5-2015

The Underground Gang: Cyclist Group Identity as Expressed Throughout Folk Art, Folk Events, Narratives, and Community Spaces

Anna P. Christiansen
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Christiansen, Anna P., "The Underground Gang: Cyclist Group Identity as Expressed Throughout Folk Art, Folk Events, Narratives, and Community Spaces" (2015). All Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 4467.
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/4467
THE UNDERGROUND GANG: CYCLIST GROUP IDENTITY AS EXPRESSED
THROUGH FOLK ART, FOLK EVENTS, NARRATIVES, AND COMMUNITY
SPACES

By

Anna P. Christiansen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Folklore

Approved:

Dr. Lisa Gabbert
Major Professor

Dr. Melody Graulich
Committee Member

Dr. Lynne McNeill
Committee Member

Dr. Mark McLellan
Vice President for Research and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2015
ABSTRACT

The Underground Gang: Cyclist Group Identity as Expressed Through Folk Art, Folk Events, Narratives, and Community Spaces

by

Anna P. Christiansen, Master of Arts
Utah State University, 2015

Major Professor: Dr. Lisa Gabbert
Department: English

This thesis is a study of the “underground” cycling community in Ogden, Utah. Countercultural cycling micro-communities exist across the United States, if not the world, but have not yet been thoroughly studied by folklorists. This research establishes a foundational understanding of the nature of underground cycling culture, particularly in relation to identity. Using folkloric definitions of identity and subculture as my foundation, I examine four different facets of cyclist activities: folk art, folk events, narratives, and the community’s use of space. These four facets provide a variety of lenses through which to examine actualized, expressive cyclist behavior. Each facet also illustrates the different levels (personal, community, and global) at which identity is performed.

The most personal performances of cyclist identity are through the folk art of modified bicycles. Modifications tend to reflect the personality of the cyclist, and
consequently a bicycle comes to hold much symbolism for the cyclist. The community-level studies consisted of examining group events where I observed how the group interacted with itself. The performance and participation in activities are what constitutes an actual cycling community, rather than a series of individual cyclists.

The examination of narratives moves outward to contextualize the cycling micro-community within the larger Ogden community. This chapter explores the role of conflict, illustrates how cyclists think of themselves, and illustrates how cyclists define themselves in opposition to motorists.

The community spaces examination looks at the use of physical space versus digital space. These spaces illustrate how the community behaves amongst itself versus how the community behaves amongst the larger, online, Utah cycling community. The physical space reflected the creativity and utilitarian needs of the group. The restrictive digital spaces manage to be expressive through images and language. Internal group conflict occurs more often online, however, due to infractions of implicit group etiquette, possibly as a symptom of a less personal form of interaction.

The marginalized, cyclist identity seemed to hold the greatest rewards at the more intimate, personal levels. Moving outward towards broader community-level contests, cyclist identity seems to become a source of conflict.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Underground Gang: Cyclist Group Identity as Expressed Through Folk Art, Folk Events, Narratives, and Community Spaces

Anna P. Christiansen

This thesis is a study of the “underground” cycling community in Ogden, Utah. This thesis establishes a groundwork understanding of the nature of underground cycling culture, particularly in relation to identity. Using folkloric definitions of identity and subculture as my foundation, I conducted fieldwork with the Ogden cycling community to examine four different facets of cyclist activities: folk art, folk events, narratives, and the community’s use of space. Each of the four facets also illustrated the different levels of identity, shifting from individual levels, outward to the performance of identity as an individual and group within a larger local and global community.

Countercultural cycling micro-communities exist across the United States, if not the world, but until now have been, relatively unstudied. This serves as a foundational study of cycling culture and contributes to folkloric understandings of identity performance.
DEDICATION

This one’s for you, Dude.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, a tremendous thank you to Professor Lisa Gabbert for her insight, patience, and support during the process of writing this thesis. Thank you to my committee members, Professors Lynne McNeill and Melody Graulich, for their assistance and expertise.

Thank you to Crystal Stephens and the USU Writing Center for guiding me through the tricky parts. Thank you to my English department colleagues for constant moral support.

I would like to thank the cyclists of Ogden that assisted me in this thesis. Thank you to Gage Jacobson, who introduced me to the community and served as my first informant. Thank you to JP Orquiz, Berk Tuttle, Candace Northrop, and Chase Christiansen for patiently answering my interview questions. Thank you to the numerous others, who allowed me to tag along and research at bike events.

A special thank you to my family for their support and encouragement. Thank you to Chase, I could not have done this without you.

Anna P. Christiansen
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2. BIKE ART</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GAGE W. JACOBSON</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JUAN PEDRO (JP) ORQUIZ</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE BICYCLE</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3. RECREATIONAL EVENTS: PERFORMING COMMUNITY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIKE POLO</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALLEY CATS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRUISES</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4. CONFLICT NARRATIVES: THE TROUBLE WITH IDENTITY</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPANDEX IS QUEEN</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRAZY AS BE-ALL</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHARE THE ROAD OR ELSE</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEAR MISS</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALT CYCLE ASSAULTS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5. COMMUNITY SPACES: PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Draisine</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bicycle diagram</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bicycle frame</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gage’s Chopper Bike</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rolly Mammoth</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gage riding his Tall Bike</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Radial wheel lacing</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Semi-tangent lacing</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>JP and Gage braising at the Collective</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bike with brazed-on cargo rack</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Flat bars</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Drop bars</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gage’s Cyclist Selfie</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dustin’s Cyclist Selfie</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Polo player with wheel covering</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ogden bike polo players chug a beer between rounds</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Poster advertising the Spring 2014 Alley Cat</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spring, Sprang, Sprung completed manifest</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Manifest for the 2012 Halloween Alley Cat</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Racers and host after the Spring, Sprang, Sprung Alley Cat</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Alley Cat poster</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Alley Cat poster</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Full Moon Boogie Facebook image</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bicycle modified to carry an elaborate sound system</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2011 Novembeer event poster</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>The Sheldon Brown picture hung in the Collective</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Collective lounge space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Collective shop room wall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Facebook post by the Ogden Bike Collective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Stencil art OBC logo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Stencil art OBC logo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Ogden Bike Polo Club page call for a game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Article posted to SaltCycle and three of the twenty-three comments posted in response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Salt Cycle Supportive posts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>SaltCycle moderator's civility post</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The summer of 2007 I began spending more and more time on bicycles. This change began at the prompting of my friend, Gage Jacobson, who was very interested in bikes. He took me on bike rides and gave me a beautiful 1970s Japanese cruiser to fix up. Through Gage’s influence and my own interest, I became increasingly involved in the world of underground cycling. I enjoyed the antics and outings of the group, but becoming a group member was not an instant process. Never before had I felt so distinctly like an outsider to a culture that existed within my own neighborhood. I was fascinated with observing and consciously learning what it meant to become a member of the underground cycling community.

This thesis is a study of the underground cycling community in my hometown of Ogden, Utah. Underground cycling communities exist across the United States, if not the world, but are, at this time, relatively unstudied micro-communities. The goal of this study is to develop a groundwork understanding of underground cycling culture, particularly in relation to identity. I seek to answer two basic questions: How do cyclists perceive themselves? And what ideas, tensions and motivations define cyclist identity? To answer these questions I examine four different facets of cyclist activities: folk art, folk events, narratives, and the community’s use of space. These four angles provide a variety of lenses through which to examine actualized, expressive cyclist behavior and thereby develop an understanding of the underground cycling community.
I use the expression “underground cycling community” to signify a network of bike-riding young men, whose interests are generally focused on transportation and informal recreation. One way to explain the community of underground bicyclists is to start with clothing. When giving an elevator pitch about my research with the Ogden underground cycling community, I clarify the term “underground cycling” by explaining that I am referring to the cargo-pants bikers, not the spandex bikers. Most people nod with understanding at the statement and I move on in explaining my research. There are, in addition to clothing, many other markers of identity for underground cyclers. Undergrounders choose to use their bicycles for transportation, even when a car or public transit might be available. When commuting, they confidently ride in the road or bike lanes, never on sidewalks. The underground group is a countercultural subculture that holds itself apart from both mainstream, motorist norms and from competitive cycling culture, which they perceive as elitist. Undergrounders are often low to middle income young men. Many members of this group are employed in the cycling industry. Many build their own bicycles. The community is not constituted of competitive racers—though a few of them once were. The majority of the group consists of young men, between the ages of 18-29.¹ Racially, the group is reflective of the composition of Ogden, about 80% White to 20% Latino ("Demographics of Ogden" 2013). Deviating from these group norms, there are some middle-aged members and a handful of young women, myself included.

¹ Demographic information for the Ogden underground cycling community is approximate based on observation.
Long before I had academic incentive to build a relationship with the Ogden underground cycling community, I began working my way in through genuine social interest. During the summer of 2009, many members of the cycling community were very dedicated to the Ogden Bicycle Collective, a volunteer-run community bicycle shop (detailed description in Chapter 5). I quickly began volunteering. Unfortunately, I knew nothing about bicycle mechanics and my lack of expertise caused me to worry that my presence was tiresome rather than helpful. In an attempt to make myself welcome, I often came to my volunteer shifts at the Collective with a homemade treat to share. I realize now that I had unconsciously won favor with the group in a few ways. First, I volunteered at the Collective, a cause beloved by the underground cycling community, and, second, I brought food to share—a gesture especially appreciated by the community of insatiable young men; and finally because my shared treats were homemade, thereby performing the DIY values of the community. The cycling community could be considered a part of the “DIY” movement, a movement focused on doing and making things oneself. Therefore, by making my own food and sharing it with the community I was unconsciously displaying my DIY skills. The cycling community holds the greatest respect for mechanical skill, but banana bread will still get you in the door.

It is with some hesitation that I consider myself a member of the Ogden underground cycling community. I often attend community events, but my status as a member is complicated. I feel disadvantaged because I have never worked in the cycling industry and am not a skilled mechanic, so most of the group’s shoptalk goes over my head. As one of the few women in the group, I have never felt like a true insider since
underground cycling is predominantly a men’s group. A few years ago, I married one of the group members and since that time I have felt my status to be even more complicated. This confusion however, may merely be due to my own self-consciousness. My interviews revealed that others of the community considered me a welcome member. My insider status particularly hit home as the result of an interview. In response to a question, my informant insisted that, as a cyclist, I ought to know the answers to the questions I was asking. When I responded by expressing ambivalence about my membership, my informant quickly became offended and, in a tone of irritation, told me I was definitely a member of the community. From this exchange, I realized that though I am certainly not a prestigious member of the community, I have nevertheless earned my way in and am considered an insider.

It is important to note that as woman my insider status is unique. The Ogden underground community is an indisputably male-dominated community. The gender composition of this community is representative of the gender disparity that generally exists within cycling. Cyclists and social scientists recognize this unequal gender representation and are making efforts to understand it. There are numerous articles (Baker 2009; Jaffe 2013; Chalabi 2014; Huff and Ralph 2014) and a handful of studies (Scheider 2010; Akar, Fisher, and Namgung 2013; Garrard, Rose, and Kai Lo 2008) that attempt to account for the disparity with the hope that it can be alleviated. These sources place the male to female ratio of cyclist commuters at anywhere from 2:1 to 4:1. The generally assumed reasons for female cycling-aversion are “fashion and fear”—non-bicycle friendly women’s clothing and the fear of street harassment (Chalabi 2014).
While the fashion/fear explanation may hold some water, surveys and travel studies offer different explanations for women’s limited interest. Akar, Fisher, and Namgung published a study specifically looking to understand the gender disparity in cycling (2013). One of the main reasons they found for the limited numbers of women on two wheels is risk aversion. Other sources, including a survey by the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, concur with Akar, Fisher, and Namgung, finding risk aversion as the major deterrent (Sibley 2010). Women simply do not feel safe traveling through city streets on bicycles. These studies noted that cities with better cycling infrastructure tended to have better female participation. Aside from risk aversion, researchers found that gendered transportation issues also created limitations for women. In the United States, women still take on the majority of the child-rearing duties and consequently make more trips for child transportation. A survey by the Bikes Belong Coalition found that women were twice as likely as men to report an “inability to carry children or other passengers” as a factor that discouraged them from cycling (Scheider 2010, 11).

These sources offer insight into the causes of gender disparity in bicycle commuting, a disparity which also appears in the social circles of underground cycling. The next step is to understand how male-dominated gender composition affects cycling communities. In Utah, there are nearly three men to every woman on a bicycle (League of American Bicyclists 2011), and the Ogden community is reflective of this statistic.

---

2 The primary risk concern expressed in this study was associated with on-road security, not street harassment. 73% expressed concern for distracted drivers, as opposed to 13% that expressed concern for street harassment.
There are female participants, but these women are few, irregular, and usually the companions of male regulars. The nature of male-dominated group culture means that to be included, women must accept and engage with “the sexualized masculine culture of the group” (Fine 2005, 61). Gary Fine specifically examines the nature of female involvement in male-dominated communities in Simon J. Bronner’s book *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities* (2005). Fine’s chapter “In the Company of Men: Female Accommodation and the Folk Culture of Male Groups” notes that there are masculine social norms to which women must adapt. Fine states that “women who wish to be part of male-dominated groups typically must be prepared to accept established patterns of male bonding and must be able successfully to decode male behavior patterns” (2005, 63). Interpreting social cues is only part of a women’s immersion in a group; she must also involve herself in the group by being “willing to engage in—or at least tolerate—coarse joking and teasing and must accept the male-based informal structure of the group” (2005, 63). My own participant observations in the cycling community provided me first-hand encounters with the masculine behaviors described by Fine. On occasions when my feminine physical strength limited me or if in aggressive games (described in Chapter 3) my behavior was considered cowardly, I was firmly told to: “put on your big-girl panties and do it.” This type of teasing was normal and all participating women encountered some form of it. The women that got along best within the group did well because they were able to “give as good as they got.” Gender plays a significant role in the structure of the underground cycling community, and it is important that it is acknowledged. Gender, however, is not the focus of this thesis. The
underground cycling community is, as of yet, relatively unstudied and the basic groundwork needs to be laid before a study focusing on gender can be conducted. This thesis works to lay that foundation by examining the group identity of underground cycling.

Currently, cycling communities across the United States are becoming increasingly visible through mainstream media that has begun showcasing the culture. *The New York Times* has published about commuter and underground cycling culture around the New York area, covering topics such as commuting concerns (Hoffman 2008), bike parks\(^3\) (Krieger 2014), and alley cats\(^4\) (Fernandez 2007). Concerns over transportation issues have prompted social scientists and city planners to closely examine cycling (Akar, Fisher, and Namgung 2013; Sibley 2010; Pucher and Renne 2003). Local news sources in Utah occasionally report on the underground community, but only when a major incident occurs to draw public attention, such as a traffic accident (Gurrister 2009; Whitehurst 2009a, 2009b; Shaw 2014; such incidents are explored in Chapter 4)

The entertainment industry has also begun capitalizing on the unique appeal of the underground cycling community. In 2012, Columbia Pictures released *Premium Rush*, an action film about a New York bike messenger. The film received generally positive reviews and took in $31 million at the box office. The television comedy series

\(^3\) A bike park can be a trail system or an open space arena, similar to a skate park. These parks contain features such as jumps and one-way trails, so riders can ride quickly without concerns for collisions with oncoming traffic.

\(^4\) Alley cats are scavenger-hunt bike races. They take place on city streets with checkpoints that competitors must find to complete the race.
Portlandia has the recurring character Spike, a countercultural bike fanatic (Michaels et al. 2011-2014).

American cycling culture has been receiving mainstream attention from popular media sources, but, unfortunately, folklore has done very little work to understand cycling communities. Robert Dobler is the first and only folklorist to zero in on cycling culture. His work "Ghost Bikes: Memorialization and Protest on City Streets" (2011) examines cycling communities’ complex reactions to the deaths of cyclists that are killed in traffic accidents. Dobler’s study centers around the Ghost Bike, a bicycle painted white and left on the street near the place of a fatal accident. A Ghost Bike left in a public space acts as a memorial for the dead, but also as a political statement. Jack Santino terms these types of temporary memorials “spontaneous shrines,” assemblage memorials “that people construct, at their own initiative, to mark the sites of untimely deaths” (2011, 98). One of the intentions of the original ghost bike was to express outrage at the carelessness of motorists and to give voice to the cyclists whose safety was jeopardized by a lack of awareness (2011, 173). The ghost bike memorial transforms a site of a tragic untimely death into a site of protest (2011, 184).

Dobler lays a foundation by recognizing cyclists as a subculture. “The organized groups that spring up around ghost bikes,” he notes, “seem to share a conception of cyclists as a subculture, sharing a more or less homogenous core of principles, concerns, and interests that must be protected and preserved from encroachment by an oppressive mainstream car culture” (2011, 83). I study this community to better understand the nature of its culture and to elucidate what Dobler describes as the group’s homogenous
core principles, concerns and interests. If cyclists feel their principles must “be protected and preserved from encroachment…” clearly the group values these principles to the extent that they take action to protect them. These valued principles must therefore be a major component to the group’s shared identity, influencing their actions and interactions. Through studying the activities of the group, I interpret the motivations behind those actions and thus understand the principles that define the cycling community.

Building on Dobler’s notion of cycling as a subculture requires an understanding of what a subculture is. Dick Hebdige’s work on subculture lends great understanding to this concept (1979). Subcultures exist within normative, mainstream society but are not of mainstream society. Hebdige explains that, subcultures function in the same way normative cultures do, “as systems of communication, forms of expression and representation” (129). The distinctive difference from mainstream cultures, he explains, is that “subcultures are … expressive forms but what they express is… a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives” (132). Hebdige defines subculture as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to the ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style (133). This thesis illustrates how underground cyclists define their subcultural identity and express their objections to the ruling motorist, mainstream culture.

It is important at this point that I define the concept of identity. Identity, however, does not lend itself well to simple definitions. Both Carla Kaplan (2014) and Roger
Abrahams (2003) agonize over the contradictions and complexities of attempting to pin down the enormous and mutable idea of identity. Kaplan’s exploration of “identity” highlights the complications of perception and practice that arise politically, socially, and individually. A well-defined identity can lead to stronger representation and voice. Unfortunately, the same well-defined identity can be limited by encouraging narrow solidarities rather than broader identifications (2014, 125). Identity can empower an individual with a sense of self or cause him/her to battle between who s/he feels s/he is and who s/he feels s/he is supposed to be (124). In an effort to avoid defining identity in terms that lead to constraining ascriptions, Kaplan recommends looking at identity in performative terms. Identity is not what we are but how we identify (emphasis mine, 126). Rather than understanding identity as a static label that individuals possess or are ascribed, performative study recognizes that identity is constituted from chains of repetitive signs (126). It is a mutable process constructed of individual’s behavior. Applying this idea of performative process to my work, this thesis seeks to expose not what a cyclist is but how a cyclist is. This thesis looks at various activities of cyclists. By looking at how cyclists conduct themselves I am able to develop an understanding of the ideologies that inform why cyclists are the way they are.

One important contributor to the ideological base that defines why cyclists behave the way they do is the DIY movement. Kristen Williams connects the DIY movement to several political movements such as third-wave feminism, environmentalism, anti-capitalism and anti-sweatshop organizing, and antiwar politics (2011, 308). Williams defines the movement (which she labels “craftivism” for reasons of differentiation) as a
“social activism that explicitly links individual creativity and human-based mechanisms of production to broader sociopolitical cultural contexts in an attempt to influence the social world” (306). These types of ideologies and politically motivated practices are present in the underground cycling movement. As illustrated through their hands-on projects and approaches to problem solving and creation, cyclists value self-sufficiency and environmental awareness. The cycling community defines itself in contrast to the perceived ideals of the consumerist, capitalist, and motorist culture.

The ideologies behind being a cyclist are what Roger Abrahams would term “an ideal life-plan or an archetypal map of the actual world” (2003, 199). In his own theoretical exploration of identity, Abrahams establishes “a life plan” or “archetypal map” as the notions upon which identity is built. The impassioned dedication to values that cyclists feel to be overwhelmingly and obviously good is part of what puts the group at odds with mainstream society, which underground cyclists perceive as inherently bad because of its perceived disregard for these values.

The underground community’s friction with mainstream communities correlates with Richard Bauman’s theory on shared identity (1971). In his article “Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore,” Bauman examines assumptions that folklore arises from shared identity and shared values, but identity is also created and defined in relation, to and often against, outsiders of different identification. Dorothy Noyes succinctly summarizes Bauman’s argument: “…folklore often thematize[s] communal identity, but rather than expressing a pre-existent identity among insiders, it more often construct[s] one aggressively or humorously, at social boundaries” (2012, 14). The
chapters of this thesis, especially Chapters 4 and 5, focus on the underground community in the broader context of its relationships to the encompassing society within which it exists. These chapters illustrate how identity can be constructed at boundary lines, through contact—and often conflict—with outsiders. This reflection on the impact of boundaries and identity connects back to a question posed by Dobler, as to whether or not cycling’s ghost bike memorials are markers of a culture war waged along political lines between cyclists and motorists (2011, 170). For cyclists a large portion of identity seems to be constructed in opposition to motorists.

Returning again to the “how” and “why” of cyclist behavior, a understanding of cyclist identity requires understanding what being a cyclist means at different levels. In *American Identities*, Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey establish three distinct levels of identity: Micro, Meso, and Macro (2006). The breakdown of these levels is as follows:

- The Micro, or personal level, includes factors such as gender, sexual orientation, marital status, social class, and education. These factors are not static and can include critical life events, such as entering school, the onset of puberty, losing a family member, or being a victim of rape.

- Meso, the community level, defines identity in relation to the surrounding environment—“at school, in the workplace, or on the street” (11). It is in these places that people ask questions that seek to fit individuals into existing social categories. Questions about where you come from or if you speak a particular language are, at root, asking “Are you one of us or not?” Community-based identity can be both geographic and emotional. This level of identity comes with
group standards, expectations, obligations, responsibilities, and demands. For example, a Latina might be expected to speak Spanish; a member of “the queer community” might be assumed to share values, interests, or culture—qualities that are thought of as defining of group membership and belonging (12).

- Macro, the global level, is the level at which people are classified “according to real or assumed physical, biological, or genetic differences, [as] a way to distinguish who is included and who is excluded from a group, to ascribe particular characteristics, to prescribed social roles, and to assign status, power, and privilege” (13). Social categories such as gender, race, and class—characteristics that can be essential elements to shaping lower-level distinctions of identity—are used at the Macro level to establish and maintain a particular kind of social order. These social category classifications and their specific features, meanings, and significance are socially constructed through history, politics, and culture (13) The specific meanings are often used to justify conquest. For example, Native Americans were described as brutal and uncivilized, thus justifying the aggressive, imperialism of White settlers.

This thesis uses Kirk and Okazawa-Rey’s levels, but the approach of each chapter does not fall neatly within the three defined levels. Starting by looking at individual identity in Chapter 2, each chapter moves outward in scope. Each chapter also employs a different lens through which to examine the practice of identity. These levels of identity, though broken into separate categories, are not constructed independently of each other. For example, personal and global influences inform how people define themselves at the
Meso-level. Incorporating each level into my study allows for an examination of how each levels impact cyclist identity.

Chapter 2 is a micro-level examination of cyclist identity studied through the folk art of two distinct artists. The works of folk art used for this examination are modified bicycles. The detailed examinations of unique, modified bikes illustrate how the mechanics’ art is representative of their individual identity. The creative process and the completed bicycles reflect important values and ideas of their makers, such as self-sufficiency and creativity. These bikes also illustrate facets of the mechanics’ individual personalities, such as cleverness and resourcefulness.

Moving outward from examining individual identity, Chapter 3 examines how group identity is practiced within the underground circle itself. Chapter 3 focuses on folk events of the cycling community in an effort to understand how the community behaves and interacts with itself. Building on the Hymes SPEAKING model, this section breaks down the components of bike polo, a traditional cycling event, to elucidate the community values that are communicated through the event structure and behavior. Polo is then compared to two other events, alley cats and cruises, to illustrate the consistent and varying facets of cycling gatherings. These events illustrate issues such as group tensions with law enforcement, issues of space, and issues of exclusivity, even within the underground circle.

Chapter 4 expands the scope, examining Meso identity through looking at the interactions of the underground community with outsiders, members of the general Ogden community. This chapter explores the nature of the cyclist-motorist conflict by
providing a collection of conflict narratives. These narratives illustrate the cyclist perspective of conflict incidents that occur on the street. The content and tone of these narratives is very telling of cycling opinions and ideas about motorists and conflicts—usually exhibiting a great deal of aggression, entitlement to the road, and the belief that motorists are inherently in the wrong.

Chapter 5 looks at the use of space and the behavior of the underground group in two different contexts. This chapter broadens the scope to consider how the Ogden underground community fits within Utah cycling communities and the online network of cyclists. This chapter’s scope is the closest to a Macro consideration, but is still limited to Utah.5 The first space examined, the Ogden Bicycle Collective, is physical and partially controlled by the Ogden underground group. The decoration, cleanliness, and use of the Collective reflect community ideas, and demographic composition. The other space examined in this chapter is digital space. This chapter describes and explores the community’s use of Facebook group pages, including the official Bike Collective business page, as well as the informal, social pages of Salt Cycle and the Ogden Bike Polo Club. Group behaviors are not the same in digital space as they are in physical, though the digital has been a valuable resource for the community after the loss of their physical space.

As noted above, my initial entry to the community was social, as a genuinely interested participant. My research interests developed later when I began viewing the

---

5 This study, unfortunately, does not reach a truly global scale. It is my opinion that a future Macro study of cycling communities is warranted. Cycling communities exist across the globe and many cyclists justify their activities as a reaction to Macro problems such as global warming, industrialism, and transportation issues.
Ogden cycling group as a community worthy of study. In retrospect, I find that my informal process still followed traditional, formal patterns. Jean Schensul and Margaret LeCompte’s extensive ethnography guide, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, describes various means of entering the field; one approach they recommend is via a “gatekeeper,” a local person who controls access to resources—human, geographic, social, or informational (1999, 39). The community gatekeeper who facilitated my introduction was my friend Gage. Once formally engaged with a community, Schensul and LeCompte note that an ethnographer needs to understand the importance of reciprocity in building relationships (30). My process of immersion, though informal, still involved reciprocity. I built my relationships with the community by volunteering time at the Collective and by bringing baked treats with me when I spent time in at the Collective. My participation in community events, though beneficial for my research, felt as though it was perceived as important reciprocal effort on my part for the benefit of the community. My lack of skill and athleticism made me an easy target for teasing, but my overall feeling was still that my presence was welcome and my efforts were appreciated.

A large part of my research for this project was completed as a participant observer. This was also the research method the community was by far the most comfortable with. As an insider, I regularly attend social gatherings and participate at events, such as Alley Cats. I needed only attend, as usual, to observe genuine and natural interactions. When I felt I had observed something particularly valuable, I would, as Schensul and LeCompte advise, retreat from the field from time to time to make notes (84). I used a voice recorder on my phone to record notes and attempt immediate
verbatim repeats of quotes I thought significant. At noteworthy moments, I casually snapped photos with my smart phone; the youthful group members, who often had phone-in-hand themselves, thought nothing of a participant taking photos. Facebook was also a wonderful tool because members always photo-documented these events and posted the images on online. When I returned home from a gathering I would immediately make field notes either by hand or verbally with a voice recorder.

Many members of the group knew that I was working on a thesis about the community, but as long as I participated as a regular insider I felt comfortable, welcome, and involved. The times when I stepped out of my role as an insider were when I felt the most uncomfortable and even unwelcome. In April 2014, I attended an Alley Cat race, which I normally would have enthusiastically raced in, but that day I watched and took notes as a researching, nonparticipating observer. The group was clearly uncomfortable being the object of research. Their reactions were stiff, unnatural, and uncomfortable. In passing when I asked members for interviews, many expressed a willingness, but when the time came to schedule a formal sit-down I could not get a response to my emails, text messages, or phone calls.

I conducted four in-person interviews, a single phone interview, and exchanged emails or Facebook posts with about five individuals. A few interviewees were clearly uncomfortable as an object of research and became rigid and reserved during the interview process. However, I also had warm, willing, and effusive informant interviews that went very well. Prior to an interview, I explained my project to each interviewee and emailed my list of questions. I brought consent forms to each interview, but no forms
were signed. However, all interviews were recorded (with permission) via an audio-recorder and interviewees gave verbal consent. Following an interview I made notes on important details, body language, impressions, and non-verbal cues and inferences. At the beginning of an interview, I explained my research in detail and allowed interviewees to have their say in what they thought was important to know about the cycling community. I conducted my interviews with a list of core questions. The following is a sample of the questions I asked.

• Do you self-identify as a Cyclist? Why?
• At what age did you become involved in cycling? Please describe how you came to be involved in cycling.
• Were your parents involved in the cycling community? Describe your family’s involvement in cycling.
• Describe your current level of involvement with cycling on a personal level and a community level. For example, on a personal level, do you commute to work each day on a bike? On a community level, do you go on group rides or attend bike polo?
• What are your feelings on the cycling community? Likes/dislikes about the community?
• What cultural differences do you notice between cyclists and motorists?
• What, if any, political ideologies motivate your participation in cycling?

I attempted to form interview questions that would explicitly answer my research questions and allow cyclists to respond to inferences I was making from my participant observations. “Do you self-identify as a cyclist?” for example, allowed individuals I perceived as cyclists to respond to the label. Their feelings on this label indicated what they felt “cyclist” to mean. I allowed interviewees to direct the flow of interview conversation and pulled the focus back to my questions when a topic ran out of steam. I attempted to keep the tone of interviews very casual, in line with the usual tone of community dialogue. Discussion was open and oftentimes tangential. I transcribed my
interviews, but edited them for focus. I did not transcribe threads of conversation that I felt to be significantly diverted from my focus.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also made use of Facebook as a fieldwork site. I observed discussion boards as a non-participating observer. Individuals often posted photographs and comments on events that I found useful in my research. For Chapter 4, I sought out individual cyclist-motorist narratives from a community cycling page known as SaltCycle.

This research and my methodologies were approved of by Utah State University’s IRB. Participant observation events and interviews were begun with an explanation of my research and a letter of information was available for informants. Per the IRB guidelines, all my research materials have been kept secure.

It is important to note that my role as an insider and my involved activities as a participant observer has left me with a strong bias to identify with the group. This identification has benefited my research because as an insider I was able to ask personal questions and appeal to the ethos of my informants. Cyclists love to talk about their passion for cycling and how wonderful they feel their group is, however, as an insider I felt I was allowed freer access and more comfortable interactions than an outsider would have been allowed. The underground group seemed incredibly uncomfortable when I openly took on the role of a researcher, but many supported me and expressed interest in helping me succeed in my studies. A researcher entering the group would likely have had difficulty shaking the title and the resistance to authority that it would have gone with it. During my writing process, I made efforts to check my insider bias by attempting to be
aware of how my experiences shape my opinions. I received much help with editing, proofreading, and discussion, from family, friends, a writing center tutor, and my thesis chair. Oftentimes these people disagreed with my interpretations and assessments. For example, my father felt my interpretation of conflict narratives was aggressively biased. Following his input I reflected and decided to stand by most my interpretations, but revised for diction that is more neutral.

It is important to keep in mind that my descriptions are specific to the Ogden underground cycling community. I chose the Ogden community because it is the community I am familiar with and the cycling group to which I have the best access. The accessibility was ideal for my research, but some details of this study are entirely unique to the Ogden community. The composition and activities of other underground cycling communities are slightly different, even in nearby Salt Lake City. For example, the Ogden community plays bike polo somewhat surreptitiously in an infrequently used parking garage. Salt Lake City’s summer polo games are hosted publicly in a major city park. The Salt Lake group, known as the Beehive Bike Polo Club, was even permitted to erect a temporary mural of their logo at their court. Differences such as this contrast in polo venue can largely be attributed to acceptance by the surrounding community. Salt Lake is a larger city than Ogden, and larger cities tend to be more diverse. Salt Lake also has a more bike-friendly infrastructure, which could be argued to have social impact on the number of cycling participants and general public acceptance. In spite of community variations, it is my hope that my conclusions are generally representative of the nature of underground cycling culture.
CHAPTER 2

BIKE ART

The bicycle is the most significant object of the material culture of the cycling community. As a crucial object for the community, it is important that the meaning and significance of this object are well understood. This chapter explores bike modification as a means of better understanding what bikes mean for the community. Cyclists build, use, endlessly discuss, and obsess over bicycles. All cyclists modify their bikes—even if the change is as simple as picking out a bold color of bar tape. This chapter examines the modification work of two different mechanics, Gage Jacobson and J.P Orquiz. These two mechanics have very different approaches to modification. The examination of their folk art draws upon the works of Jeannie Thomas, Michael Own Jones, and William Gradante to better understand the values expressed in modified bicycles. The study of only two mechanics serves to narrow the scope to examine how cyclist identity is practiced at the Micro level.

Historically, the object known today as the bicycle began as a rather uncomfortable two-wheeled running machine. In 1817, the German Baron Karl von Drais, attempted to answer the call for a human-powered carriage. He developed a running machine, or draisine,

Figure 1: Draisine (Herlihy 2004, 27)
that was ridden by straddling the machine and propelling forward, pushing off the ground with one foot, then the other, as if walking or running (Herlihy 2004, 21). While the draisine was not a perfect creation, it sparked further inventive curiosity and illustrated public interest in a mechanical horse (52-54). Decades passed and innovative minds continued to experiment with the human carriage model. The model was not significantly improved until 1867 when Pierre Michaux added cranks and pedals to the front wheel. Thereafter inventive improvements rapidly continued to change the shape of this machine. The 1870s alone progressed through patents for ball bearings, caliper breaks, and rear-wheel chain-driven safety bicycles.

The pedal-powered bicycle did not take long to develop a public following and eventually became a contributor to social and political change. By 1868 Michaux et Compagnie sponsored the first official races, which were a success and widely reported on (Herlihy 2004, 96). Feminine interest in the bicycle was so strong that women’s models began appearing no later than 1874 and popular female racers began appearing by 1879 (215, 205). For women, the bicycle acted as a vehicle for liberation, driving fashions to allow for greater mobility and even playing a role in the women’s rights movements (Dodge and Herlihy 1996, 129). By the 1890s mass production made the bicycle readily available and affordable to the general public. The development of

---

6 The bicycle pushed women’s dress towards the bloomers and other more functional garments. “The Rational Dress Society was founded in England in 1888 with the purpose of encouraging women to abandon their corsets and cumbersome and weighty skirts” (Dodge and Herlihy 1996, 126). Such changes were not without conservative pushback. Nevertheless, “the bicycle thus helped liberate women from their clothes and by extension from their domesticity and isolation” (1996, 127). The bicycle served as a vehicle for specific political movements organized around the issue of women’s rights (1996, 133). Suffragettes and Temperance activists took advantage of bicycle transportation as a means of furthering their work.
America’s roads can even be credited to the bicycle, as it was widely considered the chief catalyst behind the successful campaign for better roads, culminating in a network of highways (Herlihy 2004, 298). In only a century, the bicycle managed to make an impressive impact. In this chapter, I explain how this historic vehicle of change is also a vehicle of expression and creativity.

The industrial nature of the bike might not seem to lend itself well to folkloric study. This study, however, is not the first of its discipline to examine mass-produced objects as vehicles of creativity or identity. Jack Santino (1994) and Jeannie Thomas (2003) have both published studies that explore intersections of mass and folk culture. Santino’s *All Around the Year* examines holiday displays constructed from repurposed objects such as Clorox bottles or rubber balls. Santino notes how assemblages of mass-produced objects are made personal in the hands of individual creators (1994, 37-38). Jeannie Thomas’s book *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender*, examines the use of industrially manufactured objects such as Barbies as expressive materials. “My approach,” Thomas explains, “is that of a folklorist looking at how people use, personalize, ‘folklorize,’ and make meaningful a range of forms, including mass-produced ones” (2003, 3). This chapter adopts Thomas’s approach of examining the significance of personalized mass-produced objects, by examining how mechanics modify mass-produced bicycles to make them meaningful. The examples of this chapter illustrate how dedicated cyclists find ways to customize their bicycles in ways that are artistic, personal, and significant.
This chapter illustrates the various layers of identity that emerge in the modification of bicycles. As the product of individual creators, modified bikes stand as indicators of individual identity. “One way to describe the study of art,” according to Henrie Glassie, “is to say that it is the process of discovering through objects the values of their makers and users” (1999, 18). Close examination of modified bicycles reveals values such as self-sufficiency, creativity, bold expression, and functionality. These all illustrate aspects of the makers’ identities.

Bikes created by individuals can also serve as expressive representations of the cycling community, of which the creator is a part. Michael Own Jones illustrates this point in his article “How Can We Apply Event Analysis to ‘Material Behavior’ and Why Should We?” (1997). Jones explores the utility of studying the circumstances of an object’s creation to expand understanding of the material culture and the values embodied by the object. “Artifacts,” Jones notes, “display their makers’ attitudes and opinions, values and convictions, and identification with particular people or loyalties to certain institutions” (emphasis mine, 1997, 202). Objects created by individuals can serve as indicators of group values because these objects are not created in a vacuum. Jones notes that a social dimension surrounds construction, display and use and that this social dimension affects production (1997).

A passing remark, furrowed brow, approving nod or shrug does not go unnoticed. Often the maker solicits opinions. Frequently others comment, whether or not asked to do so. These responses challenge or reinforce behavior including the object under construction, just as audience reactions during a storytelling event affect the narrator and consequently influence the telling of the story. (205)
Though a bicycle might be made for personal use, it will be used publicly among the maker’s social circle, who will inevitably notice and comment on the maker’s work and choices. Social gatherings for cruises or meetings in a shop create opportunities for commentary and evaluation. In the early stages, when a bike is being planned and discussed in a social situation, members are quick to voice their opinions. When I voiced an intention to build a pink bike and make it as loud and feminine as possible, I was quickly shut down. I was told that anyone could paint a bike, why waste my energy doing something so boring? The bike under discussion was in the early stages of wearing to a patina. Developing the patina was perceived to be much cooler. Retro and aged is more interesting than fresh paint. My plans died on the shop floor that day.

William Gradante reinforces Jones’s observation about the communal nature of individual artistic creation in his study “Art Among the Lowriders” (1985), which examines low rider creations of the Mexican-American community in Texas. Gradante follows the process of creation and the social functions of low riders. Commenting on the social nature of lowrider construction, Gradante notes a “…philosophy of collective as opposed to individualistic expression…” and “…the concept of the production of art as both a means and an end of collective expression” (1985, 74). Constructing a lowrider is a time-consuming and costly undertaking. Nevertheless, Gradante found that these personalized masterpieces served as expressions of the Mexican-American community. A finished product driven slowly at a community cruise illustrated “values such as self and group pride, the virtues of diligence and industry, and the rewards of interpersonal and intra-group cooperation” (75). These works of Jones and Gradante illustrate that an
object, in this case a bicycle made by an individual member of the cycling community, can stand as a reflection of community as a whole. Gradante’s study nicely compliments my own work on examining the creation of bicycles and their place in the cycling community.

To understand the bicycle, I employ Michael Own Jones’s idea of “material behavior,” a process-oriented approach for studying material culture (1997). Jones explains, “material behavior—short for ‘material aspects and manifestations of human behavior’—refers to the activity involved in producing or responding to the physical dimension of our world” (202) Jones describes interaction with the physical objects as a natural human behavior. This behavior includes “not only objects that people construct but also the processes by which their artificers conceptualize them, fashion them, and use them or make them available for others to utilize” (202). Using Jones’ approach, I
examine the personal and social influences at play in the creation of a bicycle. According to Jones, the decisions involved in the making of an object (raw materials, color, texture, design, purpose) all illustrate a maker’s attitudes and opinions, values and convictions, and identification with certain people (202). These elements can impact how a bicycle is modified. The unique identities of the two mechanics influence the decisions they make in their creative processes. Different bicycles are created for different ends, but there are a few core values present in the modified bikes of this chapter, such as self-expression, creativity, and the value of the learning process. Chapter 3 fulfills the final part of Jones’s “material behavior” method by examining bicycle processes of use and the role of the bike in social interactions.

One important value, thematized in the work of my two mechanics, is the importance of learning by doing. Learning by doing and imitating impressive works of art is a common practice in the folk arts. Woodcarving, for example, is often not taught, but learned through doing and imitating. Some carvers will look at articles and books to learn and get ideas. Others are initiated into the craft by being shown a piece and are then instructed to figure out how to make it on their own. “The answer is not given—it has to be earned” (Siporin 1992, 194). Through a process of trial and error, carvers figure out how to replicate an object they have seen. Woodcarver Earnest Bennett’s introduction to chain carving came as a boy when a neighbor showed him a carved wooden chain and dared him to figure out how to make it.

Figuring it became as important as making it… because it tests mechanical skills, problem solving, and craftiness. Once he had it figured out, Earnest showed the chain to friends. They recognized the chain as a trophy, for it
embodied symbols of prestige—woodworking and adaptability—prized in the community. (Bronner 1996, 62)

The same pattern is true of bicycles. Those who understand the skill required to build a basic bicycle recognize modified bicycles as works of prestigious mechanical accomplishment.

This chapter examines the work of two very skilled mechanics of the underground cycling community, Gage Jacobson and JP Orquiz. Gage, whom I mentioned in the introduction, was my gatekeeper to the underground cycling world. Gage and JP met through their jobs at a bike-shop and became friends. They both volunteered for the Ogden Bicycle Collective and are respected members, if not leaders, of the underground cycling community. I chose to use Gage as a subject in this study because I have known him for many years and have been impressed by his creations. JP was chosen because his peers recognize him as the best mechanic among them. They both share a common

Figure 3: Bicycle frame (Intown Bikes)
enthusiasm for the beauty of the bicycle as a machine. They are very different, however, in their motives for altering this machine and have dissimilar approaches to their bicycles. Gage’s modifications play with the aesthetics of the bicycle, while JP’s modifications seek to perfect the utility.

This study of the personal qualities expressed through the work of two individual cyclists facilitates a micro-level examination of cyclist identity. The modified bicycles of this chapter highlight the characteristics and values of their makers. These expressive creations represent who these cyclists are as individuals. This chapter explores methods of how two cyclists practice, interpret, and express their identity on an individual level.

GAGE W. JACOBSON

Gage is a life-long resident of Ogden, Utah. He began his professional involvement in the cycling industry at the age of sixteen when he began working for Bingham’s Cyclery. After high school, he dabbled in classes at the local university while working for SCOTT, a sporting goods company. Following SCOTT, he came to work his current employer, Quality Bicycle Products (QBP), a bicycle parts distributor. Gage has worked his way up the ladder from working to warehouse floor, to customer service, and was recently promoted to a managerial position.

Currently twenty-seven years old, Gage began learning bicycle mechanics at the age of fifteen by experimenting with bicycles in the garage of a friend’s home. Initially, Gage described their efforts as “just attempting to build sometime weird.” One such
example was his use of a galvanized fence posts for handlebars. The first focused project Gage described to me was his chopper bicycle.  

*The Chopper.* Gage often visited bicycle websites and he and his friends became inspired by the site SCUL (Subversive Choppers Urban Legion). Gage describes SCUL as “a website run by bored engineering students” (Jacobson 2013). Using a tongue-in-cheek sci-fi register, the site describes an elaborate scoring system for bike rides. Points are earned for activities such as getting a high-five from a stranger or running over a soda can. The “Visual Log” of provides a collection of publicly submitted photos, many of which display modified chopper bicycles. Guided by SCUL’s “Ship Construction” page, Gage and his friends focused their creative mechanical energy into building chopper bicycles. They met in his friend’s garage and, without guidance or training, used welding

![Figure 4: Gage’s Chopper Bike frame with elongated body, elongated fork, and different sized wheels](image)

7 A chopper bicycle has an elongated body and fork (see Figure 4) with handlebars that are taller and broader than traditional bars (see handlebars of bicycle in Figure 6). Sometimes chopper modifications included using wheels that were different sizes as shown in Figure 4. The difference between a chopper bicycle and traditional bicycle can be compared to the differences between a traditional motorcycle and a chopper motorcycle. There are no utilitarian advantages to a chopper. There is only the insider prestige from creating and riding a unique bike that exhibits modification skills.
tools borrowed from Gage’s father. They “chopped” and welded old bike frames into elongated choppers.

When their bikes were finished, Gage and the small group of friends began calling themselves a chopper gang. They named themselves “The Biking Vikings.” The Vikings’ activities entailed gathering to work on their bicycles, going on SCUL’s point-seeking rides, and “cruising the ‘vard.” Cruising Washington Boulevard in a car is a common activity for teenagers in the Ogden, Utah area. In the study *Art Among the Low Riders*, Gradante explains the purposes of cruising:

> To the caravan of cruising low riders… the destination is of little importance in comparison with the elaborate and self-consciously staged cultural performance that takes place along the way. Group cruising at excessively low speeds brings the desired result of focusing public attention…extolling such values as self and group pride, [and] the virtues of diligence and industry. (1985, 75)

Though Gradante was writing about low riders, the function of cruising translates to bicycles as well. Cruising provided a perfect location for the Viking to display their bicycles in contrast to the cars lining the streets. Gage described the ride as an opportunity for the group of young men to show off their work and meet people.

I asked Gage why, at the age of 16, when he had just become legal to drive, he instead chose to travel on a bicycle. He responded that he would drive for necessity or convenience, but for activities like “cruising the ‘vard” he would usually ride one of his
bicycles. Riding his bike was “punk rock.” It allowed him to show off his hard work, meet people, and represent himself as countercultural.

The chopper bike was an early stage of Gage’s learning process with bicycle modification. A repeating theme present in Gage’s work is the value of learning by doing. The chopper experiment provided an introductory learning experience to frame alteration and welding. The experience also allowed Gage and his friends the opportunity to work together and the opportunity to bond through the process. When their choppers were finished, they then occupied themselves by going out on cruises together. These cruises allowed The Biking Vikings the opportunity to show off to outsiders. Cruises also acted as a sort of celebration of what they had been able to accomplish both individually and together.

*The two lives of a fur bicycle.* Gage’s experiments with chopper bikes illustrate a creation process driven by a desire to learn and socialize. His next creation, the fur bike, again illustrates the influences of the Internet, but also is an example of personal expression. The life of the fur bike began in the summer of 2008 when Gage encountered the idea of bike upholstery. He had seen numerous images of bicycles with fabric-covered frames. Inspired by these images, Gage went to a fabric store and purchased a shaggy grey faux fur. Using a combination of hand sewing and upholstery glue, Gage covered the frame and fenders. When it was finished, he playfully named the bike “The Rolly Mammoth” (Figure 5). Response from within the underground community and without was uproariously positive. I had the opportunity to accompany Gage on a ride with the Rolly Mammoth. Passing observers were more outspoken about the amusing
nature of the bike. The photo Gage posted on Facebook (Figure 5), drew enthusiastic comments such as friend Joshua Hamilton’s: “O man its like your riding a bear. Awesome.” The Rolly Mammoth remained a fur bike for a year and a half. After that time Gage moved the bike on to a new phase. I was very amused by the Rolly Mammoth and expressed to Gage my disappointment at the change. His response was that, “After a year the novelty had worn off. I was over it.” Gage had participated in the aesthetic trend he had observed online, and made it his own. He had enjoyed the social admiration of the unique modification. Now his learning process and personal interest demanded that he move forward, so he removed the fur and decided to try something new with the frame.

The next phase of the fur bike did not come from the pages of the Internet, but from individual aesthetic preferences. Gage is a fan of patina. Patina is the rust that almost inevitably appears on the surface of an old bicycle. Genuine patina can require decades to achieve. On the ex-fur bike, however, Gage created a short-cut patina. He

Figure 5: The Rolly Mammoth
stripped the bike down to the frame (removed all the parts from the bike so the frame was bare, see Figure 3). He then coated the exterior of the frame in battery acid and left the frame out to rust in the rain for two weeks. After this period of facilitated rusting Gage painted a clear coat of finish over the frame and built the bike back up again. He had artificially created a patina-finish bicycle. This was a great deal of labor to get a bike to rust. I asked Gage why he would put so much effort into creating a patina finish. Gage explained his preference for patina as an appreciation for the unobtainable. “Patina takes years or decades to happen. And it has to be the original finish. And, like, anyone can paint a bike.” Aesthetically, Gage prefers the beauty of patina. Though his artificial patina did not follow the regular natural processes, to Gage patina still seems to represent authenticity, patience, and appreciation for the natural state of things.

Each of Gage’s bicycles carries markers of the values, interests and motivations that influence his creation process. Gage’s appreciation for aesthetics explains his great effort in creating an artificial patina bike. An interest in aesthetics, a liking for attention, and a desire to express creativity and personality also explain Gage’s effort in creating the Rolly Mammoth. If not already evident, Gage considers himself countercultural. His involvement with bicycles is part of how he feels he rejects the mainstream. He values bicycles, rather than the cars valued by normative culture. He makes and modifies things himself, thereby avoiding participation in consumerist culture. He is proud of what he can make himself, rather than what he can buy.

Bicycles also satisfy Gage’s enjoyment for applied learning. In school, Gage was not an avid book-learning student, but he excels at teaching himself functional skills.
Each bicycle caused him to practice different skills including welding, sewing, and, the next example, mechanical adaptations. Every modification also forced Gage to practice stripping a bike down to its frame and then rebuilding it. The work required from each bike likely gave Gage that practice that has made him the highly skilled mechanic he is today.

Gage uses his bicycles to express his personality, especially his cleverness and wit. Gage has a gift for puns and I consider him very clever. The fur bike modification is an example of a big expression of Gage’s humor. I have also observed small, silly changes to bikes that express playfulness, such as his use of wine corks for endcaps. The witty titles of the Biking Vikings chopper gang and the Rolly Mammoth again exhibit his cleverness.

*The Tall Bike.* The next bicycle returns to the theme of the learning process. Learning is perhaps Gage’s biggest motivation for modifying a bicycle. SCUL, the same source of inspiration for the chopper bike, introduced Gage to the idea of the Tall Bike. A Tall Bike is much more complex than the bikes previously mentioned, as it required more than just the aesthetic alteration of the frame— it also requires adaptation of the mechanical parts of the frame.⁸

---

⁸The complex mechanical adaptations, Gage says, are a symptom of bored engineers According to Gage, SCUL was started by a group of MIT students. The group is based out of Boston, but I cannot further verify participant education/profession because scul.org does not offer professional details about its participants.
A Tall Bike is created using two frames, welding one frame directly over top of the other. The seat stays and chain stays are cut off of one frame (refer to Figure 3 for frame part labels). This cut frame is then welded onto the top of the other frame, lining up seat tubes and head tubes. The chain wheel and crank arms are attached to the upper frame (refer to Figure 2 for part labels). The height of the bicycle requires a long chain be fit to the ring, as the chain must reach up to the top frame and back down to the lower frame’s rear wheel hub. For additional flair, Gage chose to add chopper handlebars to his Tall Bike.

This bike again illustrates Gage’s valuation of the learning process. When Gage created his Tall Bike he did not have any instruction on the mechanical modifications that would be necessary, and, at that time, he had little experience welding. He simply borrowed his father’s welding equipment and began working the frames. As with many of his projects, Gage wanted to learn by doing.

The desire to learn by doing motivates Gage to create, but it also influences his process of creation is other ways. When he builds a bike, Gage builds to learn and practice skills, such as welding and bike building. Experimentation seems to hold its own.
intrinsic value. His main motivation is not to perfect form, but to hone his skill. The desire to learn is the reason why Gage has not replicated his unique bicycles. He has a respect for the desire to learn and is happy to teach a willing learner. In our interview, Gage explained his learning-based approach: “If somebody wanted me to teach them to make a Tall Bike—absolutely! Just for the sake of teaching them to do it.” But, he said, he would not recreate a bike for himself because, “I’ve been there, I’ve experienced it.”

The use of bicycles at underground community events will be explored in Chapter 3, but is important to note here that Gage built many of his bicycles for the unique recreation they offer. The Tall Bike, for example, is highly expressive, but also used for Tall Bike jousting. Similar to medieval jousts, Tall Bike joust competitors will ride at each other with a lance and attempt to knock each other off their bicycles. Tall Bikes have become increasingly popular among the subculture of cycling and Salt Lake City occasionally hosts Tall Bike jousting tournaments. Gage occasionally attends and has placed in these tournaments. Gage’s polo bicycle is another example of a bike modified for recreational purposes and continually adapted to meet his performance preferences. In addition to implementing competitive and safety measures on his polo bike, Gage also had to make his own polo mallet in order to be able to participate.

Gage’s experiments with bicycle modification have brought him personal, professional, and social benefits. He has developed mechanical skills. He has expressed himself as an artist through a unique medium. He has been able to socially engage through his bicycles and use his bicycles for unique recreational purposes. And by
experimenting with the mechanical limits of the bicycle, Gage developed a mechanical mastery that has translated into professional success within the cycling industry.

**Juan Pedro (JP) Orquiz**

JP is a thirty-two-year-old master mechanic. Like Gage, he is a lifelong resident of Ogden. As a teenager, he dropped out of high school and began working. At nineteen he came to work at the bike shop Bingham’s Cyclery in Sunset, Utah, where he met and became friends with Gage. Professionally, JP has moved away from working in the cycling industry. About two years ago he got married and was able to finish an Associate’s degree. Currently JP is working on a Bachelor’s at Weber State University and running the school radio station.

JP’s education in bicycle mechanics began at the age of eighteen, when he taught himself by taking bikes apart and putting them back together. He sometimes received help from his father, but, through experimentation, JP was largely able to learn on his own. A year later JP began working for Bingham’s Cyclery. It was at Bingham’s that he began receiving professional mechanical training and honed his skills into mastery.

JP’s approach to mechanics and modification is significantly different from Gage’s approach. His initial interest in understanding bicycle construction stemmed from his identity as a bicycle commuter. Because he needed his bike for transportation, it became important for him to know how to maintain and repair his bike. JP’s dependence on a bicycle for transportation and his preference for bicycle commuting is crucial to understanding him as a mechanic. While Gage enjoys being aesthetically playful, JP
tends to focus very little on aesthetics and instead concentrates on function. Bicycle modification, for JP, is part of an unending process of experimentation and improvement. Consequently, my examination of JP’s modifications is very different from my examination of Gage’s. JP has only one titled bicycle, and he has almost no photographs of his old bicycles. I attribute this partially to his lack of interest in aesthetics and partially to his creative process, which rarely produces a bicycle that he considers a finished product. For these reasons JP did not document his bicycles.

JP and Gage also differ from one another in their approach to learning, skill, and modification. Gage began toying with traditional mechanics as a learning process; for JP, it was only after he had achieved a high level of mechanical skill that he developed a desire to experiment. JP first mastered traditional mechanics and then eventually grew bored with it. He explained to me, “I just started to want to do weirder more intense projects.” He wanted to push the boundaries of bicycles and “make something fit that wasn’t supposed to be there.” He wanted to change the shape of his bicycles, and—as will be seen shortly—use materials in ways different from their original intention. This progress from
professional basics to individual artistic expression is a pattern Michel Owen Jones has observed, “…Even when people are at ‘work,’ they invariably approach their tasks with a sense of play and artistic creativity” (1997, 203).

JP began deviating from traditional mechanics by experimenting with wheel lacing patterns. The wheel lacing is the pattern of the spokes as they run out from the center of the hub to the rim (see Figure 2 for part labels, see Figure 7 and 8 for lacing examples). I have included only diagrams of for visual examples of lacing, not actual photos, because without the aid of color coding it is very difficult to appreciate the intricate in-and-out weaving of the spokes. Lacing a wheel is intricate work that carries with it many functional demands. Lacing modifications, such as in Figure 8, may require that certain spokes be measured and cut to fit, as not all spokes reach to equidistant points. Tension of the spokes must be even around the wheel; otherwise, the wheel will not be straight, which is a dire imperfection, as a lopsided wheel will affect the balance of the bicycle. Also, when building a wheel the mechanic must keep in mind the possible stress points on spokes at crossings or the possible wear and tear on the hub if spokes do not provide enough stability and shock-absorption. Building a wheel is one of the most difficult aspects of bicycle mechanics. The process requires precision and can be exceedingly difficult and time-consuming.

For one of his first experiments, JP decided to lace a late70s/early 80s BMX rim with new, blue Schwinn spokes—spokes much too long for such a small rim. Rather than ordering new spokes that would fit, JP made do with the Schwinn spokes he had

---

9 A BMX bicycle is typically very small—could be mistaken for a child's bicycle, though intended to be ridden by a mature rider. It is specifically designed for off-road racing and dirt jumping.
available to him. He cut the long spokes to fit the size of the BMX rim, laced, and tightened them in. JP’s ability to lace a wheel is one of the skills that sets him apart as a good mechanic. His ability to experiment with lacing is part of why he is considered a master mechanic by his peers. This example of adaptive lacing provided JP with a challenge in skill, resourcefulness, and problem solving—challenges he addresses in many of his other functional modifications.

JP describes the ideology behind his approach to bicycles as a quest for the Holy Grail. He is constantly seeking the “Everything Bike.” Because his main use for bicycles is transportation, JP wants a bicycle that has the capacity to accomplish all the demands of transportation. Ideal features in an Everything Bike would be light-weight to make long distance rides easier, wide tires and shock absorbers to roll over rough terrain without difficulty, a sturdy frame and cargo racks for carrying packages like groceries or...
textbooks. Unfortunately, the Everything Bike does not exist. By satisfying one demand, another is compromised. Shock absorbers, for example, add weight, and wide tires add resistance, which both slow a rider down on a long distance ride. A bicycle that is good for hauling heavy packages such as groceries is too heavy for long commutes. The sturdiness and towing capabilities required of a utility bike do not translate to the preferred lightness and streamlining of a road bike one would use to commute. JP’s Holy Grail metaphor seems to perfectly describe his efforts. Though he realizes the difficult and contradictory nature of what he is seeking, he has not given up his bicycle quest. He continues to modify bicycles to satisfy the demands of his life.

To meet these demands of being a bicycle commuter, JP went straight to the foundation of his bicycles, by experimenting with modifying the frames themselves. For these modifications, JP usually worked with steel frames as he found steel to be simpler.

Figure 10: Bike with brazed-on cargo rack
and easier to work with. He experimented with cutting frames as well as brazing mounts on to them (see Figure 9).  

Adding mounts allowed JP to add fenders, cargo racks, or more water bottles. All these changes could make an old frame more versatile. Figure 10 is an example of JP adding a structural element to a bike through brazing. The frame in this figure originally had no mounts for a rack to be added. The blue rack at the rear of the bike was brazed on by JP. (Note the visible seams from the brazing, not covered by paint.) The rack itself is not an industrially manufactured rack one could purchase at a bicycle shop. JP made the rack himself using top-tubes, down-tubes, and a fork, which he cut and brazed together (refer to Figure 2 for frame part labels). By making use of unused parts available to him, JP was able to modify his bicycle into a cargo bike.

JP has also modified bicycles by cutting parts off of the frames. He would often cut out parts of the fork, stays, and/or mounts so he could use bigger tires. He did this, he said, so that “I could do more stuff with a road bike.” This is a risky alteration because if the cutting is not done correctly it can compromise the structural integrity of the frame.

JP’s modification methodology seemed to be a process of constant minor toying with bikes for improvement or devising creative, non-traditional—what cyclist’s term “jimmy-rigging”—solutions to get around obstacles that did not serve his needs.

Throughout my interview with JP, he described all his modifications very generally. He did not use any specific bicycles for examples, but described his modifications broadly as

---

10 Process for joining two pieces of metal by applying heat and adding a filler metal. The filler, which has a lower melting point than the metals to be joined, is either pre-placed or fed into the joint as the parts are heated. (Brazing 2014).
though he tried them many different ways, many different times. This stands in sharp contrast to Gage, who avoids duplicating a project. Though JP and Gage are friends and both enjoy modifying bicycles, their approaches are very different. Gage has a strong aesthetic motivation that drives him to create unique, completed works of art—so much so that he gave his bikes names. JP is driven by a desire to improve his bicycles’ functionality. This is why JP repeatedly experimented with similar modifications, to test structural limits and thereby find a way to perfect his bicycles. Further complicating JP’s bicycle needs is the fact that his riding needs are diverse. He has been known to do many types of riding, from mountain bikes to BMX bikes. First and foremost, however, JP considers himself a bicycle commuter. Because his top priority for his bicycles is utility rather than leisure or recreation, his approach to modification is more serious in tone than Gage’s approach. JP is driven by function and cares little about aesthetic. The only bicycle that JP felt unique enough to give it a name is the Mountain Goat. This bike was so named partially because it was a mountain bike and partially because the bike was such a strange sight to see, like spotting a wild animal.

*The Mountain Goat.* The Mountain Goat was originally a mountain bike frame, but JP modified the bike with the intention to use it for other purposes. He wanted to remake the frame so it could be used for commuting and touring. At the time, he felt he needed a functional commuter bike more than a recreational mountain bike. Mountain bikes frames are built to withstand the strain of aggressive riding on uneven, rock terrain; tires are wide and textured for grip. Commuter or touring bikes are streamlined to allow
for smooth road riding. Tires are narrow and smooth for minimal resistance. The frame may have mounts for racks or panniers to allow for cargo carriage.

JP began converting his mountain bike first by changing the flat mountain bike handlebars for a road bike drop bar.\textsuperscript{11} (For the difference in shape of traditional mountain bike handlebars versus road bike handlebars refer to Figures 11 and 12). The drop bars are preferable for the road bike JP was hoping to create, as they allow a rider to tuck in close to the bike thereby minimizing wind resistance. Drop bars can be less comfortable than the upright riding encouraged by the flat bar and they can delay response/breaking time, which is important in fast-paced, multi-terrain mountain biking. The head-turning change in the Mountain Goat came when JP played with the wheels. The original wheels were 26”, but only the rear wheel remained thus. The front wheel was changed for a wheel 3” larger. This difference in wheel height caused the bike to be slightly taller in front—an unusual build. JP created this height discrepancy in hopes that it would make long periods of leaning over the drop bars more comfortable for his back. Though the

\textsuperscript{11}The curved shape of drop bars allow a cyclist to lean in for better aerodynamics—a more important feature on a road bike than a mountain bike. Mountain bars allow for easy braking and upright riding, which makes for better balance and improved safety on uneven terrain.
alterations to the Mountain Goat were intended to convert it to a commuting and touring bike, JP found himself continuing to use the bicycle for mountain biking. The atypical elements—mismatched wheels and road handlebars on a mountain bike—caused JP to receive many stares when he rode his Mountain Goat. Drop bars are advantageous on a road bike but disadvantageous for a mountain bike.

JP’s modification process illustrates a thorough functional motivation stemming from a desire to economically and creatively meet his needs as a bicycle commuter. Bicycles provide JP a frugal means of transportation, and his do-it-yourself modifications provide him with a challenge in problem solving. One of the common values exhibited by the underground cycling community is a respect for frugality, self-sufficiency, and a DIY approach to problem solving. Members such as JP and Gage respect in each other the skill to meeting individual needs and resourcefulness in solving problems. JP’s projects did not always work out as planned, but his efforts and the skill required to make his modifications epitomize what the community is about and made him well respected.

When I asked JP about the social aspects of his modification, he initially rejected the notion that his bikes concerned anyone other than himself, but he quickly changed his mind. His efforts, he felt, were not in relation to prestige in the underground community so much as a manifestation of friction between cycling subcultures. I asked JP if he was seeking to be countercultural or express cleverness similar to the ways Gage seeks to express his personality though his bicycles. JP responded, “It wasn’t really my intention to be like countercultural, but it probably wound up that way.” He went on to clarify that, if anything, his work was an effort to be countercultural within the subculture of cycling.
My introduction described some differences between underground and competitive cyclists and indicated that there is some tension there. Within competitive cycling culture there can be a great deal of elitism. The exorbitant cost of fancy bicycles and competitive racing can cause divisions among people that share a passion for the same machine. JP perceives the cleverness of cycling subculture to be a reaction against the competitiveness and perceived inflated ego of elitist road cyclists. The efforts to be clever and sarcastic through countercultural modified bicycles was an attempt to attack the superiority of road cyclists and show them that: “they [bicycle modifiers] were having just as much fun on $50 bikes as they [elitist cyclists] were having on $1500 bikes.”

**The Bicycle**

The significance of the bicycle means a great deal to a cyclist’s identity, so much so that the object can come to represent the person himself. I find this personal identification with the bicycle powerfully illustrated by cyclists’ Facebook photos, and one photo trend in particular. I refer to this photo trend as the “cyclist selfie.” The cyclist selfie is a photo of a bicycle, usually taken against a striking background—no people, just the bike (see Figures 13 and 14). These selfies are powerful expressions of identity and function similar to personal narratives in that they express traditional attitudes because they “represent an incident, an actualized behavior pattern” (Stahl 1977, 21). The scenic setting of the photo proves the cyclist is out riding, as members of the cycling community should. But a striking scene is not enough; the image of the bike proves the activity. The cyclist need not be in the photo, as his bicycle is in the photo. The machine he built and
maintains, that takes him where he needs to go, and on which he has sweat from exertion—this object stands in for the cyclist. The creative product of his labor stands in for him as a representation of his industry, mechanical skill, and unique personality.
Figure 13: Gage's Cyclist Selfie

Figure 14: Dustin's Cyclist Selfie
CHAPTER 3

RECREATIONAL EVENTS: PERFORMING COMMUNITY

This chapter is an examination of the folk events of the underground cycling community. Moving outward from the examination of individual cyclist identity in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 looks at the internal practice of group identity, through examining community events. Events serve not only as a representation of group identity but can be considered performances of community. Examining the elements of these performances illustrates the values and norms of the group and also illustrates the actions and interactions that create the connections that form a community. For the purposes of this examination I have selected three folk events to study: bike polo, alley cats, and cruises.

Barre Toelken defines a folk event as “a discrete set of actions and expressions that are motivated and directed more by group taste and demand than by the private idiosyncrasies of an individual” (1996, 157). This definition establishes a folk event as a product of a group, not an individual; therefore, the actions and expressions of a cycling event can be studied and understood as a representation of the group as a whole.

Robert A. Georges explicitly identifies folk events—storytelling events, specifically—as laced with expressive significance. Georges postulates that storytelling events may be regarded as communicative events (1969, 317). Communicative elements include encoding and decoding, transmission via audio and visual channels, and person-to-person communication. Georges’s work suggests that storytelling events are layered with meanings that are not explicitly expressed, but implied, interpreted, and understood by the participants. He expresses the belief that communicative events are comprised of
interrelated aspects and an event study must examine the interrelationships of these aspects (316-317).

Michael Owen Jones offers a similar call for folk events to be examined for their layers of meaning (1997). Jones’s analytical approach outlined in “How Can We Apply Event Studies to ‘Material Behavior’ and Why Should We?” demands an expansion from studying material objects to examining the material behavior that surrounds the objects. “To understand tangible things,” Jones states, “we must investigate the circumstances that obtained before their existence, the processes by which they came into existence, and the consequences of their existence” (1997, 209). Chapter 2 of this thesis covers the first two steps of Jones’s approach by investigating the circumstances of conception and the processes of creating unique modified bicycles; Chapter 3 now fulfills the final requirement of Jones’s approach by examining the actual use of bicycles as a function of community socializing.

Jones’s study in material behavior and event analysis freely incorporates Robert A. Georges’s analytic approach. Paul Jordan-Smith’s article “Folk Event Analysis,” breaks down the implications of Jones’s use of a storytelling event-analysis to a non-storytelling event. Jordan-Smith states that Jones’s application implies that Georges’s ideas about storytelling are relevant to every area of folkloristic research (1999, 46-47). Jordan-Smith solidifies these implications and pushes Georges’s idea further by suggesting, “every folk event may be regarded as both a communicative event as well as a social experience” (emphasis mine, 1999, 47). This classification of every event as a communicative event illustrates the expressive importance of bicycle folk events and
highlights the possibility of better understanding group identity through event examination.

To break down the aspects of a cycling folk event I make use of another event analytic method referenced by Jordan-Smith—the Dell Hymes SPEAKING mnemonic. Hymes’s method, introduced in *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (1974), was designed to promote the analysis of speaking events but can also be applied to other folk events. The model breaks an event into eight components, each component indicated by a letter of the acronym “SPEAKING.” The meaning of each letter is as follows:

- **S**—Setting and Scene; the time and place of occurrence
- **P**—Participants; everyone present or involved in the event
- **E**—Ends; purposes, goals, and outcomes
- **A**—Act Sequence; form and order of the event
- **K**—Key; the "tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done”
- **I**—Instrumentalities; forms and styles of speech.
- **N**—Norms; social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reactions
- **G**—Genre; The kind of speech act or event.

(Hymes 1974, 55-62)

I use this acronym to break down the elements of hardcourt bike polo, a traditional cycling event. I thoroughly apply the SPEAKING model only to polo and then compare norms and the ideas against to two other cycling events. The Hymes’s eight-component breakdown provides a detailed description of polo, but a breakdown of every cycling event according to Hymes’s model is not required for an understanding of the ideas that are communicated at these events. Components, such as Acts of Sequence, Key, and Instrumentalities, for example, are very similar. The event components that differ illustrate the shifting performance of community. These performances highlight the nature of the underground cycling group and facets of group identity.
Connections to studies in children’s folklore also comes into play in this chapter as I find many similarities between cycling events and children’s games. The observations of Mary and Herbert Knapp (1979) on the structure of play and the goals of children’s folk games are striking in their relevance to the structures and goals of cycling. An important bottom line for both children and cyclists is keeping the group and the game together (1979, 30), rather than winning.

Also important to this study is the idea the event creates the community. Lisa Gabbert explores the notion that activities and events can create community in *Winter Carnival in a Western Town* (2011). Gabbert explores the complicated social structures surrounding an annual Winter Carnival in McCall, Idaho. The foundation of this carnival is the snow sculpture contest. Participation in Winter Carnival, especially by creating a snow sculpture, is of great significance to the town. Through the act of making a sculpture, a team or individual is essentially performing community membership. The process of creating a sculpture also contributes to community cohesion. Sculpting is not easy, but together teams endure the difficult job and in the process they socialize and bond (93-95). The community building of cycling is similar, though less laborious. Cycling events bring individuals together and thereby create opportunities for socializing and connecting. Individuals need not compete in an event to be part of the community, but merely come together as part of the performance of the event and therefore as part of the performance of community.
The main event highlighted in this chapter is bike polo, with additional descriptions of alley cats, and cruises. There are other events, such as bike prom\textsuperscript{12} or bike porn\textsuperscript{13} screenings, which are unique to the cycling community and could have been included here as representative of the group. Both of these events, however, have their limitations. Bike prom is hosted by the Salt Lake Bike Collective and requires a costly entrance fee that can be prohibitive. Bike porn screenings are highly unique to cycling communities, but are infrequent and cater to a niche audience within the community.

I chose the polo, alley cats, and cruises because I feel they are the most common and most inclusive community events. They are the events that occur with greatest regularity and do not have major restrictors, such as money. There are more subtle limitations to these events, such as skill or fitness. The biggest restrictor is that a participant must have some connection to the community in order to know about the event. Polo and cruises are only shared with immediate community members. Alley Cats are more widely promoted—usually via Facebook and a handful of letter-sized posters that are taped in the windows of local coffee shops. The publicizing, however, is in interest of supporting the Collective (Alley Cats usually charge a small entrance fee,

\textsuperscript{12} Bike Prom is an annual fundraiser hosted by and for the benefit of the Salt Lake Bicycle Collective. The event is similar in spirit to a traditional high school prom. Semi-formal attire is encouraged. Attendees can have their photo taken on a tandem bicycle. A hired DJ keeps the dance floor active. The event is catered to adults, however, as there is a bar and usually a riotous after-party.

\textsuperscript{13} Bike porn is an explicit film display of sexual activity occurring on, through, near, or with bicycle(s). Approximately every two years, a bicycle-porn film festival occurs in Salt Lake City. Bike Smut, the name of the producing organization as well as the festival, was founded in 2007. The Bike Smut website describes the festival as “a collection of short erotic films made by inspired cyclists from all over the world.” The festival is promoted with tag lines such as “An International film festival celebrating human powered transportation and sex positive culture!” and “Spread some love and put the fun between your legs!”
which goes to support the Ogden Bike Collective), not out of interest for building the social base of the community. This lack of publicity makes the group inaccessible, but it is also part of what distinguishes these events as unique to the underground cycling community.

**Bike Polo**

There is a parking terrace on 21st and Lincoln in Ogden, Utah that, on warm summer nights, becomes the playing arena for a small group of young men. The players start rolling in around 9:00 pm in uniforms of cargo pants, threadbare hoodies, and skater shoes. The three early birds toss back a beer while they wait for more riders to arrive. A stack of four orange construction cones is pulled from a hiding place behind the terrace. Two cones are set up as goal posts on opposite ends of the empty bottom level. Mallets made from old golf clubs, ski poles, and PVC pipe are pulled out of the back of a Toyota. When enough players arrive, a game begins. Riders sprint up and down the arena chasing a small, plastic, yellow ball. Even with only four players, the game becomes crowded, messy, and dangerous. The first team to score five points wins, but a single winning match does not end the night. The group will play for hours or, on rare occasion, until a police officer comes to run the group out of the terrace. This is a typical Thursday night game of bike polo.

Polo is the most frequently occurring event of the Ogden cycling community. The hardcourt version described here, like many cycling games, is adapted from an equestrian sport. The adaptation of equine sports to cycling games should not be surprising
considering the bicycle itself was developed with the intent that a man-powered
machine could replace horse-powered transportation (Herlihy 2004, 19). The adaptation
of traditional games from horseback to bicycle can be considered a natural consequence
of modernization and urbanization. It could additionally be considered a socio-economic
adaptation of formerly upper class pastimes, now made accessible to the lower classes.
The adaptation of polo is a specific example of an economic adaptation.

In 1891, professional racer Richard J. Mecredy devised the grass-field adaptation
of bicycle polo as an inexpensive alternative to the traditional equestrian version (Brand
and Mahey 2010). The popularity of grass-field bike polo waxed and waned for about a
century until the hardcourt version sprang up in Seattle, Washington around the year
2000. Hardcourt polo simply entails that the game take place on a paved surface, rather
than a field. Within a few short years hardcourt polo was being played on tennis courts
and parking garages around the world (Norvell 2008).

The structure of the bike polo mirrors equestrian polo. Both games share the
objective to win by scoring points. Hitting the ball through the opponent’s goal scores a
point. Players chase the ball up and down the court attempting to score and attempting to
prevent the opposing team from coming in control of the ball. When a goal is scored, the
scoring team returns to their half of the court, while the scored-upon team takes
possession of the ball; play resumes when the ball reaches midcourt.

I have not observed enforcement of many rules regarding possession or out of
bounds. The parking-terrace polo-arena has no boundary lines that define play, such as
those that exist on a football field. When the ball rolls out of what might be perceived as
the field of play, the ball is usually kept active and one or two players will chase after it. Inevitably, the ball rolls between parking blocks and players display particularly impressive skill by negotiating these barriers. They chase after the ball and maneuver it back into open play while remaining on their bikes.

The one rule that can interrupt a rider’s active play is the “foot down rule.” Foot down requires that players may not touch their foot to the ground while in active play. If a player does touch the ground, he must “tap out” before he may resume active play. At the Ogden terrace, tapping out requires that a player ride to center-court and tap an overhead pipe. As mentioned, there are no exact boundary lines, but the placement of the goal-cones is usually such that an overhead pipe sits about center-court.

Polo primarily seems to be governed by the general structure of scoring goals with a few basic rules. Complicated rules and formal enforcement would kill the freedom of the game that is played primarily for fun. Scores are remembered and reported verbally. When a round is over the teams will switch sides, or, if the score reveals a major disparity in team skills, teams will be reorganized to resolve the disparity and keep play competitive.
This general description of polo gives an idea of how a game is conducted. To further explore the expressive layers of polo and to facilitate analysis, I now apply the Hymes SPEAKING model, described in the introduction of this chapter. The letter-by-letter application of this model brings in specific details of the event that might otherwise be overlooked. The first element to Hymes’s model is Setting.

*Setting.* "Setting refers to the time and place of [an event] and, in general, to the physical circumstances" (Hymes 1974, 55). Ogden polo takes place on the ground floor of an empty parking terrace. This terrace is located on the west end of Ogden near the train tracks, where the city transitions from shops to industrial buildings. The neighborhood used to be home to a number of canning factories, some of which have been torn down, while others have been repurposed for uses such as a charter school and a rock climbing gym. During the day, the terrace serves the patrons and workers of the nearby businesses, but after 6:00 pm the terrace is all but empty.

An important facet of this setting is the police station. Down the street from the terrace, only a block away, is the Ogden police headquarters. Officers in patrol cars often pass by or linger in the terrace to do paperwork. Initially the nearness of law enforcement caused problems. Passing officers would end the game, telling the players they had to leave. As time went on police interference lessened. The cyclists consistently gathered to play and officers, instead of breaking up the games, began occasionally watching them (Ortega 2013).

Like children’s folk games, bike polo has no official court or special field and consequently is played in a place not designated for games at all (Knapp1979, 55).
Fortunately, the terrace is infrequently used. The unoccupied parking stalls leave the space wide open for play, with the exception of parking blocks that serve as challenging obstacles.

*Participants.* “Participants” entails everyone present or involved in the event. At speaking events, distinctions can be drawn between participant roles such as speaker and audience. Polo has two general roles: player and spectator.

The regular players are young men in their twenties, with one or two others in their thirties. The rules of hardcourt require three players per team, six total, for a game. Games are often carried on, however, with greater or fewer numbers as attendance allows. A game can be played with four players. If more players appear, then teams grow larger to accommodate.

Occasionally guests will attend a game, but they usually just observe. Guests are welcome to play if they have interest, but more often they do not. (From participant observation, I can attest to the difficulty of joining a game; polo requires practiced skill and coordination that make jumping in very difficult and a little terrifying). These non-playing, visiting spectators are usually the female companions of the male players. Spectators sit on parking blocks at the fringes of the playing space. They cheer, heckle, chat, and, if provisions allow, sip a beer.

*Ends.* Ends encompasses the purposes, goals, and outcomes of an event. The purposeful outcomes for an event can be a formal function such as a wedding or accomplishing a communal work task. The goals of an event are not necessarily identical to the purpose; individuals may bring and act in their own unique personal interests
(Hymes 1974, 56-57). At a polo game, for example, some players may come simply to play, others come to socialize, and one person may come to show off.

The intended outcome of a polo gathering is the creation of an opportunity to play polo. The primary goal of polo is simply to experience the pleasure of play. There are a number of additional goals such as the satisfaction of competition, honing skills, socializing, and peacocking. Games allow players to competitively show off their skills and appreciate the skills of others. These patterns mirror those of children’s folk games, in which players can have individual goals to display physical skill or tactical genius, engage a friend or rival through physical or social means, or simply hold center state for a moment (Knapp 1979, 31).

A desire for exercise has little to no bearing on the goals of a polo event. Physical exercise undoubtedly occurs, but never have I observed explicitly or felt implicitly that exercise was an goal. Players do, however, enjoy developing their skills and playing competitively.

*Acts Sequence.* The Acts of Sequence are the form and order of the event—the order in which events occur. In the days when the Bike Collective was located downtown, the shop floor could have been considered the starting point for an evening of polo. A bike polo event often begins when shop hours at the Collective end, at 9:00 pm. Games occur in the evening, a little after the shop’s closing time, since many of the volunteers are also the consistent players. Volunteers and players often assembled at the shop to visit before heading to the terrace. Together they would close up the Collective,
gather their gear, and ride the four blocks to the terrace. The shop group always arrived first and other stragglers would trickle in.

The first players to arrive are responsible for setting up the court. Set up entails placing a pair of orange cones at either end of the terrae ground floor for goal posts. There is usually a waiting period, while other players roll in, followed by a period of greeting and talking. Players gather in a circle to chat and possibly toss back a beer. Once enough players have arrived, the teams are chosen. Teams are decided by players throwing their mallets into a pile, each mallet representing his player. A member of the group steps forward and separates the mallets into two piles, thus deciding the two teams. Players reclaim their mallets, group into their assigned teams, and the game begins.

Games are played to five points. The group usually plays a few games in one evening. After a team wins a game, the group may pause to drink a beer and chat for a moment before the teams are reorganized and the next round begins. After many rounds, or a few hours of playing, the evening grows late. Games are commonly hosted on Thursday nights and most players must get up the next morning to go to work. Some players will bow out after a few rounds to head home to get a full night’s sleep, while others continue playing until 11:00 pm or 12:00 am. When players decide the game is done for the evening, the gathering winds down in much the same way it began, by circling up and socializing. If any drinks are left, the last of them are passed around and finished off. Eventually discussion putters out and players head home on bicycles or in cars.
Key. Key is the "tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done… The signaling of key may be nonverbal as with a wink, gesture, posture, style of dress…” (Hymes 1974, 57-58). Tonally, polo is casual, masculine, and playful—almost a party atmosphere. The physical aspects of the gathering well illustrate these qualities. The regular polo-playing group consists predominantly of bearded, tattooed young men (see descriptions in Introduction and Chapter 5). The standard participant attire and homemade materials of the game described in the introduction of this chapter (cargo pants and hoodies; traffic-cone goal-posts and mallets made from ski poles), illustrate of the informality and handy-man masculinity of the gathering.

The game is competitive, but not taken too seriously. Players want to compete, but winning is not necessarily the bottom line; an enjoyable game is the top priority. Good games are challenging but fun. If participants prioritized winning they would likely arrive in athletic wear and carry commercially manufactured mallets; they also would most likely not toss back a few beers before and in-between games. Instead, polo is a competitive but friendly display of skill. Skill is displayed both on court and off. Participants display their handy-man skill with their hand-made materials and their masculinity at the occasional beer chugging contest (see Figure 16). The Instrumentalities and Norms of the next segments further illustrate the tone of the games and the rule that regulates competitive aggression.

Instrumentalities. Instrumentalities are the forms and styles of speech, or register. Hymes intended Instrumentalities to also incorporate the medium of transmission of speech, such as oral, written, or telegraphic.
Prior to a polo game, a variety of channels may be used to communicate event details and invite attendees. Information is usually conveyed digitally, via the Ogden Bike Polo Club Facebook page. Individual invitations and confirmations are made via text, rarely via a phone call. Any cyclists present at the Collective near closing time are likely extended a verbal invitation.

The register used at the polo games reinforces the informal, masculine tone described under Key. When greeting, cyclists often refer to each other as “dude” and “man.” Conversation is laced with slang, cursing, and the sexualized language that can be expected of a young, male-dominated group. The topics of non-gaming conversation often revolve around the cycling industry or the Bike Collective, and require a moderate level of mechanical familiarity in order to follow. Mid-game there is not conversation, but commentary and reactions to the movements of the game. Expletives and grunts echo off the concrete walls. The Ogden Community does not strictly follow official polo rules, but it is interesting to note that the list of rules on the popular polo blog Hardcourt Bike Polo specifically includes trash talking as an acceptable behavior.

Figure 16: Ogden bike polo players chug a beer between rounds. This photo was posted to the Ogden Bike Polo Club Facebook page with the caption "and this is how the OBPC rolls Bitches!!"
**Norms.** Norms are the social rules that govern the event and the participants' actions and reactions. Thus far, Ogden polo may appear to be a game lacking in official rules, but this is not entirely the case. There are many bike polo organizations with established rules (Hardcourt Bike Polo, League of Bike Polo, International Bike Polo Federation). Lists of these rules are easily accessible online, but Ogden games avoid strict regulation. The impetus is similar to the children’s games observed by Mary and Herbert Knapp, in which, “keeping the group together and the game alive is more important… than establishing and enforcing an ideal set of rules” (1979, 30). Mid-game conflicts of play are decided quickly and democratically so that play can continue.

There are not many explicit rules governing the game, but there are implicit rules. Cyclists understand that they cannot play too aggressively or dangerously. Because there is no referee, players must act on the honor system. Similar again to children’s games is the understanding that players will not want to participate if others are too competitive and make the game unpleasant (Knapp 1979, 28-29). The understood rule of sportsmanship is often expressed verbally with the command “don’t be a jerk.” “Don’t be a jerk” is an umbrella rule that requires players to be well behaved. Players should not play too physically or aggressively. They should not start fights, loose their tempers, or otherwise cause trouble.

---

14 Formal polo tournaments that are occasionally hosted in Salt Lake City by the Beehive Bike Polo Club (BBPC), do follow strict rules and have officiators. I have not observed a tournament nor the BBPC, but, judging by the posts on their Facebook page, the regularly meeting club is becoming increasingly concerned with observing and enforcing regulation rules. This is perhaps because they are a larger, more skilled group, and thus are feeling more of a need to self-regulate and enforce more structure in games.
There are no exceptions to the “don’t be a jerk” rule; however, there is, a loophole on the prohibition of physicality. Assertive physical play is acceptable between players of similar high skill. Observing the social interactions of children’s games, the Knapps note that “equals seek each other out” (1979, 36). This rule holds true for polo as well. Advanced-skill aggressive play is not permitted against a weaker opponent, that would fall under being a jerk. This does not mean, however, that skilled players must allow the less skilled to win, only that they may not be as aggressive with them. Between equals, aggressive in-game engagement is permitted. Aggression does not continue during the pauses in the game—though friendly heckling might continue. If in-game aggression results in an injury to a player, the aggressor is teased, possibly continually until the wound heals.

**Genre.** Hymes’s intends for Genre to be used as a classification of the kind of speech act, such as a poem, myth tale, proverb, riddle, etc. (1974, 61). Polo, while not a mute event, is built upon physical actions, not verbal ones. At its most basic level, polo’s genre can be called a game. The event is built around a basic structure—stay on your bike while hitting the ball through the goal. The bare bones of this structure are filled in with the norms of underground community gatherings and the culture of the group. The Hymes model breakdown of polo’s elements illustrates a few important community norms that are consistent in other cycling events.

The first element in polo that is consistent throughout underground cycling events is the Acts of Sequence. All events begin with a staggered arrival of participants who pass the waiting time by sipping beer, socializing, and showing off. Following the wait,
the event—whatever the chosen genre—is then conducted. After the structured activity, the event winds down in the same way it began, with beer, socializing, and showing off, as participants anticlimactically disperse. Any interludes during the action of the event are filled with more of the same behavior. The only variation in Acts of Sequence is the genre of an event, but beginnings, endings, and interludes at every event are all passed in the same manner. In many ways cycling events are little more than structured parties.

These events create the opportunity for socializing and thereby help create the community, but the layers of barriers cause the resulting community to be rather narrow and exclusive. Barriers change from event to event, resulting in a shifting body of insider participation (insider participation will be returned to in the conclusion), while outsider participation remains limited at most events. Events are discussed in a manner that suggests they are open and welcoming of newcomers and visitors (see Full Moon Boogie invitation below). Cyclists, such as JP in Chapter 2, are open about their dislike of elitism such as in mainstream competitive cycling. As a subculture acting in opposition to a mainstream culture they perceive as exclusionary, undergrounders verbally express themselves as inclusive. In practice, however, underground event atmosphere is not particularly welcoming for outsiders. The bicycle-based events naturally attract cyclists, but event appeal and invitations likely do not reach far beyond this immediate underground circle. An individual must have insider connection to know a gathering is occurring, but a connection is not enough. Events require varying levels of physical fitness, equipment, and knowledge of group Norms to comfortably participate. These
barriers create events that are exclusive to cyclists and unapproachable for outsiders. The disconnect between verbal expression and cultural practice results in a community that perceives itself as inclusive but behaves exclusively.

In addition to excluding outsiders, the nature of these events results in gender barriers. The male-dominated group does not explicitly exclude women, but participating women seem to be relegated to less active roles. Women that attend polo do not participate in the game, they spectate. (In my participant observation, I never observed another women other than myself playing polo). Most of the women that attend alley cats do so as facilitators of the race, not racers. Only at cruises, which are non-competitive events, do women participate more or less as equals. The norms, structures, and participant composition of these gatherings result in events that are highly exclusive—even of other undergrounders.

Community behaviors, such as aggression, and register remain consistent with each event; however, the group ideas and tensions herein expressed are best understood within the context and in comparison to other bike events. The second half of this chapter is devoted to exploring two more cycling events: alley cats (races), and cruises (social, non-competitive rides). The description of these events provides points of comparison for polo, clarifying the group values and tensions expressed through these events.
An Alley Cat is a scavenger-hunt-style bike race. This racing format originated among bike messengers in New York City as a play version of messenger work. A rider must find certain familiar or obscure locations to complete his delivery or, in the case of an alley cat, to win the race. This racing style has spread across the country, if not the world. *New York Times* columnist Manny Fernandez fittingly describes Alley Cats as “marathons for the anti-marathon set, for those who prefer showing off their tattoos instead of their spandex” and the appropriate warm up is smoking a cigarette (2007). The following description is of an alley cat race that took place in Ogden in spring of 2014.

On the afternoon of April 4th, a scraggly group of riders and a pile of bicycles gradually began forming on the front lawn in a quiet neighborhood just off 12th Street. The event was scheduled to start at 4:00 pm, but everyone knows that the starting time is when the cheep beers will show up. The actual race begins about half an hour after the

Figure 17: Poster advertising the Spring 2014 Alley Cat
starting time. As mentioned earlier, a small entry fee is always collected upon arrival. The fee, usually about $5.00, is to cover the costs of putting the race together. After cost, any profit is donated to the Ogden Bike Collective. Most Alley Cats are promoted with a tagline about supporting the Collective.

Once entry fees were collected and the grace period had passed, the riders were told to separate from their bikes and line up along the road. The riders stood and waited while a manifest was placed on each bike. A manifest lists the checkpoints that each rider must go to before rushing to the finish line (see Figure 18 and 19 for examples). The race organizer plans the checkpoints and composes the manifest, which is kept secret until the start of the race. Checkpoints are located in public spaces, such as parks or parking lots, or on private residences, such as a community member’s front yard. Race manifests include five to ten checkpoints. Checkpoints usually lay within a three-mile radius of each other but the overall distance that racers travel varies based on the routes taken and the order in which riders choose to pursue the manifest checkpoints.

When racers arrived at a checkpoint they must perform a surprise task before they can receive their checkpoint confirmation. Volunteers man these points and enforce the task before signing the manifest. Tasks can involve physical feats, such as push-ups or headstands; there may be games, such as disk golf, pin the tail on the donkey, or a beanbag toss. There is always a gastronomic task to accomplish; a racer must consume an item such as a hotdog or chug a beer. Nonalcoholic or vegetarian/vegan options are usually available to meet the needs of the community members that often self-impose dietary restrictions.
Normally riders can finish a race within an hour, especially racers who are familiar with the city. Racers usually travel over ten miles and their routes involve weaving through residential neighborhoods with low speed limits and zipping across high-speed thoroughfares. Experienced racers know that in order to win they cannot follow traffic laws. Stop signs and red lights do nothing to slow a seasoned racer. This lawless, break-neck riding is undoubtedly part of what makes Alley Cats—and the underground cycling community—hated by motorists and law enforcement.

The Spring, Sprang, Sprung race was an exceptionally long alley cat by Ogden’s standards. The first place rider arrived at the finish line after one hour and nineteen minutes of racing. The rest of the riders trickled in a few minutes apart. After throwing themselves to the ground in exhaustion, most riders grabbed a beer and began rehashing the

![Figure 18: Spring, Sprang, Sprung completed manifest](image18)

![Figure 19: Manifest for the 2012 Halloween Alley Cat](image19)
difficulties and victories of the race. One rider reported that, according to his odometer, he had covered sixteen miles.

A celebratory atmosphere gradually grew at the finish line. The riders celebrated their completion and discussed the surprising and difficult aspects of the race. When all riders had reached the finish line, awards were distributed. The prizes were donated to the event by local cycling companies. The entry fees collected from participants could never cover the cost of prizes. Fortunately most members of the underground cycling community work in the cycling industry; through their companies they are able to obtain donated products that are awarded as prizes. Items such as handlebars, riding gloves, jerseys, and water bottles are common. Contributing companies are always credited as the prizes are awarded.

Awards are given to the top finishers, occasionally with a women’s division, and always a DFL prize. DFL, or Dead Fucking Last, is the last rider to complete the race. Contrary to mainstream competitive races, the last finisher is an important part of the race. Rather than give a participation prize to all competitors, like in a youth soccer tournaments, the tradition is to celebrate the first riders and the last. The DFL rider holds a pivotal position because as

![Figure 20: Racers and host, center, after the Spring, Sprang, Sprung Alley Cat](image)
the last rider, he might feel embarrassed or disappointed; often he is riding in his first race and is unfamiliar with the aggressive riding style required in order to be competitive, or is an irregular rider and not in top physical shape. The DFL prize is intended to gently embarrass, but also celebrate the rider’s efforts and his completion of the race. The prize keeps spirits high, even for those that did not necessarily compete well. DFL prizes I have observed include a bottle of cheap liquor, a Hello Kitty backpack and an archaic stationary bicycle. The stationary bicycle was a nicely coded touch as the prize managed to chastise the DFL for poor physical fitness but was awarded with such spirit that the giving of it was celebratory. This celebration of subpar performance is not unique to underground cycling. Michel Own Jones observed group acceptance of subpar performance when group experts did not chastise poor quality from inexperienced participants. Jones concludes that at certain events subpar performance is acceptable because the most important part of the event is the social unity, not the perfection of form (Jones 1997, 207). In the case of cycling, the highly skilled receive the best awards, but the worst among them still receive acknowledgement and celebration of their participation.
Normally alley cats are conducted a little later in the evening, so the conclusion of the race will transition into an after-party, in which the group will carry on where they are or relocate to a nearby bar. That day, the Spring, Sprang, Sprung race, concluded too early in the afternoon for partying to begin. Consequently, the event quickly wound down. After prizes were awarded, racers, checkpoint volunteers, and spectators gathered around to devour a few boxes of pizza and finish off the last of the beer. The famished racers, not satisfied with a few pieces of pizza, took off to find more food and the rest of the group gradually went their separate ways.
CRUISES

I use the term “cruise” to cover a spectrum of similar events. In the simplest terms, a cruise is a leisurely group ride. This event stands in contrast to the other events of this chapter in that cruises are purely social, not competitive. These rides may be impromptu, opportunistic gatherings, or planned and organized events. Generally, cruises are small and informal. There is one common type of cruise, know as Critical Mass, that is a large, planned event. Critical Mass is an internationally practiced cruise in which cyclists gather in large numbers and take to the road in an effort to raise motorist awareness of cyclists. This section, however, focuses on an example of a localized, small-scale cruise that is unique to Ogden: the Full Moon Boogie.

The Full Moon Boogie, as its title indicates, is held once a month on the night of the full moon. The general format of the event begins with all riders meeting at a designated starting point—the parking lot at the start of the Ogden River Parkway. After a waiting period, during which time riders socialize and drink a beer, the group sets off on a slow ride along the parkway. The group rides for nearly five miles before arriving at a campsite, at which point everyone dismounts and a fire is built. Beers are passed around again, and socializing resumes around the fire. Essentially the event is a low-key party built around the premise of a bike ride.
As part of my fieldwork, I attended a boogie that was playfully titled “The August Full moon Renegade Riders Reunion Boogie Bonanza the IIIrd.” The Facebook event description read:

The Proverbial Heat has died down although the literal temperature is still ball-swelting hot. Join us in celebrating Full moons, Bikes, and Not getting Busted by the fuzz. If you forgot we'll be meeting up at the Rainbow Gardens around 9-ish and rolling out Somtime after 9-ish. First 30 participants will get one Free PBR! (Assuming you're 21 years of age, if not you get a high five!)

The invitation conveys event details in a register similar to the verbal register used at cycling events. The where/when details of the gathering are playfully woven between inside jokes and references to community history. The line about “not getting busted by the fuzz,” for example, refers to a previous Full Moon Boogie at which the police appeared and arrested two attendees.

The tone of the Boogie mirrored the playful tone of the invitation. Cyclists arrived at the designated parking lot in summer shorts and T-shirts. Beers were pulled from a pannier and sipped while riders waited for friends to arrive. Some of the waiting riders amused themselves by performing tricks on ungainly cargo and cruiser bicycles while conversation turned to the previous Boogie that had ended badly with the arrest of two participants.

Figure 23: Full Moon Boogie Facebook image. This hand-drawn illustration that was posted on Facebook to advertise the August Full Moon Boogie
The story relayed in the circle described one of the riders on a bicycle with an elaborate built-in sound system (see Figure 24). The loud sound system was initially blamed for attracting the police, but others in the circle disagreed. Gage, a leader in the group, (same Gage from Chapter 2) blamed a non-regular attendee, whom he referred to as “a dirty hippy,” for bringing drums. Gage blamed the noise of the drums for attracting the police. Dustin, another lead member of the group, quickly pointed out, that Gage had not seemed to mind the drums at the time and had looked quite happy while playing one. Gage laughed and conversation moved on. None of the cyclists in attendance at the August Full Moon Boogie had been arrested at the previous ride, so reactions were amused, not angry.

After half an hour of chatting and bike tricks, Gage decided it was time to roll out. He announced that the ride would begin and that there were a few guidelines. He reminded everyone that the Boogie is a cruise not a race, so the pace would be slow. Gage finished by announcing the only rule. “Don’t be a jerk,” he said. “I know everybody here and I don’t think that’ll be a problem.” Three cyclists immediately responded, comically insisting that they would be jerks. The group then rolled out at a leisurely pace. Two riders provided music; iPods and brick-sized speakers attached to the back of two
different bikes played an unsynchronized variety of electronic and hip-hop music. The night was quiet and the pace slow enough that staggered conversations persisted as the group rode the empty parkway.

That night the group stopped along the way to do a lap around the skate park. The ride had departed from the parking lot after 9:30, so the sky was already black and the skate park was empty. After a lap, the group stood talking and, in that moment, three cyclists rode into the park. Gage hollered after them, “Hey guys, wanna beer?” to which a very young voice responded, “Yeah!” Thunderous laughter erupted from the cyclists. The young rider did not get his beer, but an age-appropriate biker accepted one and stood to chat with the group until the ride resumed. The group continued to move at an unhurried pace, whooping and hollering as the pathway passed under bridges.

During my participant observation, I did not focus on hierarchical structures within the underground cycling community. Group structure is a facet due for further study, but, unfortunately, I have only a small observation on cruise riding-order to offer. The travel order of a cruise serves as an indicator of hierarchical status. From start to end, group leaders ride up front, general participants ride in the middle of the group, while the women ride towards the end. Guests will stick with the cyclist friend that brought them and both will usually ride in the back. Similar to the norms described in bike polo, equals tend to seek each other out. The ride moves along with few changes in riding order. This is due in part to the narrowness of the parkway, and in part to implicit social structures in riding order.
When the party arrived at the destination, the group spread out and resumed the behaviors of a party. Bikes were left under a covered picnic space, propped against tables. Though the evening was very warm, a few of the men quickly started a fire in a pit and the group circled round. The preexisting fire pit was not an officially designated burn space. The nearby train tracks and Ogden River are loitering places for homeless; this area west of the city is commonly known as a hobo campground—thus the fire pit. Music continued to play from small speakers, but only as background noise. The party broke into small discussion groups and attention turned to stories about work, camping, and the upcoming cyclo-cross race known as Party Cross.\footnote{Cyclo-cross is a bike race that involves many laps of a short course. The course often covers multiple types of terrain and includes obstacles that require a rider to dismount, carry his bicycle over, and remount.}

Dustin, the usual host of Party Cross, told stories about last year’s race. The group particularly enjoyed a story of the after party where Gage was humped while throwing up (presumably from the combination of too much alcohol and aggressive physical activity) by a rider, referred to as “porno Jeff”. I asked if Jeff was uninvited to all future cycling events “because you don’t hump a man while he’s down.” Dustin responded that, oh no, Jeff was still invited, “if Gage didn’t want to get humped he shouldn’t have been wearing that tight, spandex outfit.”

Dustin continued to carry the conversation by directing the group’s energy against law enforcement. He talked about how the parkway is supposed to be closed half an hour after sunset. The sun had already set at least an hour before we had started our fire that evening, so our presence was technically illegal. A possible part of the reason for
the arrests last month was the group’s illegal presence on the parkway. Dustin violently disagreed with the after hours regulation. He felt that the city infrastructure was unsafe for cyclists, and that the closure of a safe cycling pathway at dark was absurd. Through his venomous attack on law enforcement (using the slang “twat” a few times) and the city rule-makers, Dustin made it clear that he feels he has a right to be able to ride his bicycle and to ride safely—be it on the road or on the parkway.

These conversations carried on late into the night. Some riders lingered until the fire died down, others trickled out and rolled home. When the evening wound down, the

![OGDEN NOVEM-BEER](image)

Figure 25: 2011 Novembeer event poster.

Novem-beer is an annual cruise organized by Jeff Bailey, a.k.a. Beef Jailey. It is an organized and elaborate cruise, involving games and prizes. However, it still follows the essential format of a cruise: riders gather, drink beer, group ride to a new location, circle around a fire, and drink more beer together.
remaining riders collected their beer cans, extinguished the fire, and headed home or rode back to the starting point to retrieve their cars.

**CONCLUSION**

An event as a whole acts as a celebratory performance of community. Events are conducted with a spirit of festivity with the simple aim to have a good time. Between the lines, however, events are not merely fun and games. The three events described in this chapter exhibit patterns that illustrate group tensions and important values. One such concerning trend is the group’s disposition towards aggression. Sometimes aggression simply seems to be a consequence of natural male group behavior. At other times, aggression seems directed at a frustration, such as the counter-culture’s friction with perceptions of mainstream exclusion, especially from high-visibility spaces, and conflicts with law enforcement.

The countercultural behaviors illustrated by the Ogden underground group are not just reactions against motorist norms, but also against norms of Ogden’s predominantly LDS (Latter-day Saint or Mormon) community. The group behaviors of coarse language, drinking, and aggression are typical of male dominated communities (Fine 2005), but not of Ogden’s mainstream community. Drinking occurs at almost every cycling event, though drinking to the point of drunkenness does not always occur. Not all attendees participate in drinking—especially as some of the undergrounders are themselves LDS. Despite the sobriety of participants, the mere presence of beer acts as a countercultural

---

16 LDS doctrine forbids drinking alcohol.
statement against Utah’s strict beverage laws and the cultural stigmatization of
drinking. The use of cursing, sexualized language, and aggression all act in opposition to
LDS traditional, conservative values. Both the content and diction of Dustin’s rants
against law enforcement and his story about cyclo-cross incidents illustrate the coarse
tone of group discussion.

Dustin’s Full Moon Boogie rant can also be interpreted as an exceptionally
explicit illustration of an important community value—or, more precisely, devaluation.
The Boogie rant was an explicit expression of a community dislike of law enforcement.
Friction with law enforcement is a recurring issue for cyclists. Part of the reason for
Dustin’s rage and the community’s shared anger against law enforcement is their belief in
their entitlement to ride—a belief I have labeled “right to ride.” The right to ride is the
cyclist belief in the freedom and right to choose to use a bicycle for transportation and an
entitlement to a shared road, or other safe course of travel. (Right to ride is covered in
detail in Chapter 4). This belief is a major tenant of cyclist ideology. It repeatedly
appears, expressed both explicitly and implicitly through cyclist discussion and behavior.

Dustin’s rant is also an important example of how an event creates bonds that
form a community. Cycling community events are primarily playful events that facilitate
bonding through fun and celebration. The interactions at these playful community events
result in a community that does not necessarily bond over sacrifice and labor in the same
way that Gabbert’s community, described at the beginning of this chapter, bonds (2011,
95). The underground community does, however, perceive itself as a marginalized
community that suffers at the hands of law enforcement and mainstream culture. The
foundations of underground events are playful Genre structures, but participants do not use the entire event playfully. Conversation such as Dustin’s rant can be a bonding commiseration.

The nature of event Settings serves as continued illustration of the expression of law enforcement tensions and Right to Ride beliefs. Ogden cycling events do not have designated spaces. There is a bike park dominated by adolescents and teenagers but no public parks with courts for polo, no velodrome for races. The absence of a designated space causes the community to turn to public spaces. The spaces used are public, but that does not mean that cyclists are welcome. Each of the event descriptions mentions a history of police involvement, but this potential for interference does nothing to deter events from taking place. Cyclists enjoy these gatherings. They feel the have the right to conduct them, so they do. Polo and the Full Moon Boogie are conducted in marginal spaces in an empty parking terrace and along pathway at the city’s edge. Alley cats are different in that checkpoints are located in the heart of town. The nature of the race, however, is such that there is not one central location, nor a constantly consolidated group. The diffusion of the group into individual racers draws less attention than the concentrated presence of the group of riders that gather simultaneously for polo or Boogies. Individual racers may get stopped by police, but the rapid, mobile pace makes the race less susceptible to a total shutdown.

The spatial situating of these of these events likely contributes to groups’ feelings of marginalization. Events are located in Settings that are accessible to the group, but are not centralized enough to attract attention. Unfortunately, these spaces are open for the
group’s use because they are unwanted spaces—the Boogie bonfire is conducted in an area frequented by transients and the homeless. The group’s use of these spaces likely contributes to their feeling countercultural and marginalized. The experiences of being expelled from or arrested in these spaces likely intensify the feelings of marginalization into feelings of victimization.

One method of managing the potential interference of law enforcement is the “Don’t be a jerk” rule imposed at every event. This blanket policy demands that participants be civil. Tempers and competitive natures must be kept in check. All riders are expected to be congenial, both socially and in competition. Because events are conducted in public spaces, the group attempts to have fun, while still conducting themselves in an orderly fashion such that their presence cannot be objected to on the grounds of poor behavior. The self-regulated sportsmanship also ensures that events can carry on and the fun can continue as long as possible. Similar to the nature of children’s play, the bottom line of cycling events is not necessarily to win, but to play for the sake of the fun and to have this fun as long as possible (Knapp 1979, 30). “Don’t be a jerk” asks participants to watch their manners so that the group can enjoy the event as long as possible.

Alley cats are the exception to the good behavior rule. Before each race, racers are admonished to follow traffic laws, be safe, and respectful so as not to get themselves injured or in trouble. Every race is started with directions to be cautious, but experienced racers know that to be competitive they cannot slow down for traffic laws. Alley cat races are not only an exception to the good behavior norm, but almost require recklessness in
order to be successful. This exception to the good behavior Norm is likely because of
the diffusion of the group. Racers compete individually and do not necessarily ride in
groups. There are always a few groups of racers working together, but when this happens
they tend to be law-abiding and less competitive. The individual racers are the ones that
tear across lanes and traffic and through intersections. But these individual racers are
alone on the road. Their bad behavior is not suffered by peers—at least not in the short
term. Motorists are the short-term victims of the dangerous behavior in traffic; the long-
term consequences are motorist frustrations directed back onto the cyclists with whom
they come in contact.

One of the primary goals, or Ends, for each of these events is the pleasure of play.
The means to achieve this End varies at each events. For alley cats and polo, the
amusement is found in competition. At cruises, the amusement stems purely from the
social interaction and the enjoyment of a night ride. It is interesting to note that the
difference in means of achieving pleasure of play contributes to a difference in
Participants.

The participant make-up of the three events differs in two elements: gender
composition and visitor/outsider participation. The earlier analysis of event participation
focused on barriers that create exclusivity. The barriers of each event differ and have
shifting impacts on insider participation. At polo there is a small core group of about five
cyclists that regularly participate in the weekly games. The polo group is entirely male
with a few regulars and a few additional sporadic members. In contrast, alley cats and
cruises have greater female participation and more participating visitors. There are a
handful of women that race—in a group of thirty racers, maybe five will be women. Mostly though, the fringe, female community members participate as volunteers running checkpoints, not as racers. Cruises, such as the Full Moon Boogie, have female participation in proportions similar to alley cats. These rides do not offer explicitly distinct roles; women participate in the same roles as the men, but within the implicit hierarchical structures. Cruises also see more frequent non-member visitors. Community members bring their non-cyclist friends and these visitors are willing to participate because cruising is a non-competitive event and therefore non-threatening. The trend here indicates that composition of the Participants is directly connected to the competitive nature of the event. Polo requires specialized skill to participate successfully and therefore consists only of male regulars. Alley cats have greater numbers of women participants because the women can participate under non-competitive roles. Women or visiting competitors can also try their hand at racing without the social pressure of a constantly present audience, such as at polo. Cruises are entirely non-competitive and therefore have a similar attraction. Events become increasingly inclusive and the nature of the event becomes decreasingly competitive.

The competition and aggression at cycling events have strong impacts on the fiber of the event. Members understand aggression is part of the event. As a male-dominated group, these events act as an outlet for male aggression. Participants do not stop coming because things got heated. They expect the aggression. They expect the masculine behaviors. Masculinity, however, is not what ties the group together. The unifier is the bicycle and what that means for the individual. As was explored in Chapter 2 and will be
further explored in Chapter 4, the bike holds powerful symbolism for individual cyclists. This symbolism, however, is not uniform across the group. The group exhibits the belief that they are unified under a cohesive body of ideals, but interviews from other chapters reveal that this body of ideals is differentially understood. These group events draw the community together with bicycle-based activities, but discussion is not explicitly philosophically based in the ideals of the group. The members each seem to take their own interpretations of the significance of their involvement at these events. The unifying idea is only the love for the bicycle.

The community comes together to socialize, show off, and compete through the intercession of the bicycle. It is not necessarily a love of bikes that make them a community. It is the activities they do together that make them a community. There are others bike enthusiasts in Ogden. The enthusiasts are present at city bike infrastructure planning meetings, but these individuals are not present at Critical Mass rides or other underground cycling community events. It is the assembly of people that creates the community. The group could exist online (Chapter 5 explores online community), but the lack of face-to-face interpersonal interaction diffuses the cohesion of the group. The pleasure of play shared at these events draws this community together in a spirit of festivity.
CHAPTER 4

CONFLICT NARRATIVES: THE TROUBLE WITH IDENTITY

This chapter examines cyclist narratives, both verbal and written about cyclist/motorist altercations that occur on road, during a ride. This emphasis serves three purposes. The first purpose is to expand the Meso-level examination of identity. Moving outward from examining the underground community from within the circle of insiders, this chapter contextualizes the underground community within the larger community of Ogden. The conflict narratives specifically illustrate the reactions that occur when members of the underground subculture come in contact with the mainstream motorist community. The second purpose of this examination is that the content of these narratives specifically portrays the cyclist/motorist conflict, providing an opportunity to explore the nature of the conflict, at least as cyclists perceive it. Conflict with mainstream motorists seems to be a major part of cyclist identity and a repeat issue for the community. For this reason it is important that the conflict is understood, especially in how it shapes group identity. The third and final purpose of this examination is to explore the features of cyclist identity that are highlighted through these narratives of conflict. The content and style of these narratives illustrates key qualities about cyclist identity, such as aggression, feelings of marginalization, and assertiveness in the face of marginalization. The repeated themes of these narratives serve to highlight shared group perceptions, such as an inherent dislike of motorists.

If not already evident from the preceding chapters, the cyclists of Ogden are not a well-loved group within the city’s community. This creates an interesting friction in
Ogden because city officials have been striving to shape Ogden into a premiere cycling city. “Under the direction of Mayor Mike Caldwell, the city [has been] recruiting bike companies to open businesses here, sponsoring cycling events throughout the year and expanding the city’s cycling infrastructure” (Shaw 2014). The city’s well-publicized goal has been to bring Ogden out of its long economic slump by attracting the cycling industry and thereby bring growth to the local economy. Unfortunately, there seems to be a disconnect between the logistical business planning and successfully socially integrating the culture that often comes with the industry.

Ogden has seen almost comedic issues, such as the city’s Bike Coordinator being struck by a car on Nation Bike to Work Day (Shaw 2014). There have also been more serious issues, such as the arrest of four cyclists participating in a community-bicycle-awareness-ride, which resulted in a major community upset (Gurrister 2009; Whitehurst 2009a, 2009b). News sources and participant testimony varied in recounting what happened and in what order, but essentially the August community bike ride—known as Critical Mass—did not bring the Ogden communities closer together. Some sort of incident occurred at a stoplight in which a rider was hit, tempers escalated, and police were called. The episode caused a great deal of anger. In an effort to restore the relationship with the cycling community, Mayor Matthew Godfrey attended the Critical Mass that occurred the next month. Daily basis activities, such as commutes to work, seem to bring trouble: cars honking, buzzing far too fast and close to riders, and, sometimes open disputes right in the street. Why is that? In a city that is making an effort
to become a cycling town, what disconnect is occurring between the Ogden community at large and the cycling community?

The answer might be the nature of differential identity. Richard Bauman’s theory, explored in Chapter 1, states that the folklore of shared identity is often created at boundaries through interactions with outsiders (1971). Cyclists create and define their shared identity in relation to motorists, with whom they must share the road. It is perhaps the great difficulty of sharing that results in incidents of conflict and, therefore, an identity constructed in opposition to the source of conflict. As noted by Kaplan in Chapter 1, identity is not something that is possessed, but rather something that performatively emerges (2014, 126). The effect of these conflicts is the emergence of a cyclist identity that is constructed in opposition to motorist majority, resulting in a relationship of tension.

The cyclist/motorist conflict can also be attributed to the natural function of subcultures. It is the nature of subcultures, such as underground cycling, to be defined in opposition to the mainstream. Dick Hebdige interprets subculture as a form of resistance in which the objections to the ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style (1979, 133). As a minority group subject to the power of the majority on their lives, cyclists feel the weight of their subjugation to motorist norms. The dislike of their position breeds tension resulting in conflict. In the context of this chapter, cyclist resistance to the ruling ideology of motorist norms is represented through the stylistic choices of their narratives. Cyclist Rob Latham illustrates this type of ideological resistance in his description of what he perceives as the nature of a cyclist. In the context of Rob’s description, he
attributes virtues to cyclists and simultaneously manages to imply that motorists are the inverse or lacking in these virtues. “A bicyclist,” he says, “is constantly perceptive of their environment, the weather, the sounds, the smells, the feeling of the road under their tires, how fast a car is traveling, how far ahead a light is and whether it is red, how their legs feel, how tired they are…” (2014). Latham describes political and personal virtues, such as environmental conscientiousness and a presence of mind and body. His additional meaning suggests that motorists are disconnected from their environment in multiple ways. He implies they lack a presence of mind, an immediate connections to the surroundings of the trip, and a sense of big-picture ecological accountability.

The goal of this chapter is to better understand cyclist identity through the stories cyclists tell about themselves and to better understand motorist identity as it is perceived by cyclists.

For many psychiatrists and sociologists, as well as folklorists, one’s identity emerges from the stories one tells of oneself or one’s community. The sum of these stories constitutes the life-history of the individual or the group. Each incident, each report of past experience, is transformed as an emblem of both the uniqueness of the individual... and a badge of group membership. (Abrahams 2003, 201)

As Abrahams notes in the quotation above, the act of telling a story helps define identity for both the individual and for the group. In the case of conflict stories, the sharing of such incidents helps define the cyclist identity in contrast to outsiders, particularly motorists. Through examining cyclist narratives it becomes possible to define identity as it is created and implicitly understood by insiders.

“Personal narrative,” according to Sandra Stahl, “is the most likely vehicle for expressing a traditional attitude since it represents an incident, an actualized behavior
Narratives are important expressions of insider status because the story describes real-life actions or “actualized behavior” that reflect important shared attitudes. Cyclists usually have multiple stories about conflicts with motorists. These stories serve as an indication of the authenticity of the cyclist’s identity and reflect passion and social status. An on-road conflict is the direct result of independent riding and therefore serves as evidence of the individual’s dedication and performance of the group’s value of riding. Trends and styles in narratives also serve to express, as Dolby points out, a “traditional attitude.” The stories share similar themes and actions (conflict, aggression, assertion), heroes and villains (the good cyclist vs. the evil motorist), and thereby expresses encoded values. Many of these stories portray a conflict in which the cyclist is wronged, but aggressively stands up for himself. In these incidents, aggression is not only permitted but called for when asserting ones rights. The events, actions, and manner of expression highlight important issues for the community, such as feeling attacked, marginalized, and pushed out of public roadway spaces.

The narratives were collected from cyclists in the Wasatch Front area. I collected and audio-recorded a number of narratives in person and phone interviews. Informant contribution in this chapter is not exclusively in the form or narrative. I include quotes form my interviews, in which informants further clarify certain points of view and provide more in-depth discussion of cyclist/motorist issues. In addition to interviews, I also went online and sought narratives from members of the SaltCycle Facebook group. This effort provided a handful of brief stories and one cyclist directed me to a blog entry in which he passionately described a conflict incident. Using the information I collected,
I infer certain encoded themes and beliefs, such as a belief in the inherent virtue of cycling and the evils of cars and motorists.

The details of these narratives illustrate how cyclists consciously think of themselves. When asked directly about being a cyclist, some interviewees balked at the label. At the beginning of my interview with Candace, I told her that I wanted to interview her because she was one of the few female cyclists I knew but asked if she agreed with my identifying her as a cyclist. Candace agreed that while she does like to ride her bike, she does not like the label because she does not like to subscribe to only one label (Northrop 2014). Roger Abrahams has noted, “It is difficult to discuss identity without invoking deep stereotyping of those designated as stranger or enemy. One way or other, issues of power, segregation, and often subjugation become an outcome of such discussions” (2003,199). These issues of pigeonholing and conflict ascription are part of what case Candace to shy away from a singular label, especially as she had a deep aversion to the militant cyclist/motorist conflict she felt to be implicit in the label “cyclist.” Chase, another individual whom I would label a cyclist, echoed Abrahams’s and Candace’s ideas. Chase identifies with the label cyclist but understands why many who ride bikes might not subscribe to the label. “The term cyclist can have very corporate connotations. If you’re just a guy trying to get from point A to point B on your bike, you might not wanna deal with all the problems that the label can bring with it. You just ride your bike ‘cause you like to” (Christiansen 2014).

“Cyclist” seems to be a label that few bike-riders are eager to identify with. I have encountered no alternative emic term that undergrounders find acceptable to describe
themselves. Therefore, in spite of the aversion, “cyclist” is the label I use to describe the bike-riding people of the community. From the narratives and accompanying analysis it becomes possible to build a definition of cyclist identity, using the narrators’ own descriptions. Beginning by using the label “cyclist” to simply designate someone who rides a bike, numerous other identity-defining factors appear in these narratives. Cyclists portrayed themselves as assertive, protective, aware, brave, and conflict-resistant (“zen”). Less flattering characteristics also often emerged in these narratives. Cyclists appeared entitled, aggressive, and quick to assign blame.

**SPANDEX IS QUEEN**

The first narrative in this collection is a story I heard years ago in the summer of 2011. The story was told to a group of cyclists in the course of natural conversation at the Collective. This group present that day was volunteering for the usual shop hours. It was during the volunteer-run hours of open shop that the usual “shoptalk” would commence. The shoptalk that usually took place involved discussing mechanical challenges and successes, noteworthy events within the bike industry, and events of local or personal interest.

The following story was originally told by Brian who, at the time, was a manager of the Collective. The entry below is my own retelling of Brian’s story from memory. The story was told as part of a natural conversation, and consequently I cannot recall Brian’s wording verbatim. I do, however, recall the final lines of the story, which I feel are significant.
Brian was out for a road ride on a busy street. He was wearing the normal clothes for a road ride, a spandex jersey and shorts. Along his ride, a passing motorist leaned out the window of his truck and yelled “Faggot!” Brian responded quickly, loudly, and in his most effeminate, pseudo-gay voice: “Polluter!”

The group of cyclists that listened to this story responded with thunderous laughter. The actual comeback punch line was not terribly funny and most likely did not elicit a sense of shame from the motorist, especially as the motorist was zooming past and probably did not hear the comeback. The audience’s amusement resulted entirely from Brian’s storytelling style with exaggerated facial expressions and melodramatic tone. This story illustrates the almost universal cycling experience of being yelled at on the road.

Cyclists often deal with motorist hostility and consequently tend to hold very negative stereotypes about motorists. Brian’s story reinforced a few of these stereotypes. For example, the anonymous motorist is portrayed as bigoted and aggressive. The motorist most likely did not literally assume Brian to be gay. The term “faggot” was probably intended as an attack on Brian as a cyclist rather than on Brian’s presumed sexual orientation. Regardless of the motorist’s assumptions, the homophobic pejorative inherently acts as an attack on Brian’s masculinity and is an indicator of heteronormative prejudice. Homophobia is not a standard stereotype for motorists, but an inherent bigotry against cyclists is a presumed standard. The motorist’s obscenity only served to reinforce the cyclists’ stereotype of motorists as narrow-minded bullies, thus constructing the cyclist identity in contrast to those of motorists.

The cycling community is not necessarily active in furthering LGBT rights, but as a countercultural community, they tend to be a accepting of non-heteronormative gender
identifications and sexual preferences. I did not interpret the group’s positive response to Brian’s effeminate impersonation to be a joke or laughter at the expense of gay stereotypes but rather an acknowledgement of Brian’s ability to quickly use the motorist’s attack as part of his retaliation.

**Crazy as Be-All**

Chase is an underground cyclist who, at the time of this story, was commuting to work on his bike. I collected this story during a one-on-one interview. Chase’s story of an altercation on a ride reveals poor behavior by motorists, but also aggressive behavior on his part. The narrative illustrates and reinforces negative stereotypes of motorists as aggressive and unstable, and as exhibiting a disregard for law and cyclist safety.

There was this one time I was riding home from work and it was at the end of the day so I was pretty worn out. My girlfriend came by the shop and we closed up and hopped on the bikes. We were on our way home on kind of a busy road. Not the busiest road, but it’s a main pipeline. There’s not a shoulder and cars park on the side so there’s not a whole lot of places to go. You kind of just have to ride out in the street a bit.

We were just riding along and she was behind me single-file. We were totally within the law. One guy went by and honked and then this other car came up and honked really loud and started yelling at us through the window.

At that point I was super frustrated and kind of exhausted. We came up to them [the second honking motorist] at the stoplight and I rolled up on the driver’s side door. She was already yelling and was not very pleased. Then I got upset and started to yell at her. I told her we are allowed on the road too and she needed to pull her head out of her ass.

By that point my adrenaline was up and I was super mad. Then I backed off a bit cause she obviously was crazy as be-all and I wasn’t sure if she was going to shoot me or not. Then she took off and actually cut another car off as she was leaving.
In this story the motorists initiated the conflict, but Chase pushes the incident further by confronting one of them. His decision to confront could be interpreted as an aggressive overreaction. In the context of the story and within cycling culture, however, his action is justifiable. Chase was vindicated because he was within his legal rights as a cyclist and because he was fulfilling a traditional protective, masculine role by confronting threats to the girlfriend’s safety. The presence of the girlfriend is also perhaps why Chase chose to include the hostile language he used to respond to the motorist; his aggression is an illustration of his proper masculine response. The motorist apparently responded in-kind to Chase’s harsh language to the extent that Chase felt threatened enough to retreat.

The story ends not with the Chase’s retreat, however, but with the driver cutting off another driver as she departed. This last incident substantiates Chases’ judgment of the driver as dangerous. Through Chase’s description, the motorist appears hostile when addressed at an individual level and aggressive and reckless when allowed behind-the-wheel anonymity. Motorists' use of their vehicles to maintain impersonal distance and thereby get away with bad behavior is an accusation common among cyclists.

**SHARE THE ROAD OR ELSE…**

The following narrative of a similar confrontation was collected from the blog of Rob Latham. I do not know Rob personally. I posted a request on the SaltCycle Facebook page, a cycling page for Northern Utah, asking for stories about conflicts with motorists; Rob responded by directing me to a post on his blog, “Big Rob’s Bike Blog.” According to his blog bio, in March 2014 Rob sold his car and to become a “bad ass full time
bicycle commuter” and created a blog to document this life change. I include Rob’s written narrative, because I find it particularly interesting. Without external promoting, Rob had already written this blog entry. The full piece was an extensive post. The standard elements of a bike narrative are present, such as themes of the good cyclist and the evil motorist. Writing a post on a blog, though, Rob had time to consider and shape his narrative, making this a more conscientious presentation than the verbal narratives. Rob does not know me and only had a rough idea of my project, but he was confident enough in his work to send me to this post as an answer to my call for narratives. I also liked that Rob’s full entry went on to explicitly philosophize about the evils of motorists and the virtues of cyclists. Unfortunately, Rob’s blog has now been taken down. The following is a selection from Rob’s April 2014 entry “Share the Road or Get Smashed.”

Yesterday as I pedaled my way home after riding to the warehouse and dropping off the brakes that did not fit my bike there was a guy pulled all of the way through the pedestrian crossing at a stop sign, I said "fucking idiot" out loud, not overly loud, but I have a voice that tends to boom and carry. The guy honked, I looked back and he gave me the finger. I am not sure if its the adrenaline in my blood when I am riding, the raised testosterone due to a healthy diet and biking every day or just straight pent up anger, but I IMMEDIATELY dismounted, actually fell over as I did, somersaulted on the ground, hopped up, threw my pack off, unbuckled my helmet and started stomping my way over towards this guys car seriously ready to throw, chest puffed and yelling "WHAT! WHAT!" like Stone Cold Steve Austin circa 98'. Luckily for him, the light changed, he screeched his tires out of there and headed west onto the 215 freeway. I hadn't noticed a cop that was driving towards us about a block away, he just yelled to me " are you hurt" probably thinking I got hit then drove towards the driver onto the 215, I didn't respond and just rode off.

(Accessed May 2, 2014)

---

17 In February of 2015, I got in touch with Rob via email to ask why his blog had disappeared. He expressed to me that the blog had gotten out of hand and, for professional reasons, he felt he had to take it down.
Rob continues by musing about how cars cause people to become disconnected from one another and their environment in his post. The presumed motorist-disconnect results in encounters such as this one in which drivers create a conflict but then quickly disappear with no perceived consequences.

The written form of this narrative allowed Rob time to reflect and edit the impression he wants his story to make, yet still Rob’s story comes across as told in the heat of anger, with cursing and yelling. Rob presumably does not soften the portrayal of his confrontational behavior—though the subjectivity of personal narrative means that Rob could be softening or exaggerating the aggression of the event. The details that Rob found important to highlight were the motorist’s poor driving, the motorist’s reaction, and his own “Stone Cold Steve Austin” reaction (Stone Cole Steve Austin is the ring name for professional wrestler Steve Austin). Rob escalated the confrontation by dismounting his bicycle. He justifies his aggressive behavior by blaming increased testosterone resulting from a healthy diet and consistent riding. He highlights not poor choices for which he should be held accountable but the natural consequences of his healthy lifestyle. There is also an implied justification: the motorist was driving poorly and Rob merely called the driver out; an incident occurred only because the driver erred and then overreacted to being criticized.

**Near Miss**

The next narrative is my own. As a member of the cycling community I feel that it is not inappropriate to include my own story. This incident occurred to me prior to my
fieldwork. Among undergrounders I found myself repeatedly telling this story in a tone of outrage to any cyclist that would listen. I pitch this story as my scariest near-death ride experience (cyclists have multiple such experiences). My narrative tells of a near-confrontation that results in what I felt to be a disappointing ending.

I was riding home from work. I came up on the big hill that runs right in front or Weber State and got going pretty fast, probably close to thirty, when this car going the opposite direction swung a super quick U-turn and stopped dead in my lane in front of me.

I didn’t have time to stop. All I could do was to slam my breaks and swerve into the next lane to get around her. It was a close call. If there had been a car in that next lane I would have been hit. I immediately pulled off to the side of the road to calm down ‘cause my heart was pounding and my hands were shanking.

I stood there watching that stupid car work its way into a parallel parking spot. Then this oblivious, teenage blond chick climbed out of the car and trotted off towards campus. I had this huge moment. I wanted to walk over to her and yell at her and cuss her out. She almost killed me and wasn’t even paying attention enough to notice. She was driving like an idiot for the sake of a parking space.

I didn’t cuss her out. At the time my husband had been reading this book about being an “enlightened” cyclist. He was developing this zen attitude about cars and bikes and sharing the road. He felt that cussing out motorists didn’t help cycling’s cause. So I stood there and watched her walk off. I still regret it. I should have cussed her out.

My “enlightened” decision not to confront the driver is how I tell this story, though truthfully my decision was more likely motivated by my aversion for confrontation. As a cyclist, I felt disposed to confront, but as a shy individual, I chose to remain silent. Even today, I am frustrated by my decision because I feel I passively allowed myself to be ignored. I did not necessarily need to “cuss her out,” but I do wish I had made myself seen. When telling my story to insiders, I made an effort portray myself as assertive, but
forgiving. I probably tell my story with a tone of aggressive anger to compensate for my passivity.

One of the most resonant elements in this story is the oblivious driver. In most of the narratives, the drivers notice and are irritated by cyclists. In this narrative, the driver failed to pay attention and see the cyclist. The driver’s carelessness nearly resulted in what could have been a major accident. This narrative hits on a key issue of the cyclist-motorist conflict: in an on-road accident, the brunt of the danger is to the cyclist. A major reason cyclists feel justified in their anger towards and dislike of motorists is because there is greater physical danger to the cyclist and the vehicle that could cause greater damage is the car; therefore, in the minds of the cyclists, a great deal of responsibility lies with the motorist. Inattentive motorists, such as the one in “Near Miss,” create unpredictable hazards on the roads. Experienced cyclists know that every car is a potential danger. The feeling that every car is a danger and that drivers are oblivious and careless causes cyclists to feel that no one else on the road is looking out for them. Therefore, they must entirely look out for themselves. This feeling of vulnerable isolation means cyclists are quick on the draw and feel such behavior is justified.

**SALT CYCLE ASSAULTS**

The following series of short narratives were collected from cyclists via the Salt Cycle Facebook group and from my own network of cyclist friends on my personal page. On May 1, 2014, I posted my requests for stories of incidents with motorists occurring while on a ride. These much shorter narratives are likely a consequence of the non-verbal,
Facebook-comment medium. In their shortened form, these narratives exhibit only what the narrator views as the crucial elements of the narrative.

Someone barked at me the other day while speeding past me on a 50 MPH highway in Orem. It startled me enough to almost cause me to veer off the narrow shoulder, and into a barbed wire fence.

My experiences today: near the University I was waiting at a light while on my bike and a friendly car passenger yelled “more beer” as he rode by. Later, near West Valley, an angry car passenger yelled, “what the hell” and the driver honked as they pasted. Granted, I was looking at a dog on the sidewalk and not the road as they drove by, but I don’t think I was riding recklessly.

My wife met me half way on my commute home. As we were almost home a car drove by throwing two water balloons at my wife. They missed. As they were speeding away traffic slowed and we almost caught them after which they quickly turned onto side streets to get away. Also seems like a daily thing of getting some unknown term yelled out a moving car.

I drive a car and I roll down my window to encourage riders and thank them for riding. I have share the road plates. I've had people do the same to me, and many who give me extra space. I've had people offer a draft! Honda elements are the best for that... I've had people try to run me off the road, yell at me, try to scare me. It's a crap shoot…

I have had both the encouraging keep it up almost there while riding up hill. The random things thrown at me but the creepiest had to be the guy who pulled over in a van and asked if I needed a ride. I was all geared up and not in distress so I politely thanks him and moved on while constantly checking my 6 to make sure I did not wind up on a milk carton.

These stories illustrate some of the already explored negative stereotypes about motorists being perceived as loud, hostile, aggressive, volatile, and dangerous. Other than my own comments of thanks, commentators did not comment on one-another’s posts.

Interestingly, there seems to be an attempt by some cyclists to have decidedly positive interactions on the road. A few of the cyclists responded to my conflict-seeking
prompt by recounting positive interactions with motorists. It seems that some cyclists attempt to take a decidedly positive attitude towards motorists. In the face of negative experiences, cyclists such as the cyclist of “Near Miss” and the husband mentioned therein were attempting to avoid negative altercations, even if done begrudgingly. Cyclists also commented on the on-road support, both received and given. This is perhaps an effort at an optimistic reaction against the negativity that my request seemed to promote.

This determined positivity is what I would label as the “zen” side of cycling. (I use this term not in the true Buddhist sense, but to reference the meditative, peaceful effort for insight and balance.) There’s an underlying ideology exhibited by certain cyclists in which they attempt to be at ease with the world around them. Truly understanding this ideology would require further study. I do not know if people who identify with the effort for personal and environmental balance are drawn to cycling or if cycling promotes this ideology. At this point, I only have a rough understanding of how this effort manifests itself in the behavior of certain cyclists. Similar to the above positive narrative responses, cyclist Chase Christiansen, the same Chase of the “Crazy as Be-All” narrative, initially deflected my interview question about incidents of conflict by answering:

There’s just like a push and pull. It’s just a push and pull in that motorists yell at other motorists, and motorists yell at pedestrians, and pedestrians yell at motorists, and motorists yell at cyclists and cyclists yell at motorists, and pedestrians yell at cyclists and cyclists yell at pedestrians. And if you commute its [the push and pull] just kind everybody’s. It’s kind of the hum of the world. (2014)
Chase used my question about conflict to try and promote his ideas about how cyclists should react to the conflicts of the road. Chase believes that conflict has an inextricable presence in the world, but, as he modeled in his answer to my question, one should not necessarily engage with this conflict or become frustrated by it, but simply let it go. It was only after I persisted in requesting a story that Chase relayed the “Crazy as Be-All” narrative to me—a narrative in which Chase’s behavior strongly contradicts the zen thought process he has just explained to me. I was attempting to shape my data by collecting a particular kind of narrative, but because he had grown to disagree with the ideology implicated by the behaviors of a conflict narrative Chase was reluctant to give me this type of story. He explained that his current peaceful attitude is a result of reading and pondering on conflict. He concluded that confrontations do not accomplish anything and probably makes the cyclist/motorist conflict worse.

Conclusions

Each of these narratives comes down to space and what the two sides perceived as the correct use of space. Every one of these stories of conflict takes place on the road, often initiating while the cyclist is in motion. In narrative, the honking, yelling motorists seem to feel that bicycles should not be on the road. Their aggression pushes cyclists into the shoulders and gutters of the road and to the edge of their tempers. Even the “Near Miss” narrative, which focuses on the issue of danger and feeling unseen, illustrates issues of space; inattentive drivers create a hazardous commute space through which cyclists must travel. Cyclists feel they are left with no thoroughfare on which they can
safely travel. Space is a recurring issue for cyclists. Stories similar to the narratives in this chapter are often told at community events, such as those described in Chapter 3. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the location of community events also is often subject to issues of space. Events are conducted in locations that are otherwise unwanted and unused, such as the empty parking terrace or the parkway campground on the edge of town. These stories, which portray actualized behavior of the fight for equal ground, are told in marginalized spaces and serve to reinforce the group’s issues with space.

Another major theme highlighted in these stories is the cyclist notion of awareness. Many of the collected narratives included situation details that illustrate awareness, such as noting that riders were single-file, “we were totally within the law,” “I was going pretty fast, probably close to thirty,” “I was waiting at a light,” and “I don’t think I was riding recklessly.” The details constitute concrete evidence that the cyclists were paying attention and know what they are doing. In contrast to this awareness are the motorists that do not notice cyclists at all, such as the Near Miss motorist. But the implications of cyclist awareness are not limited to situational awareness. The introduction to the chapter includes Rob Latham’s description of how constantly perceptive cyclists are “…of their environment, the weather, the sounds, the smells, the feeling of the road under their tires, how fast a car is traveling…” (2014). Cyclists, as practitioners of a more environmentally friendly mode of transportation than motorists, consider themselves more ecologically aware than motorists. This big-picture awareness and real-life “better practice” of cycling driving gives cyclists feeling of entitlement to the road.
The right to the road, a feeling of entitlement, or “Right to Ride” as I have labeled it, is also a major theme in cycling narratives and a major facet of cyclist identity. The cyclist belief in right to ride is perhaps comparable to American citizens’ reverence and fervor for the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights. On a civil level, dedicated cyclists are aware of the laws that govern cyclists on the road and the laws that permit them the road. On a more personal level, cyclists believe that because of the intrinsically good qualities of cycling (physical exercise, environmentally friendly, alleviates traffic congestion), they have the right to ride—and that no one should impede that freedom.

The narratives in this chapter paint a picture that places the bulk of the blame for conflict squarely on the shoulders of motorists: clearly, the problem is motorists, not cyclists. Even the narratives in which the cyclists’ behavior was less than exemplary included exonerating details. All narratives were delivered in a manner that indicate that the cyclist was in the right while the motorist was the in the wrong. The motorists’ attacks were unprovoked and indicative of motorists’ erratic, aggressive behavior. Aggression itself is a common element in these stories, but is only a justifiable behavior when a cyclist is asserting himself, not a motorist. The cyclist is shown to be not only justified but in the right by aggressively asserting his rights.

Many of these narratives keep descriptions of motorists at a minimum. There may be behavioral description, but no personifying details. Even though the motorist plays a major role of the antagonist in these stories, the cyclist is the hero and gets all the descriptors, if any. The only details used to identify a motorist are the sex of the driver, the type of vehicle, and maybe a rough estimate of age. These details are omitted most
likely because the cyclists cannot get a good look at their assailants. The omission, however, serves an important purpose in conflict narratives. Without identifiable details, the motorists become mere stereotypes: the crazy old bag-lady; the ditzy teenager; or the aggressive, diesel-driving hillbilly. Most often the drivers are faceless goons that rapidly launch an attack before zooming off. Folklorist Ray Cashamn has noticed similar forms of narrative typological characterization in stories told about of a deceased person at funerals and wakes (2011). The circumstances of these typecasting narratives are similar in that the typecast individual is not present to speak for himself and therefore is subject to the purposes of the storyteller. For cyclists, the role of the faceless evil motorist serves to maintain the anonymity and every-man status of motorists. Without distinctly different drivers, these events of conflict can merge to create an image of an all-encompassing, “us against the world” struggle for cyclists.

A final traditional element to these narratives is the fast-pace with which these encounters occur. The lack of details and the rapid series of events reinforce the random, unstable, and frightening nature of an altercation on the road. Motorists zoom up on the rider, attack, and quickly exit. This narrative detail reflects both the nature of the speedy, in-motion encounters and one of cyclists’ core criticisms of motorists: they are disconnected from their surroundings. This disconnect entails both an interpersonal and an environmental disconnect. Motorists can enter, cause conflict, and then leave without resolution. In the context of these narratives, this behavior appears careless and even cowardly. In contrast to motorists’ cowardice stands the bravery and assertiveness of the
cyclist. None of the narratives I collected are about an incident when the cyclist was at fault. The amalgamation of these narratives depicts the cyclist as the wronged hero.

Collectively these narratives and interviews tell a story of a community living with friction. If these narratives do, as Abrahams says, constitute a life-history of the group (2003, 201), then the history of the cycling community is one of conflict and coping with conflict. The act of sharing these narratives brings cyclists together and keeps the conflict fresh. The event described in the narration may not have happened recently, but the telling of it causes the conflict to remain current. The adversarial nature of these narratives gives the group something to unite against. The constant telling of these types of conflict narratives keeps the tension alive and gives the group the impetus to continue fighting, or at least riding.
CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY SPACES: PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL

This chapter examines the spatial activities of the Ogden cycling community by comparing the use of digital versus physical space. The examination of physical space looks at how the community expresses itself in its own space amongst insiders. The digital segment examines how the community behaves in Internet spaces. From 2009 to 2013, the underground group made use of both physical and digital spaces. Unfortunately, the group’s physical space, the Ogden Bike Collective, closed in the winter of 2013. Since that time, only the digital space has been available. An important consideration of this chapter is an examination of how the cyclist behavior changes in different types of space. The physical space examination looks at how the underground community behaves amongst itself—similar to the situation in Chapter 3. The examination of digital space explores the narrow Ogden group, but also contextualize the Ogden group within the larger northern Utah cycling community. As a whole, the chapter examines how spaces occupied by the cycling community reflect the identity of the community.

The foundation for this study is heavily based on Beverly Gordon’s notion of “embodiment.” Gordon’s work highlights the relationship between women and the physical spaces they occupy (1996, 2003). Her article, “Embodiment, Community Building, and Aesthetic Saturation in ‘Restroom World,’ a Backstage Women's Space,” explores how an elaborately decorated women’s bathroom becomes representative of the women that occupy it (2003). Gordon anchors her idea of embodiment in women’s
spaces, and highlights how the spaces provide a place of comfort and self-expression for the female minority in the thick of a male-dominated environment.

…the consistent message of the room is that women's lives should be celebrated. Regular users feel personally identified with the space because it gives them the sense of belonging to a lighthearted, private (though nonrestricted) women's club that exists within the serious and impersonal male-dominated university. (2003, 444)

Though Gordon applies her theory of embodiment exclusively to women, this idea is not restricted by gender. The crucial condition that leads to elaborate decoration and subsequent embodiment is that a space be occupied by a person or group in the minority, or that otherwise perceives themselves as marginalized. The freedom and comfort of an owned space—outside of which the occupants feel less important—leads to a decorated space where the group’s norms not only prevail but the culture is expressed unabashedly (2003, 445). Using this understanding of Gordon’s idea, the notion of embodiment is well suited to be used as a means of understanding the Ogden underground cycling community’s spaces. Using the semiotic lens of embodiment, I examine how the decoration and use of Ogden Bicycle Collective and three online community spaces express group norms and culture.
PHYSICAL SPACE: HISTORY AND USE OF THE OGDEN BALCYCLE COLLECTIVE

I first became involved in the Ogden cycling community in the fall of 2009 when I began volunteering at the Ogden Bicycle Collective. The Collective had opened only a few months before and it rapidly became a community-gathering place for the cyclists of the Ogden area. The shop was the pet project of city employee and bike coordinator Josh Jones. After its opening, as the shop began to build a volunteer base, Josh delegated quotidian responsibilities to volunteers and eventually managed to create a paid shop manager position. Josh continues to manage the bureaucratic side of the shop, chairing shop volunteer meetings, working with the city, and attending state meetings with the Utah Bicycle Collective Board in Salt Lake City.

In its official capacity, the Ogden Bicycle Collective (OBC) was a volunteer-run community bike shop. The non-profit shop was supported by grants, donations, and the money earned through shop services and the sale of donated items. The mission of the Collective was to promote cycling within the community by teaching patrons the skills to maintain their bicycles and providing them with the tools to do so. Because the OBC was non-profit and supported by grant money, the shop had to be careful that it did not offer services that directly competed with local businesses, i.e. the volunteer mechanics cannot tune up a bike for a patron, they can only teach the patron how to fix a bike for him or herself. The target demographic for these services was the low to middle income community. The shop generally did not attract a large upper-socioeconomic
demographic, most likely because the high-income community finds the cost of a bike shop negligible.

In an unofficial capacity, the Collective functioned as a community center for local cyclists. The Collective attracted different types of cyclists: mountain bikers, commuters, road cyclists, and recreational riders. Bike enthusiasts came because the shop afforded them the maintenance needs of their bicycles. These enthusiasts would then linger or just drop by to visit, because the space was welcoming to them and attracted like-minded people with whom they could socialize. Many frequenters of the OBC became volunteers because they liked the services the shop provided, they wanted to promote cycling within their community, and they enjoyed spending time there. The shop unsurprisingly became a social center for the underground bike community. Even during the open-shop hours when the Collective was functioning in its official capacity of serving the community, the shop was never formal; visitors were usually greeted with “What’s up man?” The casual atmosphere meant that cyclists could comfortably spend time in the shop.

I do not know much about the state of the cycling community prior to the opening of the Collective in the summer of 2009. From interviews with community members, I have gathered that a loose network of cyclists existed. The creation of a comfortable meeting place caused the underground community to blossom. Cyclists that did not previously know one another found their way to the Collective and built relationships on
their shared passion. Friendships developed\textsuperscript{18}, bike polo became a regular Thursday night event, and the community grew. The existence of a physical space was integral in the development of the community.

The physical space of the Ogden Bicycle Collective was messy, greasy, and artsy. The shop was always crammed full of loose parts and bicycles in various states of disrepair. All surfaces seemed to be coated with a dirty film of grease. Volunteers had not hesitated to make the shop their own by bringing in discarded furniture and leaving their possessions in the shop. There were constant attempts to keep the shop organized, but with countless tools, parts, bikes, and mechanically clueless patrons flowing in and out the doors, it was impossible for a handful of volunteers to maintain order.

The front door of the Collective entered into the shop room where there were five work stations with elevated benches—each with a mount for a bicycle to hang from. The stations were color-coded with tools wrapped in neon electrical tape to indicate which station they belonged to. Though the stations were supposedly fully outfitted with the standard bike tools, every station had missing tools. Consequently, the color-coding did not amount to much as tools were constantly circulated through the stations. Side tables were stocked with general maintenance supplies like grease, cleaning fluids, and a copy or two of The Big Blue Book (considered the Bible of bicycle repair).

Other tools and parts were kept in side rooms. Larger bicycle parts, such as derailleur and brake calipers were stored in old, plastic milk crates in a small Parts Room that was dangerous to both toes and lower-backs alike. Expensive tools were kept

\textsuperscript{18} My husband and I met through mutual friends we knew via the Collective. He and I got to know each other while volunteering at the shop.
in a room that was supposed to be for Collective volunteers only, but this exclusivity was not well enforced. This occasionally resulted in tools disappearing.

The Collective was a thoroughly decorated space. My favorite ornamentation was an informal shrine to Sheldon Brown, the creator of the go-to website for bicycle mechanics. Shop volunteers would jokingly refer to Brown as “God.” The shrine included a whimsical picture of Brown (Figure 26) with a collection of found objects mounted around him, including hood ornaments and a tortoiseshell rattle with a deer leg for a handle.

When nature calls, the disadvantage of a male-dominated community rears its greasy head. The women’s bathroom of the OBC was a strangely empty room and incorrigibly unfriendly. The necessary supplies were never stocked and an inconveniently located window discouraged normal activity. Were a woman to be so bold as to enter the men’s bathroom, she would find a single toilet stall and a half-empty bottle of diluted hand-soap. The state of the restrooms is not to imply that the men of the cycling community were adverse to the company of women. They were entirely welcoming to female presence—especially sexually available women. When asked, the volunteers attributed the unfriendly state of the restrooms to minimal funding, absentmindedness, and male hygiene.
Perhaps the most expressive space of the Collective was “the big basement.”

There were three separate basement spaces at the collective. The smallest space was kept for volunteers to store their personal bicycles. The “middle basement” was used to store the more valuable parts and bicycles. The big basement was the primary storage space for Collective bicycles. It contained piles and piles of bicycles and parts. Volunteers had attempted to create order from the chaos by establishing separate piles for kids’ bikes, adult bikes, wheels, and tires. The room itself was cold and creepy. On more than one occasion the plumbing broke and the basements were filled with sewage. In spite of the lingering, damp stench, Collective members had devoted time to covering the walls of the basement with graffiti art. Many of the volunteers dabbled in stencil art or other forms of graffiti art. The wide, unregulated walls of the basement must have been heavenly for artists that are used to hit-and-run nature of graffiti art. The blank basement acted as a free-for-all graffiti canvas.

The process by which cyclists transformed the space of the Collective a place their own entailed leaving creative details on nearly every wall. (Figure 27 illustrates the thorough decoration of the Collective). The crowning artwork of the Collective was a large mural in the shop showroom. While the basement graffiti was done haphazardly, seemingly just because they could, the upstairs art was done with greater care and enthusiasm as it was the space shared with the Ogden community as a whole. The mural read “Ogden’s Bike Collective” in stylized script. A truly thorough examination of the Collective’s space could extend into a detailed chapter of the folk art and material culture of the Collective.
The space was somewhat conflicted as the countercultural aesthetic appealed to cyclists, but did not necessarily appeal to the mainstream demographic that the Collective was supposed to serve. A middle-class mom would likely not feel comfortable sitting with her child on the split cushions of the recycled couch, under the graffiti mural with strange odors wafting from the basement. The untidiness, the countercultural art, the packed clutter of some spaces and the awkward emptiness of others caused the Collective to appear very unprofessional. Many of the shortcomings can be blamed on the volunteer-based, non-profit nature of the shop. The interior needed remodeling to best function as a bike shop, a project well beyond the budgetary means of the Collective. Surfaces, such as the plywood floor, did not clean up easily and cleaning supplies were always wanting. The volunteers were more inclined to work on bikes for the shop than to spend their time doing thorough cleaning. The shop managers could ask volunteers to clean, but as an unpaid work force, they could not be forced to do these tasks.

Thus far my description of the Collective has been purely aesthetic. The aesthetics of the Collective certainly set the tone of the physical space, and the act of decorating was a common activity, but the shop served other purposes. The primary activity, of course, was “wrenching on bicycles.” During the process of bicycle maintenance there was usually constant talk. Shoptalk usually revolved around a consistent set of topics, and unsurprisingly the number one topic was bicycle mechanics. Other, more expressive topics included issues of local interest, often regarding the Collective itself or issues that would impact to the cycling community. There was often gossip of a personal or group nature, and plans for cruises, polo games, and other social events were hatched in the
Figure 27: Collective lounge space. Lounge furnished with salvaged couched and door repurposed as a coffee table. Background: Graffiti art mural reads "Ogden's Bike Collective;" left of mural is a poster of Medusa and a stenciled image of Gandhi.

Figure 28: Collective shop room wall. Left to right: Wall adorned with how-to bicycle mechanics posters, hand-painted recycle symbol, and hand-painted green monster.
shop. The group often held recreational events such as regular Thursday night bike polo. Occasional events like Alley Cats were held as fundraisers to support the collective. Social events, both bicycle-based and non-bike-based, formal and impromptu, kept the Collective active after hours.

In her study of physical space, Beverly Gordon observes that the decorating of a space serves as a reflection of the self, not just in aesthetic taste, but also strongly reflects the activities occurring in that space and the ideology those activities provoke (2003, 452). The graffiti art, recycled/repurposed furniture, and other décor reflected the counter cultural taste of the cycling community. The space stocked to the rafters with tools, bicycles, and bike related objects reflect the functional purpose of the space, but also the ideology cyclists associate with bicycles, such as a love of self-sufficiency and environmental consciousness. The physical space of the Collective and the activities that occur there all serve as a reflection of the ideology and values of the community. The cyclists of the OBC highly value self-sufficiency. If this value was not clear through the members’ dedication to volunteering at a shop teaching bicycle maintenance to others, then the value becomes clear through the creatively adapted furniture pieces, graffiti art, and the poster on the wall that read “DIY, it’s like doing stuff” (see background of Figure 9, Chapter 2). The shop was built on objects and ornamentation that the members had built themselves. Members used the shop to work on personal projects and promote things they made. I recall the volunteers getting very excited when JP, a manager at the time, decided to try to figure out how to sew cycling caps.
Cyclists also value environmental friendliness. An explicit part of the Bike Collective’s mission statement is to promote cycling because of its sustainable nature. Ideologically, cyclists inherently appreciate this part of the Collective’s mission because sustainability is a part of a bicycle’s appeal (see Chapter 4). Visitors to the Collective could not possibly miss sustainability as a high priority since a large green, hand-painted recycle symbol greeted them when the walked in (see background Figure 28). The parts room and the big basement were constantly messy in part because the members had a difficult time bringing themselves to throw anything away that they thought might possibly be salvaged and made useful again. Sustainability also ties in to the valuation of DIY, as evidenced by the recycled and repurposed DIY decor of the Collective. The seating in the lounge area entirely consisted of salvaged finds. The coffee table was an old door mounted on a wooden box—doorknob still intact (see Figure 27).

The aesthetic saturation of the Collective impeccably illustrates Beverly Gordon’s idea of embodiment to a human-altered space. Similar to Gordon’s women’s bathroom, the Collective space “not only mirrors the people who are involved, but also becomes an extension of them; it functions as a stage on which they project themselves, but the room also takes on a ‘body’ of its own” (2003, 452). The Collective’s walls almost literally mirrored the people involved at the Collective, as many cyclists had tattoos, piercing, and unusual haircuts. Both tattoos and graffiti art stand and a countercultural adornment, which rejects the clean orderliness of mainstream aesthetic. The countercultural aesthetic acts in opposition to cyclists’ perceptions of mainstream ideas and behaviors, such as consumerism and environmental indifference.
Unfortunately, the Ogden cycling community is currently dealing with the loss of their physical space. The downtown Collective location was subject to a combination of complications that forced it to close. The landlord was not fond of the Collective and was slow to fix issues with the property. The city was making an effort to revitalize and gentrify the neighborhood, encouraging businesses that catered towards mid-to-upper-class customers. The OBC’s target demographic for the shop was low to middle income community members; however, due to its proximity to the train tracks and the local homeless shelter, the shop had a tendency to attract vagrants. The “undesirable” frequenters of the Collective and city’s efforts to clean up the area most likely created additional pressures on both Josh and the landlord to relocate the Collective. Josh held monthly meetings, known as Key List meetings, with the core Collective volunteers; as a Key List volunteer, I attended these meetings. Meetings were used to discuss day-to-day and big picture issues, such as the pressure to move. We volunteers attempted to think of ways to resolve these problems, but ultimately Josh felt that the best solution was to move. In the winter of 2013, the Ogden Bicycle Collective closed. The property is now filled in by a brewing supply store and a printmaking shop—businesses more suitable to the city’s target demographic.

Currently a new Ogden Bike Collective is in the works. After many, many months of problems, Josh had anticipated the need to find a new location and had worked to secure a new building. An abandoned drop-cleaning shop in a residential neighborhood seemed the perfect option. Located far from the downtown homeless shelter and train tracks that brought the problematic patrons, the new shop seemed better positioned to
serve the target population. The shop was expected to open in its new location in spring of 2014, but the financial negotiations and structural issues with the building have stalled the opening. Thousands of dollars in back-taxes and meeting city code stymied the opening and at the time of this thesis (spring 2015) the Collective is still not open to the public.

This loss of a physical meeting space has had a damaging impact on the underground cycling community. A vibrant and active cycling community had grown up around the Collective, but now that it has closed, activities in the community have dissipated. This is not to say that there is no activity. There are still community events. There have been fundraisers for the Collective held on roughly a monthly basis. The frequency of informal social gatherings has simply lessened. Weekly bike polo is no longer held. The avid players commute to Salt Lake for polo. Cruises are less impulsive and more formal. Bikers do not gather to volunteer, and they no longer have the opportunity at the end of a shop shift to decide to go on a ride together. The social solidarity has diminished. Cyclists that nurtured friendships during shop volunteer hours now no longer have this premise to see one another regularly.

In her book *Number Our Days*, Barbara Myerhoff discusses the important role a community space can play in the health and cohesion of a community (1978). The culture of Myerhoff’s Jewish, senior community center was able to emerge as fully as it did because of the isolation from the outside world (9). The community’s separation, though painful to them, freed them to find their own way and allowed them to indulge their passions without fear of being stigmatized. Closure of the community center was a
constant anxiety for Myerhoff’s community. She predicted that the loss of a physical meeting space would cause social dissolution and cultural extinction of the community (120). Fortunately, her community’s fears were never realized, but her expectations of the consequences of a community center closure were not wrong. The Ogden underground cycling community is currently experiencing the loss of their community center, the Ogden Bicycle Collective, and have subsequently undergone some social dissolution. The loss of community center has been the loss of a safe space and a consistent communal space. There are still digital spaces available to the community, through which they can and do communicate, but Internet space does not function the same as a physical space. The change has caused dissipation of the community’s activities and has weakened the cohesion of the group.

In spite of the OBC closure, however, there is still community activity occurring. This (hopefully temporary) diffusion of the Ogden cycling community illustrates the impact a physical meeting space can have on a community. The social importance of a community’s space is well recognized within folklore (Myerhoff 1978; Gordon 2003). The loss of a physical space might have been devastating in earlier decades, and has been damaging to the Ogden community, but today can be mediated by the connectivity that the Internet allows.
Prior to the closure of the Collective, Facebook was a well-established means of communication for the underground community. For this study, I have chosen to examine Facebook group pages that are specifically tied to the Ogden community and have existed for years. I use two group pages as examples of group digital space: the Ogden Bike Polo Club page and SaltCycle. I include these pages because the underground community frequently uses them and because I feel they serve as a reflection community. I start the digital space examination with a study of the OBC Facebook business page. This page is not a social page, but a professional one, and therefore infrequently used by the underground community. I include this page as a point of comparison between the physical and digital spaces of the Ogden Bicycle Collective, however because it is not a social page that is used and controlled by the underground group, I primarily focus the digital study of the Ogden Bike Polo Club and SaltCycle pages.

The Internet cannot supplant physical space, but it still has tremendous benefits, especially as a public space for communities that do not otherwise have a gathering space. Bruce McClelland writing about online folklore and Russian culture, notes that public spaces, such as village churches, coffeehouses, and taverns were not “easily accessible to the average Russian before the fall of the Soviet Union” (2000,183). The Internet, however, “makes possible a ‘public space,’ which seems to be an abstraction, a ‘virtual recreation’ of actual public spheres…” As an open forum where everyone can

---

19 Descriptions of Facebook pages’ formats and functionalities are representative of the interface of these pages at the time of the writing of this thesis. Facebook often updates and alters its interface; the interface of these pages may appear also as Facebook update and changes its formatting.
potentially create or modify content, the Internet provides a mechanism for “folkloric protest” (190). In relation to the study of underground cyclists, especially in the context of the group’s loss of physical space, the value of the Internet to provide a public forum cannot be understated. The subcultural group, which by its nature defines itself in opposition to mainstream culture, is kept alive, and in some ways is able to thrive.

Trevor Blank, in his introduction to *Folklore and the Internet*, notes that the Internet can complicate basic notions, such as folk group, audience, and performance. (2009, 5). Indeed, the underground group and the parameters of this study are subject to these complications. The three online spaces I have chosen to examine, each Facebook pages, complicate the boundaries of group, audience, and consequently impact performance. The pages are public. The identity of the viewers/audience is problematic as users can easily lie on their profiles, and the SaltCycle page has so many users (over 1,500 and growing) that it is all but impossible for a single user to be aware of every member of this online community. The broad membership base creates a community in which members come together through interest in being part of a cycling community, but the lack of face-to-face relationships means that certain rules are bent or broken. The below descriptions of the three online spaces I chose for this study reiterate the answers to these questions.

Part of Facebook’s relevance to this study is its overwhelmingly common usage. As the dominant social media site (Pew Research Center 2013), Facebook has become a part of daily life for most young people. Technologically determined limitations of Facebook may cause it to seem a poor space for study, however other more flexible
digital spaces, such as blogs or a self-maintained websites, are not necessarily more advantageous because the skills required to use them can narrow the member base. I have chosen to look at Facebook because it is the social networking site with the broadest user base and therefore serves as the most accurate reflection of the full community (Pew Research Center 2013). Facebook is also an ideal object of study, because its primary functional intention is to be a social space. There are countless webpages that are important to the cycling community. Important cycling sites include Bike Snob, Bike Rumor, Sheldon Brown, etc. These sites, however, are not designed for social interaction; they are designed to highlight information and content posted by a specific user(s). Visitors may comment on content, but their commentary is given lesser precedence. These websites also incorporate a national—if not international—audience that is too broad for the scope of this study. The interface of Facebook group pages is intended for social interaction.

The nature of how the Facebook’s interface functions, however, does change the nature of what the underground communicates about online. In his exploration of how the forum of the Internet complicates basic notions of folklore, Trevor Blank asks “As a mediatory agent, how does the Internet affect expression, engender unique folkloric material (and thus become a distinctive folk product itself), and reconfigure the nature of communication as a form of cultural maintenance and definition?” (2009, 5). The online, written forum of Facebook functions in a realm that is abstract, not physical. Real-world cycling events are built on structures of physical games and movement. The online forums are able to facilitate these events, by promoting and informing, but, at their core,
these sites are simply about information. The cyclist Facebook group pages of this chapter primarily facilitate communal idea exchanges. This is different from in-person cyclist exchanges that occur at cycling and at the Collective. In-person exchanges are primarily experiential—stories and discussions that express group ideology, but are somehow personal. Online exchanges are often impersonal exchanges. The primary content exchanged on the Facebook pages is information, often in the form of articles. On SaltCycle, there are daily, if not hourly posts of links to external (not on Facebook) sites and articles. The websites and articles shared are not necessarily units of folklore, but the implicit ideas contained in these articles are often ideologies important to group identity. The content of the links and subsequent discussion in the posts illustrate major facets of cyclist identity and issues of concern to the community.

Unfortunately, Facebook presents a handful of issues for folkloric comparison of physical and digital space. An aesthetic survey of Facebook’s digital space that mirror’s the description of the Collective’s physical space, is essentially useless because community members have little to no control over the visual layout of the digital space. Therefore, this digital survey must rely on user-generated content as an indicator of how space is used and understood in the community.

*Ogden Bicycle Collective Facebook Page.* The Ogden Bicycle Collective Facebook business page is a professional space and therefore the least socially active pages used by the underground community. The page differs from the other Facebook pages examined here in that it is a business page, not a page for a social circle. Because the page serves as a public source of information about the organization, it maintains a
professional appearance. Posts by the OBC page are used to promote the Collective. The page targets and seems primarily to be used by the general public. This is not a relaxed space that is controlled and used by the underground cycling group, but a study of this page is important to round out the examination of physical and digital spaces of the OBC. The OBC business page serves as a digital representation of the nonprofit bike shop, but does not represent the underground group that is the primary occupant of the Collective. The formal appearance of the digital pages stands in sharp contrast to the colorful use of physical space within the Collective and the informal dialogue that occurred there.

It seems logical that with the loss of the physical meeting space the Ogden community would gather elsewhere, and online venues could be that forum. Most of the OBC cyclists were already active Facebook users; why would they not shift their social interaction into the digital space already available to them? There has indeed been a shift in online activities of the Ogden group, but it has not resulted in socializing on the OBC page. The digital space

Figure 29: Facebook post by the Ogden Bike Collective. Posted to promote OBC’s involvement in the Ogden City Master Bike Plan and encourage public input.
of the Bike Collective page simply does not function in a manner that allows cyclists to behave in the same manner they did in the physical space.

The OBC page is primarily used for formal self-promotion to the mainstream community. The page’s content is fairly neat and corporate. It is controlled by only a few managers and only posts by the Collective itself are highlighted. Posts to the Collective page are given a lesser visual priority. From the page’s creation in 2009 to present, nearly all posts by the Collective are focused on self-promotion and cycling related events. There seem to be three basic types of posts by the Collective page. The most common is promotional, advertising the work of the Collective and its volunteers. The second most common type of post is the call for volunteers, in which the Collective will mention a project that needs work and ask for volunteers to come help at a specific time. The final, less frequent type of post is the request for input/information, such as when the Collective posted a link for Ogden City’s Bike Plan Survey. Posts to the page, even those by volunteers who are familiar with the informal social atmosphere of the Collective, are professional and only on topics related to daily Collective business.

The limited activity occurring on the Facebook page for the Ogden Collective is where the difference between the digital and physical spaces begins to have a clear impact. The digital Facebook page is naturally much tidier than the physical space. The Facebook interface keeps dialogue linear and manageable. The dialogue on the page is more formal partially due to the nature of the page as a business page and not the more sociable group page for the local cyclists. The nature of the written word also makes dialogue more formal, as does the public nature of the page. Volunteers and local cyclist
would not conduct informal shoptalk on the Facebook page in the same manner they
would in the physical shop, especially as the public discussion of certain topics might
reflect poorly on the Collective.

Most of the social (non-mechanical) discussions that I was party to in the
Collective would be inappropriate in the context of a semi-permanent public venue. One
shop discussion that comes strongly to mind was a discussion about a particular volunteer
and frequenter of the shop named Walter. Many of the cyclists liked Walter and were
cconcerned about him. Walter had difficulty holding down a job. A few cyclists had
attempted to help him by pointing him in the direction of job openings. Walter would
either not follow through with recommendations or would pursue but quit after a short
while. Instead, to support himself, Walter had begun selling marijuana. The group was
concerned that Walter could not keep a steady job and that he seemed unappreciative of
their efforts to help. They were concerned that he would get caught or that his career
choices would progressively worsen.

This conversation about Walter took place after shop hours in the OBC between a
few volunteer mechanics. Such a conversation could not take place online, and certainly
not on the OBC’s Facebook page. Although the mechanics were essentially trying to look
after one of their own, the nature of the conversation was too personal for a public digital
conversation. The illegal content of the discussion would have reflected badly on the
organization, which none of the mechanics would have wanted. Facebook does allow for
private forums, but were a private forum created for Ogden’s underground cyclists,
Walter would have been included as a member. The in-shop conversation about Walter
was impromptu. An online anticipation and exclusion of Walter for such a
conversation would have been too calculated to be natural. At that time, Walter was
active on the existing underground cycling online forums. A conversation such as this,
documented in writing on a forum Walter participated in, would inevitably have come to
his attention. As a verbal conversation, the things said may eventually have been relayed
to Walter, but this would require retelling, which would color the conversation as gossip
and somewhat soften the content.

Although the content OBC page is
much tidier and reputable than some of the
discussions that have occurred in the physical
Collective, the page does not completely
avoid presenting a countercultural tone.
Counterculture influences manage to creep in
through slang and the photos posted. Images
of the thoroughly decorated shop and its
tattooed and bearded volunteers reveal the
shop’s countercultural inhabitants. The logos
created to promote the shop, such as Figures
30 and 31, which were posted to the OBC’s
timeline in January and April (respectively)
2014, were designed by a Collective
volunteer whose artistic credentials included

Figure 30: Stencil art OBC logo. Logo
designed by a Collective volunteer.

Figure 31: Stencil art OBC logo. Logo
designed by a Collective volunteer and
screen-printed on a promotional tote bag.
screen-printing and graffiti art experience. These online images are used by the shop for digital promotion and on real life material objects such as T-shirts and the Figure 31 promotional tote bag.

*Ogden Bike Polo Club Facebook Page.* Of the many digital pages used by the Ogden cycling community, there are two additional pages I feel important to cover in this study: the Ogden Bike Polo Club and SaltCycle Facebook pages. These pages differ from the OBC page in that they are group pages and not a business/organization page. Therefore, all members’ comments are posted with equal precedence. Each group page has at least one admin who moderates the page, but otherwise there is equality in the visual precedence of posts.

The Ogden Bike Polo Club Facebook group was created in November of 2011 by Walter, a Bike Collective volunteer (same Walter as above). At the page’s inception and zenith, the posts calling for games were very regular—at least once a week. Even in winter, cyclists were posting weekly to call for a game. A call for a game can be as simple as “Polo?” to which players will respond with a Like or a comment to indicate their participation. The Ogden polo group is a relatively small group; there are fifty members on the Facebook page, but the consistent polo players are even fewer. The page has stayed active, in part because a few members straddle between the Ogden community and Salt Lake’s cycling community. Many Ogden players also follow Salt Lake’s Beehive Bike Polo Club (BBPC) page where the SLC game info is posted. Nevertheless, there are a few players who faithfully repost the BBPC’s game info on the Ogden community’s page, in hopes that a few players will be willing to make the commute and
join the game. The page also remains busy because it is essentially the running events page for cyclists of Ogden. Officially the page is dedicated to polo and polo related discussions occur most frequently, but it is also a public forum Ogden cyclists. Promotions for events, such as alley cats and cyclo-cross (see Chapter 3), are posted to the page. This is perhaps why, though the regular Ogden polo group consists of about ten players, the page has fifty followers.

Unfortunately, despite the online forum for creating and announcing such events, bike polo in Ogden has waned. The fizzle seems to be directly correlated with the closure of the Collective. In the year leading up to the Collective’s closure the posts on the Oden Bike Polo Club page grew fewer and fewer. Most of the posts in 2013 were invitations to Salt Lake’s polo games. It seems that a large part of Ogden’s polo practice was rooted in the open shop hours at the Collective, in which cyclists would gather to volunteer (explored in Chapter 3). During shop hours, a volunteer/ polo player would post an invite online. After the shop closed for the evening, the pre-assembled group of volunteers would ride the few blocks to the parking terrace used for a polo court. Now that the Collective is closed, volunteers are no longer

Figure 32: Ogden Bike Polo Club page call for a game
pre-assembled. The pretense of the Collective no longer feeds into the participant body of the game.

It seems that digital posts worked in tandem with the physical location but not independently of the physical location. The primary function of the polo group page was as a supplementary events promotion page. The polo page acts as a social calendar of sorts; it is one way for cyclists to be “in the know” about cycling events, but it is used almost solely for events, not for other socializing. The page fills a gap in the Facebook interface. Facebook formatting allows event pages that are created for singular events with fixed dates and times. One limitation of the event page is that it can only be built around a one-time event. Event pages do not accommodate recurring events, such as weekly polo, but the polo group page fulfills this function. Members notify others of planned polo games through the group page or ask for games. Post content is usually used inform and invite attendance. There are occasional exceptions in which users post about bikes that have been stolen or that are for sale. Users will also post on the polo group pages to announce and invite users to other cycling events, such as Alley Cats.

*Salt Cycle Facebook Page.* If the polo group page acts as a facilitator for group socialization, but not as a space for socializing, where does the socializing occur? There is only one page on Facebook used as a social base: SaltCycle. The SaltCycle group page was created in tandem with a blog, saltcycle.org, which is “dedicated to promoting and reporting progress in urban cycling in Salt Lake City, Utah.” The blog has its own webpage, a Facebook business page, and a Facebook group page. The two former pages publish content by a few primary contributors, but are open to public comments. Perhaps
because as a group page the interface gives equal precedence to all posters, not just a few contributors, the SaltCycle Facebook page has become the major social page for Utah cyclists. The group page acts as the cycling community page for northern Utah. At the time of the writing of this paper, SaltCycle had over 1,500 members.

SaltCycle presents the issues of folk group and audience, as previously mentioned and as indicated by the large number of members. This group exhibits much broader membership than the Ogden group, however, the performance of group is not as clearly defined as it is in the physical Ogden underground circle. In the physical practice, the Ogden underground group performs community via social gatherings (see Chapter 3). The SaltCycle group, in contrast, exists on the digital space of the Facebook page, and group activity occurs through posts to the page. During the summertime there are easily two or three posts a day on SaltCycle, but not every member actively posts and the reading of the posts is at the leisure of the Facebook users. Individuals’ readings of posts are not public knowledge and thus the group has no sense of which members are active and no concrete sense of audience. In addition, the hung number of members makes it difficult for all members to be acquainted with one-another. Thus, the performance of community is not as clear in the digital space of SaltCycle as it is in the physical space.

SaltCycle digital space differs greatly from the rest of this study in the nature and performance of community, nevertheless, it serves as an excellent forum for contextualizing the Ogden cycling group within the broader cycling community in Utah. It is a forum in that it brings together a wide spectrum of cycling types across Utah, from the underground cycling hooligans of Ogden, to commuters, to competitive racers. The
user base is broad, including low-involvement riders and important official representatives, like user Philip Carlson, the president of the Utah Bicycle Board of Directors. SaltCycle brings together different types cyclists and micro-communities. Without SaltCycle these cyclists and communities may not otherwise have interacted.

As a public forum that brings together the broad corners of the cycling community, SaltCycle is an important forum for examining the dialogue that is occurring within the community. Salt Cycle is also important because it functions in a manner nearest the social interaction that occurs in a physical space, and its impact extends from beyond the digital and into physical space. The other Facebook pages have an impact that reaches into the physical world by facilitating events. SaltCycle, however, is a facilitator of ideas and discussion. Events are still promoted in this space, but it primarily serves as a forum for the discussion of issues of interest.

During the summer months SaltCycle can look very much like the classifieds page of a newspaper. The site is inundated with posts of bikes for sale, bikes wanted, and bikes stolen. In-between the summer commerce and especially in the winter when the exchange of bicycles slows down, SaltCycle’s content posts primarily touch on a few core topics: news of local (and occasionally national) interest, new cycling technology, and discussions of conflict with motorists/law enforcement. The range of SaltCycle topics mirrors the discussion topics that often occurred in the physical spaces such as the Collective (but with far less discussion of mechanics, though mechanical questions do come up sometimes). The dialogue on SaltCycle illustrates issues of concern to the
community, but the reactions to posts are so broad that it becomes difficult to highlight singular shared values within the diverse group.

One crucial shared idea that arises on SaltCycle is the Right to Ride. Many cyclists share the belief that cycling is inherently good: good for themselves, for the community, and good for the environment. That being the case, cyclists believe in a Right to Ride and therefore a right to the road. The Right to Ride idea appears in posts of articles on cycling laws and legislation, news of cyclists hit while riding, and posts on conflict. The practical execution of how to exercise one’s right to ride is where many cyclists disagree. Figure 33 illustrates one such article posted to the page and the 20+ comments reacting to the post. The article itself is a militant assertion that cyclists need to take control of the road. The issue of standing your ground on the road is a hot topic that not all cyclists agree on, but that most in the community have had real world experience with and find to be a troublesome problem. The thread of commentary is not included here because the argument deteriorated into petty attacks on posters’ rhetoric.

The reaction to the article illustrates one of the core differences between real-life and online communications: civility. Real-life cycling events all insist upon the rule “don’t be a jerk.” Online interactions are not an exception to this rule, but the broad audience of the SaltCycle community is not as homogenous as the small underground Ogden community, which results in disagreements. Because community members do not necessarily know one another, there is not immediate social pressure to maintain civility.

The loosening of social pressure to maintain peace means that fights occasionally break out on SaltCycle. Sometimes members are able to peacefully discuss and disagree,
Figure 33: Article posted to Salt Cycle and three of the twenty-three comments posted in response.
Figure 34: Salt Cycle Supportive posts.

Though there is disagreement, the SaltCycle community attempts to lookout for each other. The belief in the Right to Ride extends to supporting other riders. The posts about local news, stolen bikes, and conflicts are often posted with a communal belief that the others will look out for them. This image illustrates two such supportive, look-out-for-one-another posts. Consecutive Facebook Posts to SaltCycle's page in which users offer supportive advice.
but other times the page moderator has to step in. Social etiquettes are not abandoned, only more difficult to enforce. When a faux pas is committed, the community quickly attempts to correct it and keep each other in-line. One example is a post in which a cyclist criticized the incompetence of a local bike shop, which he did not name, but clearly implied. This post violated an understood rule of the cycling community, which is that cyclists be supportive of cycling. The thread rapidly filled with comments by other community members who disapproved of his criticism of a local shop and disliked his negativity. The community considered the post inappropriate and responses varied in politeness. The negativity of the post was not the true issue, as there are plenty of angry, critical posts on SaltCycle. These other posts, however, are directed towards external targets such as law enforcement or motorists. The true violation of the community code was that the poster’s negativity struck within community. The thread was quickly deleted.

Figure 35: SaltCycle moderator's civility post
by a page admin who shortly thereafter posted a comment reminding users to be civil and positive in SaltCycle (Figure 35).

The moderator’s post (which was also eventually deleted) and the subsequent comments on his post ended the digital dialogue on the incident. This incident serves as an example of the real-world reach a digital space can have. The negative post occurred one day prior to the Moonlight Boogie. The evening of the Boogie, the incident was readily brought up in the course of conversation. Gage happily noted that Dustin had commented on a thread that got deleted from SaltCycle. The conversation noted that the poster was an undesirable member of the Salt Lake cycling community. Dustin affirmed that he felt he had been civil and entirely appropriate in calling the poster out on his negativity. The poster’s credibility was called into question because he works for Wal-Mart assembling bicycles and was subsequently written off for being of unacceptable character and the conversation moved on.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the conversation of the SaltCycle faux pas, the digital and physical worlds interact and impact one another. Real world events and activities wind up in posts in the virtual world; a cycling event seems incomplete until photos are posted to Facebook. Virtual invitations result in real world polo games. Community members connect via the virtual world and come together in the physical world for real action. A cross-examination of these spaces reveals the interconnected impact of activities. More physical points of comparison, however, such as of the adorned walls of the Collective
and the visuals of Facebook do not quite translate. The interface limitations of Facebook mean that cyclists simply cannot create visual spaces in the same manner they did in the Collective.

The social rules are is not necessarily different in physical and digital spaces, only more difficult to enforce in the digital. The breakdown in civility is not unique to cycling but the mask of anonymity the Internet provides causes much bad behavior online. The impact to the online community however, is that it makes the digital space a less safe place. There is an advantage to the breadth of the online group. The discussions online are likely far more intellectually compelling and challenging than the discussions that occur in person. The broad membership brings together a variety of minds that share unique ideas and opinions. Unfortunately, users cannot be sure that all members will debate with civility; the risk of engagement is that they will deteriorate into jerks.

Ultimately, the digital space cannot and does not replace physical space. Intellectual idea exchanges can run smoothly online, but not personal conversations. Personal conversations do not occur in the digital space the way they can in the physical world. Not that the manly cyclists are given to highly emotional conversation, but mere experiential conversations do not translate well. The loss of body language, tone, and other inter-personal cues cause online forums to be better suited for conversations of the mind, and not the heart. The intimacy and cohesion of a group depends upon physical meetings. Many folklorists have written about how the Internet is a phenomenal tool for creating communities and spreading the word about events—better even than a community center (Baym 1993; McNeill 2012). I have not, however, found a study with
an entirely similar context. The “vibrant” online groups seem to be groups that would not otherwise exist without the Internet. The Ogden underground group, however, already existed through physical, real-world performances community. The loss of physical space has curtailed the vibrancy of this community, but thanks to the Internet the Ogden community has avoided extinction.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The process of writing this thesis has significantly changed my understanding of the underground cycling community. When I embarked on this project over a year ago I wanted to write about the underground community because it was a group that I loved and admired. At the time, I believed I understood the community and what they stood for. The thesis, I thought, would allow me to study, celebrate, and promote all the wonderful aspects of the community. At the conclusion of this project, I feel no less love for the community, but my understanding of them is not as simple as it once was, and my perspective is not as rose-colored as it used to be.

One of the struggles of working with a community in which I am an insider was that when I ran into resistance to my research I took it very personally. I naively believed that all insiders could automatically be considered friends because he or she too was an insider. This, unfortunately, was not what other insiders seemed to feel. When an interviewee was terse or I was stood up for an interview appointment, I became incredibly discouraged. I was surprised that a group I considered so wonderful, and people I considered my friends could be so cold towards me, a cyclist who just wanted to write about how awesome cycling is. My feeling of membership in the community was already complicated for me, and now, at the conclusion of this project, I now feel an even more distant sense of membership than I did before.

The saddest change for me was when I realized the deeply exclusive nature of the community. In early drafts, my interpretations depicted the community as open, inclusive
and welcoming. My thesis chair pointed out, however, that the details of my descriptions implied a community that is actually quite closed off. I had failed to recognize that the community’s many expectations—requirements of mechanical skill, physical fitness, and especially knowledge of underground culture—create a community that is exclusive. Considering a consistent community complaint of mainstream motorist culture and road infrastructure is that it excludes cyclists, I had felt cycling community reacts against this exclusion by remaining open themselves. Unfortunately, as I came to see, inclusivity is not the usual practice, so much as group events are festive and essentiality celebratory of themselves.

I also failed to appreciate the full extent to which masculinity governed the culture of the group. I was well aware that the group was male-dominated and masculine, but until this study did not recognize how masculine norms reached into all aspects of the community. Members of the group seem to be in a constant performance of William Pollack’s “give ‘em hell” manly folktype. Give ‘em hell “is a stance based on a false self of extreme daring, bravado and attraction to violence. This injunction stems largely from the myth that "boys will be boys" -- the misconception that somehow boys are biologically wired to act like macho, high-energy, even violent supermen” (Pollack 1998, 24). The behaviors described of “Give ‘em hell” are also the nature of the behaviors practiced at cycling events, particularly the competitive events, in which group play is friendly but aggressive.

Cyclist interactions with outsiders also seem to be governed by Pollack’s masculine norms. The conflict narratives of Chapter 4, in which cyclists describe
altercations with motorists, illustrate the bravado of the “give ‘em hell” type but also incorporate the expectations of Pollack’s “sturdy oak” and “bike wheel” folktypes which require that boys never show weakness and achieve dominance and power. When describing conflict with others cyclists are, or at least portray themselves as, refusing to be picked on. They are assertive and aggressive in doing so. Their descriptions of these encounters convey that they feel a sense of rightness in their confrontations and assertiveness. The Facebook posts in Chapter 5 echo these sentiments of hostility towards motorists.

This combative side of cyclist identity reinforces Robert Dobler’s ideas that “the organized groups that spring up around ghost bikes seem to share a conception of cyclists as a subculture, sharing a more or less homogenous core of principles, concerns, and interests that must be protected and preserved from encroachment by an oppressive mainstream car culture” (2011, 183). The underground group does perceive itself as a unified group that must defend and assert itself against motorists. This defense manifests itself in aggressive, confrontational behaviors that are considered normal, and not merely justified but good.

Robert Dobler’s research on cyclists and ghosts bikes poses an important question of the significance of the ghost bike. Dobler asks: “Could these ghost bike memorials be marker of a larger culture war that is being waged along political lines, dividing cyclists and car drivers into traditionally opposing camps of the more ecologically minded left and the conservative right” (Dobler 2011, 170). Initially my response to this question was, “absolutely!” As an insider to a cyclist community, I felt that there is indeed a
culture war of ecologic and economic significance. My research into the community, however, has led me to believe that if there is a war it is entirely one-sided. Certain members of the underground community may feel that they are in a war, but I would not presume to believe that there is a unified motorist body waging conscious battle on cyclists. This feeling that cyclists are fighting a culture war merely stems from a motorist majority that feels oppressive. Not all cyclists feel there is a war. Cyclists, like Chase and Candace, whose comments came up in Chapter 4, expressed the belief that cyclist/motorist conflicts are just part of the nature of life and they do not want to take part in a battle for the road. Chase expressed his perspective on the cyclist/motorist conflict as merely a part of the flow of life:

There’s just like a push and pull. It’s just a push and pull in that motorists yell at other motorists, and motorists yell at pedestrians, and pedestrians yell at motorists, and motorists yell at cyclists and cyclists yell at motorists, and pedestrians yell at cyclists and cyclists yell at pedestrians.

And if you commute [the push and pull is] just kind everybody’s. It’s kind of the hum of the world. (Christiansen 2014)

This peaceful attitude is present is some of the cyclists I spoke with. Others, especially some of the Facebook SaltCycle users, however were insistently militant and took offense at this type of passivity.

It is on this issue of cyclist/motorist conflict that I see an inconsistent understanding among cyclists of their shared homogenous core of principles and concerns. Dobler’s notion that cyclists seem to share “a more or less homogenous core of
principles, concerns, and interests” (2011, 183) is correct, in that cyclists share a

conception that cycling is a subculture with unified values. I would agree that there is a perceived unity, and in some cases there is actual unity in certain values. Cyclists seem unified in their love of the fun of the bicycle. They all value the economic freedom the bike gives (no monthly loan payment for a bike, no legally mandated insurance, no cost per gallon). The more political implications of the bicycle, such as environmental friendliness and rights to the road, are not, however, unified core concerns for all cyclists.

This difference in values is a major reflection of Bauman’s idea of differential understanding of group folklore. Bauman’s theory is primarily focused on the creation of group folklore through contact with outsiders, but he also notes that in internal practices “…folklore performance does not require that the lore be a collective representation of the participants, pertaining and belonging equally to all of them. It may be so, but it may also be differentially distributed, differentially performed, differentially perceived, and differentially understood” (1971, 38). This is exactly the case in underground cycling. The community is unified in the celebratory facets of the community (the love of the bike, freedom, and fun), and unified in a perception of unity. The more political issues, and issues of cyclist/motorist conflict, however, are not uniformly perceived or performed.

Another complicated issue of this thesis was the impact of a marginalized identity. The chapters of this thesis wavered back and forth between characterizing a marginalized cyclist identity as having positive impacts and negative impacts for individuals. The benefits and detriments seem to contingent upon the level at which one
is examining identity. Marginalized cyclist identity seems to be a source of pride for individual at the personal, Micro level. Performance of Micro-level cyclist identity allows individuals an outlet for personal expression—such as the expressive bicycles of Chapter 2. Moving outward to the Meso, community level, the underground group provides individuals with a community, sense of belonging, and a vehicle for socializing and bonding with this community. At the more expansive, city-wide levels of Meso identity, cyclists seems to fall victim to pigeon-holing, stereotyping issues associated with identity. Kaplan notes one of the disadvantages of a recognized identity is that it can limit new democratic possibilities by “encouraging narrow solidarities rather than broader identifications” (2014, 125). Immersed in the city-wide Meso community, cyclists become a mere category, falling victim to outsider stereotypes of what cyclists are like. They also seem to limit themselves through creating boundaries between themselves and non-cyclists, reflecting Bauman’s notion of differential identity that is constructed through boundaries (1971). The consequences, actions, and social interactions indicate that the personal benefits of marginalized identity seem to increase as the scope of identity narrows.

Looking to the future of the study of underground cycling, I hope to improve my current study by improving my details of documentation and covering other facets of the community, as well as exploring the complications outlined above inherent in the notion of community itself (cf. Gabbert 2011). For example, towards the end of my study I
realized that the community has traditional jokes that they tell.\textsuperscript{20} I would like to document cycling evens with greater detail, particularly looking at complicated social facts, such as hierarchy and gender. The impact of the masculine social habits was unavoidable in this study, however, I left out interesting deviations from traditional gender norms, such as the JP’s experimentations with sewing and Brian’s obsession with baking.

I also hope to improve folklore studies of underground cycling by expanding my examination of underground cycling communities both horizontally and vertically. I would like to continue to observe how the Ogden community behaves over time. The community is still recovering from the loss of the Collective’s original location. The shop has reopened at a new location, but from a brief social chat with a long-time volunteer, the old crew is more or less gone. They have moved on to other things. The hope is that the new location will attract a new group of young people who will run the shop, and thus likely become the new underground cycling community. This volunteer’s predictions would have interesting implications if they came true. The community would remain perpetually a youth community, composed primarily by young men, who move on to other folk groups as they grow older. Perhaps they move deeper into their careers, start families, and therefore have less time for volunteering and socializing.

\textsuperscript{20} One such repeated joke is “$N+1$.” This mathematical equation is joking repeated every time a discussion turns to the question “How many bikes is too many?” The answer is $N+1$, where $N$=the number of bikes a cyclist currently owns. The joke is that when a cyclist gets another bike, $N$ changes. Therefore, the number of bikes that is too many to own is infinite.


Christiansen, Chase. 2014. Interview by author. Personal interview. Logan, UT.


Gilbert, Bonnie. 2014. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Ogden, Utah.


Hepworth, Jeff. 2014. Interview by author. Email interview.


Jacobson, Gage. 2013. Interview by author. Personal interview. Ogden, UT.


Leak, Risshon S. 2014. Interview by author. Email interview.


Northrop, Candace. 2014. Interview by author. Ogden, UT.


Orquiz, Juan Pedro. 2013. Interview by author. Phone interview. Roy, UT/Logan, UT.


Platt, David. 2014. Interview by author. Email Interview.


Premium Rush. USA: Columbia Pictures., 2012. DVD.


Swisher, Benjamin. 2014. Interview by author. Email interview. Provo/Logan, UT.

Taylor, Claire. 2014. Interview by author. Email interview.

Tecklenberg, Brian. 2009. Interview by author. Personal interview. Ogden, UT.


Tuttle, Berk. 2014. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Ogden, UT

