

⁴ Business Case and Intervention Summary: Girl Hub Ethiopia. Accessed 14.04.13, <http://projects.dfid.gov.uk/IATI/document/3763610>.

⁵ The Girl Effect Media Kit. Accessed 23.03.11, http://www.nikefoundation.org/files/The_Girl_Effect_Media_Kit.pdf.

⁶ Accessed 11.07.13, http://novofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Girl_Effect_Your_Move.pdf.

⁷ Accessed 18.04.12, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maria-eitel/day-1-at-davos-girls-econ_b_440715.html.

⁸ Accessed 2.04.13, http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/ICAI-Girl-Hub-Final-Report_P1-51.pdf.

⁹ ibid., 1.

¹⁰ ibid., 5.

¹¹ Nike Foundation 2007. *Request for Proposals. She’s an Economic Powerhouse: Economic Empowerment Models for Girls*, 2.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356084>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356084>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)