

2015

Race, Gender, Sexuality, Ability, Identity and Cycling, Blog 2

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ENDO: transforming cycle culture

Race, Gender, Sexuality, Ability, Identity and Cycling — UNIV 291 SEC 039



About hchamet

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Bike Ethnography

by Hchamet on September 29, 2015 in **Bike ethnography**

I was not present for the race itself, but I followed it in media while studying bike culture in my home town. I wanted to do a comparison of a few different view points of cycling, the UCI Road World Championships, and bike culture. I decided to attempt this in a few parts:

1. I studied a few different photo galleries compiled post-race and looked for trends in reporting on the race.
2. I talked to people who were at the race about their experience and observations.
3. I thought about cycle culture outside of the race and what the race can show us about it.

My main observation after studying the photo galleries were pertaining to gender and race. I focused primarily on two photo galleries: one from a local Richmond news source which asked spectators of the race to submit their own pictures (can be found [here](#)) and a UK news source (found [here](#)). The former showed pretty blatantly how the public views cycling: it was entirely pictures of white men. I did not see a single picture that was visibly of a woman cyclist, and only one which included non-white competitors (specifically the Rwandan team). This gallery includes 100 spectator submitted pictures, and I think the proof is in the pudding for both cycling's lack of diversity and the public perception of what a cyclist is. The latter source was a more complex study. The gallery mostly focuses on the winners of both the men's and women's races, and follows them through the actual competition and onto the podium to receive their medals. It includes men and women competitors in just about equal numbers, and upon first glance is pretty fair. However, after a closer look I found a vast difference in the captioning of the photos. A few captions that stood out to me especially from the photos of the women's winners on the podium: "Fighting back tears", "All smiles", "Team effort" and "Familiar feeling". The men's photo captions: "Work

horses”, “Masters”, “Attack, attack, attack”, “Sealed with a kiss” (a photo of the champion kissing his wife), “National pride”, and, my personal favorite, “Champion of the world”.

The champion of the women’s race gets “Fighting back tears” compared to the man’s “National pride”, the top three women were captioned “All smiles” while the men got “Champion of the world”. The women were given emotional, tender captions and the men strong, intense ones. Take from that what you will.

Everyone I spoke to about their experience as a spectator said about the same thing: almost entirely white, upper-middle class, able-bodied spectators, many with beer and patriotic clothing. Almost entirely white competitors as well, with expensive, sponsored gear. I wanted to tie this information into my focus (bike infrastructure in terms of class, race, etc.), so I questioned how cycling is viewed within and outside of this race:

“The World is Coming to Richmond”, we were told. We celebrated the cultural and economic benefits a major sporting event has for a city. We closed streets, shut down VCU, cancelled all of our plans and put the city on hold so that we could celebrate this army of physically pristine, world class cyclists occupying our town. Compare this to our complaints about student cyclists at VCU who take up space, get in the way of cars, cause general issues. Compare this to our complete lack of bike lanes in poor neighborhoods and seeming inability to understand that poor people can’t just *get* healthier food, or to job interviews and work, or to school without access to safe, affordable transportation. Think about how we will raise 21 million dollars ([source](#)) to bring white, rich, talented cyclists to Richmond, but can’t commit to plans to make our real, daily world bike friendly.

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Bike activism “Artifact” analysis: GGRBC Room to Ride

by **Hchamet** on September 22, 2015 in **Artifact Analysis**

I believe that implementing an initiative similar to the Room to Ride program in Grand Rapids, Michigan (outlined below) would be a cost effective, simple, and lasting way to increase cycling accessibility to members of society who may not fit the white, athletic, able-bodied, upper-class view of the cycling world.

<http://www.bikegrandrapids.org/programs-and-projects/room-to-ride/>

The Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition (GGRBC):

Purpose: “to serve as a single voice advocating for safer and more accessible bicycling of all kinds in Greater Grand Rapids.”

GGRBC’s “Room to Ride” Program:

Campaign for 100 miles of on street bike lanes by the end of 2015

Room to Ride hopes to provide:

- “Room to Get to Work: Bike lanes increase the comfort and confidence of people who use their bicycle to get to work. Many households do not have access to a car. We are making room to ride for bicyclists with infrastructure that supports those trying to support themselves and their families.
- Room to Spend: People who ride bikes buy bikes—and other things too. People on bikes are also more likely to make repeat trips to their local stores. We are making room to ride so bike-accessible business districts can benefit by catering to these customers.
- Room to Be Healthy: People who ride bikes are reducing health risk factors like diabetes and high blood pressure. We are making room to ride to contribute to active, healthy lifestyles.
- Room to Be Safe: Bike lanes create separation between cyclists and vehicles and can reduce crashes. People who ride bikes need safer routes to get from point A to point B. We are making room to ride for bicyclists with infrastructure that reduces the risk of accident and injury”

In terms of my focus for this course, Room to Ride is a great example of simple infrastructure being crucial to cycle accessibility.

- Many of the aforementioned families without cars are likely lower income families. While cycling is viewed as an upper class activity, the upper class are likely those who need easy, cheap transportation the least.
- Many low income neighborhoods do not have healthy, inexpensive food options near by. Many times the only close store is a convenience store, which often has higher prices and lower quality. Nutritious food, even once made financially accessible, may be physically distant and not walkable.
- Poverty is a risk factor for higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, etc.
- The physically disabled, elderly, hungry, etc. may have a difficult time with the fast-paced, dangerous world of on street biking. The risk of accident and injury for these members of society is much greater. Those members of the population who aren't incredibly fit, world-class bikers may be scared away from cycling because there are not safe, separate places for them to bike at their own rate.

I think this would be fairly simple and not incredibly expensive to implement in Richmond. Bike lanes are one of the simplest ways to make biking more accessible, and the economic and social benefits far outweigh the costs.

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My Focus

by **Hchamet** on September 15, 2015 in **Introduction/focus selection**

Hey everyone, I'm Hallie Chametzky. I'm a freshman Dance major and hopefully a future Women, Gender, and Sexuality minor, so I'm super excited to get started with this course!

I plan to focus on how the infrastructure of biking (such as a lack of wide, even, and consistent bike lanes) may create an exclusive and discriminatory culture within cycling. I want to study how the lack of government funding and initiative in implementing easily bike-able areas, especially in low income areas, has perpetuated the image of cycling as a white, male, able-bodied, upper class activity.

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