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# Positive Deviance and Child Marriage by Abduction in the Sidama Zone of Ethiopia

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POSITIVE DEVIANCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE BY ABDUCTION IN THE SIDAMA  
ZONE OF ETHIOPIA

ASHLEY N. LACKOVICH-VAN GORP

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program  
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in partial fulfillment  
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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

POSITIVE DEVIANCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE BY ABDUCTION IN THE SIDAMA  
ZONE OF ETHIOPIA

prepared by

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I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Lidija Birchiko and Darija Tihun, and to all of the girls of Sidama, Ethiopia.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation uses Positive Deviance (PD) to understand child marriage by abduction in a community in the Sidama Zone of Ethiopia. Marriage by abduction occurs among the poorest 10% of the Sidama population and entails the kidnapping of girls between the ages of 10 and 14 for forced genital circumcision, rape and marriage. PD is a problem solving approach that mobilizes a community to uncover existing yet unrecognized solutions to solve the specific problem. This study, which entailed an examination of the evolution of marriage norms among the Sidama as well as an analysis of the underpinnings of marriage by abduction, discovered that some community members practice behaviors and strategies that can prevent child marriage by abduction. The results support PD application to this specific form of child marriage as well as the practice as a whole, offering an alternative to traditional behavior change methodology. The electronic version of this Dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, [www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd)

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## **Chapter I: Introduction, Purpose and Justification**

Perceptions of childhood and adolescence are not universal. In some cultures and communities adulthood commences with puberty whereas others mark maturity by age. Transitions to adulthood are even more diverse than the assessment of when this stage of life begins. In certain communities in rural Serbia boys are given cigarettes to mark their coming of age. In southern Ethiopia girls in the Borena tribe receive lip plates during adolescence to demonstrate their increasing maturity. In the United States adulthood is signaled by being able to drive a car, vote and obtaining the legal right to drink alcohol. Regardless of the cultural dynamics, the transition to adulthood is one of the most formative, if not the single most formative, transition among humans. In some places this transition is a joyous, exciting celebration; in others, the bridge between the world of child and the world of adult is perilous, harrowing and isolating.

Early marriage creates such a perilous transition. When a girl marries, her childhood comes to an abrupt and premature end, although she is likely unaware of what is happening. A typical child bride “knows little of her new husband or new life, has little control over her destiny and is unaware of the health risks that she faces” (World Health Organization [WHO], 2006, p. 4). The United Nations International Children’s Fund ([UNICEF], 2006) calls child marriage “perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls” (p. 1). Each day, an estimated 39,000 girl children become child brides (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2013, para 1). This practice represents a rupture of girlhood and is a violation of human rights that impacts every aspect of the girl child’s life.

Child marriage by abduction is a specific form of child marriage. The practice occurs in pockets throughout the globe; however, I have found little information on the issue outside of

Kyrgyzstan. Most references outside of Kyrgyzstan either examine the historic evolution of the practice or mention child marriage by abduction in context of child marriage. Although the specific details of the practice vary, marriage by abduction in the context of Ethiopia entails a marriage “where an unmarried girl is forcefully taken, often followed by rape by her future husband or gang rape by her husband and friends” (Population Council & United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2010, p. 1). While there tends to be more physical violence associated with child marriage by abduction, the practice is similar to child marriage in that both result in the marriage of the girl child before she is able to provide full, prior and informed consent.

### **Defining Child Marriage**

The United Nations (UN) formally recognizes child marriage as a harmful traditional practice (HTP) in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN HCHR) Fact Sheet 23 (1995). The UN identifies HTPs “as a way of naming and combating some of the most blatant forms of male domination of women” (Winter, Thompson, & Jeffreys, 2010, p. 1). This systematic approach, which is recognized by UN member states as well as the international human rights and development communities, understands that early marriage can take multiple forms. For instance, the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights ([UNOHCHR], 1995) specifically includes marriage by abduction (para 4).

The UN began to distinguish HTPs in the 1950s when colonial administrators voiced concern over unsafe practices, in particular female genital mutilation (FGM), in their colonies (Winter et al., 2010, p. 73). During the decolonization period of the 1950s and 1960s, the UN debated intervention in light of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) that was ratified by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948; however, in 1966 the UN adopted

the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (UN, 1966) that prohibited interference in any culturally related practice (UN, 1966, article 1, para 1). On November 7, 1962, the UN ratified the *Convention on Consent to Marriage* (UN, 1962) that indicated a need for a minimum marriage age (article 2). Still, sovereignty over practices perceived as traditional remained until the UN adoption of the *Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) in 1979. CEDAW changed the UN agenda concerning HTPs, stating that parties to the Convention must “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women” (UN, 1979, article 2, para f). Further, CEDAW directly addresses child marriage, stating that “the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage” (UN, 1979, article 16, section 2). Although CEDAW did not propose a minimum marriage age, the document created a platform to develop the legislation needed to officially define and combat child marriage.

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (UN, 1989), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989, and ratified by every UN member except the United States, Somalia and South Sudan, fulfills CEDAW’s call for a minimum marriage age and formally defines a child as any person under the age of 18 (article 1). In addition to international policies, many countries have a legal marriage age, which is ideally although not always based on the CRC’s dividing line between childhood and adulthood. Subsequent UN resolutions, such as the 2008 *General Assembly Resolution on the Girl Child* (UN, 2008), reinforce the stance against all forms of child marriage.

Despite this strong legal framework, traditional marriages tend to occur before legal age and international and domestic policies offer limited protection. While most child marriages occur in adolescence, in certain locations in Africa and Asia early marriage “entails marrying girls as young as seven years old to grown men” (Ras-Work, 2006, p. 2). In many countries “marriage automatically confers adult status,” which then renders protection of the CRC powerless (WHO, 2006, p. 6). The assumption is that the people will have access to protection and rights under these treaties and laws (Toyo, 2006, pp. 1229-1230). This supposition overlooks local contexts and the “infused relations of power which hollow out the real value of legal provisions” (Toyo, 2006, pp. 1230). In essence, legislative power is contextual.

In many countries marriage remains a social rather than legal alignment, negating the authority of international conventions as well as federal and local laws to delay marriage until adulthood. In certain contexts marriage entails cohabitation, meaning individuals live together without formal recognition of a marital union. Cohabitation “raises the same human rights concerns as marriage” (UNICEF, 2005, p. 1). In some places marriage is a process with different stages (Haberland, Chong, & Bracken, 2003, p. 7). Consequently, the western conception of marriage as entailing a ceremony and a legal agreement imposes “dichotomous categories that are not uniformly defined, or may not even identify the most relevant point in a process of transition” (UNICEF, 2005, p. 7). The unique cultural specifics of a marriage are important in understanding the unique circumstance of the married child.

The UN uses early marriage and child marriage synonymously. For instance, CEDAW refers to child marriage whereas the *CRC* refers to early marriage. In my research, I remain consistent with the UN and use the two terms interchangeably. If a study refers to married adolescents rather than married girls, I use the term married adolescents. Otherwise, I use the

phrase married girls to refer to all married female children under the age of 18. Although I may specifically apply the terminology of girl child, unless otherwise noted all references to early marriage refer to the marriage of girls to adult men. Child marriage can affect boys; however, girls suffer “in greater numbers with graver consequences” (UNFPA, 2012, p. 11). In my research, I mark child marriage as the point in which a girl leaves the home of her parents and/or guardians to enter the home of her husband, regardless of any legal, religious or cultural ceremonies or agreements.

### **Implications of Child Marriage**

Early marriage introduces newly married girls to a host of risks and vulnerabilities, with the transition to marriage impacting every aspect of a girl’s life. Child brides have “less power to negotiate a state of affairs with which they can feel safe and comfortable” (Haberland et al., 2003, p. 3). Marriage places the child wife within a structure in which she has little control over her life and little to no power to combat the physical and psychological threats to her wellbeing.

Child marriage entails significant health risks. The popular assumption in both gender and public health programming is that married girls face low risk of HIV infection, especially in comparison with their unmarried sexually active peers. This assumption is based on the premise that both husband and child wife are uninfected at the time of marriage and maintain a monogamous relationship; however, “these conditions are not often met” (Clark, Bruce, & Dude, 2006, p. 79). WHO affirmed that “the most common route for risky sexual intercourse for adolescent girls in developing countries is through marriage” (2006, p. 14). Married girls are at a high risk for HIV and other STDs because child brides are unlikely to use condoms due their limited negotiation power within their marriage (WHO, 2006, p. 14).

Girls who become pregnant face particular health risks. Pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls in lower income countries (UNFPA, 2012, p. 6). Pregnant girls are at risk for obstructed labor, which can result in maternal death, fetal death and fistula (WHO, 2006, p. 23). In addition, “a growing pregnant girl must compete with her baby in the womb for nutrition,” which places pregnant girls at increased risk for anemia, malnutrition and malaria (WHO, 2006, p. 22). In many societies, girls abstain from food so that men and boys can eat more, elevating the risk of illness and malnutrition for pregnant girls (WHO, 2006, p. 22). Further complicating health issues, married girls tend to lack access to health care, as they “miss out on health services for adolescents because they are married and for married women because of their age, lack of experience and lack of autonomy” (WHO, 2006, p. 26). They tend to be unable to control when they become pregnant because of both lack of reproductive health knowledge and lack of control over sexual intercourse (WHO, 2006, p. 26).

The social isolation of married girls hinders their access to resources and their psychological resilience. Typically, a married girl goes to live with her husband and/or his family, which often causes the child bride to lose contact with her friends and family (Haberland et al., 2003, p. 4). Married girls tend to stop attending school at the time of marriage (WHO, 2006, p. 10). As a result, social interactions become exclusive to the husband’s social circle, which often results in isolation for the child wife (Haberland et al., 2003, p. 4). Due to the coupling of this new familial hierarchy with the inherent inexperience and insecurities of childhood, married girls have less economic power, less mobility, less exposure to media and fewer social networks than their unmarried peers (Haberland et al., 2003, pp. 5-7). Married girls in polygamous marriages have additional challenges, as they may be answering to senior wives in addition to their husbands and mothers-in-law. Even within societies that accept polygamy,

the existing wives themselves tend to object to the practice, creating an especially hostile environment for an already vulnerable new child wife (WHO, 2006, p. 7).

### **Child Marriage in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian Constitution (1994) states that marriage requires “free and full consent of the intending spouses” and fixes the marriage age as that which is defined by law (article 34). Ethiopia ratified the CRC in 1991 and legally sets the minimum marriage age at 18. Despite this strong legal foundation, “Ethiopia has one of the most severe crises of child marriage in the world today” (Population Council, 2004, p. 1). Nationwide 19% of girls are married by age 15 and approximately half by age 18 (Population Council, 2004, p. 1). Among girls age 15-19 in Ethiopia, approximately half have already given birth (Population Council, 2004, p. 1).

Culture and tradition may play a role in promoting child marriage in Ethiopia; however, poverty and inequality are significant fueling factors. In rural Ethiopia among poor families with daughters, “marriage relieves the economic cost of raising and feeding her, and provides some economic reward through the bride-price that they receive” (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009, p. 7). WHO directly challenged the UNOHCHR’s notion of child marriage as traditional, stating that “although early marriages are often said to reflect traditional cultures, the pressures that lead to early marriage are present day” (WHO, 2006, p. 8). Globally, child marriage is most common among the poorest 20% of the population (UNICEF, 2005, p. 5).

The majority of research on and programing against child marriage takes place in the Amhara region. This region has the lowest average marriage age in Ethiopia (Population Council, 2004, p. 2). The rate of early marriage in Amhara is one of the highest, and possibly the highest, in the country: 50% of girls are married by age 15 and 80% by age 18 (Population Council, 2004, p. 1). A Population Council survey in Amhara revealed that, of the 1,800 girls

surveyed, 14% were married by age 10 and 39% by age 15 (Erulkar & Ab Mekbib, 2007, p. 2). Further, 95% of the girls did not know their husbands before the marriage, 85% did not know they were marrying before the ceremony and 81% percent described their first sexual encounter with their husbands as forced (Erulkar & Ab Mekbib, 2007, pp. 2-3). Further, this region has particularly low rates of female school attendance compared to other areas of Ethiopia (Erulkar & Ab Mekbib, 2007, p. 1). Certain areas of the Amhara region report the highest rates of HIV among pregnant women and girls in the country (Population Council, 2004, p. 2).

### **Strategies to Delay Marriage Age**

In terms of increasing wellbeing of the girl child, “the most significant improvement in the progress for adolescent girls would be to delay marriage” (WHO, 2006, p. 30). If marriage is delayed, a girl may have the opportunity to attend school, select a safe and healthy livelihood and “develop more fully as an individual in her own right” (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009, p. 7). Nonetheless, there are few programs in Sub-Saharan Africa that address early marriage, with even fewer programs having a “rigorous evaluation framework” (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009, p. 7). WHO selected the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to conduct a global systemic review of early marriage prevention programming. The subsequent 2011 report identified 23 programs worldwide; however, only 10% had ever been evaluated and even fewer with rigorous evaluation methodologies (International Center for Research on Women [ICRW], 2011, p. 5). Of those 23 programs, only 11 worked directly with child marriage whereas the others had various programmatic objectives of which child marriage was one (p. 6). Only two of the 23 programs took place in Ethiopia (p.16).

The ICRW (2011) identified four strategies to delay marriage age: (a) empowering girls, (b) educating and mobilizing parents and community members, (c) school attendance and quality

enhancement, economic support/incentives and (d) legal and policy framework (p. 13). In terms of changes in attitude and behavior, approximately half of the results were positive with the others mixed or negative (p. 23). In Ethiopia in 2013, several international and national organizations are using these strategies to curtail child marriage, including the Population Council, Care International and Plan International.

All identified strategies focus on behavior change to delay marriage age; however, none include any form of asset-based programming. Traditional approaches to behavior change focus on identifying the gap in resources that hinders behavior change to determine which service to provide to the community. Conversely, asset-based approaches recognize that communities can undertake development by themselves and change their own behavior by “mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets” (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 474). Traditional needs-based approaches present a “one-sided negative view, which has often compromised, rather than contributed to, community capacity building” (p. 476). No organization has applied asset-based programming to early marriage (ICRW, 2011).

### **Positive Deviance**

Positive Deviance (PD) is an assets-based approach to adaptive behavior change that focuses on unearthing existing community solutions that, given their local origins, are often more acceptable within the unique socio-economic and cultural context than foreign imported best practices. Jerry and Monique Sternin developed the PD approach in Viet Nam in 1990. Based on the concept that the community has unrecognized resources and solutions, PD helps a community to “amplify uncommon behaviors or strategies discovered by community members among the least likely to succeed (positive deviants), develop some activities based on these findings and measure outcomes” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 2). Through community-led

discussions and observations, the process first focuses on discovering PD strategies and behaviors that led to a better outcome than the normative practices. In the Sternins' initial PD work with childhood malnutrition, the PD individuals were very poor parents who fed their children small shrimps, crabs and greens that they collected from the rice paddies. As a result of these nutrient rich and uncommon supplementary foods as well as other unusual health-seeking behaviors such as hand washing, these children maintained a healthy weight and nutrition level while the majority of children in the village were malnourished.

The second phase in the PD process entails creating opportunities for the community to actively practice the newly discovered divergent behaviors and strategies. The need for actively practicing the PD behaviors is based on the philosophy that “knowledge doesn’t advance practice. Rather, practice advances (and internalizes) knowledge” (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010, p. 113). The focus on practice rather than information sharing is the opposite of traditional behavior change approaches, in which the community members learn new behavior methods and then are expected to apply their learning to their practice. These solutions, called best practices, are typically imported from another community and often even from another country. Advocates for the PD approach argue this best practice model is only temporarily effective because it “invariably evokes the immune rejection response,” meaning that outside methods and ideas are neither culturally appropriate nor sustainable (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 112). Since the Viet Nam pilot project, the PD approach has been used extensively in nutrition and public health. It has reached other sectors of relief and development, such as education, hygiene and sanitation, income generation, child protection and gender equality, including combating HTPs.

## **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research is to (a) address the gap in research and programming for all forms of child marriage and (b) pilot efforts to apply Positive Deviance (PD) to child marriage by abduction in Titira, a village located in the Sidama Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia. In this research I sought to understand evolution of marriage norms among the Sidama people, the ethnic group living in this part of Ethiopia, to contextualize child marriage by abduction. In addition, I sought to understand how PD behaviors and strategies can prevent child marriage by abduction. In my Antioch University Individualized Learning Agreement (ILA), "Positive Deviance and Harmful Traditional Practices in Ethiopia," I began the PD process with this community with the intent to focus on child marriage. During the course of the work, the community reframed the problem to child marriage by abduction.

I undertook my research in collaboration with Common River. Common River is a community development organization working exclusively with the Titira community in Aleta Wondo, Ethiopia. Common River served as a platform for my Antioch University case study, change project and ILA research, networking me with community members and fostering my own learning and understanding. The organization has a vested interest in this project, as together we are developing programs to curtail early marriage based on the findings of this research.

## **Research Rationale**

This study addresses the gap in research and programming for all forms of child marriage. The UN Secretary General's report on forced marriage of the girl child specifically stated that one of the challenges in delaying marriage age is "lack of knowledge about the scope and prevalence of this phenomenon" (United Nations Office of the Secretary General, 2008, p. 18).

The report recommended that attention “be given to enhancing the knowledge base on forced marriage, including its scope, prevalence and causes and consequences, as well as promising practices for preventing such marriages” (p. 19). The UN has documented early marriage and its implications; however, there is little empirical evidence to guide efforts on the ground. In Ethiopia, research and programing remain concentrated in the Amhara region despite the existence of the practice throughout the country. Much of the programmatic research that does exist takes the form of program assessments and lacks the rigor of an empirical study.

This research focused on child marriage by abduction as a specific type of child marriage. Child marriage by abduction is mentioned briefly in reports on Ethiopia such as in the numerous child marriage publications of the Population Council; however, in my research I was able to find neither scholarly articles nor programmatic reports dedicated exclusively to this practice in Ethiopia. To the best of my knowledge, this research is unprecedented.

This research piloted efforts to apply PD to child marriage by abduction, indicating whether or not PD is effective against this specific form of early marriage as well as the practice as a whole. PD has been used to reduce child trafficking, curtail FGM and socially reintegrate female Ugandan child soldiers; thus, there is precedent for applying PD to related cultural and social challenges to the wellbeing of the girl child (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000; Singhal & Dura, 2008). This study demonstrates that PD offers a community-based alternative to the outsider imported approach to tackle the marriage of girls.

### **Research Questions**

The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

- How have past Sidama marriage norms evolved?
- How does marriage by abduction occur?

- Which factors underpin marriage by abduction and create an environment that permits the practice?
- What are the PD behaviors and strategies that prevent early marriage by abduction?

### **Participatory Action Research**

In Chapter III I argue that PD is a type of participatory action research. Participatory action research, which emerged from the work of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), is a "highly inductive process in which research is seen as a form of social action" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, Participatory research: legacy of Paulo Freire, para 1). Participatory action research differs from traditional research in that the research participants act as co-researchers who are involved in the entire decision-making process, from initial conception to data collection and analysis. A small portion of the scholarly community accuses participatory action research of lacking rigor and a systemic approach; however, participatory action research is widely accepted, with some arguing that the approach is more valid than traditional research because it focuses on the voice of the participants (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). My research centered on investigating the lived experience of a community regarding marriage. I collaborated with the participants to discover the ways in which PD girls navigated their environment to avoid child marriage in an effort to create social change by determining how, and if, these behaviors and strategies could be replicated.

I present the results of this research in a case study, which enables me to create a context for the PD process and outcomes. When applying PD to a new domain, such as early marriage, the researcher should not only focus on the process and outcomes, but the normative and PD "behaviors and what influences them" (Lapping et al., 2009, p.130). The case study provided a framework in which to develop this nuanced understanding of behaviors and their influencers.

This research included the data from the PD process, a review of existing documents, interviews with community members, conversations with professionals working to curtail child marriage, ethnographic observations and reflective journaling.

## **Position of Researcher**

This dissertation emerges out of my professional work in girl child protection and adaptive behavior change. Having worked with programs to delay marriage age, my professional experience shows that these outside efforts create a superficial impact and sometimes result in a backlash that perpetuates the practice. Research in Ethiopia indicates that the general effort to curtail child marriage may have pushed the practice further underground, which “can leave girls even more unprotected” (Overseas Development Institute [ODI], 2013, p. 5). I see PD as a more ethical and sustainable alternative because it focuses on local solutions that emerge from local knowledge. Given their indigenous nature, these local solutions are more culturally appropriate than the imported ideas, increasing the odds for their acceptance and the subsequent behavior change. Since becoming exposed to PD in 2011 during my Antioch University case study, I have focused my learning and practice on discovering the ways in which PD can be applied to girl child protection. For instance, in my work with the Center for Creative Leadership, I integrated PD into a life skills curriculum for adolescent girls in Ethiopia.

Personally, I struggle with western conceptions of knowledge, progress and civil society. I recognize that “the globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 63). The PD approach appeals to me in that it opposes this reaffirmation of the West. The facilitator guides an organic process aimed at unearthing local behaviors and strategies that lead to a better outcome, as ultimately the local wisdom, experience and perspectives contain knowledge that is not accessible through a western lens. In this sense, I transcended the traditional western belief in the universality of western understanding in order to learn and promote change.

I have a special connection to the Sidama people: I am the mother of two Sidama daughters whom I adopted while living in Ethiopia. A Slavic proverb states that a woman's home is where her first child was born. My first child was born in Sidama, making the lush coffee filled valleys my emotional home. Although I have worked throughout Ethiopia, when I work among the Sidama people I feel that I am working among my own people. Despite differences in culture, socio-economics, education, ethnicity and life stories, my connection to the Sidama remains strong. To me, there is no other place to do this work.

### **Summary of Subsequent Chapters**

Chapter II provides a framework for understanding PD theory and application in international relief and development. I highlight PD use with HTPs while situating this discussion in the context of standard model development, the main development strategy used across all sectors of the field. Ultimately, I place emphasis on literature detailing PD application to infant mortality, FGM, trafficking and social reintegration of girl child soldiers. By highlighting these specific examples, I present a case for application of PD to curtail marriage by abduction by demonstrating how PD has worked to create a better outcome for girls and women impacted by these interrelated practices.

In Chapter III I present an overview of participatory action research and case study methodologies, situating PD and my own research within this framework. I describe the specific methods and procedures that I applied in this study, including details on the ways in which I assured quality and rigor. In addition, I include the process, procedures and findings of my pilot study. I present this study in Chapter III rather than as a separate chapter because the dissertation research design is largely based on this initial work.

Chapter IV presents the results. This entails a case study of marriage practices among the Sidama and a description of the process and outcomes of the PD effort. The findings highlight my experience with the PD process and both the scholarly and practical results of the work.

In Chapter V, I examine and interpret the results of the research as well as the implications for PD programming to curtail child marriage. I focus on the ways in which this research met its objectives of a) addressing the gap in research on child marriage and b) determining if PD can be effective against child marriage. Finally, I reflect upon implications of the study and discuss a scholarly and professional way forward.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

There is no individual theory or body of work that provides a complete framework for Positive Deviance (PD) application to child marriage by abduction; therefore, in this literature review I weave together scholarly theories, trends in development and previous PD projects to create a rhetorical argument to support this study. Instead of undertaking a critical analysis of the literature from a specific theoretical lens, I focus on the PD applications to provide a framework for my PD effort. I begin with a discussion on standard model development. After discussing this model at depth, I present key components of PD in order to develop a conceptual context for this approach to adaptive behavior change. I then draw upon PD programming to curtail infant mortality, female genital mutilation (FGM), trafficking and social reintegration of girl child soldiers to illustrate the ways that PD has worked to create better outcomes for those impacted by seemingly intractable social issues.

### **Standard Model Development and Delivery System Theory of Change**

PD is centered on learning through contrast, a concept that is helpful in explaining the PD approach itself by examining its antithesis: standard model development. In the field standard model development, which includes the delivery model theory of change, is referred to simply as development because the method is the norm across all sectors. By examining the historical evolution of this approach, I explain the ways in which positive and negative aspects of development, combined with business principles, create the approach used today.

The modern concept of international relief and development emerged out of the colonial era. Historically, there was an “abrupt transition from colonialism to foreign aid and benevolent military intervention” (Easterly, 2006, p. 23). This original form of international development was comprised of projects that relied completely on material aid, “when those providing

international assistance literally packaged up items collected in their better-off countries and delivered them to meet needs in countries where people suffered” (Anderson, Brown, & Jean, 2012, p. 38). This focus on provision of materials continued with the Marshall Plan for reconstruction of Europe after World War II (Easterly, 2006, p. 24).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, international relief and development continued to undertake community-specific projects and simultaneously expanded beyond provision of material goods to include the sharing of knowledge and skills transfer (Anderson et al., 2012). “As the aid system evolved, education, training, and advice were added to the provisions” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). The United States, which today plays a leading role in international development, officially formed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the passing of the Foreign Assistance Act in 1961. The Peace Corps, one of the most well-known organizations implementing non-material community-based development, was created in the same year.

In the 1980s there was a “radical change in aid delivery structure from project aid to policy-based aid” (Nissanke, 2010, p. 63). International donors began incorporating business concepts into their procedures and plans, increasing competitiveness in the grant application process and aligning projects with donor policy (Moyo, 2009, p. 7). The business-model was and continues to be motivated by the donors’ desire for increased accountability of funds and predictability of results (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 36). Today, international relief and development continues to follow this trend toward a business orientation.

The current form of development is the result of this history of provision of material and non-material resources and alignment with policy and business principles (Anderson et al., 2012). The result is that international development has become an industry, often with multiple

players placing emphasis on branding, deliverables, value for money and return on investment over the actual needs of the people (Anderson et al., 2012). The field has become a “complex enterprise” that is comprised of “multilateral organizations, bilateral development aid agencies, international and local NGOs, community-based organizations, foundations, diplomats, banks, consultants, contractors, companies, academics, development ‘experts’ and more” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 33). This large, multifaceted and multi-tiered system has become standard and is used across all sectors, from public health to economic development to gender equality.

Standard model development can be described as synonymous with social engineering, in which leaders orchestrate change and “intelligence is centralized near those at top” (Pascale, Milleman, & Gioja, 2001, p. 13). The concept of social engineering provides donors with more authority, as “implementation plans are scripted on the assumption of a reasonable degree of predictability and control” and “initiative flows from top down” (Pascale et al., 2001, p. 13). This approach is often labeled community-based; however, there is a “vener of participation to engender buy-in” (Pascale et al., 2001, p. 13). Evidence shows that communities are asked for input; however, the implementing organization often only accepts the input that aligns with the predetermined and donor approved work plan (Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009).

This entire approach is based on the delivery model theory of change. This change theory proposes that “efficiently providing tangible and intangible inputs, international actors can effectively cause, catalyze or support positive economic, social or political change in other countries” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). This theory of change is the foundation for behavior change communication (BCC), the mostly widely used method of social behavior change. BCC aims to “bridge the gap between information, a person’s knowledge, attitudes and subsequent behavior” because provision of information is expected to result in changed knowledge, attitudes

and practice (UNICEF, 2006, p. 40). As the driving force behind standard model development, this theory underpins the majority of current development projects.

In their study of over 6,000 international development stakeholders, Anderson et al. (2012) noted that this model has a negative impact on development processes, actors and purposes. The results most relevant to this research involve the focus on needs over assets, delivery of outside resources and lack of community agency. These results are pertinent to this study because they reveal the significant differences between the standard model and PD.

Focus on needs over assets: The delivery model theory of change centralizes on provision of direct services and makes no reference to existing community resources, including community knowledge. As a result, the standard model focuses on “the ‘needs assessment’ rather than on existing strengths and capacities” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). From the perspective of PD, lack of attention to assets indicates that there is likelihood of neglecting the possibility of finding existing, local- and therefore inherently culturally acceptable and sustainable- solutions (Pascale et al., 2010). Further, concentrating solely on a resource gap is a superficial attempt at behavior change, as “meeting a need does not necessarily solve the problem that produces the need, and if help is provided without connection to exiting capacities, it can undermine them” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38).

Provision of delivery of outside resources: The focus on delivery “translates into supply-driven assistance where providers make decisions and choices even before they talk to receivers” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). Based on the needs assessment, outside experts decide which type of support the community needs and then develop programs accordingly. With decisions made outside of the community, the donor and implementer “may deliver the wrong things at the wrong time or in the wrong way” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). PD sees provision

of outside resources as unsustainable because it “invariably evokes the immune rejection response,” meaning that outside methods and ideas are neither culturally appropriate nor sustainable (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 112). If the provided services are material, unsustainability is unavoidable, as eventually the supply will stop.

Lack of community agency: This theory of change approaches the beneficiaries as passive, uninformed and unaware of their own challenges and opportunities. As a result, “people on the receiving end have seen their own voice curtailed. Many feel that the delivery system objectifies them” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 49). Lack of community involvement has resulted in development plans “that are not connected to reality at the bottom” (Easterly, 2006, p. 17). Although many development projects are channeled through local organizations, the donor continues to dictate the process, procedures and, to the extent possible, outcomes (p. 45). In PD all projects are community-based, designed and led because local knowledge takes precedent over foreign knowledge (Pascale et al., 2010).

The standard model and delivery system theory of change have had some success when applied to technical challenges, such as contributing to near worldwide eradication of polio; however, research on overall progress indicates that the current system is failing. Decades of western aid and development “have done little in changing the destinies of many African states” (Andrews, 2009, p. 8). Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest region of the world, has an adjusted per capital income today that is lower than in the 1970s, which is a catastrophe for the field of relief and development (Moyo, 2009, p. 5). PD maintains that communities will progress when they are empowered to undertake their own development based on their individual priorities, knowledge and assets (Pascale et al., 2010).

## **Conceptual Underpinnings of Positive Deviance**

The connections among PD and individual theories in such fields as leadership, psychology, international development and anthropology are vast, making discussion of all these related applied and scholarly notions beyond the scope of this research. At the same time, (a) adaptive leadership, (b) complex adaptive systems, (c) community mobilization, (d) social psychological concepts of social proof, enactment and consistency and (e) indigenous knowledge substantiate the PD approach as one applicable to child marriage by abduction. Looking at these areas of scholarship, I discuss key factors that contribute to understanding the ways in which PD functions as an approach to adaptive behavior change within communities as complex social systems. Each one of these five areas of scholarship includes key factors that contribute to understanding how PD differs from standard model development, offering a collaborative, non-hierarchical process for communities to come together to create action against adaptive social challenges.

I deliberately decided not to include positive psychology in this discussion. Positive psychology appears as “a loose assemblage of signatories whose current or past resonates with postiveness’s overall themes,” making PD a distinct component of the field (Fineman, 2006, p. 271). Nonetheless, the literature neglects PD as a specific approach to adaptive behavior change. The field of positive psychology, which initially focused on clinical applications, is concentrating more and more on the professional setting (Luthans & Avolio, 2009, p. 292). Concepts such as psychological capital, positive organization scholarship and positive organization behavior seem to dominate discussions (Luthans & Avolio, 2009, pp. 300-302). While these concepts and connections remain relevant to PD as a theory, my research focuses on

PD as a practice. In this study, I concentrate on the underpinnings relevant to application over those that contribute to conceptual understanding.

**Adaptive leadership.** PD focuses on adaptive challenges and leadership, as “the PD process is a tool for adaptive work” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 8). Heifetz (2009) distinguished technical problems from adaptive challenges. Technical problems “have known solutions that can be implemented by current knowhow. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization’s current structures, procedures and ways of doing things” (Heifetz, 2009, p. 54). Adaptive challenges differ from technical problems in that neither the definition of the problem nor the solution is clear; instead, learning is required to reframe the problem and develop potential solutions (pp. 54-56). For example, combatting malaria is a technical problem that can be solved by providing chemically treated mosquito nets under which one sleeps. Getting individuals to sleep under nets is an adaptive problem because we know neither why they do not use available nets nor how they can be persuaded to use them. Adaptive challenges “can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress goes beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses and generating the new capacity to thrive anew” (p. 54). Essentially, adaptive challenges are systemic and elusive and cannot be solved by mere input.

Technical solutions seek to create distinctive change whereas adaptive solutions focus on creating a better outcome through a slight evolution. Adaptation “is a process of conservation as well as loss” and “adaptive change is mostly not about change at all...as in nature, a successful adaptation enables an organization or community to take the best from its traditions, identity and history into the future” (Heifetz, 2004, p. 62). Adaptive change can emerge informally,

organically and often imperceptibly with respect to the existing culture. PD believes in “conserving all that is possible and changing only that which is necessary” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 181). Focusing on adaptive challenges, PD looks for these “subtle shifts of behavior” rather than monumental change (p. 181).

Adaptive leadership breaks the leader/follower paradigm because it can take place with or without formal positional power (Heifetz, 2004). In such cases mobilized individuals become “not followers, but rather activated participants,” individuals without formal leadership positions who “lead in turn by taking responsibility for tackling tough challenges, often beyond expectations and beyond their authority” (p. 9). These mobilized individuals must solve the problem, as “adaptive work requires a shift in responsibility from the shoulders of authority figures and the authority structure to the stakeholders (people with an interest in an outcome) themselves” (p. 10). In PD, this redistribution of responsibility reframes the leader as a facilitator and the mobilized individuals as the problem-solvers. The PD facilitator focuses on “creating an ‘authority-vacuum’ to enable stakeholders to find solutions” and rejects the concept of outside expertise (p. 118). Leadership in PD revolves around mobilizing others to lead.

**Complex adaptive systems.** Adaptive challenges do not exist in isolation because “adaptive problems are embedded in social complexity” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 7). In PD social complexity refers to complex adaptive systems, which are “neutral-like networks of interacting, independent agents who are bounded in a cooperative dynamic by common goal, outlook, need, etc. They are changeable structures with overlapping hierarchies” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007, p. 299). The focus in complex adaptive systems is not on the individuals, but rather on the interactions among the individuals and with their reality. Context in such a social system is the “ambiance that spawns a given system’s dynamic persona” and “refers to the nature

of interactions and interdependencies among agents (people, ideas, etc.), hierarchical divisions, organizations, and environments” (p. 299). This complex adaptive system, this socially constructed context to which individuals have adapted their behavior, “holds intractable problems in place and must be unfrozen to allow new behaviors and mind-sets to evolve” (p. 11). Dealing with the adaptive challenges requires recognition of the context in which the challenge is embedded.

Slightly altering one component of a complex adaptive system can have unintended results because “there is a cogenerative symbiotic relationship between the PD process and the evolving social system” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 100). For instance, gender relations in a community in Pakistan improved as a result of PD application to infant survival (p. 179). This was not an intended programmatic outcome; instead, “transformation occurred precisely because *it wasn't* the intended objective” (p. 181). The change in gender relations was a natural, organic and unforeseeable result of altering one component of the inherently interconnected complex adaptive system.

As a result of this intrinsic unpredictability, working with adaptive challenges is a reiterative process that involves situational learning in the forms of observations and interpretations (Heifetz, 2009, pp. 80-86). Facilitators manage a creative tension from which potential solutions emerge, transforming leadership into “improvisation” (Heifetz, 2004, p. 11). “Adaptive work requires experimentation,” as these potential solutions may fail and/or produce outcomes that may or may not contribute to the problem-solving (Heifetz, 2004, p. 11). In PD, learning focuses on inversion, understood as the opposite of circular logic (Pascale et al., 2010, pp. 29-30). For instance, instead of asking why most children are malnourished, the PD facilitator asks why there are well-nourished children among very poor families (p. 30). This

entails “learning through contrast” by learning from the deviance rather than the norm (p. 31). This situational learning and relearning are essential because understanding the adaptive problem requires knowledge of the social system in which it is embedded.

**Community mobilization.** PD “draws heavily on the large body of experience with community building” and the methods of community builders such as Alinsky and Yankelovich (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 64). The PD approach seeks “to mobilize communities for behavior change” (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 107). Yankelovich (1999) wrote of the divide between elites and everyday people, a divide that is reflected in standard model development. Traditionally it is “the task of the leader or expert to convey the message and the task of the recipients of the message to understand and absorb it, not to contribute to its content,” which results in a “dangerous wedge” between leaders and the public (Yankelovich, 1999, pp. 156-157). Conversely, PD is rooted in connecting, and not separating, people:

Experts are “answers” looking for problems to solve. PD practitioners, on the other hand, are community mobilizers who catalyze others’ empowerment. Group conversations are the means for translating these intentions into actions. “Solving the problem” is secondary to tapping the distributed intelligence of the community to discover its own latent wisdom. (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 164)

In community organizing, “people have to make their own decisions” and the organizer cannot go “outside the experience of the people” (Alinsky, 1971, p. 91). Community organizing avoids large projects because the challenge must be “small enough to be grasped by the hands of experience” to be sustained at a community level (p. 96). In PD, the community must lead the entire process and the outside “‘leader’ must blend into the landscape” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 8). While an approach to adaptive behavior change, PD focuses on mobilizing communities to undertake the behavior change themselves.

**Social proof, enactment, and consistency.** Social proof explains the psychological phenomenon in which people follow the actions and behaviors of others in order to fit into any given social situation (Cialdini, 1984; Surowiecki, 2004). Although social proof corresponds with group think, in which psychological homogeneity results from a group of individuals who follow each other and therefore unconsciously construct social norms, social proof can also encourage deviant behavior (Janis, 1971). Simply explained, “when someone ‘just like me’ does something, I’m much more likely to do it myself” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 78). This is especially important in confronting social norms, in which the individual is surrounded by the group that practices the same behavior regardless if it is harmful. As a result of this homogeneity, “our beliefs appear to be more sensible and warranted - and therefore common - than they would if were exposed to a less biased body of information” (Gilovich, 1999, p. 115). Although social proof serves to perpetuate a social norm, social proof can simultaneously oppose the assumed universality when an individual or group deviates from the norm (Cialdini, 1984). PD is a problem solving approach that uncovers the deviant behaviors and strategies as social proof that there is an alternative to dominant group behavior to solve the specific problem.

The social psychological theories of enactment and consistency underpin PD. Within the context of social norms and group think, behavior change occurs through consistent, repetitive enactment, when an individual behaves differently in the presence of peers and among established social norms (Cialdini, 1984, pp. 57-69). Consistency is important because undertaking a deviant behavior once is an aberration whereas consistent enactment leads to commitment to the new behavior (Cialdini, 1984, pp. 57-69). The intellectualization of knowledge has limitations because “knowledge helps only when it descends into habits” (Bruner, 1997, p. 152). These habits are reflections of the culture in which they occur, meaning that

creating new habits has the potential to change the culture (p. 153). In PD the community participants discover the PD behaviors and strategies and then they determine “how change can be disseminated through the *practice* of new behavior - not through explanation or edict” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 8).

Introducing new behaviors disrupts the social system, which can result in a backlash that prevents consistent enactment; however, PD “has the lowest perturbation to impact ratio” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 13). PD focuses on indigenous behaviors that are currently practiced by the community. These are “solutions already proven *within* the system versus importing foreign solutions that arouse skepticism at best and outright sabotage at worst” (p. 13). This indigenous base allows community members to enact new behaviors among social norms consistently, which ultimately results in behavior change. Enactment is vital because it “means putting skin in the game. Doing so breeds commitment - and with commitment comes a shift in attitude” (p. 14).

**Indigenous knowledge.** Standard model development devalues local knowledge and attempts to create best practices and service packages to fit all lower income countries, as “the positional superiority of first-world knowledge systems and perceptions of reality has created a dichotomy where the remaining world is perceived as opposite and therefore the same” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 82). Easterly (2006) advised that the field of development abandon “all the comprehensive frameworks, central plans, and worldwide goals. Just respond to each local situation according to what people in that situation need and want” (p. 206).

PD replaces western knowledge and imported best practices with local knowledge and indigenous solutions (Pascale et al., 2010). “PD is based on the sociocultural context of each program community. It must always be, by definition, ‘ours,’ and is genetically ‘culturally appropriate’” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 44). The approach recognizes local, indigenous knowledge

may have solutions beyond western knowledge. Local knowledge may “offer genuine alternatives to the current dominant form of development” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 105). The PD approach creates an “authority vacuum” in order to provide a space for local leadership, knowledge and solutions to emerge (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 118).

### **Positive Deviance**

The PD approach that emerged from Jerry and Monique Sternins’ work in Viet Nam “brings about sustainable behavioral and social change by identifying solutions already existing in the system” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 1). Given this origin in childhood malnutrition, PD is most widely applied to nutrition. The *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed journal published by the International Nutrition Foundation for the United Nations University, has published over 20 articles related to PD. As this publication history indicates, PD application to nutrition is based on a foundation of experiential and theoretical knowledge. Further, PD application to nutrition is uncomplicated in that the PD individuals tend to be well-nourished in spite of poverty (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 115). Expanding PD beyond nutrition entails the inherent challenges of adaptive problems in complex adaptive systems as well as a great deal of promise. Through discussion of PD application to infant mortality, I at once expand on the description of PD offered in the previous chapter while illuminating the challenges and opportunities of PD application outside of nutrition. From there, I discuss PD application to female genital mutilation (FGM), trafficking and reintegration of girl child soldiers to create a bridge to my own research.

**Infant mortality.** Working with Save the Children, Monique Sternin facilitated a PD project to reduce infant mortality through newborn care practices in Pakistan. This project is relevant to this study in that PD for newborn care was unprecedented and involved identification of less tangible practices than in PD nutrition projects (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 115). The article,

“Identification of model newborn care practices through a PD inquiry to guide behavior change interventions in Haipur, Pakistan,” clearly and succinctly demonstrates the steps in applying PD to an area outside of nutrition (Marsh et al., 2002).

Applying PD to newborn care practices entailed the five steps of the PD process, where the community members or a self-selected group of community members join the PD team to work on (1) defining the problem and explore its causes and state desired outcome; (2) determining the presence of PD individuals or groups; (3) discovering uncommon behaviors and strategies through inquiry; (4) designing the initiative; and (5) monitoring and evaluating the project (Tufts University, 2010, p. 6). This article records the initial preparation for PD, which included organizing the field teams and clarifying the roles of the teams regarding the central role of the community (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 108). The community orientation introduced PD and explored the community’s interest in addressing the issue using the PD approach and the situation analysis uncovered the community’s normative newborn care practices through semi-structured interviews (p. 108). After organizing the normative care practices in a matrix, the team was able to learn by contrast and identify PDs, those whose behavior deviated from the norm in terms of antenatal care, delivery and infant care and resulted in a better outcome (p. 109). From there, they conducted a PD inquiry, “the stage in the process whereby the community seeks to discover demonstrably successful behaviors and strategies” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 2). The PD inquiry obtained details on PD practices through further interviews based upon questionnaires (Marsh et al., 2002, pp. 110-111). During community feedback and action planning, the team reviewed the previous steps and created an action plan (p. 111).

Despite the contextual challenges of applying PD to an area outside of nutrition, PD “catalyzed communities to find viable solutions from within,” demonstrating success when

applied to areas beyond nutrition (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 115). The authors note that “the PD approach is complex, in part because it accomplishes so much: community mobilization, fact-finding, and behavior change” (p. 115). Despite this complexity, PD informed projects in a wide variety of sectors such as health care, public health, education, governance and mental health in 31 nations in Africa, ten in Asia, five in Latin America and dozens across the United States and Canada (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 5).

**Female genital mutilation (FGM).** The UN recognizes FGM, also referred to as female genital cutting (FGC), as an HTP along with child marriage (UN Office for High Commission on Human Rights [UNOHCHR] et al., 2008, p. 1). Categorizing HTPs as individual, separate issues, the UN affirmed that they are related in that “they are all consequences of the value placed on women and the girl child by society. They persist in an environment where women and the girl child have unequal access to education, wealth, health and employment” (p. 2). The UN defined FMG as “involving partial or total removal of the female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (p. 1). Depending on the community, FGM is performed on infants, girls between seven and ten years old or adolescents. Having no known benefits, FGM has both immediate and long-term implications for physical and mental health, including increased risk for neonatal death among pregnant women (p. 11). Further, FGM is a violation of human rights, as “like the now-abandoned footbinding in China and the practice of dowry and child marriage, female genital mutilation represents society’s control over women” (2008, p. 5). FGM is most prevalent in western, eastern and north-eastern regions of Africa, some parts of Asia and the Middle East.

Monique Sternin supported the experimental use of PD for advocacy against FGM in Egypt in 1997. Initially, she doubted whether PD would be successful. She wrote that “FGM in

Egypt is not only deeply rooted but regarded as a desirable,” making it difficult to mobilize a community against a universally perceived benefit (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 55). Moving forward despite hesitations from the Egyptian anti-FGM task force, Sternin worked with the Center for Development and Population Activities and the Coptic Organization for Services and Training (CEDPA) to pilot a PD project on FGM eradication through advocacy. After training the local CEDPA team on PD, Sternin took the role of technical advisor instead of a more formal leadership position to ensure that the solutions remained indigenous (Pascale et al., 2010).

The team identified PDs, which included “a grandmother, parents who refused to circumcise their daughters, a man married to an uncircumcised woman and a medical doctor who had stopped practicing FGM” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 63). The PDs met at a workshop, where, given the sensitivity of the issue, they spent time creating trust. This was essential because they were “to engage in disclosure that was, in itself, a tacit betrayal of community norms” ( p. 67). Prior to the workshop the CEDPA team videotaped eight individuals who had refused FGM to present to the participants of the workshop. They told their stories on camera, creating a repository of social proof against the universality of FGM (pp. 68-70). After the three day workshop the PD team set out to engage their communities in conversations on FGM, identifying and interviewing those who had rejected the practice (p. 67).

In the following year, in two of the eight communities not a single girl was circumcised during the FGM season (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 75). As of 2007, the continued program, run by the Egyptian Government and sponsored by UNICEF, had identified more than a thousand PD individuals and had reached 1,693 families (Pascale et al., 2010). Studies show a 4% decline in FGM nationwide from 1997 and 2000 (Pascale et al., 2010).

The USAID FRONTIERS Project report, “Critical analysis of interventions against FGC in Egypt,” compared four models of intervention against FGM in Egypt (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000). One of the four was the PD effort initiated by Sternin and partners. This comparison of PD with other efforts illuminated the strengths of PD as an approach to curtailing HTPs.

Looking at the now larger PD program against FGM, the study noted an expansion of PD individuals from the original, including “community leaders who speak openly against the practice; and dayas who have stopped circumcising girls and young women” (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000, p. 13). The broader set of PD individuals demonstrates that the efforts scaled horizontally because “momentum builds as participants feel they are driving the inquiry, not riding as passengers” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 64). The report noted the initial difficulty in finding these individuals because “since circumcision is the norm, it is very difficult to find a woman who will openly say that she is not circumcised, or a man who will declare that he would not circumcise his daughter” (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000, p. 13). Consequently, the report emphasized the importance of members of the community, and not outside PD facilitators, seeking those practicing PD behaviors and strategies. “Once one person announces his or her position, others are encouraged to speak, and hence more PDs are identified” (p. 13).

The report noted that the project’s success was related to the fact that PD individuals were local members of the community (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000). Once the PD individuals began to unite and share their experiences, they became empowered to advocate against FGM to help other girls. The project’s success is linked to its origins within the community because “people found the stories that were told by PDs to be convincing, mostly because they did not

come from experts or community workers but from people like themselves” (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000, p. 14).

The article, “Penetrating the silence in Sierra Leone: A blueprint for the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation,” advocated for PD application to FGM (Mgbako, Saxena, Cave, Farjad, & Shin, 2010). While describing PD efforts in Sierra Leone and noting their success, the authors provided rigid guidelines for PD application to FGM in Sierra Leone. This strays from the purist understanding of PD, in which each community designs its own intervention according to its specific needs and knowledge (Pascale et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it is significant that the concept of PD is being used and encouraged in Sierra Leone.

**Trafficking.** The UN does not recognize trafficking as an HTP; however, trafficking is categorized under violence against women, a non-traditional practice that has similar implications and outcomes for women and society (WHO, 2012, p. 11). In the broadest sense, trafficking is defined as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (WHO, 2012, p. 1)

The UN noted that men, women and children are all subject to trafficking; however, today “trafficking is often a ‘gendered’ crime,” given that the majority of those trafficked for sex and domestic labor are girls and women (WHO, 2012, p. 2). While considered two separate practices, child marriage by abduction can be understood as a form of trafficking because the child is taken from her family to the home of the abductor.

In 2002, the Nuwakot District Development Community in Nepal received technical support from Save the Children to pilot PD to develop programing to reduce the trafficking of

girls for commercial sex work. The program report, “Application of the positive deviance approach to anti-trafficking programming in Nepal - A trail in Nuwakot District,” contains information on both the PD process and its outcomes; however, halfway through the process Maoist rebels interrupted the project in four out of five communities (Save the Children, 2002). As a result, only one community completed the entire PD inquiry whereas all five communities completed the situation analysis.

Differing from PD application to FGM in Egypt, this initiative did not attempt to create behavior change through advocacy, but rather to inform a new direction of an existing program (Save the Children, 2002). PD is not always used as a behavior change method, as “PD findings can support programs in various ways, including refinement of current activities, informing an intervention specifically to promote the discovered skills...or even advocacy” (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 130). The Nuwakot District Development Community had been working to combat trafficking since 1992 and program leaders decided to use PD “to look at the issue from a whole new angle, and thus perhaps lead to innovations in programming ” (Save the Children, 2002, pp. 4-5). The program had struggled to address such a multifaceted, sensitive social issue and saw PD as offering guidance toward more culturally effective and acceptable interventions (Save the Children, 2002, p. 5).

Given that trafficking is an adaptive challenge, the study found it “hard to predict exactly what categories of behavior, knowledge or practice might distinguish PD girls and families from their non-PD neighbors” (Save the Children, 2002, p. 5). Applying the approach to an area so far from nutrition required a particular focus on “not only outcomes, but also behaviors and what influences them” (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 130). The study revealed variances in gender attitudes, family relationships and levels of knowledge, intangible PD characteristics that require long-term

behavior change to replicate (Save the Children, 2002, p. 5). Despite the complexity of the findings and the limitations caused by the interference of rebels, the PD approach met the goal of informing future programming because it provided “the opportunity to refine existing awareness and behavior change strategies in light of the experience of PD families and daughters” (Save the Children, 2002, p. 5). PD helped to dispel myths about the cause of trafficking, including the programmatic perspective that most people are “ignorant about what happened to ‘disappeared’ girls” (Save the Children, 2002, p. 20). Although the results of this PD project lacked the direct impact of the FGM projects, this PD application clarified community perceptions and offered a new way forward.

From February 2002 to February 2005, Save the Children, with the support of the Oak Foundation and in partnership with the East Java Institution for Community Research and Development, piloted a PD anti-trafficking program. Jerry Sternin facilitated the PD process. While the program took place in three different villages, the process, procedures and outcomes are especially well-documented in the village of Gadungsari.

The community of Gadungsari was aware that girl child trafficking was a problem; however, given the sensitive nature of the subject, Singhal and Dura (2008) noted in the report, “A positive deviance approach to child protection: a comparative assessment of two projects,” that “the initial PD session was created as a forum to discuss community problems in general” (p. 51). During this session the community did identify trafficking as the single greatest threat to communal wellbeing (Singhal & Dura, 2008). Sternin then worked with the community to specifically define the problem as “many girls from poor families often leave the community and go to work outside and end up in the sex industry” (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 53). Now with a concrete understanding of the problem, the community defined a PD individual as “a poor family

who has refused to send their girls out to work in the sex industry” (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 53).

Sternin and partners used community mapping to create a greater understanding of the extent of the problem and lay the foundation for more universal support. Community mapping, also called village mapping, is a form of participatory research that indigenizes inquiry by using local knowledge, and not western knowledge, to illuminate a problem (Chilisa, 2012). Making a physical map of the village, together the partners and approximately 50 community members circled the homes of those girls who were missing and those most at risk for trafficking. This exercise revealed that 140 people were missing from the village, with the majority being teenage girls (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 53). This tangible evidence helped mobilize support, as the community saw the measurable extent of trafficking. In addition, “mapping was used to visually depict how power was distributed through the twelve hamlets in Gadungsari, what level of influence was wielded by which trafficker on what residents and why, and so on” (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 54).

After identifying PD practices and behaviors, the community met to share the results and create an action plan to combat trafficking. The group established community watch committees to monitor traffickers, selected village members to meet with families whose daughters were at increased risk for trafficking, appointed community leaders to work with the government to create more economic opportunities for young women and stricter requirements for travel documents, and launched an anti-trafficking campaign (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 56). The two year program assessment revealed that, since the beginning of the anti-trafficking program, no girls had entered the sex trade and twenty trafficking attempts were averted (p. 57). In 2004,

Save the Children partnered with the International Organization of Migration (IOM) to work with an additional 135 communities in East Java (p. 59).

**Reintegration of girl child soldiers.** The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been fighting the government in northern Uganda since 1987. Since 2006 security has improved; however, the LRA has abducted and trafficked tens of thousands of children and adults to serve as soldiers, porters and sexual and domestic servants (Pham, Vinck, & Stover, 2007, p. 5). The Government of Uganda established a Child Protection Unit of the Ugandan People's Army to locate abducted children and move them to a camp for physical and psychological evaluations and care while locating surviving family (p. 1). While most children stay two to six weeks, child mothers stay up to six months because they often have no family members willing to claim them and their children (p. 1).

In March, 2007 Save the Children, with the support of the Oak Foundation, began implementation of a PD pilot project for the social reintegration and empowerment of child mothers who had left the camps and were living in the community. The program worked with an initial 500 girls who were either child mothers or who served as caregivers for younger siblings (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 19). The PD program sought to:

create an enabling reintegration for child mothers and vulnerable girl survivors returning from LRA captivity and to reduce their engagement in transactional/commercial sex as a means of survival by strengthening peer support networks, identifying effective and sustainable local solutions for social and economic reintegration, and facilitating access to social services. (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 20)

The PD process began with initial meetings followed by community mapping to physically identify child mothers and caregivers (Singhal & Dura, 2008, p. 21). The PD team then created criteria by which to recognize PDs, which included traits such as attends school, saves money, respects community members and seeks their advice and exhibits self-respect

(p. 22). Once identified, the PD girls took part in interviews to “arrive at specific coping mechanisms” (p. 23). The PD girls identified play, sports, music, games, exercise and association with other people as their coping mechanisms, all transferable behaviors that lead to social development (pp. 23-24).

District officials, peer educators and mentors established a project to promote these healthy alternative coping strategies as well as small business management to teach girls to start self-sustaining income generation projects (Singhal & Dura, 2008, pp. 23-24). At the one year project review, Save the Children conducted a mixed methods survey to determine project impact. The results showed “tremendous progress in terms of understanding, practice and sustainability of identified PD practices” (p. 24). For instance, 96.4% of participants understood the negative implications of transactional sex, 96.4% improved their personal hygiene and kept their homes clean and 92.7% began engaging in crop growing (pp. 24-26). The two weakest areas of achievement were school attendance, with only 7.3% of girls enrolling in school, and small business development, with only 36.4% creating a small business (pp. 24-26).

**PD and child marriage by abduction.** The PD approach is multifaceted. Adapted to meet the nuances of the specific situation, “the PD approach defies simple classification,” making it difficult to condense the rationale behind PD application to child marriage by abduction (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 129). PD is an approach to adaptive challenges that acknowledges the role of the social system, the leadership of the community and the primacy of local knowledge to find solutions outside of the status quo, helping communities navigate challenges to their wellbeing in a way that poses minimal threat to power structures and requires minimal, if any, outside assistance. With documented success against FGM, trafficking and

social exclusion of girl child soldiers, PD has the potential to steer a community away from the practice of child bride kidnapping.

This study has little practical and scholarly precedent. In searching the donor and agency program databases as well as the literature, I have been able to identify only one program that focuses, albeit partially, on child marriage by abduction in Ethiopia. While there are numerous projects by local and international NGOs and government entities that indirectly address marriage by abduction through an array of programs promoting gender equality, Care International is the only organization to confront the problem directly. Its USAID-funded program, “Healthy Unions: Community Engagement and Behavior Change to Eliminate Bride Price, Bride Abduction and Early Marriage in Ethiopia,” uses behavior change communication to “change community norms underlying the harmful practices bride price, bride abduction and early marriage” (Care International, 2009, p. 1). Projects include community conversations, community awareness raising campaigns, school clubs and training of local awareness raisers to promote behavior change (pp. 1-4). While including all members of the community, the program emphasizes in school and out of school girls beginning with elementary age children (pp. 2-4).

Although I recognize the importance of awareness creation among girls, Care International’s emphasis on girls vulnerable to abduction and simultaneous under-emphasis on, if not complete neglect of, underpinning factors ignores the structural violence from which abduction emerges and places the responsibility to curtail the violence on the girl child. Much like victim blaming, this approach suggests that children are responsible for their own protection rather than recognizing the social system that places them at risk. In the UN Chronicle Online, George Kent, coordinator of the Task Force on Children's Nutrition Rights and co-convener of

the Commission on International Human Rights of the International Peace Research Association, characterizes victim-centered development efforts as follows:

Perhaps the appreciation of structural violence has not been just another passing fad; perhaps it has been pushed aside. For those who are well served by existing social systems, it is more comforting to see bad outcomes as resulting from bad agents: individuals remain poor because they are lazy or ignorant; AIDS is caused solely by sexual behaviour; market failures result from misbehaving corporations; and countries remain poor because they are not sufficiently engaged with the market. These can be fixed by structural adjustment, with the international financial institutions as global chiropractors. (Kent, 2003, para 2)

This description can be extended toward this approach to curtail child marriage by abduction: girls are abducted because they are uninformed. Based on the delivery system theory of change, this program theorizes that girls will receive information on child marriage by abduction and change their behavior. Ultimately, this approach assumes that the girl child is responsible and ignores the social system in which child marriage by abduction is embedded.

PD application to child marriage by abduction is unprecedented, which can be daunting; however, as demonstrated in PD application to infant mortality, FGM, trafficking and reintegration of girl child soldiers, each project presents a unique set of challenges embedded in the specific social context. Nonetheless, “a great deal can be done to reduce these barriers by giving careful thought to the choreography of the process. Mobilizing a group requires exquisite sensitivity to the social architecture that brings people together” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 64). These efforts have succeeded in part because each PD project was uniquely designed by the community, as “discoveries from one community cannot be repackaged and provided to another as a silver bullet” (p. 112). Monique Sternin noted that, regardless of the outcome, there is value in the PD process: the mere act of mobilizing community members to talk amongst themselves about child marriage by abduction may have an unplanned, unforeseeable impact in that this is an adaptive challenge in a complex adaptive system (personal communication, July, 2013).

### **Chapter III: Methodological Approach**

In this dissertation, I undertook participatory action research to (a) address the gap in research and programming for all forms of child marriage and (b) pilot efforts to apply Positive Deviance (PD) to child marriage by abduction in order to determine if PD can be effective against this specific form of early marriage as well as the practice as a whole. This participatory action research took the form of PD and the case study to describe both the nuances of the PD process as applied to a new realm and the ways that PD behaviors and strategies can offer increased protection for girl children at risk for abduction. In this chapter, I describe my preliminary research with this community, which serves as the pilot study. Following this discussion, I offer a description of the methods applied in this research.

#### **Pilot Project: PD and Harmful Traditional Practices in Ethiopia**

Under the mentorship of Monique Sternin, in April-June, 2013 I undertook my Antioch University Individualized Learning Agreement (ILA), “Positive Deviance and Harmful Traditional Practices in Ethiopia.” This research intended to serve as a preliminary introduction to PD application to early marriage in Ethiopia and now forms a foundation for this study. I am including a brief discussion of this pilot in this chapter rather than as a separate chapter because this initial research underpins the design of my dissertation. This study as a whole includes this pilot, as “in action research, a pilot study is likely to simply be early cycles of research in an ongoing research spiral” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, para 4). In this chapter I am not including a comprehensive representation of the entire ILA research process and outcomes, but rather a presentation most pertinent to the methodological design of this study. I interweave the results of this pilot in the results section of this dissertation, Chapter V.

**Pilot research summary.** In the pilot research I completed the first phase of the PD process, which entails engaging community members to reframe the problem. I did not intend to achieve the full PD process, which “refers to the entire journey encompassing the skillful use of experiential learning methods and skilled facilitation applied to four steps of the PD design” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 2). Instead, I focused on step one, reframing the problem, as this pilot was a small, limited exploratory project.

The research was split into two components. The first entailed engaging in conversations with those working to curtail early marriage in Ethiopia, a type of information gathering that mirrors professional discussions within my professional practice. The collected data helped me to gain a more nuanced understanding of the perspectives, methodologies and philosophies that underpin current efforts to derail child marriage. While information gathering meetings occurred throughout the entire research timeframe, I found the Population Council’s seminar on May 14, 2013, “A decade of research and programs for adolescent girls in Ethiopia: The past and future,” to be a milestone. Together with representatives from nearly every organization working in child protection in Ethiopia, I participated in rich and enlightening discussions on a range of interlocking issues within early marriage.

For the second stage of my pilot research, I coupled group conversations with three individual interviews to indicate the potential to apply PD to child marriage. As described in the introduction, this research was conducted in partnership with Common River. The field research primarily involved three rounds of discussions with two large groups, which together equaled 42 individuals from Common River’s female literacy program. These women, all of whom were subsistence farmers, lived in a relatively rural location and had either elementary or no formal education, all traits that correspond with early marriage (UNFPA, 2012).

In these conversations, I had intended to focus on child marriage; however, the participants reframed the problem from child marriage to child marriage by abduction. This thematic change demonstrates that in the PD process the “initial framing of the problem often turns out to be a placeholder” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 155). The participants recognized child marriage as detrimental to the wellbeing of girls; however, they unanimously agreed that the most pressing threat is child marriage by abduction. Following the direction of the community, I changed my research focus.

**Interview methods and applied concepts.** In these large group conversations, I had originally planned a semi-structured interview, which would have included an interview guide to ensure that data collection was similar for both groups; however, I decided to use an unstructured interview in order to generate as much of an organic conversation as possible. Having relied completely on western research to identify child marriage as a problem for this community, I aimed to facilitate an open discussion in which participants had the opportunity to grapple with what I had presented or generate conversation on an alternative issue. As a result of this freedom, the participants were able to move beyond my topic to an issue of importance to them.

Group conversations are a hallmark of PD (Pascale et al., 2010). The questions that the facilitator poses are intended to prompt reflection and foster engagement among the participants. In essence, through open ended questions the participants discuss with each other, and the facilitator contributes to maximizing engagement. The PD process emphasizes group conversations because it does not aim for “just ‘knowledge’ or getting an 80-20 understanding of the situation. The overriding objective is engagement, creating a buzz, mobilizing people to take action” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 162). Further, the conventional hierarchical interview method “leans toward individualistic, Westernized assumptions and theories,” which ultimately oppose

many indigenous cultures and value systems (Chilisa, 2012, p. 204). Group conversations reflect the collective identity and offer a social structure within which questions can be discussed by peers, providing a gateway toward smaller group and individual interviews once the topic is defined.

In these group conversations, I used the following strategies:

Sharing relevant personal stories: I shared my own personal relationship stories in order to make the participants feel comfortable. This serves to “develop trust by admitting your own vulnerability” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 198). Further, storytelling is common among the Sidama, making this a familiar means of communication. I intentionally told stories that were slightly uncomfortable for me to create a climate in which the women would feel free to engage. In addition, I shared amusing stories in order to relieve some of the initial tension and shyness. I found storytelling to be especially powerful. The stories served to make everyone, including me, feel at ease. In addition, the women asked questions about my stories, which then provided me with the opportunity to ask return questions about marriage in Sidama.

Avoiding overreaching: Throughout the process, I intentionally sought to avoid generalizing, inferring or creating questions aimed at a specific answer. I realized that I could frame my questions in a way to shed light on child marriage as a problem; however, I remembered that “research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 7). I reflected upon the framing of questions before I spoke in an attempt to minimize my influence on the discussion.

Remembering my role as a learner: Monique Sternin wrote in context of her work with FGM that “as an educated outsider, I had to let go of knowing it all, or indeed, of knowing anything” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 76). By mentally distancing myself from the role of expert to

the extent possible, I was able to navigate the interviews as a learner. Unable to escape subjectivity, my awareness of my position of power and privilege helped me to filter out western judgment as much as possible. For example, at times the women would make statements on issues pertaining to what they believed was the essential role of a wife. Despite the urge to contradict their opinions, I reminded myself that I was there to guide, listen and learn, not dictate and teach. This was an exercise in accepting local knowledge and questioning my own perspective rather than the perspective of others.

Verification of findings: I had not prepared to discuss child marriage by abduction; consequently, I sought ways to provide initial verification of findings through triangulation. After the women reframed the problem, I conducted individual interviews with the Common River CEO, the local midwife and Workenesh, my translator who, in the process, became my co-researcher. Upon return to my home in Addis Ababa, I analyzed exiting data sources and spoke with Dr. Annabel Erulkar, senior associate and Ethiopia country director of the Population Council, to verify my findings against existing knowledge of and information on the practice.

**Pilot study results, conclusions and implications.** The consensus of all 45 participants created a portrait of child marriage by abduction as it occurs within this specific community. This description was substantiated through additional data sources. Here I briefly summarize the results of this pilot in order to reveal the conceptual basis upon which I constructed this dissertation.

Those vulnerable to abduction: Very young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 are considered the most vulnerable to abduction. Older adolescents and adult women are rarely kidnapped.

Who abducts and motivating factors: The women categorized those who abduct as men who are too poor to afford a bride price, which is a sum of money payable to the father of the girl by the future husband. If the man is unable to pay, it is difficult, if not impossible, for him to marry. Marriage is a social norm and an economic asset. An unmarried man who relies on subsistence farming is dependent upon a partnership for survival. If he cannot afford the bride price, he may turn to abduction.

Sequence of events: Abduction itself entails luring a girl away from public places and then taking her by physical force. She is usually taken to the home of the man. Once there, a woman (usually a member of his family) circumcises the girl. Within hours of the circumcision, the man rapes her, at which point they are considered married.

Why it is considered irreversible: The circumcision marks her experience and sexual initiation, making her unattractive to other men; consequently, her prospects of marrying anyone except this man are low. If she does not marry, her family will see her as a financial burden and a mark of shame.

The women consider marriage by abduction an unpreventable, irreversible and intractable problem for the following reasons:

- Parents and other caregivers cannot protect the girls from abduction, as they cannot be with the girls all of the time.
- If a man wants to abduct a girl, he will use physical force against anyone who tries to protect her. Typically, the abductor is accompanied by a group, making the threat of physical violence greater.
- Most people in the community know that abduction is illegal; however, this has had little impact on the practice. One woman said that abduction no longer occurs, a

statement with which the others disagreed. The difference, the group explained, is that before knowledge of the law was widespread, the community discussed abduction freely. Now the practice is kept secret. Ultimately, all agreed that the law is not being enforced because the practice is hidden from officials as well as community members.

- In this community, most families are subsistence farmers whose food security is dependent upon seasonal crop yields. Consequently, many men cannot afford a bride price, which means that he cannot marry with the blessing of family, church/mosque and society.
- Abduction encourages child marriage. Fathers tend to marry their daughters early before they can be abducted. Here the fathers willingly give their daughters in marriage; however, the end result is that a child is still married, albeit not in the form of kidnapping. Moreover, this does not change the fact that there are many poor men who cannot pay a bride price. Ultimately, this is the link to the overriding issue of child marriage because marriage by abduction is a type of child marriage.

While my search of the literature resulted in limited information on child marriage by abduction in Ethiopia, I was able to collect enough data to substantiate my findings. In 2009, the Population Council and the UNFPA undertook a survey in five districts/woredas of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region: Dale, Sodo Zuria, Sodo town, Hawassa Zuria and Hawassa town. Dale, Hawassa Zuria and Hawassa town are in the Sidama Zone, whereas Sodo Zuria and Sodo town are in the neighboring Wolayta Zone. The district in which I conducted my research was not surveyed; however, the data from the surveyed districts in the Sidama Zone may indicate a general trend given the shared culture, livelihoods and geographic space. In 2010,

Norwegian Church Aid and Beza Youth Health and Counseling Center (2010) (Beza) conducted a similar survey in Sidama.

In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region 13% of surveyed girls and 13% of women indicated marriage by abduction (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 21). Unfortunately, those data are neither broken down by district/woreda nor zone. Marriage by abduction is considered common among the Sidama (Norwegian Church Aid & Beza, 2010). Since the practice is increasingly secretive and associated with a high level of trauma and stigma, it may be difficult to find girls and/or women who will admit to having been abducted. Consequently, the survey asked the participants if marriage by abduction is practiced widely, sometimes or not at all based on their knowledge and experience. No participants responded that it was not practiced at all. In Yirgalem, 58.30% responded widely or sometimes, in Dale 48.70%, in Wensho 35.10% and Lokabaya 64.30% (p. 32). In some cases, women did admit to having experienced marriage by abduction, with 18% in Lokabaya affirming this was their marriage experience (p. 32).

The interviewed participants of Common River's Female Literacy Class agreed that the community knows that marriage by abduction is illegal, noting that because of this knowledge marriage by abduction has become a silent phenomenon. In the surveyed woredas, 92% of the respondents knew that all forms of child marriage is illegal, which coincides with the women's perceptions (Norwegian Church Aid & Beza, 2010, p. 33). Research in Ethiopia indicates that the legal constraints of child marriage have "pushed it below the radar, with many marriages now more 'clandestine' than ever, which can leave girls even more unprotected" (ODI, 2013, p. 5). My initial research indicated that this is the case in Titira.

The women's claim that the abducted girls undergo FGM to decrease their prospects of marrying someone other than their abductor is substantiated by these surveys. When men were asked if they would prefer to marry a cut or uncut woman, over 80% of respondents in Yirgalem, Dale and Lokabaya and 68.4% in Wensho responded uncut (Norwegian Church Aid & Beza, 2010, p. 25). In Dale 53.4% of girls and women are circumcised, 67.1% in Hawassa town and 63.7% in Hawassa Zuria (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 16). The primary reason for circumcision is noted as custom/tradition (86%); however, there is no description of the cultural underpinnings (p. 16). My conversations with the women indicated that FGM is performed prior to marriage to indicate that a woman is married. Once she is circumcised, it is difficult for her to marry because circumcision marks loss of virginity.

### **Participatory Action Research**

This dissertation encompasses past, current and future collaboration with the community of Titira, Ethiopia. After the successful completion of my pilot research, my dissertation chair, Dr. Alan Guskin, advised me to continue this research prior to formal dissertation approval, as he recognized the ongoing nature of participatory action research (personal communication, August, 2014). He noted that a significant gap in engagement would be detrimental to the project and supported the extension of my IRB for my dissertation (personal communication, August, 2014). The extended IRB was approved on October 9, 2013. In total, this research took place over the course of 11 months, from April, 2013 until March, 2014.

The study continued from the pilot to create one continuous, uninterrupted project. This next stage of research served to verify the reframing of the problem from child marriage to child marriage by abduction. The research then continued to step four of the PD process, designing an initiative to address the problem based on findings. The actual field research concluded with step

three, discovering uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies through inquiry and observation. I selected this end point for numerous reasons. First, complete design and implementation of a project based upon results of my research will require a significant amount of time. Although my involvement will continue past this dissertation, actual implementation of the designed project is beyond the scope of this research. In an action research dissertation, the researcher selects a practical end point because “it’s not that the research is finished; rather, the doctoral student bounds it for the purpose of the dissertation. This results in a document that is essentially an account of the research thus far” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, para 2). Second, both PD and participatory action research are based on the premise of empowering individuals to create change. As I will describe in Chapter V, the PD process yielded immediate results, which creates hope that grassroots change is taking place without further outside assistance.

This research is inevitably political. As discussed in Chapter II, standard model development is a hierarchical approach based on western knowledge. Such projects, “whatever marginal changes they may create in poor countries and poor regions, are not the road to meaningful social change” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 156). In addition, western research “told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 3). This dissertation’s underlying message to scholars and practitioners in international development is that western knowledge is not universal, imperial practices do not contribute to sustainable change and indigenous knowledge contains solutions beyond western reach. By identifying PD behaviors and strategies, I am contributing to the growing evidence that the people can increase their own wellbeing if we, as western and western-educated professionals, accept their right to lead in their own development.

**Rationale for participatory action research.** I selected participatory action research for this study because this method of inquiry corresponds directly with PD. As discussed in Chapter II, PD is an alternative approach to standard model development that focuses on a community's discovery of its own existing solutions to adaptive challenges. Participatory research is an approach to scholarship in which the community and the researcher collaborate to create critical knowledge aimed at social change (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In addition, the steps of participatory action research align with those of PD, blurring the lines between an approach to social change based on research and research involving social change. In both participatory action research and PD, the researcher/facilitator collaborates with the community in defining the problem and collecting and analyzing the data. The researcher/facilitator and the community have different sets of knowledge and abilities, which contribute to the overall action.

The following chart demonstrates the similarities among participatory action research and PD:

Table 3.1

*Similarities Between Participatory Action Research and Positive Deviance*

Participatory Action Research	Positive Deviance
Problem selection and action planning	Problem definition/redefinition
Reflection upon information specific to the situation and cultural context	Reflection upon information specific to the situation and cultural context
Data collection, as PAR process is reiterative	Data collection, as PD process is reiterative
Data analysis and interpretation	Discovery of positive deviant behaviors and strategies through data analysis and interpretation
Planning and action	Discovery of solutions through PDs
	Planning and action

Based upon the PD approach to adaptive behavior change, this dissertation is rooted firmly in social change. Although I recognize that a more traditional, theoretical study could inform future change efforts, as a practitioner I could not disregard the opportunity to create action through a combination of theory and practice. Participatory action research is a form of social action (Freire, 1971). In participatory research, “research and action...become a single process” and are “concerned with equity, self-reliance and oppression problems” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, para 3). This method fostered both the scholar and practitioner sides of my identity, as this study enabled me to conduct research while actively promoting social change.

PD is a reiterative process that requires a substantial amount of time and, since I began the process in Titira with the support of Common River, the logical direction of this study was a continuation of these efforts. This evolution is typical in participatory action research, as “a pilot study is likely to simply be early cycles of research in an ongoing research spiral” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, para 6). As per my IRB, I was able to use the information collected in June, 2013, as part of this dissertation.

My entry process was organic in that it emerged out of a two year history with the community. While needing to remain conscious of potential conflicts of interest, my pilot research demonstrated the benefits of working in a familiar environment in which I have established trust. Participatory action research seeks to create partnerships with communities to identify their priorities and then take concrete action to overcome the identified challenges to wellbeing. Instead of conducting research on my participants, I conducted research with them. I believe that this participatory framework lessens the vulnerability in that the community members are not passive research subjects, but rather active participants.

**Positionality.** While I discussed my overall positionality in Chapter I, I address the topic again because my frame of reference is especially important in this section, as reflection is a key characteristic of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Throughout the research process, I reflected upon my positionality in a conscious attempt to mitigate power structures, engage most respectfully with the participants and better understand my own subjectivity.

When conducting the field research, I focused on reciprocal collaboration, in which I attempted to work as an outsider equally with a team of insiders; however, this ideal was not fully possible. The participants had roles and responsibilities beyond this research. Many of the female participants work in the coffee fields, are responsible for a household and have several children, making this project a task that could not take precedent over others. Workenesh, my co-researcher, and I have formed a close bond and, having the privilege of living beyond subsistence, we were able to coordinate schedules and time allocation; however, I remained aware that we did not share this luxury of time with our participants.

To a greater extent I was able to maintain reciprocal collaboration with Workenesh. Nonetheless, a dissertation is an individual body of work for which I am solely responsible. This research represents a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview,” however, as the author of this dissertation and the PhD candidate, ultimately I am accountable for the written documentation (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1).

My positionality is complex, as “positionality occurs not only in terms of insider/outsider, but also in terms of one’s position in the organization or social hierarchy, and one’s position of power vis-à-vis other stakeholders inside and outside the setting” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, Chapter 3, section 5, para 8). As a western educated white development professional, throughout

the research process I maintained a status and a degree of socio-economic privilege. To some extent this power was moderated because I was a woman undertaking work in a traditional, patriarchal society. At the same time, I remained conscious of the ways in which I could mitigate my privilege: I wore long skirts and flowing head scarves, ate the local food and followed the local norms in an effort to blend in to the extent possible. In addition, I have spent significant time in the community with my daughters who are members of the Sidama ethnic group. During one research session in June, 2013 I took my six year old daughter with me to Titira. She accompanied me for my work, often playing outside with other children while I spoke with the women. This tangible, personal and lasting connection to Sidama gave me a unique position, as, while remaining an outsider, I was at ease with community and I believe its members were at ease with me. I speak some Sidama and understand many of the cultural norms. Although I can never fully view the world through the lens of an indigenous Sidama woman, I believe that I possess enough understanding to foster sincere engagement based on mutual respect and trust.

**Research methods.** Given that participatory research is emergent and highly dependent upon the action that occurs within the community, I did not enter the community with a concrete outline of methods. Instead, I created a flexible, tentative approach that represented my “best guess as to what will transpire in the field” based upon my knowledge of participatory action research, PD, the community and the challenges and opportunities of the pilot research in June,, 2013 (Herr & Anderson, 2005, Chapter 5, section 3, para 2). In this section I present the selected research tools, their rationale, limitations and benefits. In some cases, I explain the ways in which I deviated from my intended method in order to follow the community’s leadership in this process. I present the actual research procedures with the results in Chapter V, as this section serves to describe the research tools and rationale.

Continuing from the pilot phase, my first step entailed clarifying and expanding upon my understanding of the problem with the initial 45 female participants. In addition, I verified their description of events with 12 additional community members who were identified during the research process. From there, I followed the next two steps of the PD process, which entailed the community determining the presence of positive deviant behaviors and strategies and discovering the specific uncommon practices that enable PDs to prevent or solve the identified problem.

In more traditional research, focus group discussions would likely be applied to verify the description of events of child marriage by abduction. Instead of undertaking focus groups, I continued to use large group conversations as well as two smaller group conversations of 15 and 13 individuals. The aim of focus groups is “to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue” and the interviewer, called the moderator or facilitator, strives to create a “permissive atmosphere for the expression of personal and conflicting viewpoints on the topics in focus” (Kvale, 2007, p. 72). I have applied focus groups in my professional research in child marriage, as “in the case of sensitive topics, the group interaction may facilitate expression of viewpoints usually not accessible” (p. 72). Despite my positive previous experience, I chose to use group conversations in this study. While seemingly similar, the orientation is distinctive. Focus groups were developed by western advertising agencies in the 1950s and aim to “extract information” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 161). In PD, group conversations “are somewhere near the opposite end of a continuum” (p. 161). The primary goal is not to abstract linear information, but to generate thought and create knowledge through discussion. In focus groups, the interviewer stops when all topics have been covered and the sought information has been acquired. In group

conversations, “the overriding objective is engagement,” as ultimately the PD process prioritizes action (p. 161).

Following this period of clarification and expansion, I planned to lead the community in identifying PD individuals, from whom we could identify PD behaviors and strategies. While I anticipated a formal, semi-structured process that entailed my preplanned presentation, the PD individuals emerged organically during a large group conversation. I will discuss this process in Chapter V.

Once we identified the PDs, I intended to conduct individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with the PD individuals or, if the identified PD was a child, with her parents/guardians. Individual interviews are vital to understanding the nuances of marriage by abduction, as issues impacting very young adolescents “are complicated, dynamic, and generally better captured through individual interviews” (Haberland, 2003, p. 221). I had planned to conduct these individual interviews alone with Workenesh and the individual participants; however, these individual interviews took place during the large group conversations. This process emerged spontaneously, as the identification of PD individuals organically melted into an in-depth interview. The identified individuals felt more comfortable in the presence of their peers than they did in a smaller, more intimate setting in which I would have acted as a more formal interviewer. Workenesh explained that this preference for group conversation corresponds with the relational understanding of the experience among women and is reflective of the women’s comfort as a group within the structure of Common River. I understood that, while momentarily disorienting, I needed to spontaneously change my plans and reorient my thinking, as “situational learning has become a core component of the PD process” (Pascale et

al., 2010, p. 33). I recognized the significance in this level of community engagement and followed, rather than redirected, the natural contours of the process.

I had planned to base the individual interviews upon the life world interview, which “seeks to obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon” (Kvale, 2007, p. 52). This occurred organically through the interaction of the participants. Although Workenesh and I were conducting the interview, the other women served as co-facilitators as they interjected questions throughout the conversation. The peer questions, many of which I would not have thought of myself, were more applicable because the women were speaking from a framework of their own lived reality. This reconceptualized the individual interview and indigenized the methodology, as it represented a true “blending of an imported discipline with the generation of new concepts and approaches from within that culture” (Adiar, Puhan, & Vohre, 1993, p. 102).

In sum, the following chart demonstrates the following methods I applied during the process of identifying PDs:

Table 3.2

*Methods of Identifying Positive Deviants*

Research Technique	Objective/Rationale	Key Elements
Interviews in the form of large and small group conversations, group discussions and individual interviews	Confirm the reframing of the problem to child marriage by abduction; understand the normative and unusual experiences of child marriage by abduction, identify PD behaviors and strategies that led to a better outcome	Reiterative process involving conversations, unstructured, semi-structured interviews with primarily open ended questions
Observations	Identify behaviors revealing kinships and group dynamics and structure	Observations to identify any observable exceptions in behavior and relations among any identified PDs
Analysis of existing information on child marriage by abduction	Provide supplementary, guiding and confirming information on child marriage by abduction in Sidama	Critical analysis of quantitative and qualitative reports and scholarly information
Conversations with professionals working with the community	Provide supplementary, guiding and confirming information on child marriage by abduction in Sidama	Conversations verified collected data while revealing new information

**Quality assurance.** In this dissertation, I prioritized local knowledge. My work was built on a reciprocal relationship of trust in the community's knowledge and direction because in participatory action research "local knowledge of the situation is authentic, detailed and valued, an idea that many external organizers, who are sure they know what is good for their 'people,' routinely ignore" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 156). At the same time, this study is centered on rigorous academic research. Validity is linked with outcomes, relational practice and new ways of knowing, as "good knowing rests on collaborative relationships, on a wide variety of ways of knowing, and an understanding of value and purpose, as well as more traditional forms or intellectual and empirical rigour" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, para 5).

Assessing quality in action research represents a departure "from current validity criteria for both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, para 7). The participants' role in the research and the centrality of the action require an alternative approach to quality. Action research provides accountability through research strategies, which can offer more nuanced, meaningful and applicable results than traditional research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). I applied the following strategies to ensure quality in my research:

Debrief with participants: Following each interview, I debriefed with the participants to ensure my understanding, simultaneously providing an opportunity for the participants to add additional information. This is a type of member checking, in which the researcher works to "verify with research participants the themes and patterns that are developing as a result of data collected and analyzed" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 166). This member checking was a form of action itself because the participants often responded to the information when I fed it back to them. At times, the member checking evolved into another in-depth conversation, providing me with the

opportunity to delve deeper into the topic at hand. In addition, both Workenesh and I remained aware of subtle, non-verbal reactions to the debriefing.

Debrief with Workenesh: Interviewing across cultures is particularly challenging because “it is difficult to become aware of the multitude of cultural factors that affect the relationship between interviewer and interviewee” (Kvale, 2007, p. 68). Although I am familiar with the more obvious aspects of the culture, I may neglect or misinterpret more nuanced cues. As a result, after each interview I debriefed with Workenesh, who, as an insider, is culturally appropriate, fluent in the language and able to recognize gestures, subtle linguistic distinctions and other verbal and non-verbal cultural signs.

Checking with colleagues: I debriefed with several professional colleagues in order to validate the data collected from the interviews. While in Sidama, I shared the results of my field work with Tsegaye Bekele, the CEO of Common River. As a native of Sidama working in community-based development, he has extensive knowledge of local norms, values and practices and was able to situate my research within his experience. He posed critical questions, both commenting on my research and guiding me toward increased understanding of the process, procedures and outcomes. This debriefing organically evolved into a method of data collection, as Tsegaye expanded upon our conversation and provided additional information.

Follow the steps of the PD process: PD is “paradoxically both spontaneous and disciplined” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 153). One common pitfall of the PD process is collapsing the distinctive steps into one (p. 154). PD application to child marriage by abduction did require improvisation; however, this improvisation took place within the distinctive steps of PD. Although I followed the direction of the community, I contained the progression within the PD framework.

Feedback loops: Both PD and action research rely on a cycle of action and reflection based on the data collected through the various methods of inquiry. In this way, theories are created from the action and then tested through further cycles. As I explain in Chapter V, at several points in the PD process I returned to previous steps in order to obtain more information or evaluate existing data. This reiterative process took into account all methods of inquiry and inherently resulted in improved quality of research and action.

Journal and reflection: After each interview session, I reflected upon my interactions, recording my thoughts and impressions in a research journal. “These immediate impressions, based on the interviewer's empathetic access to the meanings communicated in the live interview interaction” can be used to “provide a valuable context for the later analysis of transcripts” (Kvale, 2007, p. 18). In addition, this is a method that enabled me to develop progressive subjectivity, in which “researchers monitor their own developing constructions and document the process of change from the beginning of the study until it ends” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 166). The reflections provided a space for critical thinking, which is an indispensable component to all research. This is especially important in research on such a sensitive issue because “if we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 36). Research journaling created a space for critical thinking and helped me to clarify my own subjectivity and become aware of my own process of meaning-making.

Triangulate data: Triangulation is “based on the assumption that the use of multiple methods, data sources or investigators can eliminate biases in a study” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 167). Using methodological triangulation, I compared data collected by the various types of interviews, observations, research notes and the analysis of existing documents on child marriage by abduction. This information is presented in the results section and assures validity of the field

data by creating a framework through which the field data can be understood and questioned. Recognizing that there may be slight variances in data due to natural occurring differences in perspectives and contextual factors such as place, time and influences, I was prepared to undertake and document a negative case analysis for any conflicting data; however, as I will present in Chapter IV, the results remained consistent.

### **Data Presentation**

My presentation of the PD process and outcomes is embedded in a case study. In order to create an in-depth, nuanced understanding of normative behaviors in relation to marriage, I created a context for my work through a thorough analysis of the evolution of marriage norms. When applying PD outside of nutrition and public health, the case study provides the opportunity to present an intricate understanding of the context, as “application of positive deviance to new domains requires a clear understanding of the key conceptual elements” (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 133). The case study is uniquely positioned to record pilot PD efforts because it enables the creation of an at once detailed and holistic understanding.

The case study extends beyond the PD process and outcomes because the priority in applying PD to a new domain includes the normative and PD “behaviors and what influences them” (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 130). Well-constructed case studies maintain the “meaningful characteristic of real-life events,” which is essential in accurately describing the context in which child marriage by abduction occurs (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This case study focuses on creating a holistic and simultaneously nuanced context in order to situate the PD effort. I present the results of the PD process only after offering a holistic portrait of the community within which a nuanced understanding of marriage norms is embedded.

The case study “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The multiple sources of evidence serve to ensure validity through consistency while also creating an in-depth, descriptive and nuanced study. In addition, it is equally important to clearly and concisely record the data collection procedures and the data analysis process to reveal the entire course of research (p. 102). This record of procedure and process demonstrates the extent to which the research leads to an accurate depiction of the case. Given that positionality influences bias and subjectivity, I included my reflections in this description of procedure and process. In addition, I continued the steps taken to ensure validity in the participatory action research in this phase of the research.

The case study focuses on child marriage by abduction among the Sidama, situating this specific case within the larger instance of child marriage by abduction in Ethiopia. Since I have found little information on child marriage by abduction among the Sidama, the case study created an unprecedented piece of scholarly evidence. While this case study and the action research that forms its foundation are local, “local problems and local settings are parts of larger problems and broader social forces that not only impact local settings, but are implicated in how local settings are constructed” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, chapter 4, section 6, the macropolitics of action research projects). While focusing on a specific setting, context and incidence, the case study linked this specific example with the broader social framework.

### **Case Study Rationale**

I present the PD process and outcomes within a case study because this method of data presentation serves to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This specific study acknowledges the unique dynamics of a social

system that at once enables child marriage by abduction and permits the unique behaviors and strategies that result in a better outcome. This contextualized research is set apart from standard model development research, which, like the implementing international organizations, “prescribe research methodologies that ignore contextual differences” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 82). The case study provides an outlet for research to break the sameness pattern, as the case study serves to “cover contextual conditions-believing that they might be highly pertinent” to the studied phenomenon (Yin, 2009, p. 13). Rather than focusing on generalization, this case study enabled me to highlight a specific focus on the situation in Sidama that is relevant to the overall topic, child marriage by abduction, which is not well-documented outside of Kyrgyzstan.

This case study places emphasis on data collection that illuminates risk factors, enablers and behaviors contributing to child marriage by abduction (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 129). These contextual underpinnings are important in PD application to new areas because they provide a nuanced understanding of how the approach functions outside of the traditional realm of childhood malnutrition (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 129). The case study included a review of existing documents, observations, conversations, and interviews designed to answer the following questions:

- How have past Sidama marriage norms evolved?
- How does marriage by abduction occur?
- Which factors underpin marriage by abduction and create an environment that permits the practice?
- What are the PD behaviors and strategies that prevent early by abduction?

This case study contributes to the evidence that validates PD as an approach for HTPs, marking this as the first PD application to any form of child marriage. While social change

cannot be forced into a rigid academic framework, “some systematic approach or structure is needed to help identify what makes some community initiatives succeed and what may be lacking in those that fail” (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002, p. iv). Case studies can provide such structure, as they are uniquely positioned to contextualize a change process and its outcomes (Figueroa et al., 2002). Well-constructed case studies “allow one to peer into the box of causality to locate the intermediate factors lying between some structural cause and its purported effect. Ideally, they allow one to see X and Y interact” (Gerring, 2007, p. 45). The case study contextualizes the process and results in an accessible, structured manner, which allows the case study to serve as an illumination of the structural underpinnings of child marriage by abduction and the social change process.

My review of the literature has uncovered little statistical and no qualitative information on child marriage by abduction among the Sidama and this study contributed to the development of a foundation of knowledge for local and international scholar-practitioners. Although this dissertation entails participatory action research, the case study recognizes that action cannot occur in a vacuum. Further, the case study generates broader interest by contributing to a lack of knowledge on child marriage by abduction in Ethiopia. In addition, this study demonstrates an indigenized approach to understanding a complex phenomenon, as the data emerge from the participatory action research and add local knowledge and a challenge to a conversation among scholars and practitioners in which western knowledge is both given precedent and considered sufficient (Chilisa, 2012).

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This methodology section presented the PD approach as a form of participatory action research that indigenizes western inquiry. The results of this research are presented in Chapter IV in the form of a case study. The case study focuses on child marriage by abduction among the Sidama, situating this specific case within the larger instance of child marriage by abduction in Ethiopia. Since I have found little information on child marriage by abduction among the Sidama, the case study created an unprecedented piece of scholarly evidence. While this case study and the action research that forms its foundation are local, “local problems and local settings are parts of larger problems and broader social forces that not only impact local settings, but are implicated in how local settings are constructed” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, chapter 4, section 6, the macropolitics of action research projects). While focusing on a specific setting, context and incidence, the case study linked this specific example with the broader social framework.

## Chapter IV: Results

Child marriage by abduction occurs throughout Ethiopia; however, there is little documentation on the practice. Labeled a harmful traditional practice (HTP), the UN considers the act of kidnapping a very young adolescent for marriage to be an ancient, entrenched cultural custom (UN OHCHR, 1995, introduction, para 4). Following the guidance of the UN, the international development community approaches child marriage by abduction as an offshoot of child marriage and tends to address abduction within programming for child marriage in general (Care International, 2009). Programs aimed at child marriage focus on delaying marriage age, as in Ethiopia fathers typically have full agency over the decision as to when to marry their daughters. In cases of abduction, this approach is rendered invalid by the fact that the kidnapping occurs without parental consent.

In this research I approach child marriage by abduction as an individual practice that is at once connected to and separate from child marriage. By applying positive deviance (PD) to child marriage by abduction in Titira, Ethiopia, I engaged in action research that is at once creating change and contributing to the literature on PD, child marriage by abduction and practices considered HTPs. I present the results in the form of a case study because PD is a form of practice-based research, in which reflection on practice is informed by both critical reflection and knowledge from other sources (Jarvis, 1999). The case study is “about the *process* of learning about and researching the specific phenomenon or phenomena under investigation and about the *product* of that learning and researching” (Jarvis, 1999, p. 77). This case study contextualizes both the topic and the PD intervention. In terms of the topic, the case study situates child marriage by abduction within a historic and present cultural framework in an effort to understand the factors that enable the practice. At the same time, the case study reveals current marriage

norms in Titira, which enabled me, through the guidance of the community, to uncover PD behaviors and strategies that resulted in the prevention of abduction among girls considered to be at high risk for abduction.

## **Background**

The Sidama, an ethnic group of approximately 3 million people, comprise approximately 4% of the population of Ethiopia (Sillan, 2013). They live in the Sidama Zone, which is located in the southern portion of the Ethiopian Rift Valley. Ranging from 4,500 to 10,000 feet above sea level, the area is comprised of lowlands, midlands and highlands and “the land is surprisingly lush and green, with rolling hills and verdant valleys” (p. 9). The Sidama speak their own language, commonly called Sidama, which is a Cushitic oral language that did not have a written form until the 1960s (Sillan, 2013). Today 95% of the Sidama are primarily agriculturists with limited livestock (Sillan, 2013). The staple crop is wese, enset, which in English is commonly called false banana. While both agriculture and livestock remain central to their livelihood, many Sidama cultivate coffee as a cash crop. Sidama coffee production accounts for approximately 40% of washed coffee in Ethiopia; however, the majority of the Sidama remain subsistence farmers (Sillan, 2013). Sidama is one of the least developed regions of Ethiopia, with the majority of residents living in chronic poverty and with chronic food insecurity (Goodo, 2007, section 3, para 1).

The geographic focus of this research encompasses the kebele of Titira. A kebele, which means neighborhood in Amharic, is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Titira is located in the Aleta Wondo woreda, with a woreda being a local administrative unit similar to the United States concept of a county. Since Titira is contained within Aleta Wondo, this research specifically reflects the population of Titira while projecting information on the woreda. The

current woreda population is estimated at 436,672 of which the rural population comprises 418,135 and urban population of 18,537 (Common River, 2010). As in Sidama in general, many residents of Aleta Wondo work in the coffee plantations; however, they are not paid a livable wage, meaning that their income level is not sufficient to meet their basic needs (Common River, 2010). The majority of the residents, including the coffee farmers, rely on subsistence farming with the average land holding size per family at 0.25 hector (Common River, 2010). None of the inhabitants have access to drinkable water; as a result, 60% use unprotected springs as their water source, 20% unprotected river water, 19% unprotected wells and 1% unprotected ponds (Common River, 2010).

Titira is located approximately two kilometers from the Aleta Wondo administrative center. I have found little literature on Titira itself because most references include the kebele within information on Aleta Wondo. While data exist on neither income nor equality of opportunity in Titira, organizations working in the area noted that the majority of the population live in poverty and most residents lack access to basic health care, hygiene and sanitation and potable water (ACF, personal communication, May, 2013). Women in particular lack opportunities to increase their wellbeing. For instance, gender based violence is common; however, there are neither domestic nor internationally sponsored programs to address the issue (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013).

### **Case Study Questions and Intent**

In addition to recording the PD process and outcomes, this case study responds to my objective of addressing the gap in research and programing for all forms of child marriage. The case study serves to highlight a specific case that is relevant to the general case as a whole (Yin,

2009). By developing a holistic and nuanced portrait of child marriage by abduction in this particular context, this study contributes to the general knowledge base on child marriage.

The case study focuses on answering the following research questions:

- How have past Sidama marriage norms evolved?
- How does marriage by abduction occur?
- Which factors underpin marriage by abduction and create an environment that permits the practice?
- What are the PD behaviors and strategies that prevent early marriage by abduction?

I created these questions in light of the PD process because the PD intervention requires a holistic, nuanced and contextual understanding of the normative behaviors and the social structures that support those behaviors (Pascale et al., 2010). In comparison to its original and popular use in nutrition, many PD applications, including this application to child marriage by abduction, have been more daunting, with “the constellation of potential factors impacting the problem [being] less clear” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 44). The context created by the case study reduced challenges during PD application. This study serves as a multifaceted framework for my scholarly practice and supports the social change process by functioning as a situation analysis in the PD process.

## **Methodology**

I conducted this case study throughout the entire period of research, from June, 2013 to March, 2014. Had I undertaken a PD initiative outside of the academic context, I may not have included the in-depth interviews with the elderly members of the community. In this case study, these interviews serve to provide information on past marriage norms in order to facilitate a deeper, more nuanced understanding of current marriage practices through examination of their

evolution. Although this aspect of research may have been neglected under different circumstances, it remains a part of the PD process. When applying PD to new realms, such as this application to child marriage by abduction, the research should include as much information as possible on both the normative and deviant behaviors and what influences them (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 130). This case study serves to contextualize the PD intervention, which provides a framework for a deeper understanding of the PD process and outcomes. At the same time, this study demonstrates the way in which contextual information on PD application to child marriage by abduction supports the PD process, illuminating the possibility of applying the approach to other socially complex issues impacting the wellbeing of the girl child. Separate from PD, the more comprehensive information serves to situate child marriage by abduction within a larger historic, socioeconomic, political and cultural framework, which allows this case study to inform the general knowledge base on early marriage.

As described in detail in Chapter III on methodology, the data collection involved the findings from the participatory action research, secondary data sources, notes from meetings with professional colleagues working with child marriage in Ethiopia and/or on development projects in the Sidama Zone, notes from related conferences and workshops and notes from personal reflections taken during the research process. The numerous, diverse data sources substantiate and validate findings because the case study “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Together, the multiple sources of data verify outcomes and enable the study to reveal both the contextual nuances of child marriage by abduction and project general trends that make this study relevant to child marriage by abduction in general.

This case study is grounded in my interactions with the community, which included 12 large group conversations with a total of 57 participants, 4 small group discussions and 6 in-depth interviews and observations in both the private and public realms. This local foundation is important, as otherwise I would risk creating a context based on western assumptions because traditional western research creates “context in the mirror of Eurocentric Western epistemologies and realities” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 82). Framing this study around the participatory action research strengthened the indigenous voice around which I constructed this dissertation.

All in-depth interviews with older members of the community took place in their homes. Culturally, this is a respectful way to approach women of this generation. In addition to Workenesh, my local co-researcher, I was accompanied by Ashenafi, the midwife’s son and a well-known and unanimously liked member of the community. His presence further reinforced an atmosphere of trust. He and I are friends and our apparent comfort with each other increased the ease of the participants. Worknesh, Ashenafi and I were astonished by the consistency of the individual narratives. At one point Worknesh, who is not familiar with academic research, expressed the extent of the level of consistency, noting, “I’m worried about your research. Everyone is saying the same thing and you aren’t getting any new information” (personal communication, November, 2013). The information gathered from these interviews was collected individually; however, there were no pertinent discrepancies in the accounts.

I did not undertake in-depth interviews with younger women for this component of the study because the group discussion yielded abundant information. Since the interviews with the younger women occurred in a group setting, the women conducted member checks with each other as they spoke, verifying information and exploring and negotiating discrepancies before

reaching consensus. The process not only generated information, but contributed to the relationship building that is an integral part of the PD process.

### **Historic Context**

Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of marriage, this case study examines the evolution of marriage norms in Sidama as a means to understand the factors that underpin child marriage by abduction today. I decided to include past norms based on my questioning of how a context could develop in which it is acceptable to abduct a child with the intent of marriage. This understanding of context supports the PD process, in which “only by knowing the context - different from what - is it possible to differentiate PD practices from the norm” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 28). The present represents an evolution of the past; however, at the same time I acknowledge that “history is also about power. In fact, history is mostly about power” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 34). I do not attempt to understand history as an ideology in this section, as here the historic context serves as part of a situation analysis within which the discourse of my participants can be understood and explored. In this study, I created the historic context in response to my participants’ worldview. I do not critique their understanding, as “problematizing the indigenous is a Western obsession” with which, due to both my commitment to indigenized research and my own ethics, I do not want to engage (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 91).

As reflective individuals living in a culture that promotes philosophical inquiry through a connection with the earth, my participants articulated a correlation between the various regimes and the evolution of their collective social norms and values. The Sidama live “remote and off the beaten track, avoiding much of the political turmoil” that has taken place in more populated areas of the country (Sillan, 2013, p. 9). Their conceptualization of history revolves around the correlation between the leaders, who represent the respective political ideology and government,

and their daily lives. Following their direction, this brief historic overview serves only to provide reference for the following segments on the evolution of marriage norms, which makes reference to the specific governments.

My participants categorize their lives and conceptualize social norms according to the three different governments in recent Ethiopian history: the Ethiopian Empire under Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), the Communist Government under Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1987) and the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi (1991-2012). Although Meles died in 2012, my participants continue to refer to the current government as Meles. They recognize the current leadership as indistinguishable from that of Meles because the change of prime minister has had no impact on their lives. In an effort to honor their worldview, I use this terminology in this case study, referring to time periods according to the associated ruler. I acknowledge that my use of this terminology is unconventional; however, I remain cognizant of the marginalization of indigenous perspectives through language (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 20). Instead of denying their understanding of reality by overriding their terms, I am incorporating their worldview into western research in order to indigenize this work.

In terms of personal history, birthdays, including birth years, have no value in Sidama. The Sidama calendar is not the same as the national calendar of Ethiopia; as such, documentation of dates must be translated. Further, Ethiopia uses the Julian calendar whereas the West uses the Gregorian calendar, necessitating a third translation of dates in order to conceptualize time for a western audience. The layers of translation often cause inaccuracy. Further, in this study I worked with an illiterate population who lacked all identification documentation, including birth certificates. Birth dates, and therefore ages, are neither recorded nor known. Estimating the age

of my participants would impose my western perception of reality on a people who do not value numerical age. At the same time, this study focuses on child marriage, necessitating knowledge of marriage age. To resolve this tension, I followed the ways in which this community conceptualizes time and, in terms of the age of girls, began to understand age as marked by level of physical and emotional maturity along with the mothers' best calculation of how many harvests had passed since the daughters' births. Although not ideal through a western framework, indigenized research prioritizes "a cultural group's ways of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and the value systems that inform research processes" (Chilisa, 2012, p.13). This way of perceiving reality is reflected throughout this study.

**Ethiopia under Haile Selassie.** The Sidama had been a formal part of the Ethiopian Empire since the 1880s (Sillan, 2013, p. 9). Since this time, the Empire sent administrators from the northern Amhara ethnic group to Sidama; however, originally these administrators served more to ensure geographic unity of Ethiopia, with the southern border creating a buffer against colonial interests, than to impact social change (Hamer, 2007). Further, federal authorities, including military and police, were located in the towns and had a limited presence in rural areas; consequently, indigenous authorities and systems, which were based on the governance of elders, continued to develop and implement local policies separate from the federal system (Hamer, 2002, p. 605).

The modern Ethiopian Empire began in 1137 and ended in a revolution in 1974. In this study, I focus on the influence of the Ethiopian Empire under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, who reigned from 1930 until 1974. This focus emerged from my participants, none of whom were born prior to Haile Selassie's reign. Further, all participants referred to the period as "Haile Selassie's time," emphasizing their experience within a specific time and context. They

characterized this period as one in which indigenous Sidama traditions governed life, despite the increasing presence of other Ethiopians as well as foreigners.

Haile Selassie continued to rule a monarchy; however, his reign brought unprecedented changes to the Empire (Vadala, 2008). He was advised by a cabinet of ministers and the crown council, with the cabinet of ministers being comprised of persons “from humble backgrounds, but had pursued higher education in prestigious Western universities” (p. 642). Further, he instituted a national constitution in 1955, creating a nascent parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy. Consequently, Haile Selassie invited local leaders, in the case of the Sidama the male elders, to represent their respective peoples (p. 213). These appointed elders became responsible for tax collection and the establishment of a small claims court (p. 213). This court sought to replace the traditional elder counsel and aimed to serve as a bridge between indigenous and federal systems. Nonetheless, there was a “gap between the Western-style central government system and the Sidamo way of life” (p. 213). Ultimately, many Sidama attempted to settle matters outside of court to avoid “entanglements” with the federal court system (p. 213).

Valuing the western model of education, in the 1950s and 1960s Haile Selassie invited foreigners to Ethiopia to establish schools and work as teachers. Some foreigners came on secular missions. For example, beginning in 1962 the US Peace Corps sent hundreds of volunteers to Ethiopia (Guskin, personal communication, May, 2014). At the same time, evangelical Protestant missions came to Ethiopia and were permitted to proselytize in exchange for providing free education to the rural populations (Hamer, 2002). Many missionaries settled in Sidama; however, by the 1970s only a small minority of the Sidama had converted to Protestant Christianity despite widespread conversion efforts by three different Protestant churches (Hamer,

2002). While the increased connections to federal administration and presence of foreigners inevitably impacted society, indigenous social norms and traditions remained firmly intact.

**Ethiopia under the Mengistu Haile Mariam.** Following discontent among students with Haile Selassie's leadership, the 1974 revolution abolished the monarchy and ushered in the communist Derg government. Formally called the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army, the Derg governing committee was comprised of representatives from the forty units of the Ethiopian military forces. The Derg was "essentially a military junta that proclaimed itself Marxist-Leninist" (Vadala, 2008, p. 644). Mengistu Haile Mariam, simply referred to as Mengistu, served as the head of state throughout the duration of the Derg. His leadership included the orchestration of the Red Terror, a violent political campaign that took place between 1977 and 1978 and resulted in the genocide of approximately 300,000 to 500,000 individuals.

While the Sidama remained removed from geographic centers of political activity, the centralization of the state impacted Sidama society. The Derg aimed to "create a more egalitarian society in terms of class" (Vadala, 2008, p. 651). Simultaneously, the regime attempted to secularize Ethiopia and centralize Ethiopian politics (Hamer, 2007, p. 215). The government nationalized land, finance and foreign and local businesses and eliminated all political opponents (Vadala, 2008, p. 644). In Aleta Wondo, Sidama members of the Derg party oversaw these changes, aiding in the arrest of those who resisted (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013). By the 1980s, "peasants everywhere were complaining they had lost control over local affairs" (Hamer, 2007, p. 215). Still, the focal point of change remained political and economic. Derg policy had little impact on marriage norms among the rural Sidama because they maintained their traditional social structures, including the elders (Hamer, 2007).

The Derg did not expel the missionaries in Sidama because the missionaries focused on the government's priority of education (Hamer, 2007). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, more Sidama did convert to Protestantism; however, the collective sense of Sidama identity overrode changes in religion and "converts did not set themselves obtrusively apart from the majority in their everyday style of living" (Hamer, 2002, p. 619). Further, the Derg government became increasingly concerned with political engagement among the rural population and changes in social behavior could have been interpreted as anti-government (Tsegaye Bekele, personal communication, June 2013). While shifts in attitude may have been occurring internally, behavior and practice in regard to marriage norms remained similar as under Haile Selassie.

**Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi.** In 1991, the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, which was led by Meles Zenawi, came to power and established a parliamentary democracy. This government, simply referred to as Meles by my participants, installed a free-market economy based on the western capitalist economic system. This government brought, and continues to bring, unprecedented social changes to Ethiopia, including fundamental changes in marriage norms.

All participants affirmed that life has changed drastically since 1991, and the literature suggests a radical turn from indigenous systems to western-influenced structures. Side Goodo, a prominent Sidama political writer, wrote that since 1991, "the Sidama region has deteriorated from self-sustained traditional economic system into an economic disaster where hunger and famine have become order of the day" (Goodo, 2007, section II, para 3). For instance, the majority of the residents of Titira work in the coffee plantations, but they do not earn livable wages and live below the poverty line (Common River, 2010). As a result of their daily engagement with coffee farming, they have less time to allocate toward their own subsistence

farming, reducing both the quality and quantity of their harvests. The lack of a livable wage coupled with reduced harvests results in reoccurring cycles of food insecurity; however, living in a capitalist culture that values productivity, the community remains committed to the plantations despite their awareness of its unprofitable demands on their time (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013). Although historically the Sidama have been subsistence farmers, the food insecurity ushers in a new dimension of poverty.

Since the fall of the Derg, many Sidama converted to Protestant Christianity and today only 15% practice traditional beliefs (Sillan, 2013, p. 9). In Titira, the majority of the members of the lowest socio-economic class are Protestant (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013). This large scale conversion aligns with capitalism, as “the new doctrine of Christianity implied that people could be made equal by earning and possessing money” (Hamer, 2002, p. 614). The Protestant work ethic and moral code focus on the individual and what he/she achieves, corresponds with the new socio-economic values of the country (Hamer, 2002). According to all female participants who married during the governments of Haile Selassie and Mengistu, marriage norms changed drastically under the current regime. The women explained that society has embraced the concept of individual freedom, and the traditional marriage norms, which centered on arranged marriages, are now considered too rigid to fit in the modern framework. “Under Haile Selassie and Mengistu,” one participant explained, “we had no freedom, only our traditions. Today, we have freedom, which means that we have no traditions” (personal communication, November, 2013). As Ethiopia transitioned into a western-style parliamentary democracy and capitalist economic system, these traditional marriage structures disappeared.

## **Halalu**

Halalu is a reoccurring concept throughout these three time periods. The Sidama practiced traditional, indigenous beliefs until the 1960s (Sillan, 2013, p. 9). These beliefs are tightly connected with a moral code, halalu, which was prescribed by God, called Magano (Hamer, 1996, p. 526). The moral code is a set of principles that focuses on fairness and harmony, and these principles are understood in context as interpreted by elders (Hamer, 1996, p. 528). Today, only 15% of Sidama practice traditional beliefs, with the rest practicing Christianity or Islam (Sillan, 2013, p. 9). Yet, despite the fact that the majority of Sidama do not ascribe to their traditional beliefs, the moral code remains embedded into Sidama society because halalu is “a set of principles that all are aware of” and that “directly or indirectly influences all people” regardless of religious affiliation (Hamer, 1996, p. 528). Although a spiritual concept, halalu provides the basis for social behavior, as “Sidama believe that they will flourish so long as they are obedient in conforming to the rules of the agreement with Magano, who told them that survival is contingent upon following the code of Halalu” (p. 601). Despite diverse religious practices, this concept is central to the Sidama worldview (2003).

The centrality of halalu in Sidama society does not protect halalu from tensions caused by the intersection of an ancient worldview and modern thought. The tension arises from “clashes with state laws of retribution and recent Protestant Christian principles of morality” (Hamer, 1996, p. 528). For instance, according to halalu guilt and punishment are secondary to “fair compensation and the restoration of harmony” because the cohesion of the community is one of its highest priorities (Hamer, 1996, p. 529). The approach focuses on restorative justice through mediation of elders in order to repair harm done by a crime (Hamer, 1996). For instance, justice in halalu often includes the public admitting of a wrong and the payment of a sum to the person

against whom the crime was committed, after which the parties are expected to forgive one another and move forward in peace (Hamer, 1996). If the guilty party does not admit to the crime and therefore does not provide retribution, historically the elders would curse the individual as well as his/her family and cattle by saying that “halalu and Magano will follow you” (Hamer, 1996, p. 529). Further negative reaction, for instance denying the significance of the curse, may be seen as rejecting halalu, which would lead to complete ostracism from society, meaning that “others will not eat with, work with, touch, or enter the dwelling of the recalcitrant” (p. 529). This worldview is in conflict with individualistic western Protestant values, which may interpret the financial compensation as a bribe and reject the concept of a curse (p. 529). This also conflicts with the federal penal system, which uses incarceration as the primary form of justice (p. 529). Given this conflict with traditional views on justice, many Sidama find it difficult to turn to secular and religious institutions for conflict mediation because these systems risk further disruption of communal harmony.

### **Evolution of Marriage Norms**

This section serves to illuminate past and present marriage norms in order to create a nuanced, holistic understanding of the context in which child marriage by abduction occurs. Bride price, FGM, and marriage age are marriage norms that contribute to the conceptual framework of child marriage by abduction. These topics emerged from my field research and inform key findings of this case study. The participants identified these norms and their evolution within the context of their own marriage as well as that of their immediate family members.

**Bride price.** Since the 9th century, the Sidama have used symbols of value in exchange for goods (Hamer, 2009). Specifically, the currency at the time was comprised of iron bars and

value depended on the shape of the bar (Hamer, 2009). Concurrently, the barter system also existed, with women exchanging coffee at markets in exchange for butter, milk and false banana with women from other ethnic groups (Hamer, 2009). In the 1940s, coffee, which had always grown wild in the Sidama Zone, became a cash crop (Hamer, 2009). By the 1960s coffee had become a major Ethiopian export item, and the Sidama were using western style currency in all aspects of life (Hamer, 2009).

Despite this turn toward currency, the bride price continued to be paid in livestock, with the groom's family providing one or more cows to the family of the bride (Hamer, 2007). Until the downfall of the Derg regime, the bride price was negotiated by a representative of the groom's family, typically the groom's father or eldest brother, and the father of the bride. The bride price served as a symbol to unite the two families, with the calf (or one of the calves depending on the amount of cattle given) being slaughtered at some point during the engagement or wedding celebrations. The groom's family provided some inheritance to the groom, which usually took the form of land sharing.

The Sidama can be characterized as an agrarian society and "in agrarian societies, marriage is an event of deep economic importance" (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2005, p. 387). Historically, the economic importance had little to do with the bride price and instead centered on the development of a new unit, a family, to produce a livelihood (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2005). There was low intergenerational mobility in Ethiopian society, meaning that individuals typically did not marry outside of their socio-economic class (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2005). As such, the bride price was not intended to change economic status, as the marital union itself intended to secure the livelihood of the couple while alleviating economic pressures of their parents through their children's independence. The fact that the bride price

continued to be paid in cattle despite the currency-based economy demonstrates that the bride price served as a symbol and not a payment because the Sidama slaughter calves at most major important life events (Hamer, 1996).

After the downfall of the Derg regime and movement into the new capitalist economic system, the bride price transitioned from a symbolic gift of cattle to a specific amount of cash (Hamer, 2007). This change altered how negotiations over brides occurred, as the interactions transitioned from a symbolic, playful discussion to one of great earnestness. This transition occurred because the currency led to the commodification of the bride. Formerly, the economic benefit of marriage was comprised of a new familial unit of livelihood production; however, a cash exchange alters the economic implications because, for the family of the bride, marriage now “provides some economic reward through the bride-price that they receive” (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009, p. 7). Among populations living in poverty, bride price can provide additional income during hardships (Population Council, 2004, p. 1). Since bride price, in one form or the other, is traditional among the Sidama, the practice is deeply engrained into the rituals around marriage.

**Female genital mutilation.** FGM is a traditional practice among the Sidama. The Sidama practice what the Who Health Organization (WHO) classifies as Type II circumcision, which is defined as “partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora” (UNOHCHR et al., 2008, p. 4). Among the women I interviewed, all had undergone Type II circumcision prior to their marriage. Although my search of the literature indicated no reliable data on female circumcision in Aleta Wondo, I have found information on prevalence of the practice in other areas of Sidama. Specifically, 53.4% of girls and women

between the ages of 12-14 in Dale are circumcised, 67.1% in Hawassa town and 63.7% in Hawassa Zuria (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 16).

All participants who were circumcised since the government change in 1994 conferred that their circumcision served to mark their status as married. This indicator of marriage likely corresponds with the Population Council and UNFPA's finding that the primary reason for circumcision is cultural (2010, p. 16). One woman explained that circumcision functions to allow men to "mark what is theirs" (personal communication, November, 2013). Further, a circumcised woman may be unable to marry, as the circumcision symbolizes loss of virginity. Further, if a woman is not obedient to her husband, the husband may ask a female member of his family to "cut off some more" in order to make her "more docile" (personal communication, November, 2013). While the women acknowledge that the men rarely act on this threat, they admit that they are intimidated by the concept of undergoing further cutting.

All women who had been circumcised clearly stated that they did not approve of the practice. Some articulated the suffering surrounding FGM, recalling the physical and emotional trauma, whereas one woman described childbirth difficulties that occurred as a result of her circumcision. The midwife specifically noted that circumcision must be performed "correctly" in order to ensure that the procedure does not have negative implications for childbirth (personal communication, June, 2013). Describing their circumcision, the women noted that it occurred "days before marriage," leading to trauma during intercourse and, in some cases, infection (personal communication, November, 2013). Approximately 1/3 of these young participants said that the circumcision was performed either by their future mother-in-law or another female member of their future husband's family. They used words such as violent, painful, loveless and cruel to describe the procedure. The other women declined comment, which may suggest that

their circumcision was performed by men in the context of abduction because it is considered dishonorable and shameful for the woman if a man performs her circumcision. All women directly stated that they do not want their daughters to undergo circumcision; however, they simultaneously believe that their daughters will be unable to marry without being circumcised, as FGM is a Sidama tradition that is tightly interwoven with marriage. The women acknowledged that FGM is illegal under Ethiopian law and that public and private schools speak against the practice; however, the prevalence of circumcision indicates that the law against FGM is ineffective.

As currently practiced, FGM among the Sidama corresponds with the UN's definition of an HTP in that it is a traditional practice that serves to promote patriarchal control over women; however, traditionally circumcision had a different meaning. The midwife compared the traditional circumcision with the modern version, noting that a "sacred rite of passage" had evolved into "something cruel" (personal communication, June, 2013). The women who were circumcised under Haile Selassie as well as most who were circumcised under Mengistu described a different process as well as a different rationale for FGM. The descriptions of all 57 women were identical.

Traditionally, circumcision occurred 3 to 6 months before marriage, which provided a timeframe for physical and psychological healing in contrast to the current norm in which marriage occurs within several days after FGM. As currently practiced, the future mother-in-law or another woman from the future husband's family performs the circumcision; however, the culture surrounding the process and its aftermath are drastically different than in the past. Traditionally, on the day of the circumcision, the future mother-in-law along with a trusted female friend arrive at the future bride's home. The future bride is dressed in distinctive, fine

clothes that were made by her mother. The future bride returns to the home of the mother-of-law along with the mother-in-law's friend. There are no men present because all men must leave the property before the circumcision. The future mother-in-law performs the circumcision while the trusted friend holds the girl and covers her eyes with her hand or a cloth. After the circumcision, the mother-in-law and friend feed the future bride the finest foods, including a freshly slaughtered calf. They bathe her in water mixed with oil, wash and braid her hair, sing to her and attend to her pain and her wound with traditional medicines. This continues until she is healed, which normally occurs during that 3-6 month period. During this time, women from the community come to the home with gifts for the future bride, welcoming her into their circle of adulthood. No men are allowed in the home, as this is a time for female bonding in recognition of the importance of a loving, supportive transition from childhood to adulthood.

Although the women who had undergone FGM in recent years used negative adjectives to describe their circumcision, the older women used positive words and phrases such as loving, sentimental, special and important. When asked if they felt the same about the current practice of FGM, all women reacted harshly, with some of the slightly older women specifically noting that the practice today is separate from the tradition. The younger women were surprised to learn of the traditional means of circumcision, as this topic has become taboo and is not discussed. One woman explained that FGM has evolved into a symbol of control over women and their sexuality; however, she argued that traditionally FGM served to welcome women into a community of peers. Several older women noted that, under Haile Selassie as well as under Mengistu, men were circumcised. The literature indicates that male circumcision occurred upon initiation as an elder (Hamer, 1996, p. 537). Whereas all married women were circumcised, only a select group of men underwent the procedure. Nonetheless, the older women drew parallels

between male and female circumcision, noting that the traditional practice did not reflect patriarchal dominance due to the fact that it was not limited to women.

**Marriage age.** In my search of the literature I have found no reliable information on the average age of marriage during the periods of the Ethiopian Empire under Haile Selassie and the Derg. All participants who married during these time periods described an identical timeframe for marriage; however, since ages are not recorded in Sidama, I was unable to receive a direct statement on approximate age. Marriage preparation began when a girl entered puberty, which was identified by the beginning of breast development. Prior to this point, girls kept their hair cut short and at this time, a girl would begin to grow her hair. Once her hair reached her chin in length, her mother wove red and white ribbons into it, indicating that she had entered a timeframe in which she could become engaged; however, she would not become engaged until her mother felt that she was able to both manage a household and engage in a relationship. Once engaged, there was a waiting period between engagement and circumcision that lasted approximately one to two additional years. The wedding took place approximately three months after circumcision. Based on this information, Workenesh and I calculated that marriage took place between the ages of 15.5 years and 18 years of age. We presented this information back to Common River CEO Tsegaye Bekele, who agreed that this was the approximate age of marriage. Remaining sensitive to the lack of understanding of age, we did not feed this information back to the participants.

Since the 1991 Revolution, marriage age has decreased. While the Sidama do not keep any record of ages, the traditional system of marriage preparation created a timeframe in which marriage occurred. This system no longer exists among the Sidama, which has resulted in the lowering of the marriage age. All of my older participants agree that the average marriage age

now is years lower than in previous years, as girls typically marry shortly after the onset of puberty whereas the younger women were not knowledgeable enough on past marriage norms to provide an opinion. All women acknowledge that the girls are too young to marry; however, the father makes decisions regarding marriage without the consent, and often without the knowledge, of the mothers.

Data on marriage age exists; however, since none of my participants were certain of their age, I have reservations regarding the accuracy of the available data. Further, much of the information on average marriage age conflicts with information gathered by Common River. For instance, the Population Council reports that only 1% of girls below the age of 18 were married in the surveyed areas of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia, which included areas of Sidama though neither Aleta Wondo nor Titira (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 21). This conflicts with the experience of Common River, which indicates that many of the girls in Titira are married. Although ages are approximate, Common River finds that most girls are married before they reach adulthood. The published data "doesn't reflect reality on the ground" (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013). "The people here, they don't know how to answer when someone comes around and asks ages and dates. They don't want to cause problems, so they just say what they think they should say" (Bekele, personal communication, November, 2013). This willingness to gratify corresponds with *halalu*, in which harmony takes precedence over accuracy (Hamer, 1996). Further, the Population Council data were not segregated by economic level, and child marriage occurs among the poorest 20% of the population, which are the people with whom Common River and I are working (UNICEF, 2005, p. 5).

### **Dirra (Abduction)**

The most consequential piece of this study is the evolution of the practice of child marriage by abduction, which is called dirra in Sidama. As Ethiopia transitioned to a western parliamentary democracy and capitalist economic system, traditions and indigenous belief systems shifted abruptly and unnaturally. Ultimately, this change created an enabling environment in which abduction has become a common marriage practice in this community: every individual participant whom I interviewed knew at least one person who had been abducted for marriage at some point during the past year. In order to contextualize the modern practice, I first present the historic process of abduction, followed by a detailed description of the practice today.

**During the governments of Haile Selassie and Mengistu.** The women who married during the governments of Haile Selassie and Mengistu acknowledged the historic presence of abduction; however, they all agreed that both the practice and the community's response to the practice have evolved significantly. Traditionally, abduction was an uncommon practice in which a young man physically kidnapped an adolescent. Specifically, such men sought after girls who wore the white and red ribbon in their hair, which, based on descriptions from the participants, indicates that the girl was between the ages of 14 and 17. The abductor would then arrange for a female member of his family to circumcise her. Normally the abductor did not rape her to consummate the marriage because FGM served to indicate the marriage had occurred. The primary motivation for abduction was social mobility: men who abducted tended to be those from lower tribes within the Sidama ethnic group who wanted to marry into a higher tribe.

When a girl was abducted, her parents were unable to retrieve her because FGM marked her as married. Nonetheless, the community viewed abduction as the breaking of halalu,

disrupting both familial and communal harmony. The father of the girl would report the abduction to the council of elders, who would then seek restorative justice by compelling the abductor to admit his wrongdoing. After he admitted the abduction, the elders would decide how he could compensate the family of the girl for the loss of their daughter, which often included a conversation as to how he would treat the daughter as his wife. The specific agreements depended on the particular situation, as with halalu “meaning varies with context” (Hamer, 1996, p. 528). The girl had no agency in the process, as her father represented her interests to the elders just as he would have represented her interests to potential suitors had she not been abducted.

In many cases, the man would either refuse to admit that he had abducted the girl or attempt to rationalize his action. In such cases, the parents would be able to get the girl back as the abductor was incriminating himself by opposing halalu and defying the elders; however, she would likely not be able to marry since she had already been circumcised. The elders may have made arrangements for her, perhaps negotiating with widowers or men willing to take a second wife. Alternatively, she would have lived with her parents.

Both denial and rationalization are contrary to halalu (Hamer, 1996, p. 529). If the abductor refused to cooperate with the elders in an attempt to restore community harmony, the elders would curse him and his family. By saying, “halalu and Magano will follow you,” the elders “evoke the moral code and its creator, which it is believed will ultimately lead to disaster for a suspected malefactor, his family, and cattle” (p. 529). If he would continue to refuse to collaborate in restoration of harmony, he would be shunned by the community. One participant recalled that, during the period of Haile Selassie, the home of an abductor was burnt down by the community. They refused to acknowledge his property because he no longer existed to them.

“He was dead to us,” the elderly woman explained, “the dead have no use for a home” (personal communication, November, 2013).

The parents almost always reported abductions to the elders as a disruption of familial and community harmony and the elders are obliged by the *halalu* to work to restore this harmony (Hamer, 1996). Abduction occurred often enough that the community was aware of the repercussions. All participants who married during the governments of Haile Selassie and Mengistu believed that this awareness reduced the instances of abduction because the act neither guaranteed marriage nor the desired social mobility. Instead, abduction was widely recognized as disruption of harmony that would only be considered a marriage after restorative justice occurred.

**Abduction today.** In my search of the literature I have found few reports that mention child marriage by abduction. In my interactions with professional colleagues, none expressed any in-depth knowledge of the issue. In a session on very young adolescents at the International Family Planning Conference in November, 2013, Save the Children US demonstrated lack of awareness of the prevalence of the practice, noting that “in the field [in Ethiopia] all girls are so afraid of this abduction. But really, what is the chance of it actually happening?” (personal communication, November, 2013). In the surveyed areas of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region of Ethiopia, 13% of girls and women reported being married by abduction (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 21). This survey, which included neither Aleta Wondo nor Titira, was not segregated by socio-economic class. Given the correlation between all forms of child marriage and the poorest 20% of populations, this information may not indicate the prevalence among the community of this study (UNICEF, 2005, p. 5). As a result, the

information suggests a presence of abduction in the general geographic area; however, the data are not indicative of the frequency in Sidama or, more specifically, Aleta Wondo or Titira.

Abduction entails a specific process. The abductor himself does not kidnap the girl; instead, he orchestrates the capture with a group of approximately three to seven male relatives and friends. This collective act serves to protect the abductor by removing him from the physical act of taking the girl, ultimately blurring evidence of abduction. After identifying the girl he intends to kidnap, the abductor instructs one of his relatives/friends to lure her into a predetermined, remote location. Typically, this man entices the girl with the promise of coca cola, which is considered a luxury drink that the girl has likely never had. Once the girl arrives at the given location, the abductor appears and taps her on her shoulder, confirming that this is the girl he selected. The group then physically kidnaps her, taking her to the home of the abductor or another discreet private location, such as the home of one of the members of the group.

Circumcision and rape are central to abduction. Previously, FGM was viewed as a rite of passage that exclusively involved girls and women. Even in cases of abduction, the circumcision was not performed by a man. Today, often the men who abduct the girl circumcise her themselves. My participants indicated that the men perform the act because they want to keep the abduction hidden and do not want to risk involving another party, especially a woman.

Circumcision performed by a man is shocking and counters the traditional norms. The practice has transitioned from a method of female bonding, one which ran parallel to the male bonding that occurred during male circumcision at initiation to elder, to a means of male control over the female body. The exclusively female rite of passage has become a “manifestation of gender inequality that is deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures” (UNOHCHR et al., 2008, p. 5).

The circumcision and rape both occur immediately, as FGM remains a physical marker of marriage that prevents the return of the girl to her family. Further, rape serves as a modern expression of power, reinforcing male control over the female body. The participants differentiate modern abduction from traditional abduction because the differences among the two, which include the process of abduction, circumcision, rape and the number of people involved, are fundamental. Given this differentiation, I asked the collective large group the word for this new form of abduction. After a period of silence, one woman replied that no word exists for modern abduction because, “no one ever talks about it. You can’t have a word for something you don’t say” (personal communication, November, 2013).

Prior to the period of the current government, abduction was handled according to halalu. This sophisticated indigenous system for managing civil disputes and wrongdoings has been undermined by both the various religious and secular state worldviews on punitive justice, leaving the Sidama caught at the intersection of a traditional worldview and modern influences. This causes a conflict for families whose daughter has been abducted. “If we report an abductor,” one woman said hypothetically, “we would further disrupt [the harmony of] the community. Then we would be cursed” (personal communication, November, 2013). The curse that, traditionally, would fall upon the abductor and hence mitigate future abductions now falls upon the victim’s family. This occurs because the indigenous worldview intersects with the western system of punitive justice. As a result, the parents of the victim as well as the child bride herself find themselves paralyzed: if they report the abductor, they will cause a greater disruption of harmony, bringing a curse upon themselves because community cohesion and harmony are valued above all else (Hamer, 1996, p. 529). Further, the participants lack trust in the local courts and justice system, as they do not feel that justice will be served by reporting the abduction. As a

result, the belief is that the courts are useless and, even if they were not, the halalu curse would fall upon them if they reported the abduction.

### **Positive Deviance Process and Outcomes**

As discussed in Chapter III, the PD process is composed of four basic steps that result in “community mobilization and ownership, discovery of existing solutions, creation of new networks, and emergence of new solutions as a result of community initiatives” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 2). Although the PD process is malleable, it is important for the four specific stages of the process to remain distinct and not be collapsed (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 155). In this study, I focused on maintaining the distinction of these steps, actually implementing the four steps during four separate periods of time. Remaining consistent with the structure of the PD process, I present the results within the context of these four phases. Although these components remained distinct, PD is an iterative process that required me to return to previous steps as new information emerged throughout the course of the application.

This cyclical nature creates difficulties in constructing a linear timeline of the process; thus, I do not present these steps within a temporal framework. My direct facilitation of the process took place over four approximately one week trips to Titira in June, 2013, October, 2013, and December, 2013. As with group conversations and interviews, feedback conversations with knowledgeable collaborators occurred throughout the process. I spoke with Common River CEO Tsegaye Bekele repeatedly while in Titira, as he both provided information and served as a trusted source for member checking. I spoke with Common River Program Director Donna Sillan in January, 2014 and PD co-founder Monique Sternin in March, 2013. In addition, in January, 2014, I conducted an interview with Ellin Krinsky, who has undertaken research on

traditional storytelling among the Sidama and was able to help me to understand the results that involved use of stories.

### **PD Process Step One: Reframing and Defining the Problem**

Child marriage by abduction is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon whose nuances emerged throughout the entire period of research. Having no word to define the practice, the reframing and defining of the problem proved complex. Distinct from dirra, which refers to a more traditional act of kidnapping, child marriage by abduction among the Sidama involves an interplay of coercion, physical force, FGM and rape. As a result, my co-researcher, Workenesh, and I reframed the problem during the pilot stage, but, given the absence of concrete language, we continued to define and refine the nuances of the practice until we established a concrete definition that was affirmed by all 57 local participants. I included a discussion of the pilot phase of the research in Chapter III because the initial study underpins the design of the dissertation; however, this step extended beyond the pilot. Collectively, step one entailed the reframing of the problem child marriage to child marriage by abduction, defining child marriage by abduction and illuminating the associated risk factors.

As described in-depth in Chapter III, during my pilot research the initial 45 participants reframed the problem from child marriage to child marriage by abduction. Continuing from this point, I included an additional 12 community members to expand upon the nascent definition. The focus on the definition was important because there is little scholarship on child marriage by abduction in this area. I expanded upon this definition in Chapter IV within the context of the case study. Here I elaborate on the process from which this definition emerged.

Workenesh and I facilitated two large group discussions of a total of 48 individuals and two small group interviews of twelve people in order to develop a description of child marriage

by abduction. Both the large and small group discussions took place at Common River. This location is significant because Common River is perhaps the only place in Titira where the women feel free to speak honestly without negative repercussions. The organization provides literacy and other programming to the women who have never before had a structured opportunity to learn with their peers. Given that literacy is interwoven with issues of power, agency and education, the participants find the location itself empowering. “This place,” one participant explained, “is the only place where we are free” (personal communication, June, 2013). Just off the main road and nestled among lush enset trees, Common River provided a safe, familiar and comfortable environment. “This is the only place where I can talk and be taken seriously,” one woman explained (personal communication, June, 2013). Another noted that, “it is OK to discuss private things here because I trust this place and everyone who comes here” (personal communication, June, 2013).

Since it was raining heavily, these conversations took place inside of the Common River classroom. Having thoroughly prepared Workenesh, I encouraged her to lead the discussion because, as an outsider, I wanted to blend into the background to the extent possible. Workenesh stood in front of the group whereas I sat down among the women. While Workenesh translated, the women would often talk among themselves, generating ideas completely on their own. After Workenesh and I finished our communication, the women would often share the ideas that they generated during these private conversations with the large group. This self-initiated discussion was important in that it confirmed the group’s interest in the topic.

In addition to these group conversations, we discussed the practice in the individual in-depth interviews with all seven of the older women. These in-depth interviews took place in their homes, as my participants were older women who tend not to go out unless necessary. Five

conversations took place in the living area of the home and two conversations took place under a tree outside. In all interviews, the atmosphere was casual, as the women are accustomed to visitors. In addition to Workenesh, the midwife's son, Ashenafi, accompanied me to the homes. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, he often did not stay to participate in the discussion; however, his initial presence and introduction served to reassure the women that I was someone whom they could trust. The interviews served to contextualize marriage by abduction, situating the practice within a complex adaptive system.

In the large group discussions, focus group conversations and individual interviews, we used a semi-structured interview. While we maintained the goal of developing an understanding of child marriage by abduction, we allowed the participants to explore the topic according to the ways in which they understood reality. Often, this discussion was direct and succinct; at other times the participants spoke metaphorically and came to conclusions through a more circular thought process. This freedom allowed the women to describe a complex, controversial and sensitive issue without being restricted to a specific format. This participant-centered structure allowed Workenesh and me to develop more sensitive, effective and contextualized follow up questions.

The participants consistently described child marriage by abduction. After two days of intense discussions, I noted in my journal that:

If consistency serves to validate findings, the description of child marriage by abduction is unquestionably sound. There were no inconsistencies in any descriptions. It was like the participants were all describing something that they each experienced or witnessed firsthand. It was exciting, but at the same time it was rattling. How tragic that they know this practice so well. (November, 2013)

Although there were variations in descriptions, the differences demonstrate that, while the specific details of abduction may differ, the general process of abduction is universal. For

instance, in some cases the girl may be told that she is going to receive a type of soft drink whereas in other cases she may be promised candy or told she is being taken to a party. Despite the variances in nuances, use of an incentive remains universal.

We did not develop a single word definition for the practice because the community uses descriptive terminology. The modern form of abduction is understood as the secret, forceful marriage of very young adolescent girls to older men that occurs through a combination of coercion, enticement and kidnapping by a group. The marriage is marked by circumcision and rape and due to the tension among traditional law, secular law and western values, is not reversible.

Once this definition was established, I sought to “generate data that measures the magnitude of the problem” through “discussions with various groups in the community to learn about common practices and normative behaviors” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 6). As elaborated upon in the case study, child marriage by abduction is a common practice among the poorest population. Of the total 57 participants, every individual knew one or more girls who had been abducted for marriage in the last year. In line with existing research, these girls came from poor households and had either little or no schooling. This information may not be indicative of the prevalence of the practice because this is a small community in which most residents know one another. In order to develop a clearer understanding, I intended to ask which households had a girl who was abducted in the past year in an effort to produce community-generated data on abduction as a form of community mapping. In PD application to trafficking in Indonesia, this step enabled the community to understand the extent of the problem while simultaneously serving to indigenize the research process (Singhal & Dura, 2008). I planned to triangulate this data with the testimony of the participants and the existing research on the intersection of

poverty and child marriage; however, this question was problematic because many of the households formed out of abduction. For the men who had abducted their wives, this question posed a threat to their wellbeing because the community is aware that abduction is illegal. For the girls and women who were abducted as well as their natal families, this question evoked feelings of shame, fear and guilt. As a result, the risks of harm outweighed the benefit and I abandoned my plans to collect these data.

As an alternative to community mapping, I asked each woman directly if a member of her natal family had been abducted. I did not ask the participant to identify their relationship to that family member and I specified that natal family could include mother, sister, or self. I did not ask the men because the female participants did not feel that they would be truthful. Of the 57 of women, 36, which is approximately 63%, stated that a member of their natal family was abducted.

In PD as well as in participatory research in general, the community reviews data to “measure the magnitude of the problem” (Tufts University, 2010, p. 7). Rather than having an exclusive feedback session, I provided the information to the participants in stages as it was collected. I made this decision in light of the nature of our discussions, in which child marriage was embedded in interlocking conversations on FGM, relations among husbands and wives, poverty, education and religion. As a result, I presented feedback within these conversations. Although the participants remained engaged, they were not particularly interested in what I had learned because I was not presenting new information to them. One young woman explained during a large group discussion that “it [child marriage by abduction] is everywhere. Do we need to talk about the sky? If the sky was falling, we won’t talk about what it looks like. Just how to hold it up.” This perspective on abduction corresponds with PD application to curtail FGM in

Egypt, where the practice was so widespread and accepted that awareness creation was unnecessary (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 56). This perspective validates the prevalence of the practice and, equally importantly, the desire to end it.

### **PD Process Step Two: The Community Determines the Presence of Positive Deviant Individuals/Groups**

After we had developed a nuanced understanding of child marriage by abduction, we began to conceptualize a PD girl. I did not use the term positive deviant, as the phrase is not easily translated into Sidama or Amharic. Following the cultural codes, Workenesh used descriptive terminology to explain that we wanted to generate a discussion on how a girl who avoided child marriage might be defined or understood. This discussion occurred in one large group, as PD favors large group discussions as a method of participatory, collective consensus building (Sternin, personal communication, February, 2013). Workenesh addressed the topic with the women, and I remained discreetly seated off to the side of the room. Having discussed the goal of the session, Workenesh and I decided that she should avoid frequent translation or reference to me. This decision was not based upon questioning the credibility of translation, as Workenesh is completely fluent in English and is a skilled, seasoned translator. We wanted to avoid abrupt and frequent breaks in engagement with the group because this we feared this disruption would have interrupted the natural flow of the conversation. Instead, she focused on facilitating the discussion, following the natural contours of conversation to various related topics such as school attendance, adolescence and power relations in marriage.

Although there was one large group discussion, I observed that several of the women conversed among themselves in small groups of two to four. Neither Workenesh nor I made any effort to curtail these conversations, as we both recognized the value of such sub-engagement. In many cases, the women were bouncing ideas off of their immediate peers before sharing with the

large group whereas other women were clarifying their understanding with peers. These conversations enhanced the dynamics of the group because the spontaneous conversations increased overall engagement by creating a more relaxed and natural environment.

Approximately halfway through the two hour session, Workenesh did pause to brief me on the discussion, which provided the women with a more formal opportunity to engage among themselves before returning to the group.

The participants understood PD girls as those who came from very poor households and had reached their 18th birthdays without being married. When asked if they knew the birthdays of their daughters, the majority of the women replied that they did not, with those who knew the birthday stating it in the context of a season and not as a specific date. Given their knowledge of 18 as the legal marriage age, the participants, acting in line with the cordiality of halalu, attempted to accommodate my understanding of child marriage. Orienting myself to local understanding of age and time, we defined a PD girl as one who has gone through puberty without marriage. From the perspective of gender programming, this would mean that a PD girl is beyond very young adolescence, meaning she is over the age of 14. This may indicate that PD girls are younger than 18; however, since only very young adolescents are abducted, this definition is sufficient for the purposes of this application.

Of the 40 female participants with adolescent daughters, we found four potential PD girls. Together with the participants, we identified these girls in context of the large group conversations, which I will describe in the next section on step three of the PD process. One of the four exhibited what PD calls true but useless characteristics, which is understood as behaviors and strategies that are not transmittable to the community. In this case, the PD girl lived in Hawassa, a relatively nearby city, with a relative. Although from a very poor family in

the community, the fact that she is spending her adolescence in a different location means that her coping skills are not transmittable because she is no longer facing the same challenges in the same environment. Further, moving to avoid abduction is neither a viable nor sustainable option. The other three girls meet the criteria for PD.

### **PD Process Step Three: The Community Discovers the Specific Uncommon Practices That Enable PDs to Prevent or Solve the Identified Problem**

The first PD girl was identified during a large group conversation in December, 2013. As one participant began to describe her daughter she did not realize that she was different from most of the girls her age. The differences were “invisible in plain sight,” as PD individuals “don’t realize they are doing anything unusual or noteworthy” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 7). She had gone through puberty and remained unmarried, with her mother estimating that she is approximately sixteen years old. She attends school and participates in a drama group that is organized by Common River. The mother did not begin speaking about her daughter because she thought she was a PD girl; instead, the mother brought her daughter up in a conversation about the dynamics in her home. “She isn’t afraid to speak out,” her mother stated. “If she doesn’t want to do something, she will tell you” (personal communication, December, 2013). As the mother went on to describe her daughter, I realized that in June, 2013 I had seen a play in which this girl performed. Her attitude and demeanor were strikingly different from that of her female peers. Whereas the other girls were shy and quiet even while performing, this girl exuded confidence. Typically, girls in this community are compliant and meek, and after the performance this girl asserted herself among her peers, laughing and joking in a manner more commonly associated with either young children or adolescent boys. I assumed that her confidence was a result of Common River’s program and I did not see her as a PD. My inability to connect confidence with avoidance of child marriage by abduction demonstrates the need to commit to the entire PD

process because the previous steps of the process created an awareness from which such a discovery could be made. Further, I recognize that the community members themselves—and not the outside facilitator - are uniquely positioned to identify which uncommon behaviors and strategies can result in a better outcome.

Through the descriptions of the mother, we learned that this PD girl is assertive and confident. Her demeanor likely wards off men, as her nonverbal communication indicates that she is neither naïve or compliant. As we discussed the traits of this girl, her mother made a comment that transformed my conception of PD individuals: “If someone ever tried to grab her, I told her to scream and run” (personal communication, December, 2013). Here the mother revealed herself as a PD individual: whereas the other mothers never spoke of abduction to their daughters, this mother prepared her daughter for the potential, providing clear instructions on how to respond. While looking for the behaviors and strategies of girls, here we realized that we needed to identify the ways in which these behaviors emerged. In PD, this represents “the classic shift from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 176). We sought an outward indicator of PD; however, the source of that indicator demonstrated how these positive coping skills are transferred.

We decided to explore this woman’s parenting strategies. In order to determine whether or not this protective, proactive parenting behavior was uncommon, we developed a baseline understanding of typical mother-daughter relationships in this community. Although this returns to PD steps 1 and 2, as stated earlier PD is an iterative process that requires perpetual learning and unlearning (Pascale et al., 2010). This task was neither daunting nor difficult, as we had created a guiding framework in which we could situate our newly acquired knowledge and understanding. We sought only to gain a baseline understanding of normative characteristics of

mother-daughter relations among this specific population. This was achieved through observations of mothers with their daughters as well as conversations with mothers.

Of the 57 women we interviewed, all married as a child. Given the sensitivity of the topic, I did not directly ask if their marriage occurred through abduction; however, I created a safe space in which I offered them the opportunity to talk about that experience, if they felt such a discussion would be beneficial. Of the 57 women, 12 spoke to me about their experience of abduction. All 12 women used descriptive terminology to convey their experience, with none directly stating how their marriage occurred. This type of communication corresponded with the lack of concrete term for the practice, relational ways of knowing and creating meaning and the cordiality of *halalu*. “I was told that I would get to marry a prince,” one woman explained, “I just followed him. His friends were there. Everything happened. The cutting. Sex. Marriage” (personal communication, December, 2013). This information at once added to my knowledge of the practice, helping to verify the previously collected data.

As former child brides, all of my participants expressed difficulty in navigating the early years of their marriage, which included the transition into motherhood. As a child bride and child mother, “a girl may experience stress or depression because she is not psychologically prepared for marriage, sex or pregnancy, and especially when sex is coerced or non-consensual” (UNFPA, 2013, p. 24). In the experience of my participants, motherhood in childhood represented a continuation of the trauma of child marriage. The women explained that they not only lacked the knowledge and skills to properly care for their children, but struggled with bonding and attachment because they viewed their children as a reminder of their unwanted marriage and forced sexual relations with their husbands. Carrying over to the present, the women characterized their relationships with their daughters as distant, strained and nonexistent. The

women explained that, from a young age, they permitted their daughters to roam about the village unsupervised. They did not check in on them until dark, when it was expected that they would return home to eat and sleep. This demonstrates the intergenerational cycle of marginalization, as the impact of child marriage on the bride is “often passed down to her child, who starts life at a disadvantage, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of marginalization, exclusion and poverty” (UNFPA, 2013, p. 18). This suggests that the repercussions of child marriage by abduction extend beyond the child bride and create an intergenerational impact.

This baseline understanding of the normative mother-daughter relationship proved helpful. In the case of the PD girls their mothers taught them life skills such as assertiveness, confidence and critical thinking to safely navigate an environment in which they are at risk for child marriage by abduction along with child marriage in general. This understanding of common behaviors allowed us to identify three PD mothers. The three PD mothers were able to foster life skills development in their daughters because they maintained the specific goal of helping their daughters avoid the practice of child marriage by abduction. In order to describe the nuances of their PD behaviors and strategies, I am presenting each PD mother separately. Emphasis is on the first PD mother, as, due to her ability to articulate complex ideas in an accessible manner, she provides a framework in which the subsequent PD mothers can be understood.

**PD mother one.** Drawing on her life story, I estimate that the first PD mother is approximately 30 years old. Slim, petite and solemn, she carries a notebook with her everywhere she goes so that she always has the opportunity to practice writing her name. She dresses neatly and her clothes are always clean because she makes a point to change from her work clothes before coming to the sessions. Abducted for marriage around age 12, she gave birth to her

daughter approximately two years later. She has four children and remains married to the man who abducted her. She expressed despair over her marriage, noting that her home life “is not a life at all” (personal communication, December, 2013). She briefly described her abduction, looking at her feet and twisting her hands as she recalled being lured away from the town by a man who promised she would have sweets with a prince if she followed him through the false banana forest. She quickly depicted the events that occurred once she arrived at the site of the abduction, never looking up at me, Workenesh or the other women. These events aligned with the established definition of child marriage by abduction. While confident and composed with an unwavering voice, she did not want to elaborate upon the abduction. Instead, she focused on her life as a married child. Confused, isolated from her natal family and lonely, she was afraid of her husband. He would often hit her because she did not know how to cook and clean to his satisfaction. She described sexual relations as forced and “scary” and then described her feelings toward having a daughter as follows:

I didn't even know how I made a baby. It was like God saw how lonely I was and gave me a friend. My husband was so upset because it was not a boy. Most women get sad because of that, but not me. It made me feel even closer to her because he hated both of us. I sang to her about my life and I wasn't lonely anymore. She shared my sorrow. (personal communication, December, 2013)

This perspective on becoming a mother is drastically different from the norm, as “the impact on a young mother is often passed down to her child” (UNFPA, 2013, p. 18). Whereas most women recalled feelings of resentment, profound sadness and confusion as a child mother, this woman saw her baby as a friend. “She was the only one who would listen to my problems. When she cried I felt like she was crying for both of us” (personal communication, December, 2013). Partially a reflection of her innocence and inexperience, she did not understand how she

conceived a child and therefore considered the baby a gift from God. This attitude fostered bonding and attachment.

The singing is significant. Ellin Krinsly, a storyteller who has spent time researching Sidama stories and their meanings, helped to clarify the importance of conveying messages through song. In alignment with halalu, traditionally women did not voice their discontent so as not to disrupt harmony in the home or community (Krinsly, personal communication, January, 2014). Instead, women often sang about sorrow. This singing served as an outlet for emotion and, in the cases of singing to children, a focal point for emotional connection (Krinsly, personal communication, January, 2014). Here, this PD woman, who at the time was a child, drew from indigenous sources of strength to navigate a situation for which she was not prepared. She noted that “it was hard to talk about difficult things, so instead of talking I would sing about them” (personal communication, December, 2013). As is customary among the Sidama, as her daughter grew, the mother created new songs with new messages specific to her stage of life.

As her daughter become older, her mother became more deliberate in directing her path. She recognized that she had to “to teach her [daughter] to be smarter and stronger” than she was in order for her to avoid abduction (personal communication, December, 2013). She shared her own story with her daughter, explaining how she was lured into the forest with the promise of sweets only to be kidnapped, circumcised, raped and married. Considered shameful and a violation of halalu, these topics are taboo and typically go unspoken, making her conversation a deviant from the norm. She explained what she could have done differently, pushing her daughter to envision how she would respond in such a situation. “My life is not a life,” she told her, “this is just survival” (personal communication, December, 2013). By emphasizing the outcome, the mother conveyed the gravity of abduction.

In addition to abduction, this woman attempts to protect her daughter from child marriage arranged by her husband. She feels that her daughter can defend herself against her father just as she can a man from outside of the home. She believes that if a girl is strong, she can navigate child marriage. “If you can tell a stranger no,” she said, “then you can tell a man you know the same thing. A man won’t want to sell a daughter who will cause problems for the husband. That will make him look bad” (personal communication, November, 2013). As a result, she talks to her daughter about assertiveness. When her daughter entered puberty, she kept her daughter as far away from her husband as possible in an attempt to hide her increasing physical maturity from him. She encouraged her to be involved in school and other activities, such as Common River’s drama club. She continued to express her fears in songs, singing in the presence of her daughter about staying away from men, including her father. In addition, she closely watches her husband, making note of any unusual behavior such as talking to unfamiliar men who may be potential husbands for her daughter. “I don’t trust him,” she admitted, “so I have to watch him” (personal communication, December, 2013). By remaining alert to warning signs, the mother positions herself to protect her daughter through awareness and instruction.

**PD mother two.** Immediately after the first PD mother told her story, the second mother came forward. “I do the same things,” she said (personal communication, December, 2013). Like the first PD mother, this woman was abducted as “a young girl” (personal communication, December, 2013). She did not go into the details of her marriage, only quietly noting that she was abducted “just like the others, in the typical way” (personal communication, December, 2013). She has two adolescent daughters, who are approximately 13 and 16 years old and unmarried. While her elder daughter is considered a PD, her younger daughter remains in the age of risk for abduction. Unlike the first PD mother, she did not share the perception of seeing her

daughters as friends; however, she did and does feel a sense of responsibility for their wellbeing. Whether this resulted from a bond or empathy, her experience of abduction underpinned her desire to ensure that her daughters had a different future. “My life was so bad,” she said to her large group of peers (personal communication, December, 2013). “I don’t want them to have that life” (personal communication, December, 2013). By fully acknowledging her own pain and difficulty, she fostered a desire to protect her daughters.

Sharing similar parenting strategies as the first PD mother, this woman vocalized her marriage experience to her daughters, both in the form of song and direct conversation. She also emphasized that she remains aware of her daughters’ schedules and she advises them against deterring from the main road for any reason, noting that “if it cannot be found in a public area it is not worth finding” (personal communication, December, 2013). Demonstrating her behavior as deviant, she noted that neighbors find her emphasis on her daughters’ location to be strange and that they often discourage her attentiveness. “They always gossip about me,” she noted with a bit of hostility (personal communication, December, 2013). “But I just ignore it. The people here, they are always talking about something” (personal communication, December, 2013). The other woman shook their heads and made a “tsk” sound, demonstrating both their acknowledgment and disapproval of the behavior.

This PD mother considers her husband as much of a threat to her daughters’ wellbeing as an abductor. “You worry when they are home” she explained, “and you worry when they are out” (personal communication, December, 2013). Her husband has expressed interest in marrying their oldest daughter, to which the woman responded that, if he married her, she would poison his food. This threat was considered as jest; however, her ability to assert herself in her marriage is unusual. “No one does that,” another woman noted in the conversation, “she is

strong” (personal communication, December, 2013). The PD woman does not know if this form of banter impacted her husband’s attitude or behavior regarding marriage; regardless, this uncommon confrontation indicates that she is modeling assertiveness in her home.

**PD mother three.** The PD behaviors and strategies of the third PD mother reflected those of the first and second PD mothers. Like her PD peers, this woman was abducted when she was approximately 11 years old. Still married to the man who abducted her, she is reluctant to talk about her marriage. “You know what that [the marriage] is about,” she explained (personal communication, December, 2013). Since her daughters were young, she feared that they would be kidnapped. In an effort to protect them, she took her girls with her to the market, coffee plantations and other typical destinations. The unconventionality of child accompaniment caused her neighbors to gossip, demonstrating that her behavior differed from the norm. She noted that she ignored the gossip, as “everyone is always talking about something here. I wasn’t going to let it stop me from doing something good” (personal communication, December, 2013). When her oldest daughter was approximately ten years old, she had the resources to send her to school. “It was a big change for her because she had to walk by herself,” she explained (personal communication, December, 2013). “For other girls, that’s normal. But not for my daughter” (personal communication, December, 2013). School attendance requires a twenty minute walk each direction. In order to help her daughter navigate the risk of walking alone, every morning she reminds her daughter that, should a man approach her, she should run and never follow him. She does think that school is a form of protection for her daughter; however, she does not feel that it is the only form of protection. “School is good because there you can learn things that you couldn’t learn any place else. But the most important thing is what girls learn in the home. The

home is the first school” (personal communication, December, 2013). After making this comment, the other women in the group nodded their heads in agreement.

While she fears that her daughters will be abducted, she also fears that her husband will marry them off for the bride price. She informed her husband that if he were to marry her daughter, she would take the girl back from the new husband. She believes she could retrieve her daughter because she knows that in other places in Ethiopia a girl who is circumcised can still marry. “I’ll take my daughters to Hawassa. We can work doing laundry or cleaning houses. Then they can marry a man who is kind, who won’t beat them” (personal communication, December, 2013). Another woman challenged her, noting that she would be cursed “if she caused these problems” by removing her daughter from the new husband’s home (personal communication, December, 2013). After a moment of silence, the woman acknowledged the risks involved with this act. Regardless of her intent, she noted that her husband cannot determine whether or not she is serious, meaning that the verbalization of intent may be effective in itself.

### **Conclusion: PD Behaviors and Strategies**

The PD girls successfully navigated an environment in which they were at risk for marriage by abduction as well as child marriage as arranged by their fathers. While all are currently enrolled in school, two of the PD girls did not begin to attend school until approximately age ten, meaning that they were out of school during a portion of the timeframe in which they were vulnerable to abduction. Given that men target very young adolescents due to their inexperience and passivity, the confidence that these girls exhibit likely deterred abductors. Knowing the stories of their mothers, these girls were aware of the risks in their environment and knew how to mitigate these risks, for example not responding to men who attempt to engage them in conversation. Their mothers continuously foster assertiveness in their daughters because

they realize that this is an effective coping skill that transcends abduction and is applicable even to child marriage as arranged by their fathers.

The PD mothers were all abducted as very young adolescents. While the one PD mother articulated the way in which she created a solid, lasting bond with her daughter, the other two mothers did not reveal how they navigated their own transition to motherhood in childhood. Regardless of the specific nuances of each mother-daughter relationship, all three PD mothers shared a focus on providing their daughters with the knowledge and skills to remain safe. These mothers also realized that the potential of abduction may have fueled their husband's desire to marry their daughter for a bride price as a very young adolescent. As a result, the PD mothers sought to protect their daughters from both abductors and their husbands. Two of the three mothers directly addressed child marriage with their husbands while one monitored her husband's behavior and relations to identify signs of marriage planning.

The specific PD behaviors and strategies of the PD mothers are as follows:

- Repeatedly share their own abduction story, either through songs or conversation, with their daughters as a means to help them understand the risks of their environment
- Maintain knowledge of their daughters' whereabouts and plans, keeping their daughters with them to the extent possible
- Advise their daughters on how to respond to any men who approach them
- Encourage their daughters to attend school and participate in safe community activities, specifically activities associated with church/mosque and Common River.

In a subsequent large group discussion, Workenesh and I shared the PD findings with the participants to verify that these PD behaviors and strategies differed from the norm. Throughout

the PD process, the participants were actively engaged in discussions. In this result sharing session, the twenty-two women who were present seemed disengaged. They were quiet and distant and, while they listened attentively, they did not wish to participate in conversation. One of the women even rested her head at the desk, occasionally closing her eyes. I interpreted this behavior as disinterest or withdrawal, and it concerned me. Workenesh asked them why they were disengaged. They responded that they had spent the day working in the coffee plantation and they were tired and wanted to go home. Upon the request of the participants, our session ended early that day. Although I was provided with a concrete reason for their lack of engagement, I worried that their disconnection indicated that our results may not be valid. Workenesh assured me that this was not the case; however, I remained concerned.

Unexpectedly, the next large group session, which took place on the next day, served to validate the PD results. On this day, Workenesh and I arrived after all of the women. Walking into the room, I was worried because the lull of the previous session continued to concern me. We found seventeen women sitting in chairs as usual with one shocking difference: two of the women brought their very young adolescent daughters with them. The two girls sat on benches beside their mothers, one smiling and swinging her feet under the desk. "She's happy," her mother said smiling, "because this is the first time she's ever been anywhere with me" (personal communication, December, 2013). I turned toward the other mother who was smiling, her entire being radiating from pride and joy. She nodded toward her daughter, never taking her eyes off of me to gauge my reaction. I smiled and nodded back. Her daughter had a shy smile on her face. This moment is significant because it demonstrates the organic social change that begun as a result of the process. That night in my journal I wrote:

Last night I was convinced that this process failed, which shows me how little the outsider truly understands...today two women replicated the PD behaviors, and we didn't

even get to that step of the process. The other women noticed that these women had their daughters with them, and I can't help but think that the realization will prompt further replication. I'm humbled by the power of this process. (December, 2013)

While our previous discussion of the results did not extend into the concept of replicating PD behaviors, the participants themselves realized that they could practice these local coping strategies without my prompting.

The results of the case study, PD process and discovery of PD behaviors and strategies are significant. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings within the context of child marriage, programs to curtail child marriage and application of the PD approach to issues of gender inequality. In addition, I deliberate on implications of my research, with emphasis on the ways in which programs to curtail child marriage can emerge from this study.

## **Chapter V: Discussion and Reflection**

This study aimed to (a) address the gap in research and programing for all forms of child marriage and (b) pilot efforts to apply Positive Deviance (PD) to child marriage by abduction, indicating whether or not PD can be effective against this specific form of early marriage as well as the practice as a whole. In both regards, the success of this study surpassed my expectations. The discussion in this chapter centers on how I met these two objectives in my research.

The International Center for Research on Women's (ICRW) global systemic review of early marriage prevention programs indicated that there have been no attempts to use any form of asset-based programing, including PD, to curtail child marriage. This study represents unprecedented application of PD to child marriage by abduction, which indicates that this effort expands upon existing approaches by piloting an alternative. While the PD application in itself is novel, the information I collected throughout the process also represents new insights that at once contribute to the foundation of knowledge on child marriage and bring into question common assumptions on the nature of the practice.

### **Objective One: Address the Gap in Research and Programing for All Forms of Child Marriage**

The UN Secretary General directly stated that one of the greatest challenges to efforts to combat child marriage is lack of knowledge on the practice (UN, 2008). In response, the Secretary General recommended “enhancing the knowledge base on forced marriage, including its scope, prevalence and causes and consequences” (p. 19). In Ethiopia, the majority of research is centered in the Amhara region, where 50% of girls are married by age 15 and 80% by age 18 (Population Council, 2004, p. 1). While organizations such as Plan International, Care International and the Population Council center their efforts on the Amhara region, child

marriage exists throughout the country, as “Ethiopia has one of the most severe crises of child marriage in the world today” (Population Council, 2004, p.1). In order to expand beyond these geographic limitations, my research took place in the Sidama Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region, approximately 400 miles from the Amhara region. There is little research on child marriage in this part of Ethiopia and there are currently no programs to curtail the practice. As part of this study, I researched the evolution of marriage norms among the Sidama. This information served to situate child marriage by abduction within a larger historic, socioeconomic, political and cultural framework. In application of PD to child marriage by abduction in Titira, Ethiopia, I could have narrowed the scope of information and still remained true to the PD process. Instead, I expanded upon the breath of information collected in order to answer the UN Secretary General’s call to contribute to the limited knowledge base on child marriage.

The key findings of this research represent unprecedented information. Prior to undertaking this study, I had anticipated that my findings would support common conceptions of child marriage. Instead, my results challenge typical assumptions, drawing into question the validity of generalizing on a practice that, while emerging from poverty, is shaped by the nuances of the respective culture. I discuss each key finding separately in order to highlight the distinction of each result.

**Child marriage by abduction entails a uniform process.** This finding is significant because uniformity reveals that child marriage by abduction is not a random occurrence, but rather an established practice. While the UN recognizes child marriage by abduction as a distinct HTP, many practitioners working in gender programming dispute the reality of the practice and remain unaware of the extent of the issue (UN HCHR, 1995, introduction, para 4). In a post

session conversation at the International Family Planning Conference's session, "Very Young Adolescents: A Program for Changing the Trajectory in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health," Save the Children USA Adolescent Reproductive Health Advisor expressed a widespread belief that in Ethiopia child marriage by abduction is "a fear, not a reality" for adolescent girls (personal communication, November, 2013). This lack of knowledge and understanding creates barriers for progress because the issues cannot be addressed until they are recognized and understood. The lack of available information hinders action against the practice because there is little empirical information upon which to create an intervention.

This specific form of child marriage by abduction involves both coercion and kidnapping. In Ethiopia, marriage by abduction is "where an unmarried girl is forcefully taken, often followed by rape by her future husband or gang rape by her husband and friends" (Population Council & UNFPA, 2010, p. 1). This definition does not include coercion. This variation of child marriage by abduction is plausible because child marriage takes many different forms in Ethiopia (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009, p. 6). Understanding the role of coercion in this form of marriage by abduction is vital to combatting the practice, as coercion is a central element that facilitates the process by isolating the girl from public spaces and therefore removing her social protection. A program to curtail child marriage by abduction in a place where coercion plays a role that does not take the element of coercion into account would likely have limited success.

**There is no name for this specific form of abduction.** The Sidama have names for the traditional practice of child marriage by abduction, which did not involve coercion, and a separate name for marriage by coercion that does not involve abduction. There is no name for this common form of abduction that combines both coercion and kidnapping. The implications of this lack of terminology are profound. Given that there is no word for the modern form of

abduction, research on child marriage may be flawed because a practice cannot be recorded if it cannot be expressed. Given that programing is based on research, the tendency to ignore the presence of child marriage by abduction may be linked to the lack of terminology to convey the extent and effects of the practice.

The lack of language reveals the secrecy of the practice. Initially, I assumed that the absence of terminology indicated that child marriage by abduction was a rare, fringe occurrence. The participants were slow to express the extent of the problem, which I understood as supporting my assumption. Eventually, the participants began to project a different narrative, revealing that abduction occurs often among the poorest percent of the population. This change created tension within me because I was not certain which narrative was correct. One participant explained that the initial reluctance to disclose relates to halalu. “It’s not good to make people uncomfortable. This topic makes everyone uncomfortable, especially people who aren’t used to it” (personal communication, June, 2013). The secrecy surrounding delicate issues is common among the Sidama. The Common River program director noted that the women in the female literacy program, all of whom are circumcised, originally indicated that cutting does not exist in the community (Sillan, personal communication, January, 2014). This should not be seen as dishonesty, but rather as a difference in priorities, with the Sidama prioritizing harmony, which we can understand here as unwillingness to discuss uncomfortable topics, and the westerners prioritizing transparency.

As the women began to express the prevalence of abduction, I directly questioned the lack of terminology. My assumption had been that concrete language validates the presence of a practice. Here, the opposite was true: lack of concrete language reflected the presence and power of the practice. “We don’t talk about it because it’s everywhere. We know it exists, there’s

nothing to discuss” (personal communication, June, 2013). Further, one of the women who was abducted expressed a desire to avoid language. “You can pretend your marriage was consensual if there is no way to say that it wasn’t” (personal communication, June, 2013). In my journal, I noted that “child marriage by abduction goes unspoken. Since the women feel that there is nothing they can do to prevent the practice, they opt not to discuss it. It’s a coping skill: if we can’t do anything against it, then let’s avoid the pain of addressing it.” I remained respectful of this entrenched psychological coping skill and did not push the women to narrow their description of the practice to a word or short phrase.

**Child marriage by abduction is not a harmful traditional practice, but rather a harmful modern phenomenon.** My findings indicate that child marriage by abduction in this specific context is a harmful modern phenomenon with historic origins. I realize that this claim does oppose the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ categorization of child marriage as an HTP; however, other UN entities contest the universality of this classification. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintains that despite being labeled an HTP, “the pressures that lead to early marriage are present day” (WHO, 2006, p. 8). By acknowledging that early marriage is caused by modern pressures, WHO contests the universality of the role of tradition.

Although the practice existed historically in the Sidama Zone, my research indicates that child marriage by abduction has only become common since the transition from the communist Derg regime to the current democratic government after 1991. This corresponds with the commodification of the bride that occurred when the bride price took on a western capitalistic monetary value, specifically when the bride price began being paid in cash currency rather than livestock (Hamer, 2007, p. 4). “Capitalism and Western culture have transformed earlier trade

practices,” which here has created an environment in which adolescent girls are either exchanged for currency or kidnapped (Tuhivai Smith, 1999, p. 89). Modern poverty and inequality fuel this commodification, in this case creating an environment in which men who cannot afford a bride price rationalize kidnapping.

WHO found that child marriage can be a modern manifestation of poverty and inequality, noting that the current “insecurity and rising expenses may be forcing mothers who themselves married after the age of 18 to marry off their daughters before they are 18” (2006, p. 6). In Titira, older women recalled child marriage by abduction as a rare practice whereas younger women recognize it as common. The lack of a terminology for child marriage by abduction in the Sidama language further supports the finding that this is a modern, and not ancient, practice, because it is new enough not to be described by a concrete word or phrase.

Recognition of modern factors that fuel this practice is important in designing effective programming. Programs for HTPs often focus on awareness creation, with the assumption being that behavior change can occur through communication. The ICRW (2011) report found that 13 of the 23 programs to curtail child marriage aimed to “change social norms and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who are willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage” (p.11). If the fueling factors are modern, this type of intervention may be counterproductive because it conceptualizes the problem as tradition, custom or culture rather than recognizing the modern factors that have led to the practice. Understanding a practice as traditional or cultural creates a straightforward understanding of power structures, and “what is less clearly recognized, however, are the more subtle ways in which male domination operates under conditions of modernity” (Winter et al., 2010, p. 77). Acknowledging that child marriage

by abduction goes beyond tradition indicates that the practice is entrenched in a modern social system.

Identifying the modern nature of a categorized HTP reconceptualizes the practice. Creating a system of recognizing and combatting some of the most blatant forms of subordination of women, the category of HTPs attempts to go beyond cultural relativism in alignment with globally recognized human rights. This classification itself has important implications. For example, labeling a practice as a manifestation of an ancient culture places blame on the culture for creating an enabling environment. Indigenized research offers an opportunity to explore the practice through the lens of those for whom it is a lived reality. In this study, indigenized research revealed an alternative historic narrative that questions the UN's labeling of child marriage by abduction. I recognize the West "has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world have been theorized" and in this process "indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 29). The majority of existing information on practices labeled HTPs maintain a western perspective, as the "global network of international organizations that fund research work within the long-established categories of the colonized and the colonizer" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 81). Indigenous research offered an opportunity to the women of Titira to reclaim a story, which allowed me as a scholar-practitioner the opportunity to relearn their story. Now that this practice is recognized as a response to modern poverty and inequality, new opportunities for intervention exist.

**Child marriage by abduction occurred historically; however, it was an uncommon practice that was discouraged by halalu.** The indigenous system of restorative justice, halalu, considered abduction a rupture of community harmony. Historically under this system, the elders ensured that harmony was restored to the community, which meant that there were financial and

social implications for the abductor. As a result, abduction was rare. As discussed in-depth in Chapter IV, today the tensions among halalu, secular law and the emerging Protestant worldview paralyze families of abducted girls, preventing both grassroots and legal action. This suggests the complexity of modernization. The Ethiopian Government uses secular law in an attempt to increase human rights and wellbeing, and yet here democracy and development are undermining the sophisticated, effective indigenous system of justice. The western framework assumes law equates progress, as the “contrast being drawn here between the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’ implies that violence against women would or should disappear once nation states were to introduce ‘modern’ arrangements in relation to women. But this is hardly likely to be the case” (Winter et al., 2010, p. 77). Research indicates that the modern legal framework may have resulted in increased girl child vulnerability, as all forms of child marriage have become more secretive (Overseas Development Institute, 2013, p. 5).

**Objective Two: Pilot Efforts to Apply PD to Child Marriage by Abduction, Indicating Whether or Not PD Is Effective Against This Specific Form of Early Marriage as well as the Practice as a Whole**

In this section I focus discussion on key elements of the PD process, emphasizing the identification of PD individuals and their behaviors and strategies. I am selective in determining the focus points because “the PD approach is complex, in part because it accomplishes so much: community mobilization, fact-finding, and behavior change” (Marsh et al., 2002, p. 115). Rather than examining every step of the process, I highlight the factors that underpinned the success of the project, that are unique to this research and that inform future PD efforts.

**Platform for programing.** Initially, I thought that my collaboration with Common River would represent a conflict of interest because I am friends with the co-founders and have spent extensive time on-site with the organization. Instead of creating tension, this space and sense of

connectedness presented an organic entry point for my research. Many of the participants knew me as well as my two daughters who are from the Sidama ethnic group. While I remained an outsider, I had a tangible connection to the community that fostered a sense of familiarity and trust. My previous engagement with the community as a volunteer with my daughters created a solid foundation for this work.

On a broader scale, the role of Common River demonstrates the importance of a platform for programing. While open to all members of the community, Common River is an established safe space for women and girls, which can be understood as “a social asset in itself” that, among many other functions, provides “a sense of validated belonging to their society” (Sewall-Menon & Bruce, 2012, p. v). The women found a connection between Common River’s female literacy program and the ability to openly discuss topics that are considered taboo, such as marriage age and circumcision. One woman noted that, “I got my voice at Common River” (personal communication, November, 2013). This study affirmed the potential of the PD approach to deal with issues related to gender inequality and simultaneously validated the importance of a platform that is accessible to the most marginalized women and girls.

**Investment of time.** Comfort, transparency and willingness to share evolved gradually. Had this project occurred within a more condensed timeframe, I do not believe it would have been possible to collect such nuanced information. For instance, during my initial meeting with the women before the start of this research, they told me that they had all married consensually as adults, having chosen their own spouse. As our relationship developed, they revealed that they were married before adulthood, either by abduction or by arranged marriage for a bride price. Common River CEO Tsegaye Bekele noted that the Common River participants are better positioned to answer questions now than when the organization first began working with the

women in 2009. “At first, when we asked them what they thought about something, they just stared at us. No one had ever asked their opinions before and they just didn’t know how to respond. It takes time to learn that you have a voice” (personal communication, November, 2013). Formally, the field component of this research took place from June, 2013 to January, 2014. Informally, I have been engaging with this community since November, 2011. I consider this study to be the result of approximately 2.5 years of regular engagement.

This progression of transparency also calls into question the rapid assessments that are common in international development. Although the limitations of these quick situational reviews are understood by those who implement and interpret them, this study encourages practitioners to think critically about this type of rapid research. A rapid assessment can depict obvious challenges and opportunities and is especially useful in a humanitarian crisis; however, the more nuanced aspects of the situation can only be understood through in-depth study, ideally through the guidance of an insider.

**Local co-researcher/co-facilitator.** This work would not have been possible without Workenesh. As described previously, Workenesh began as my translator and quickly and seamlessly transitioned into my partner. She offered her advice, her perspective and her organic ability to interact with the women as a peer. She brought humor and grace to the process, reminding me that the best way to honor the experience of the women is to view them as individuals who are friends, not a mass of participants in a project.

**Researcher as facilitator.** One of the greatest challenges served as one of the greatest opportunities: partaking in PD as a form of participatory action research, this methodology required me to assume more of a facilitative role than in traditional research. This extended beyond committing to local knowledge and entailed “managing visibility, blending into the

background, keenly observing and coming out when a catalyst is needed” (Sternin, personal communication, February, 2013). PD “requires a profound shift in the traditional role of an NGO staff person” that requires trusting “that others would deliver ideas and actions that were far beyond what I could dream or imagine” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 77). Facilitation entailed actively leading the process, which often required encouraging others to expand upon their roles and responsibilities. Most notably, I shared my role as facilitator with Workenesh. At times this meant stepping back, sitting among the women and observing Workenesh orchestrate the process. This was not difficult for me because I strongly believe that the western outsider should rely on local community members to the extent possible. However, I recognize that this would have been difficult for many development professionals.

At times, I surprised myself by shifting my perspective. I view my professional work through a feminist framework and, although there is no one feminism, I did enter the research with a western orientation toward women’s rights and roles in society. For example, I entered this process opposed to any form of female genital cutting, considering the practice in all of its forms as mutilation. After several conversations with the older women who maintained a more positive view, I began to assume their perspective, understanding that any practice is contextualized and interwoven in a complex social system. I began to understand that “the problem is that often, Western feminisms have used Western women’s experiences as the norm and basis against which all other non-Western women’s experiences are judged” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 286). While this change in perspective did create some tension within me, I began to understand the internal shift as a positive indication of my relationship with the women because “to the extent that a true partnership exists, the action researcher over time begins to take an insider perspective” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, chapter 4, para 9). My ability to understand the

perspective of the women to the point of sharing their view indicates that I was able to fulfill my personal commitment of understanding the local perspective and accepting local knowledge as guiding knowledge.

### **Identifying and Understanding Positive Deviants**

While each step in the PD process is vital to its success, the pivotal moment is identifying and understanding PD behaviors and strategies. I am dedicating an entire section to a discussion on this aspect of the process because the presence of PD behaviors and strategies indicates the potential of success. The indigenous alternatives reveal the possibility for adaptive change while demonstrating the value and sophistication of local coping skills.

Prior to identifying PD individuals, we conceptualized PD girls as those being unmarried, in school or out of school with any educational background. Typically, in-school girls would be not be considered at risk for any type of child marriage, as school delays marriage age because it provides a safe space for girls and “helps a girl to be seen as a child, and thus not marriageable” (ICRW, 2011, p. 14). This correlation is important; however, school attendance does not completely protect against child marriage. The correlation between delayed marriage age and education tends to occur once a girl begins her secondary education, with elementary education offering minimal protection against child marriage (UNICEF, 2005). Only one of my participants with school age children had a daughter studying at a secondary level. Further, the father of a second grade student removed her from school for marriage despite the intervention of both the girl’s maternal grandmother and Common River, demonstrating that support systems may not eliminate the risk of child marriage for in-school girls from very poor households (Bekele, personal communication, June, 2013). Children from impoverished households in Titira may not receive enough schooling to significantly delay marriage age. The lack of education of the

participants coupled with the lack of secondary education of their children influenced our decision that PD girls could be in or out of school with any educational background.

Although our discussion centered on PD girls, the actual focus remained on the PD behaviors and strategies that enabled the girls to avoid abduction. Rather than concentrating on the individuals themselves, PD focuses on how uncommon behaviors and strategies result in a better outcome than the common coping skills (Pascale et al., 2010). We identified PD girls; however, ultimately we sought to discover how these PD girls navigated their environment differently than their peers. Much like PD application to FGM in Egypt and the social reintegration of girl child soldiers in Uganda, this PD application to child marriage by abduction recognized that the behaviors and strategies emerge through the identification of individuals (Abdel-Tawab & Hegazi, 2000; Pascale et al., 2010; Singhal & Dura, 2008).

Given the ethics surrounding this dissertation, girls assumed to be under the age of 18 were not included as participants in this study. This is a limitation; however, the risks of involving girls in this research, which included the risk of drawing attention to adolescent girls as marriageable, were too great. As a result, we sought to identify PD girls through mothers, teachers and other adults familiar with the local adolescent population. Originally, I had planned to include fathers in this process because PD application to infant mortality in Pakistan demonstrated the benefit of including men for gendered problems (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 179). Further, Monique Sternin noted that, “girls and women aren’t the problem; they aren’t abducting themselves” (Sternin, personal communication, July, 2013). However, the original female participants were adamantly against this inclusion. They argued that many of the fathers had abducted their wives themselves, creating a conflict of interest. The most powerful statement against their inclusion involved their husband’s desire to marry off their daughters for the bride

price. The participants informed me that they were not only protecting their daughters from abduction, but from their husband's desire to arrange a marriage. They worried that discussion on abduction could encourage the men to offer their daughters in marriage before abduction could occur. As a result, I followed the lead of the women and limited male participation.

Exclusion of men is not ideal in PD and the relative exclusion of men in this application represents a limitation. Although I adamantly support our decision not to include men, I recognize that we excluded the male half of the population from which abductors come. In the case of infant mortality in Pakistan, the inclusion of men in what was considered a woman's problem created the opportunity for significant and organic social change. As a result of including men in the infant mortality application, "invisible, without transplant rejection, the impenetrable wall between the lives of men and women had been replaced by a gauze curtain. Its symbolic presence maintained tradition. Permeability symbolized transition to a new order" (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 180). I recognize that the social change potential is increased when all members of the community are included. If the risk of harm does not outweigh the benefits, I recommend male inclusion in future PD applications to problems related to gender inequality.

In order to determine PD girls, Workenesh and I sought to find mothers from very poor households who had daughters who had gone through puberty and were not married. If the mothers had a married daughter who had not gone through puberty, I did not ask how the marriage occurred. This information would have expanded the knowledge base on child marriage by abduction; however, given the sensitive nature of the topic the risk of harm outweighed the benefit because the information would have served to benefit me as a western researcher while having little to no positive impact on the community. Further, the women saw little difference between abduction and an arranged marriage. "Whether it's a stranger or the father," one woman

noted, “the girl still gets married” (personal communication, November, 2013). Many of these women were abducted by their husbands, who are the fathers of their children. As such, the women see their husbands as abductors who desire to take their daughters from them for financial compensation. The end result is that their daughters are married as children against their will, whether with or without the participation of their husbands. While outsiders differentiate between child marriage and child marriage by abduction, the women recognize that the two practices are separated by nuances.

### **Key Findings**

In addition to the specific results of the PD process, key findings emerged from this study. These findings serve to contextualize the results, illuminate and project child marriage trends among the Sidama.

**Child marriage by abduction fuels child marriage.** The fathers know the risk of abduction and often aim to marry their daughters before they are abducted. This serves to lower marriage age because abduction occurs before traditional marriage age. My female participants who were mothers feared that their daughters would be abducted as much as they feared that their husbands would marry off their daughters. While action research focuses on a specific local problem, “local problems and local settings are parts of larger problems and broader social forces that not only impact local settings, but are implicated in how local settings are constituted” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, macropolitics, para 1). In PD, often the specific challenge is linked to and indicative of a greater overarching social problem (Sternin, personal communication, July, 2013). In this application, child marriage by abduction reflected the overarching problem of child marriage.

**Child marriage contributes to intergenerational cycle of marginalization.** Research indicates that child brides pass their experience of “poverty, exclusion and powerlessness” down to their children (UNFPA, 2013, p. 18). My research expanded upon this concept by revealing a specific way in which intergenerational marginalization functions. Due to the trauma of their marriage, child mothers tended to resent their husbands and struggled to bond and attach with their children. This lack of attachment prevented mothers from transmitting life skills and from disclosing the circumstances of their own marriage to their daughters, which seemed to elevate their risk for child marriage by abduction.

**PD mothers admit their own abduction.** Most women refused to reveal how their marriage took place, noting that this was a taboo topic that was discussed in neither public nor private settings. The PD mothers broke this barrier by speaking, either indirectly through song or directly in conversation, with their daughters about their own abduction. This rebellious transparency served as a cautioning for their daughters. Further, their ability to transcend trauma may indicate that they have acquired life skills that they are now transferring to their daughters.

**PD mothers used traditional singing.** As elaborated upon in the case study, traditionally the Sidama had a sophisticated system of conflict mitigation. By using the traditional form of storytelling in song, the PD mothers successfully applied an indigenous coping skill to a modern situation. The mothers conveyed messages to their daughters in song, and its effectiveness “makes perfect sense because singing is a form of advocacy” (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2014). This demonstrates that the standard model development behavior change communication programs that concentrate on western forms of information sharing may not be as effective as local communication strategies. “Indigenous peoples offer genuine alternatives to

the current dominant form of development,” and the PD process is particularly receptive to these alternative forms (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 105).

**PD behaviors and strategies are linked to traits.** The PD girls exhibited confidence and assertiveness whereas the PD mothers felt responsible for their daughters and possessed and were able to transfer life skills. With the exception of the physical protective behaviors, the PD behaviors are traits, such as confidence and assertiveness. This finding corresponds with existing literature on the importance of life skills in girl child protection (Sewall-Menon & Bruce, 2012; WHO, 1999). As in PD application to trafficking in Nepal, this PD application recognizes that changes in gender attitudes and family relationships “would likely require extensive, long-term behavior change campaigns” (Save the Children, 2002, p. 5).

**The community is knowledgeable on child marriage by abduction, yet it remains a taboo topic.** Programs often assume that harmful practices, including child marriage, occur because the community lacks knowledge on the prevalence and implications of the practices (ICRW, 2011). In this situation, all participants expressed an in-depth and nuanced understanding of child marriage by abduction. Their knowledge comes from either direct experience or the experience of a family member. In addition, the participants were aware that all forms of child marriage are illegal. Rather than mitigating the practice, policy seems to have “pushed it below the radar, with many of these marriages now more ‘clandestine’ than ever, which can leave girls even more unprotected” (ODI, 2013, p. 5). As a result of the secrecy of the practice and the male-dominated power structures within marriages, mothers tend not to discuss child marriage by abduction with their daughters, including daughters who are at risk. Further, they assume that their daughters are aware of the practice and therefore can develop their own coping skills to mitigate the risks.

**Women worry about their daughters.** This is a significant finding because motherhood in childhood often hinders the development of healthy relationships between a child mother and her child (UNFPA, 2013). The act of worrying signifies a desire to alter an outcome and illuminates the potential to continue working with the women to curtail child marriage by abduction as well as other challenges that hinder the wellbeing of the girl child. While this is significant, worry does not necessarily presuppose action. For instance, Common River brought a child marriage case to the authorities on behalf of the child bride's grandmother; however, the grandmother refused to sign the charge because she was afraid of the community's response (Sillan, personal communication, October, 2014).

**The community believes in the curse of halalu.** With the exception of one, all participants said that they believe that if the parents of an abducted girl attempt to retrieve her, the family will be cursed for this disruption of community harmony. Given that all participants adhere to a mainstream religion, they acknowledge the contradiction between this traditional belief in the curse and religious as well as secular teachings. Regardless of the discrepancy in belief systems, the participants believed that the halalu curse would manifest in this situation because "although abduction causes many problems, taking back a girl who has been circumcised and raped would cause even more problems" (personal communication, November, 2013). Even though conflict with the wrongdoer was necessary to restore community harmony under halalu, the difference now is that the concept of punitive justice, which is foreign to the Sidama, is considered worse than any wrongdoing. The disruption of harmony that punitive justice, such as incarceration, causes is greater than the disruption caused by abduction.

**There is a stigma surrounding abduction.** When a sudden marriage of a very young adolescent occurs, the community speculates as to whether or not the child was abducted. This

speculation tends to take the form of gossip, which creates stigma for both the child who was abducted and her family. Most girls and women will not admit to their abduction, as they fear gossip. This stigma further contributes to the silence around child marriage abduction. My participants noted that mothers who were abducted may be ashamed to discuss their own abduction with their daughters. The Common River programing will foster communication skills as a means to encourage discussions on this topic because PD mothers did discuss their own abduction with their daughters.

**The women feel little affinity toward their husbands.** Most women viewed their marriage as a social obligation and, while many felt kinship toward their children and specifically their daughters, few expressed any positive sentiments toward their husbands. They felt that their husbands' involvement in the PD process would be detrimental because they view them as adversaries in their ongoing negotiation of a situation in which they are neither comfortable nor safe.

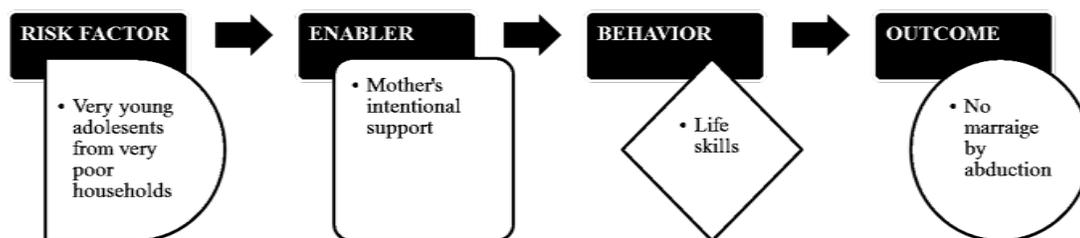
### **Implications for Future Study and Action**

**PD application to practices related to gender inequality.** The PD process was successful, which creates a pathway toward future PD application to practices related to gender inequality. Although the case study did enable me to project trends among the Sidama, this study was small, specific and ethnically and geographically concentrated. The limited size and scope of the research may draw criticism; however, the number of PD individuals in relation to the size of the study indicates success because “three people out of 57 is normal. Researchers are going to say it’s anecdotal, but it’s not because of the effect it has” (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2013). Further, as an action research study I placed emphasis on the PD approach itself. Given the success of the application, “we can generalize the approach because now we have the

pattern. It's the approach that we are looking at, and the approach worked" (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2014). When viewed in conjunction with PD application to FGM, social reintegration of former girl child soldiers and trafficking, this application indicates the future potential for PD.

When applied to new realms, PD results should be understood in terms of not only the outcomes, but the behaviors and what influences them (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 130). Since the outcomes and mechanisms in PD vary according to the specific application, illumination of these factors serves to substantiate the PD process. In most situations in international development, the risk factors are "often socioeconomic conditions that are not easily or quickly modifiable" (Lapping et al., 2009, p. 129). In this application, one of the main risk factors is poverty, as the abductors are men who cannot afford a bride price. In addition, age and sex are risk factors because very young adolescent girls are at risk for abduction. Whereas the traditional PD application to malnutrition tends to focus on identifying well-nourished children from very poor households, this application sought to identify unmarried girls from very poor households who had gone through puberty.

The following figure demonstrates the risk factor, enabler, behavior and outcome uncovered in this PD application:



*Figure 5.1.* Positive Deviance application to child marriage by abduction.

**Knowledge base of very young adolescents.** This study contributed to the knowledge base on very young adolescents. In international relief and development, “adolescent girls are often the most marginalized and invisible segments of the population” (Sewall-Menon & Bruce, 2012, p. 6). In addition, I focused on an issue pertaining to girls between the ages of 10 and 14 and these “very young adolescents have special vulnerabilities, and too little has been done to understand and respond to the daunting challenges they face” (UNFPA, 2013, p. xi). Completely apart from the PD application, “the understanding of the normative practices [involving child marriage] in itself makes an immense contribution and paves the way for future research” (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2014). I have found existing research neither on child marriage nor adolescent girls in Sidama, which attests to the contribution of this study to the nascent information base on very young adolescents in that area.

Moving forward there remains a need for more research on very young adolescents. Although ethical challenges in collecting data from this group inhibits research, in my study I demonstrated a way to obtain information on this group without directly involving them. By not speaking directly with the girls, I accepted their mothers as authorized to speak on their behalf. This indirect method has limitations as well as ethical implications. Given that this portion of the population is referred to as invisible, it is legitimate to question the ethics of granting others the right a voice to convey the lived experience of these girls. At the same time, “some researchers question whether very young adolescents have the cognitive ability to answer questions requiring a thoughtful assessment of the barriers they face” (UNFPA, 2013, p. 8). Some researchers combine interviews with mothers and older adolescents in effort to triangulate data.

Regardless of the data collection method, I believe that research on very young adolescents should benefit the participants. Given their vulnerability, especially those coming

from poor households at risk for abduction and other harmful practices, I struggle with research that exists solely for the purpose of acquiring knowledge. I understand that information is a prerequisite to assistance; however, research “on indigenous peoples is still justified by the ends rather than the means, particularly if the indigenous peoples concerned can still be positioned as ignorant and undeveloped” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 25). I strongly urge researchers to not only balance risks of harm with benefits, but actively place emphasis on the ways in which the work creates a positive impact.

**PD next steps for the community.** As indicated in Chapter V, several women began practicing the PD behaviors immediately upon hearing the PD women describe the ways in which they engaged with their daughters. This practice entailed two women bringing their very young adolescent daughters with them to our next session. Neither Workenesh nor I instructed the women to follow this PD behavior; instead, they decided completely on their own with no outside prompting to replicate this act. This is significant because it indicates that change was taking place without outside interference. This demonstrates that “the research has an immediate impact and presumably a longer term impact” (personal communication, March, 2013). The almost intuitive replication of PD behavior by these two mothers indicates the potential for the change process to continue.

PD affirms that “knowledge doesn’t advance practice. Rather, practice advances (and internalizes) knowledge” (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 113). This may seem to indicate a need to develop a structured framework in which the women could practice the new behaviors, yet here the women had already begun to replicate the behaviors on their own. The PD process acts as a catalyst for change and, while sometimes there is a need for a structure, other times the action emerges organically as part of the process. The PD process can be understood as “the particular

trigger that initiates the community dialogue about a specific issue of concern or interest to the community” (Figueroa et al., 2002, p. 6). “If they are replicating behavior and disseminating knowledge on their own, then let them continue. This is about community mobilization and that means that the outsider has to let go and just wait” (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2014). When the two mothers brought their daughters with them to my session, they demonstrated how naturally this change can begin.

There are no plans to create a structured action plan related to the PD results. Immediate structured programming runs the risks of replacing an organic change process with a framework designed by outside experts. I recognize myself as one of the outside experts, as this process has taught me that I have the greatest impact when I act as a catalyst and then step back and let the community move forward. Further, this effort was not designed to create a revolution, but rather initiate an adaptive change process because “PD is organic, it’s latent, it’s a ripple effect with undetermined consequences. You go fast by going slow. Let the people think for themselves. Give them time. There is a latent process of internalization” (Sternin, personal communication, March, 2013).

**Common River programming for the community.** As with the PD application to social reintegration of former girl child soldiers, the information gathered from the PD process can be used to foster social assets. The PD mothers and daughters exhibited life skills, which can be understood as “psychosocial skills that result in an ability to navigate the environment in a healthy, safe manner” (UN, 1999, p. 3). Life skills include practices such as “self-awareness, problem-solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills” (p. 3). Many of the other mothers seemed to lack many of these skills. Motherhood in childhood often means that these essential life skills are not acquired because “her health, education, earning potential and her entire future

may be in jeopardy, trapping her in a lifetime of poverty, exclusion and powerlessness” (UNFPA, 2013, p. 18). “I want to learn out to make my life better,” one woman noted (personal communication, November, 2013). “I can’t change my life, but there has to be a way to make it more bearable” (personal communication, November, 2013). Life skills are tools that can help these women negotiate a state of affairs in which they are safe and comfortable.

The participants expressed a desire for financial literacy, as they recognize that control over money would lead to increased freedom and independence. “I want to earn money separate from my husband,” one woman said, “because that will help me stand up to him” (personal communication, November, 2013). The desire to have an income extends beyond financial need and entails serving as a tool for constructing a more comfortable relationship. The women believe that an income increases their negotiation power and gives them a voice in affairs related to the home and family.

Donna Sillan, Common River cofounder and program director, and I are designing a life skills and financial literacy program to address the needs that the women expressed as the most pressing. The financial literacy component will entail vocational training, basic math skills and the opening of bank accounts. The life skills portion will focus on assertiveness, negotiation skills, reflective reasoning and other traits that are conducive to negotiating a situation in which they are safe and comfortable. The program will begin in fall, 2014 and will initially run for one year. In addition, have also recommended that Common River create structured support groups for child mothers as well as adult mothers married as children to help them learn to care for their children and themselves.

The programing for the women is significant within the context of addressing the needs of child brides. For a married girl, the transition from childhood to adulthood takes place within

the hierarchy of a marriage, which inhibits the girl child's access to the social and human assets needed to develop as an individual in her own right. In terms of outside interventions, married girls fail to benefit from "services for adolescents because they are married and for married women because of their age, lack of experience and lack of autonomy" (WHO, 2012, p. 26). The social, economic and personal implications of child marriage remain in adulthood, as "when a girl marries as a child, she is disempowered for life" (Sundaram, 2014, para 7).

I have found no reference to programs that address the lingering needs of women who were married as children, yet "the problems women in the developing world face in their adult lives can often be traced back to their experiences as adolescent girls" (Sundaram, 2014, para 4). This research created an opportunity for me as a scholar-practitioner to understand the ways in which child marriage shapes the lived reality of adult women. By better understanding the long-term, the development community is better positioned to design effective programming to assist these women in navigating their environment in such a manner that enables them to live lives of dignity. When former child brides have tools to navigate their environment in a safe, healthy manner, their children will benefit.

### **Reflections on Professional and Personal Implications**

For me personally, this study represented a journey from the place of expert to the place of the learner. I set out to understand the context of child marriage by abduction in a way that questioned whether or not there were existing, local solutions. This entailed "seeing the situation through new and different lenses" (Sternin, personal communication, February, 2013). To take on this perspective, I followed the first three steps of the PD process: reframing and defining the problem, determining the presence of PD behaviors and strategies and encouraging the

community to discover the specific uncommon practices that enable PDs to prevent or solve the identified problem.

I developed an in-depth, nuanced understanding of a specific problem among a specific group of people. In my work, I tend to emotionally distance myself from my participants in an effort to both foster professionalism and protect my own vulnerability. In this research, I took the opposite approach. I wanted to cultivate empathy as well as a contextual understanding of the lived experience of the people with whom I worked. This dismantling of stoicism came naturally because I am connected to this community through my daughters and through my friends, Common River cofounders Donna Sillan and Tsegaye Bekele. This sense of closeness heightened my ability to process my surroundings, deconstruct information and implement activities. Although I recognize that I cannot always embrace a community as I have in this study, moving forward I will create more spaces for empathy regardless of the professional norms of the outside expert. This approach is more humane, creates greater results and is more consistent with my own ethics.

In terms of my future scholarly and professional pursuits, I have learned that “indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity” (Tuhivai Smith, 1999, p. 5). This study clearly impacts my future work because I now have a heightened awareness of the limitations of my own expertise. My education and experience do provide me with skills to advance the wellbeing of the communities in which I work; however, the members of these communities have the knowledge of lived experience. While not minimizing my expertise, I must keep my credentials in perspective because “the support for an authoritarian approach to development is sometimes not overt but implied. It is often altruistic rather than self-serving” (Easterly, 2006, p. 8). I recognize that “sometimes the obstacle to doing leadership differently is oneself” (Sinclair, 2007,

p. 165). If I do not continuously reflect on my inherent position of power and attempt to mitigate that power, I will inevitably recreate the power structures in which I am embedded. In addition, this lack of awareness can hinder my effectiveness. Had I relied on my knowledge as an adolescent girl expert, this study would have centered on child marriage and overlooked child marriage by abduction, a related practice that fuels child marriage. Moving forward personally and professionally, I will hold on to this experience of reframing the problem, as here I have learned a lesson with endless potential to create change: the community, and only the community, is positioned to know, express and improve its reality.

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