An Uphill Battle: Gender Construction in Mountain Bike Racing

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(Under the Direction of David Smilde)

ABSTRACT

Analyses of the significance of sport in the construction of gender identify sport as a practice that creates and legitimizes male dominance. This paper focuses on how gender is constructed through both organizational elements of and individuals' interaction in mountain bike racing. I have identified five types of interaction through which organization (structure) and participants create gendered meanings: race structure, cycling teams, assumptions of gender ("the boy advantage"), a focus on men as legitimate competitors ("men: the main attraction"), and different standards for men and women ("different standards"). The findings indicate that structure and individuals' social practices in mountain bike racing create masculinity as the norm and consequently marginalize women participants.

INDEX WORDS: gender, interaction, cycling, sport, culture, mountain bike racing

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On a wintry January day, when conditions drove most everyone from the streets, a group of cyclists congregated outside Valley Cycles' storefront. As we waited for the group leader to signal the start of a particularly brutal five-hour ride, made even crueler by the weather, I watched as people huddled together in conversation, blowing hot breath into cupped hands in a vain attempt to stay warm. I pushed myself closer to Mandy, Beth and Josh, as Katie, a world-renowned cycling champion, walked over. “I expected to be the only girl today,” she said, addressing our shivering human knot. I looked around at the larger assembly and within seconds located Debbie, Amanda, Kathy and Monica. I returned my gaze to Katie and said, “There are many women here.” She did not reply, apparently there was no need. Beth twisted around and searched the group as well. After a moment she asked, “Where is Dave? I am ready to start.”

As I stood in front of Valley Cycles and waited for the ride to leave, I watched and listened for signs of reaction to Katie's comment; no one who heard Katie asked her why she thought she would be the only woman on the ride that cold winter’s day. Later, when I asked Beth her thoughts about Katie's remark, she didn't recall the comment at all, in much the same way that one would not take notice of or remember an off-handed comment about the weather.

The lack of obvious reaction to Katie's comment in the situation described above is intriguing for two reasons, whether one problematizes, questions, challenges, agrees with it, or otherwise. First, this interaction illustrates specifically how cultural norms in cycling influence

actors in situations and taken-for-granted expectations. Second, and more generally, it shows the often unconscious but ever-present role gender plays in social life.

Cycling, in particular, and sport, more generally, is characterized by high levels of gender inequity, despite gains in gender equity in many other areas of social life, particularly in 2005, when, for the first time ever, a woman became the conductor of a major symphony orchestra and a record number of women entered the fields of medicine, law and academia. Scholars argue that these changes occur largely through gains made by women in education, employment and reduced dependence on husbands and fathers (Walby 2000). Given this juxtaposition, my primary aim is to shed light on how women in sport are continually marginalized during an era in which women have made significant gains in so many other areas of social life.

Sport plays a prominent role in social life; thus, I argue that my research informs social life at-large. According to Therberge (1997), competitive sport is one of the most important arenas for the production and expression of gender. Previous research identifies sport as a social world, in which notions of male dominance are created and legitimated (Anderson 1999). Through athletic participation in organized sports, men learn to exclude women, and how to understand the hierarchical and regulated structures that help create a particular form of idealized masculinity; this ideal masculinity becomes a part of men's identities (Messner 1992). Influenced by hegemonic theory, in my view, the processes that construct masculinity also form a particular version of masculinity and femininity which becomes a part of women's identities.

Therefore, gender roles created and celebrated in sport powerfully influence dominant gender ideologies society-wide. In sport, masculinity is constructed as authoritative, brave and strong, while femininity is constructed as frail, weak, unassertive and uncompetitive. Embedded in culture and re-created through interaction, gender constructions gain dominance and shape

beliefs about gender. Thus, interactions in sport, and the resulting gender constructions and performances, influence gender hierarchies within society at-large.

Empirically, in this paper I explore mountain bike racing. Mountain bike racing is a sport dominated by men with very few women participants. Common rationales for this skewed participation include beliefs that women do not like physical challenges, dirt (mountain biking is done on dirt trails) or sweat, have a fear of getting hurt and a non-competitive nature, and that women are not tough enough. Overwhelmingly, the most common rationale used to explain why women do not participate in sports as much as men is that men are naturally superior athletes.

The belief that men are naturally more athletic than women is not unique to mountain bike racing. Other sports, such as basketball and tennis, have different rules and equipment "better" suited for women. These sports cite biology as responsible for the apparent differences between men's and women's athletic abilities. This "scientific" assertion negates challenges to men's domination in sports, because science and biology are non-negotiable *facts* which cannot be disputed. Thus, the belief that men are naturally more athletic than women is not limited to men; many women negotiating male-dominated sports also accept the idea that men are better athletes.

Consequently, few actors look to social explanations for why men seem to athletically dominate mountain bike racing. However, I argue that social reasons do play a role in men's athletic success. I cannot and do not claim that social reasons alone account for this success, or that biology plays no part. Nevertheless, I do contend that social reasons account for much of the perceived gap in athletic abilities between men and women.

Since mountain biking's inception, through its infancy and development beyond a fringe sport, virtually all the actors involved, from the athlete to bike designer and the race promoter,

were men. The homogeneous gender composition of participants historically involved in mountain bike racing's development was central in developing the present gender stratification system and image of the "natural" male mountain bike racer. Thus, men's domination within the field is hardly surprising.

Therefore, my empirical question is: How are women in mountain bike racing marginalized? To explore this question, I employed participant-observation to observe multiple social settings in which mountain bike racers interacted. Upon analyzing my data, I found that within mountain bike racing, culture influences interaction and, ultimately, sustains taken-for-granted gender characteristics, "naturalizes" male athleticism, and preserves male dominance, while simultaneously marginalizing female participation. Thus, in this paper, I show that structure and agency are culturally produced and inter-related influences on interaction processes that largely results in social reproduction. For mountain bike racing, this means that during interaction, participants actively reproduce gender constructions and roles that reaffirm hegemonic masculinity and the prevailing patriarchal gender order.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HOW WOMEN ARE MARGINALIZED IN MOUNTAIN BIKE RACING

In this chapter, I develop the theoretic lens and provide the analytical tools I find useful in exploring and understanding the interaction and processes by which women athletes are marginalized in mountain bike racing. In doing so, I first discuss Eviatar Zerubavel's work on distinctions and boundaries, in order to show how these elements are mechanisms for identifying and socially constructing difference in ways that appear "natural." Following the discussion of Zerubavel's work, I show how Candice West and Don Zimmerman's concept of "doing gender" as a performance is useful in showing how actors generally reproduce gender distinctions and boundaries specific to a given social world. Guided by Zerubavel and West and Zimmerman's theories, I focus on how organizational and expressive dimensions of culture embody gender distinctions and boundaries and color the way in which actors "do" gender. I argue that particular organizational and expressive dimensions of culture influence gender constructions and ultimately effect social outcomes. Next, I discuss interaction as a pivotal site for gender constructions, noting that the character of the interaction is largely the result of cultural influences. Finally, I review the literature on sport and gender and argue that, although existing studies contribute to the general analysis of patriarchal control and how it operates in sport specifically, these studies fail to address how culture reinforces hegemonic gender distinctions and boundaries as "natural" and effective mechanisms of patriarchal control.

Distinctions and Boundaries

In this section, I discuss Eviatar Zerubavel's theoretical work on distinctions and boundaries. I engage Zerubavel's work in order to show how distinctions and boundaries organize social life. I discuss how distinctions and boundaries aid in rendering categories within social life as "natural," and, therefore, powerful, divisions of social life.

Zerubavel (1991) asserts that the "real world" exists without categories, and that actors actively create their world (or version of reality) by making meaningful distinctions between or among things. According to Zerubavel (1991), distinctions and boundaries serve "both inclusive and exclusive functions, identifying what (or who) belongs inside or outside them" (Spain 1993, p1076). Exposing the ways actors make distinctions and maintain boundaries allows for investigations into the "taken-for-granted" realm of social life.

Zerubavel (1991) argues that actors see the world through a "social lens" of distinction that influences how they create meaning. The process of marking one thing from another, or distinction, is necessary in order to know who we are; however, it is important to note that though powerful and arguably necessary, distinctions are also arbitrary and both affect and effect social constructions. Together, boundaries and distinctions create perceived gaps in social life generally, as well as within specific social worlds, that artificially inflate constructed differences and perceived distances between social categories (Kearl 1993). Ultimately, boundaries and distinctions, Zerubavel (1991, p1) argues, "affect the way we organize our everyday life."

As tools for organizing social life, boundaries and distinctions influence social practices. In turn, social practices reinforce existing boundaries and distinctions, as well as propagate new boundaries and distinctions, and/or the meanings actors attribute to boundaries and distinctions. Through this mutually constituting process, some meanings and social practices, those associated

with gender, for example, are reified, institutionalized and become dominant. Thus, the lens through which actors view social life reflects dominant meanings that are distilled from and reinforced by distinctions and boundaries. Because this process is often routine and invisible, the socially constructed meanings that result from this process are “taken-for-granted,” and the characteristics bound within categories are seen as “naturally” derived.

Race and gender are examples of categories found within social life that are defined by “naturally” occurring distinguishing characteristics which actors imbue with meaning. The powerful impact of race and gender distinctions on an actor’s life chances and outcomes has been documented in much of the social science literature. However, because the social processes which produce these categories are often invisible, and "taken-for-granted" as naturally occurring, many actors essentialize individual and group behaviors, thus reducing explanations of life outcomes to biological causes. Some examples include beliefs that women are naturally more emotional than men, or that men are naturally more athletic than women.

To assume specific attributes are naturally occurring within certain groups advantages members of the group whose attributes are more prized and valued, while disadvantaging those who display “other” characteristics. The process of associating or matching more or less valued characteristics with distinctive members of a particular group stratifies members within social life generally and particularly. Once a hierarchy is established, positions within the hierarchy have access to more or less power. Thus, essentialist explanations, either intentionally or unintentionally, sustain systems of stratification and, consequently, embody various dimensions of power.

In addition, essentialist explanations hinder social change; after all, how can you change biology and nature? Consequently, there is little to no opportunity for behavior to manifest

differently. Ultimately, if change is then not seen as an available alternative, then conditions preventing equality are preserved, the status quo remains, and sexism, racism and classism prevail.

Therefore, making visible the specific ways in which socially constructed distinctions and boundaries are re-created and re-enforced is crucial to understanding how systems of domination work. To that end, in this paper I attempt to uncover the processes by which gender boundaries and distinctions are produced, as part of an over-arching aim to understand the mechanisms by which patriarchy continues to operate within present-day society. In order to conceptualize the role gender plays within patriarchal institutions, I now turn to Candice West and Don Zimmerman's (1987) theory of "doing" gender.

Gender

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is a set of behaviors within social life associated with an actor's sex. Due to the link between sex and gender, for many actors, the terms are confounded. However, social scientists conceive of gender as a social construct enforced through boundaries and distinctions. Conceptualized by West and Zimmerman as a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment," gender distinctions and boundaries divide actors into two categories, men and women (1987, p128). These divisions are not simply static labels of "man" or "woman." Instead, divisions or categories, are reflections of cultural meanings surrounding attributes and characteristics bound in these categories. In other words, gender is not a biological characteristic, but rather is a system of meanings which influences actors' ways of seeing, interpreting and interacting within a given social setting.

Therefore, gender bounds meanings that are expressed through gender performances (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, the boundaries and distinctions embodied by gender performances are not generated in a vacuum. Rather, the framework that guides the specific

ways in which gender is performed is influenced by culture, within both particular and general cultural sites. As such, gender performances are situated conduct (West and Zimmerman 1987). As situated conduct, gender performances are simultaneously robust and persisting, as well as fluid and shifting (Yancy Martin 2003).

West and Zimmerman's theory of gender conceives of gender as "an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" (1987, p128). The assertion that "doing gender," or a gender performance, is tailored to and by the context in which the actors are embedded, suggests that though individuals "do gender," gender performances are not simply individual accomplishments. Instead, gender performances can be understood as social performances that are shaped by the culture that characterizes specific sites. As such, culture shapes social outcomes vis-à-vis gender performances. But how does culture impact gender performances? In order to answer this question, I now turn to a discussion of culture.

Culture

Culture, or "ways of seeing," influences the way actors view social life, and subsequently, informs the way actors behave (Berger 1972). As such, culture influences gender performances and, consequently, gendered outcomes. Within social life, generally, and particularly social worlds, norms and values reflect meanings. Meaningful norms and values are both explicit to specific social sites and social life in general. These general and specific meanings are embodied by and reflected in cultural dimensions found within social sites. Thus, when viewing gender as a performance, I argue that culture shapes perceptions of gender and gender performances. Therefore, in attempting to make visible the mechanisms by which gender is performed, produced and recreated, culture should be central to the analysis.

In the task of considering and analyzing the role culture plays in (re)producing gender, I find it useful to analytically separate culture into two dimensions, the organizational and expressive dimensions of culture, as key components of the production and practice of gender (Williams 2006). Organizational dimensions structure social life and include associations, rules, events and mechanics (Williams 2006). Expressive dimensions include values, beliefs and everyday practices (Williams 2006). As parts of a whole, these cultural components mutually constitute each other.

For a gender analysis, both of these cultural dimensions function as important mechanisms that generate meaning about gender, and subsequently reinforce gender boundaries and distinctions. The elements constituting and enabling gender systems are re-created through social gender performances; actors "doing" gender engage with other actors. Hence, "doing" gender relies on social interaction. Therefore, I argue that interaction is a key site for "doing" gender. Further, I argue that the nature of the interaction depends on organizational and expressive dimensions of culture. In turn, the cultural character of the interaction influences how actors "do" gender and, consequently, how gender hierarchies are (re)constructed. For that reason, I now discuss interaction as a significant site in which ways of seeing are accomplished and sustained, and how gender is subsequently (re)constructed.

Interaction

Social interaction, or engagement with other actors, is a dialectical process through which culture is produced and which is also influenced by culture. During interaction, actors reflexively constitute meanings and significances; interaction facilitates the cementing of beliefs and world views about social reality through information-gathering, the sharing of ideas, and the creation of understandings about the world (Hannerz 1969). Because gender is a defining feature

of social life and central to the way in which social life is organized, gender affects interactions between actors. Therefore, as a process or practice of meaning-making through which boundaries and distinctions are re-created, actors re-produce gender through interactions.

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), "gender itself is constituted through interaction and structures interaction" (p 131). Actors embedded in social worlds, in which gender is the prevailing method for social organization, develop gendered social lenses while interacting with others. As actors develop meanings about gender, and thus view the world through a gender lens, certain gendered behaviors become the norm. Because actors are increasingly involved in multiple social worlds, actors bring norms and values developed in one social world to other social worlds. Thus, interaction can become institutionalized in repetitive patterns (Ritzer 2000). Hence, interaction acts as a "bridge" between the specific and general areas of social life.

Through such bridge-interactions, actors bring their gender blueprint of meanings to interactions with actors in other social worlds. The strength and particularity of an actor's social lens depends, in part, upon the actor's blueprint for "doing" gender appropriately. In other words, culture within social worlds affects gender constructions and performances differently. Therefore, for an analysis of gender constructions and performances, investigations into any given social world may be more or less useful. Thus, because sport is a hyper-masculine social world, in which gender is both the defining method of social organization and the means by which identity of an athlete is deemed legitimate, I argue that, in an analysis of gender and culture, sport is a particularly salient social world for rendering the mechanisms which make gender distinctions visible. To illustrate why sport is a particularly significant site for an investigation into gender (re)production, I now turn to a discussion of sport.

Sport

In contrast to West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of gender, which conceives of gender as a socially constructed and situated accomplishment, most actors hold the common-sense perspective that gender is an individual attribute determined exclusively by an actor's biology. The common-sense perspective posits that the body is responsible for the characteristics and attributes bound in categories of gender. This perspective persists, despite the fact that most of today's lifestyles no longer require physical engagement. Thus, the body is removed from its central position in the accomplishments of life. However, in sports, the body remains central to performance. Arguably, then, because gender is coupled with the body and the body is central to sports, sport is as a particularly salient arena in which to study the mechanisms that reproduce gender and gender stratification.

As a prominent and widespread institution, sport has a powerful influence on the performance and (re)production of gender. Sport, in general, is characterized by specific cultural norms that celebrate, teach, practice and re-produce masculinity (Stacy and Thorne 1985; Acker 1990; Therberge 1993; Crossett 1990; Kimmel 1990; Connell 1983). As a setting in which to develop and display traits and abilities that signify power and authority, sport has been theorized as one of the most important arenas for the socialization of masculinity (Therberge 1993; Crossett 1990; Kimmel 1990). Further, because the masculine cultural norms that are developed in opposition to femininity are the foundation of sport, mixed-gender competition seems illogical. In other words, gender is the "natural" method by which to separate participants, and structures the social experience in sport. Consequently, while sport celebrates masculinity, it simultaneously restricts women's participation. Women's restricted and/or limited participation enables and perpetuates stereotypical images of female frailty and femininity (Therberge 1993).

Thus, in sport, as a social setting in which gender boundaries and distinctions are categorized, re-created, and learned, both men *and* women learn and practice how to "do" gender appropriately.

Gender and Sport

Guided by cultural norms within sport, the process of "doing" gender appropriately reproduces gender norms, gender attributes and characterizations. Through the influence of organizational and expressive dimensions of culture, produced gender norms appear "natural," as opposed to being conceived of as "socially organized achievements" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Culture within sport, therefore, serves as a blueprint for constructing gender and gender norms. Specifically, because sport promotes masculinity as the defining characteristic of a successful or "natural" athlete, actors involved in sport create patriarchal gender norms that assume an athlete to be male, not a gender-free person (Acker 1990). For actors involved with sport, their "social lens" is often gendered and reciprocally constitutes organizational and expressive dimensions of culture. These dimensions of culture, in turn, reconstruct the way sport is organized and practiced, as well as how actors involved in sport interact with other actors and other institutions.

Because actors are involved in over-lapping spheres of social life, actors who learn how to "do" gender within sport develop a corresponding lens through which they view social life generally. Consequently, the gender lens and practices that actors develop and make "natural" in sport merge with other areas of social life. Gender norms are then re-created within social life at- large, and support and perpetuate patriarchal gender lens and practices. In this way, actors use patterns of meanings constructed in sport to guide interaction and make sense of everyday social reality (Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman 1991). Thus, gender inequalities are re-

produced as a reflection of dominant cultural norms found within sport that value masculinity and the male athlete.

Culture and interaction, coupled with the historical dominance of masculinity in sport, "naturalizes" the male athlete as biologically superior (Lorber 1993). In fact, the processes which render men as the biologically superior athlete are so convincing and powerful that biological explanations of inequalities in sport prevail despite evidence to the contrary; though many physical differences between male and female bodies do exist, there are more physiological differences found within rather than between genders (Hyde 1990). However, as discussed earlier, the ways in which many sports are played or performed, and norms regulating access to and participation in sports, contribute to gendered outcomes and ultimately construct common-sense notions about gender, sport and power.

In sport, the separation of athletes into gendered groups reflects society's power differentials (Foucault 1978); grouping competition by gender, rather than by hair color or astrological sign, has become the "natural" division of participants, and is legitimized by dominant physiological ideology. In fact, many traditional sports, such as baseball/softball, basketball and tennis, follow a model in which participants are separated by gender during both practice and competition. The outcomes of this separatist model have been well-documented in previous research; examples include disparate treatment of men versus women athletes, differences in the quality of coaching and training facilities, differing rules of play, variations of equipment, and, consequently, drastically different athletic experiences. For example, males make more money, enjoy more perks, are awarded more social capital than females, and are discursively constructed differently in the media (Therberge 1993; Messner et al 1993; Berlage 1994).

Specifically, scholars in this tradition examine the effects of this “natural” division. Few studies, however, have explicitly examined why or how dividing sporting participants by gender is legitimate. I assert, then, that while acknowledging previous contributions to the understanding of the effects of differential gender norms on participants and participation, I argue that more progress needs to be made toward uncovering the mechanisms by which gender, gender boundaries, and gender distinctions are created. In order to facilitate this project, I suggest an analysis of sports that examines mixed-gender sports performances and interactions. High levels of mixed-gender interaction provide opportunities to view interactions in which gender is re-produced and rigidly gendered categories are legitimized.

The organizational barriers within traditional sports limit interactions among gender categories, and may influence researchers to instead focus on the different treatment of gendered groups. However, “alternative” sports, such as rock climbing, running and cycling, are sports in which participants often train together and compete at the same time and location, though in gendered categories. These alternative sports do not have the same kind of organizational barriers that limit mixed-gender interaction that traditional sports have. Thus, alternative sports provide an opportunity to focus on the processes that construct gender and validate gender as a “natural” method by which to divide sporting participants into categories for competition. Therefore, in order to observe gender construction and make the process visible, I investigate mountain bike racing.

Mountain bike racing is an “alternative” sport in which participants spend most of their time training and racing in mixed-gender groups. However, though mountain bike racing is ostensibly focused on athletes, the sport includes and relies on many actors and organizations in order to operate. This multiplicity of actors influences mountain bike racing culture, interaction,

and the subsequent production of gender. Therefore, because social interaction is more than face-to-face exchanges and institutional structures that "influence the nature, content, and meaning of whatever face-to-face interactions occur with them," it is necessary to consider all the actors and organizations involved with mountain biking, in order to gain an understanding of gender and gender construction within the sport (Dalton and Fenstermaker 2002, p169). However, according to Dalton and Fenstermaker (2002), the empirical challenge is to situate face-to-face interactions in the specific context of the "overarching social structures" in which interactions occur.

Conclusion

Through researching mountain bike racing, I investigate how culture influences gender performances. My aim is to make visible the mechanisms by which women in mountain bike racing are marginalized. My study is guided by Zerubavel's (1991) theory on boundaries and distinctions and the theory of gender developed by West and Zimmerman (1987,) and complimented by the literature on boundaries and distinctions, culture, interaction, sport, and gender in sport. This synthesis of theories and concepts allows me to interrogate how mountain bike racing continues to be a highly gender-stratified social world, despite a movement towards gender equity in society at-large.

In answering this question, I argue that gender is "taken-for-granted" as a natural and legitimate method of separating participants into categories for competition in cycling. I find that this method of organizing competition develops, in part, from meanings and gender constructions made by participants and organizations through interaction. Further, through observing participants' interactions, I find that culture shapes gender constructions, and the ways in which these constructions marginalize women's participation in mountain bike racing.

In this chapter, I outlined and discussed the theoretic perspectives and analytical tools I employ, in order to explore and understand how women are marginalized within mountain bike racing. In doing so, I discussed Eviatar Zerubavel's work on distinctions and boundaries, and showed how distinctions and boundaries socially construct difference. Next, I explained Candice West and Don Zimmerman's concept of "doing gender" as a performance. I drew upon their theory, in order to illustrate that "doing" gender is a cultural production through which actors often re-produce existing gender distinctions and boundaries.

In an effort to better conceptualize culture, I discussed how organizational and expressive dimensions of culture color the way in which actors "do" gender and effect social outcomes. Subsequently, I discussed interactions as key sites for gender performances, through which gender is (re)constructed. Last, I posited that due to the prevalence of masculine norms within sport, it is a particularly salient world in which to do my research on gender. I argued that current research on gender and sport contributes to the general analysis of patriarchy, but fails to address how culture reinforces hegemonic gender distinctions and boundaries as "natural" and effective mechanisms of patriarchal control. In an attempt to contribute making mechanisms of patriarchy visible, I posited that researchers should turn to alternative sports as a research sites characterized by mixed-gender interactions.

CHAPTER 3

ETHNOGRAPHY

In this chapter, I describe the ethnographic methods I used to answer the question of how women are marginalized within mountain bike racing. First, I show why the Southeastern United States is a salient place to conduct this research. Then, I describe the settings in which I took field notes. Next, I discuss the kinds of observations I made and the roles I took during participant-observation. Finally, I explore the dimensions of my role as both a researcher and an athlete within the mountain bike racing community I researched.

Data and Methods

Mountain bike enthusiasts hail from all regions of the U.S. Though this may seem counterintuitive, as the topography of many states does not include mountains, mountain bikers can make trails over virtually any terrain. However, a higher number of mountain bikers are found in certain parts of the country more so than in others; California, the Rocky Mountain States and the Southeast are among those regions that claim greater numbers of mountain bikers.

As a region with a large number of mountain bike activities and participants, the Southeast is a particularly salient place to do research; in order to serve, and as a result of, its large mountain bike community, the Southeast offers many organizational dimensions of mountain bike racing, numerous ways in which to engage in mountain bike racing, and many opportunities to mountain bike race. Therefore, within the Southeast there are several opportunities and a variety of types of observations available for analysis. Such a vibrant scene

increases the chance that patterns will emerge about social life in mountain bike racing that may not be as readily apparent in a smaller, more static cycling community.

My description of the interactions of mountain bike racing participants is drawn primarily from ethnographic work I conducted in the Southeastern U.S. between the years 2003 and 2005. During my fieldwork, I observed many interactions between athletes, team managers, organizers, officials, by-standers and fans. I found these actors "did" gender during the course of interaction. Resistance to these gender norms was rare and actors' gender performances most often re-produced patriarchal gender norms. Most interactions I observed were confined to single events, but some interactions between actors, which focused on a particular issue or matter, spanned several events.

Settings

I observed interactions in a variety of settings, including leisurely group rides, races, training rides, camping trips, car rides, dinners, parties, trail building and meetings. Mountain bike racing overwhelming attracts white, middle-class males between the ages of 19 and 54. Therefore, within all these social settings, I made an effort to include a range of ages, classes (when I knew), races and ethnicities, in addition to gender, in my observations. Further, I attempted to observe participants from all competition categories. However, though I could observe such participants *at* races, while camping, at parties and during some training rides, I was not able to be as selective *during* races and hard-training rides.

Leisure rides, training rides, camping trips, dinners, parties and meetings took place throughout the year. However, events, such as team meetings and team promotional parties, clustered around March, which is the beginning of the racing season. In addition, virtually all

races and trail-building events took place during the racing seasons months of March through October.

Observations

Within each setting, I tried to include a variety of dimensions and dynamics in my observations. I made an effort to observe numerous combinations of actors; I attempted to observe varying numbers, genders, statuses, and the roles of actors interacting. In all my observations, I was a participant-observer, though the role I occupied often changed. In most of my field notes, I was included in the event because I am a professional category racer. This does not mean I was always racing during events; for example, I went to compulsory team meetings as a team member and was invited to parties because of my membership in the mountain bike community. In some cases, I simply observed from the sidelines; for instance, I went to some races strictly to observe and did not compete.

During observations of parties, camping trips and meetings, I often withdrew to the bathroom or my car in order to jot down key words or complete phrases. At many races and meetings, I was able to write without withdrawing from the setting because writing during these events was not conspicuous. A few times, I saved key words in the phonebook of my cellular phone. When the mechanics of writing were impossible, such while I was racing or riding, I repeated key words to myself and wrote these key words down as soon as writing became an option.

I compiled field notes immediately upon returning home to my computer or during extended car rides in which it was possible for me to use a laptop. Both during and after the time in which I was actively observing in the field, I read and re-read my observations, in order to identify patterns within the data. Using a grounded approach, I assigned codes to observations.

From these codes, I distilled five major themes: race structure; cycling teams; the "boy advantage"; “men: the main attraction” (the focus on the males); and “different standards” (for gendered mountain bike racers).

During the course of my research, I told many actors of my research and my role as researcher, and repeatedly reminded riders with whom I had re-occurring contact. However, many actors I came into contact with were unaware of my research. I did not refrain from informing every actor about my research in an effort to keep my research role covert; many times the shear numbers of riders with whom I interacted, and/or the fleeting nature of some of the interactions, did not provide an opportunity for me to inform riders. To protect the identities of the riders discussed in this paper, pseudonyms are used.

Methods

The empirical question of my study is how, as opposed to why, women are marginalized in mountain bike racing. In this paper, I describe how actors perform and construct gender through qualitative data I gathered from in-depth, participant-observation. Drawing from my field notes, I show how actors interact and reproduce gender norms and taken-for-granted gender sensibilities. Through ethnographic examples, I illustrate how gender is constructed and men come to be seen as “natural” athletes while women do not. While no single example captures all gender performances, constructions or interactions, the examples I include in this paper are representative of interactions I consistently observed across settings.

Researcher Role

Although the data gathered in this ethnography spans two years, my involvement with both mountain bike racing, in general, and the particular mountain bike racing community I explore in this paper, began approximately four years before I began collecting data. In 1999, I

joined the University of Georgia cycling club as a novice cyclist but as a seasoned athlete, after I watched and was inspired by a local mountain bike race. Almost immediately after joining the club, my previous life experiences and expectations - developed and influenced in part from attending an all-female high school, coupled with my prior sports involvement with gymnastics (a female-dominated sport) - clashed with the male-dominated world of cycling. One of my earliest memories of cycling is from a club meeting in which the male president began a general question-and-answer session with the comment that anyone, aside from myself or others "bitching" about women's issues, were welcome to take the floor.

As my development as a mountain biker progressed, from that of a beginner to that of a professional racer, I encountered a number of differences in the treatment of men and women mountain bike racers - some obstacles and some advantages. As a beginner racer, I noticed women were given the worst start times and start orders in races; as a professional, in addition to noticing the start times and start orders of races, I now also noticed the inequitable prize money, the team composition, and a variety of other issues that did not affect me when my only concern was to finish the beginners' race, as opposed to win the professionals' race.

Simultaneous with my development as a mountain biker, was the extension of my personal relationships with other cyclists, my understanding of the cycling-specific social environment and community, and my position within this community. This athletic, personal and social growth brought with it differences in the types of situations I encountered, how I handled these situations, and the outcomes of situations. As a beginning cyclist, I knew virtually no one else within the community and, therefore, did not have the benefit of allies, the impediment of adversaries, nor any reputation whatsoever. After six years of involvement with

cycling, however, I developed relationships that today include many of my best friends and my husband.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE: THE SCOPE OF MOUNTAIN BIKE RACING

Culture influences actors' perceptions and meanings. It shapes the lens through which actors view the world. Therefore, culture impacts how a social world is constructed, organized and administered. However, social constructions and organizations affect culture in turn. Thus, these mutually constituting processes impact the way actors experience everyday life. Accordingly, cultural dimensions affect social outcomes within any given social world. Through routine engagement with culture, then, actors come to view certain elements in social life as "natural."

Gender is a culturally informed social construction which, in turn, shapes culture. Through habitual engagement with and routinized performances of gender, actors come to see gender and gender characteristics as "natural." Within mountain bike racing, men are viewed as "natural" athletes while women athletes are marginalized. Therefore, to examine how women within mountain bike racing are marginalized, I focus on culture for explanation. To engage culture, I borrow Patrick Williams' (2006) approach to culture and analytically separate culture into two dimensions: the organizational and the expressive dimensions of culture as key elements in the production and practice of gender.

In this chapter and in chapter five, I focus on the organizational dimensions of culture in mountain bike racing, which includes associations, rules and events (Williams 2005). In this paper, this analytical move is cued by West and Fenstermaker's (1995) argument that

institutional structures influence “the nature, content, and meaning of whatever face-to face interactions occur with them.” In other words, social context directly impacts culture. In turn, culture influences individuals' capacity to access certain outcomes and their ability to imagine those outcomes (Young 1999).

In portraying organizational dimensions of culture, in this chapter, I first render an overview of mountain biking’s history in the U.S., showing that mountain biking has gone from a fringe to a mainstream sport. Next, I describe the rules dictating how mountain bikers navigate the sport, including national organizations and competition levels. Then, I describe the composition of the Southeastern U.S. mountain bike racing social world, showing it to be a dynamic and salient site for research. I identify local associations, organizations, teams, and resources. Last, I discuss a mountain bike racer’s physical training regime and dedication to the sport, in order to draw out the high emotional, physical and time commitments that actors invest in mountain bike racing.

Development of Mountain Bike Racing

In the past 25 years, the sport of mountain biking in the U.S. has increased in popularity[1]. Though not a traditional sport in this country, in the same sense as baseball or basketball, mountain biking is now a popular, mainstream sport with enthusiastic and dedicated participants. No longer conforming to former stereotypes as a fringe sport for thrill-seeking youngsters, mountain biking attracts participants of all ages. However, despite growth in recent years, mountain bike racing’s participants remain overwhelmingly male.

As mountain biking emerged into the mainstream sporting world, institutional associations and agencies developed alongside the physical practice of the sport, in order to

[1] In the 6th annual Outdoor Recreation Participation Study, conducted by the Leisure Trends Group and presented by the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), the trade association of the outdoor industry, the number of mountain bike "enthusiasts" grew 150 percent since 1998 -- from 2.5 million in 1998 to 7.5 million in 2001 (www.imba.com).

create standards by which to advance the sport, organize participants, and establish rules for competition. I argue that, in conjunction with participants' beliefs about gender, gendered levels of participation and the present-day organization of mountain-biking associations influence interaction. As a result of these forms of culture, gender is produced and controlled, men are viewed as superior athletes, and mountain bike racing remains a male domain.

U.S. Mountain Bike History, Associations, and Organizations

The growth of mountain bike racing accelerated in the 1980s as mountain biking gained prominence in the U.S. From 1982 on, mountain bikes and mountain bike parts became stock items manufactured and offered for sale by virtually every cycling-related company. In fact, in 1985, mountain bike sales surpassed road bike sales. Even in Europe, a social world steeped in road cycling, mountain bike sales eventually eclipsed sales of other bikes.

During this time, the National Off-Road Bicycle Association (NORBA) was founded as the governing body of off-road racing. Since NORBA's inception, the organization has changed hands numerous times. In 1989, NORBA was bought by its present owner, the United States Cycling Federation (USCF), which currently falls under the umbrella of USA Cycling, a 75-year-old organization. During its evolutionary process, NORBA's original goal of providing trail access faded to the sole pursuit of race sanctioning. As testament to NORBA's efforts to promote the sport, today cross-country mountain bike racing is an Olympic event. The 1996 individual Olympic mountain bike race medalists represented Holland, Switzerland, France, Italy, Canada and the United States — a multi-national field that reflected the gains mountain bike racing made in appealing to participants within the last 20 years.

USA Cycling, a branch of the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), is an organization dedicated specifically to the promotion of cycling. It oversees races, race-promoters, teams,

festivals, mechanics, coaches and more. The two most popular disciplines, represented within the parent organization USA Cycling, are mountain biking and road cycling, governed by the semi-autonomous governing bodies of NORBA and USCF, respectively. (USA Cycling's official associations include USPRO, an association dedicated to men's elite professional road racing, the National Collegiate Cycling Association (NCAA), an association dedicated to collegiate cycling, and associations representing BMX, Track and Cyclocross.)

As of May 2004, USA Cycling members have totaled 47,031. Of this total, 13,070 are NORBA mountain bike members. The age and gender breakdowns of NORBA and USCF are found in the table below. As we can see, NORBA and USCF participants are almost exclusively male and most fall between the ages 19 to 54 years, with over 60% concentrated between the ages of 25 and 44.

Table 1.1: NORBA Cycling Demographics

Age	USCF (%)	NORBA (%)
18-and-under	4.6	9.1
19-24	8.0	10.5
25-34	26.7	31.9
35-44	35.8	31.7
45-54	18.5	13.6
55-59	3.6%	2.0
60-and-over	2.8	1.2

Gender	Men (%)	Women (%)
USCF	87.2	12.8
NORBA	86.2	13.8

* Source: USA Cycling

The governance and organization of mountain biking in the U.S. is no longer in the exclusive control of NORBA, but now includes a handful of alternative, independent race organizers. In addition, there are thousands of local bike clubs whose members are mountain bike enthusiasts who do not race; therefore these enthusiasts often do not need or desire to be affiliated with USA Cycling or any other organizing body. However, though NORBA is no

longer the only association promoting races and events, it is still widely recognized as the most legitimate organization.

In part, NORBA's legitimacy stems from an exclusive mandate to appoint, develop and produce competitors for Olympic and World Cup teams to represent the U.S., in both domestic and international competition. In partial fulfillment of this mandate, each year NORBA sanctions an annual racing series, the National Championship Series (NCS); the NCS consists of five to eight events per year, which are held throughout the U.S. These races are specifically engineered to enable mountain bikers from all categories to compete for national ranking within their respective category, as well as to earn the points necessary to ascend categories. A racer who finishes as one of the top five competitors in three races in this series (and only in this series) earns enough points to advance to the next NORBA category.

Though these races are obligatory for all cyclists hoping to ascend categories within NORBA, in general, this high-level race series focuses on professional racing. However, though the elite-focused NCS races are the only races NORBA formally promotes, NORBA also officially sanctions numerous races and activities throughout the U.S. that cater to beginner, intermediate and recreational riders. As the largest and most wide-spread mountain bike race organization in the United States, most mountain bikers interact with NORBA at some point, even if it is by simply entering a local race. Thus, promoters of unaffiliated races often look to NORBA for a blueprint of how to schedule and generally execute mountain bike events.

This dynamic is true of mountain bike race promoters within the Southeastern U.S. NORBA, specifically, and USA Cycling, generally, influences Southeastern U.S. mountain bike racing organization and structure. However, many other associations and organizations also operate within the Southeastern U.S. Therefore, I now sketch a portrait of cycling in the

Southeast, in order to bring about a sense of the dynamic nature of this community that renders it such a significant setting for research.

Southeastern U.S. Cycling

The Southeast is home to an enthusiastic and prolific cycling community dominated by road and mountain bike participants. Hillsville, Sunville, Lee City and Hamilton are known for their strong cycling communities. Hillsville and Hamilton are repeatedly nominated to lists of top cycling destinations published in cycling-related magazines. Lee City and Hamilton are current and past homes to professional road bikers and teams, as well as professional mountain bikers and teams. Adding to the community of local elite athletes, are visiting athletes from colder climates who migrate to Hamilton for the competitive and warm, year-round training opportunities.

Racing Teams

Since 2000, Jake's professional men's road cycling team calls Hamilton home; Lee City was home to a recently defunct professional women's road cycling team. Racers in the Southeast hold membership on other renowned and celebrated teams, as well as lesser-known but well-regarded regional teams. Of the eight national teams represented in this region and included in my field notes, one is an all-women's team and two include at least one woman on their team; of the 11 local teams, two are all-women's teams and two include at least one woman on their team.

Events

Downtown Hamilton hosts the annual Star Criterium[2]. The Star Criterium, a National Calendar Race (a race awarded prestige by USCF and used to nationally rank riders), is known as the "fastest criterium in the nation" and attracts hundreds of racers and thousands of spectators. Recently, Hamilton became the starting location for the most elite and highest-ranked male road cycling stage race in the U.S., the Mountain Tour (there is no equivalent caliber race for female professional/elite road racers in the U.S.). These two races attract high-profile cyclists from across the U.S. and abroad.

During the winter months, Hamilton becomes the destination of choice for Saturday morning Train Right League (TRL) rides. The TRL is a nationally renowned series of training rides that leave from Hamilton every Saturday between December 1st and the last Saturday in February. These rides range from approximate distances of 75 to 135 miles, increasing in distance with consecutive rides as the winter months progress. TRL rides attract, on average, 50 to 150 riders. The rides are hard, fast and hilly, and designed for professionals or dedicated amateurs with high-fitness levels. Riders compete against each other on rides for points over the course of three months. The 2005 TRL season was the first year a female ever won the prestigious TRL overall leader's jersey.

In addition to these notable events, races can be found throughout the Southeast virtually every weekend from March through October. Every state in the Southeastern region hosts its own racing series in which racers travel, often in excess of five hours, in order to participate. Some of these races are NORBA-affiliated, and include the Dirt Series, Chain Ring Series and

[2] A criterium is a cycling road race over a closed circuit under 5k (typically, about 1 mile through city streets). This leads to tight groups of cyclists making frequent turns, which makes crashes more frequent than in traditional road races. Rather than riding a set number of laps, the length of a criterium is typically determined by time (e.g. 1 hour of riding followed by 5 more laps). To add some excitement to those first laps where riders need only pace with the group for position, sponsors often offer prizes for finishing specific laps first.

Singletrack Series. At the regional level, the Southeast offers NORBA-sanctioned Southeast Regional Championship Series (SERC) races throughout the Southeast. These races, known as American Mountain Bike Challenges (AMBCs) are categorically ranked higher than all local state races, but lower than the NCS national series offered by NORBA. While these races affect a rider's national ranking, they are less useful in facilitating a race category upgrade.

Non-racing, Mountain Bike-Oriented Organizations and Associations

Additionally, the Southeast is home to a large number of recreational mountain bike riders, including many passionate mountain bikers who choose not to race. The cycling-friendly environment, coupled with a large, close-knit cycling community and motivated organizers, makes the Southeast an attractive region for mountain bikers. Therefore, many advocacy and recreational groups also find a home in the Southeast. These groups, including the well-known Southern Off Road Biking Association (SORBA), lobby for trail use and bike lanes, organize group rides, maintain trails, offer clinics and bike tune-ups, and host social events, among other enterprises.

To participate within many of these elements of Southeastern mountain biking, actors dedicate time and energy to physical and mental conditioning. Actors vary in the extent of their involvement with mountain biking, and, thus, in the extent to which they dedicate themselves to the daily demands of physical and emotional conditioning. However, in order to be competitive amongst mountain bike racers, most actors spend considerable amounts of time and energy engaged in training. In order to show mountain bike racers' "schema of dedication" to the sport, I now discuss actors' time, energy and physical commitments.

The Dedication to Mountain Bike Racing Schema

The content and methods of role performances are pivotal to social constructions, including the social construction of gender and of gendered activities. Therefore, understanding the way mountain bike racing is performed, and what it takes to be a competitive mountain bike racer, is important in order to have a fuller, more nuanced understanding of how gender is constructed in mountain bike racing, and how men become viewed as “natural” athletes. Thus, in the pursuit of understanding how women are marginalized in mountain bike racing, I now describe the overall training demands of mountain bike racing.

The physical demands required to competitively participate in mountain bike racing are distinctive but not exclusive to the sport. While many professional sports require high levels of physical fitness, many sports can be played socially with little or no fitness. However, to successfully take part in athletic competition, most actors spend time developing their physical and mental fitness. Mountain bike racing is a sport of constant motion and effort with very little rest; frustratingly, for many, rest that may come while coasting downhill on a bike is often followed by a stretch of hills. Consequently, in order to “play” successfully with other mountain bike racers, without “play” breaking down by continually walking your bike up the hills, riders must ride their bikes consistently and maintain elevated levels of fitness. The physical dedication needed in order to maintain participation in mountain bike racing renders it as much of a lifestyle as a sport.

Common to both racers and recreational riders alike are the physical, mental, and time demands that are necessary in order to achieve competitive competency. Mountain bikers who ride for fun may ride one or two times a week. Mountain bikers, who attain the high levels of athleticism, fitness and proficiency needed to be competitive, generally train for two to five hours per day. Most mountain bike racers train with others, in pairs or in groups, because the

time, energy and dedication required is exhaustive and motivation garnered from others helps pass the time on long, hard rides, as well as for safety reasons, such as to protect riders from cars, dogs, crashes and other distractions.

The need to ride daily — and the benefits of riding with others — provides many social opportunities for mountain bike racers to interact. These interactions are generally prolonged and are encountered repeatedly owing to the frequency and duration of rides. While any given training ride may include new riders, mountain bikers generally establish a "riding partner" (or partners) with whom they prefer to train. Often, partners pair up by virtue of age, ability, availability, fitness and gender. In addition, mountain bike racers who train together often travel together to races and frequently share hotels and meals. Training partnerships regularly extend beyond training specific events, and may include time spent together in other casual social situations, such as dinners, parties and other leisure practices.

In addition to the physical and mental requirements, participating in mountain bike racing requires a substantial time commitment. Mountain bike racers spend time preparing to train, training, recovering from training, and traveling to races or terrains on which to train. As a result, it is not unusual to find recreational, moderately competitive and professional mountain bike racers alike who hold part-time jobs, are unemployed, or maintain non-traditional lifestyles that enable their mountain biking pursuits. Owing to the intensity of the demands of mountain bike racing, mountain bike racing often transcends what is commonly thought of as sport and is lived as a lifestyle in and of itself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the organizational dimensions of culture in mountain bike racing, in order to capture this social world's general organization. I argued that rendering these

dynamics visible is important in uncovering how women are marginalized in mountain bike racing because social organization and context directly impacts social outcomes. Therefore, I first discussed mountain biking's emergence as a mainstream sport. Then, I described the national associations which provide a blueprint for how mountain bikers compete within the sport. Next, I depicted cycling and mountain biking specifically within the southeastern United States. In doing so, I distinguished local associations, organizations, teams and resources. Finally, I developed a "dedication to mountain bike racing schema," in order to portray the emotional, physical and time investment actors involved in mountain bike racing make. To further unpack the organizational culture of mountain bike racing, in the next chapter I focus on the structural influences on "doing" gender.

CHAPTER 5

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES ON GENDER OUTCOMES

Gender segregation in mountain biking persists, despite a distinct lack of empirical physiological evidence that takes into account the social structures, norms and habits that negatively impact participation and performance for women. Therefore, one might conclude that there are other reasons – social reasons – contributing to the overwhelmingly biased levels of participation. In this paper, I argue that culture influences the ways in which mountain bike racers view and construct their world and, consequently, bring about particular gender outcomes in the sport. In exploring organizational dimensions of cultural that influence this process, in chapter four I discussed the way in which mountain bike racers arrange and enact their social world.

In this chapter, I continue to investigate organizational dimensions of culture. First, I discuss USA Cycling's and NORBA's focus on men. Next, I focus on two structural variables within mountain bike racing, which I argue encourage men and marginalize women: races and teams. In doing so, I explain how mountain bike race categories of competition reflect this focus on men. Next, I show how the race structure compromises women athletes' success, by forcing females to experience physical deficiencies, deprivations or handicaps (such as dehydration) in ways top male athletes do not. Following that discussion, I explore how prevailing methods of race organization demoralize women, symbolizing them as obstacles to men. Finally, I argue

that certain cycling team recruitment tactics systematically advantage men, with economic and social encouragement that promote their success in the sport.

Race Structure

USA Cycling and NORBA

Governing bodies, such as USA Cycling and NORBA, reflect mountain bike racing's male focus. One of the most overt examples of USA Cycling's male focus was sent to me while I was doing research for this project. In response to my request for USA Cycling's membership demographics, I was sent a one-page attachment via e-mail, entitled "USA Cycling Overview." This overview included a single-sentence description of the four associations that USA Cycling promotes:

> The U.S. Cycling Federation (USCF -- road and track cycling), National Off-Road Bicycle Association (NORBA -- mountain biking), U.S. Professional Racing Organization (USPRO -- men's elite professional road cycling), and the National Collegiate Cycling Association (NCCA), a program of USA Cycling dedicated to collegiate cycling.

Notable in this text, is that the description of USPRO explicitly includes men and clearly does not mention women. Thus, it seems that USA Cycling has a specific association dedicated to men's professional road cycling, but has no similar association for women.

Further, I found additional support that USA Cycling focuses on men when I examined USA Cycling's Web site. I opened a link on the Web site that declared "Junior National Team Announced," only to scan a list of eight men's names, with no mention of any women. I quickly hit "back" on my browser in order to determine whether I had misread the headline "Junior National Team Announced" as "*Men's* Junior National Team Announced." From the team's

label "Junior National Team," what I had expected to find, when I initially viewed the list of team members, was two lists, one for the men and one for the women members on the junior national team. However, there was only one list, comprised completely of men. Re-reading the headline confirmed my initial reading to be correct; the link was labeled "Junior National Team Announced." After pausing for a moment, I realized the Junior National Team roster I was looking for did not exist; no women were included on the Junior National Team and, seemingly, the authors of the headline saw no need to label the "Junior National Team" as the "*Men's* Junior National Team," though the gender composition of the names of team members clearly identified the team as a men's team. I suggest that the logic at work here is that, as a USA Cycling production, the gender/sex make-up of the junior national team did not need clarifying; the junior national team *is* an all-male team. Since this incident, I have noticed other announcements that adhere to the same logic; men's teams do not have gender/sex labels, such as "the junior national team," while women's teams do have gender/sex labels such as "the women's national mountain bike team."

NORBA's Race Categories

USA Cycling's noticeable lack of organizational gender equity also comes through in categories for race competition. The blueprint created by NORBA, and followed by most race promoters regardless of their affiliation with NORBA, is based on separating races and racers into hierarchical categories. The theoretic purpose of these divisions is to create races where the skills and speeds of the participants are roughly equivalent, thereby engendering appropriate and fair competition. This division is not an attempt to ensure that all competitors in a group win, but that all competitors in a group are within a range of similar skills and fitness levels, and thus able to compete fairly. This logic suggests that if a member of a specific competition group competes

outside of his/her "appropriate" group, he/she would either noticeably out- or under- perform other racers.

All racers compete in a single category situated within five categories of increasing skills: "beginner," "sport," "expert," "semi-pro," or "pro," — with beginner being the slowest, least-experienced, and pro the fastest and most-advanced. For men, each of these categories is then sub-divided into age ranges, from which start-times are then assigned accordingly. For example, the expert category will have separate start-times designated for "junior experts" (ages up to 18), "senior experts" (ages between 19 and 29), "master experts" (ages between 30 and 45), and "vet experts" (ages over 45 years old.) All women within a given category race together regardless of age.

The gender category further divides races between men and women across the beginner, sport, expert, and pro fields. Gender-separated races and categories add many complexities to races for female racers. Foremost, gender segregation is an addendum to the logic which justifies dividing participants by fitness and skill, to implicitly include gender as a criterion to further divide races *despite* skill and fitness. An empirical look at the finish times for men's and women's races shows that not all men are faster than all women in a given category, and not all women are slower than all men in a given category.

An additional point of interest is that many promoters permit cross-gender competition for women, but not for men. Women may race with men, but men are never allowed to race in women's races. This rule embodies the notion that dividing participants by gender is "natural"; it implies that a man in a women's race would be competing with an unfair advantage over the women and, consequently, extinguish competition, but a woman racing with the men is fair because she would be handicapped, but not advantaged, by her gender. This constructs women

who cross the gender line and race with the men as extraordinary because they are overcoming their gender deficiency.

Effects of Race Start-Order for Competition

NORBA's race structure effectively discourages women's athletic successes in very real terms. At times, the impact of NORBA's race structure physically impairs women athletes in ways that men do not experience. For example, within a given race category (e.g., expert), the women are all grouped together, regardless of age, and are always the last race to start. If the start time for the experts is noon, all experts are required to gather at that time in their appropriate subgroups to await their official start. The "senior pro/experts" start first, followed by the "master experts." The "masters" are followed by the "vet experts" and then the "junior experts" start. Last to go are the "women pro/experts." Between the start of each category, there is a minimum delay of five minutes, in addition to the time that it takes for the entire category to get moving off the start line. If the official charged with starting each race is diligent, the minimum lag time between the men's and the women's starts is about 25 minutes.

Before starting their race, the women's group of a particular race category is forced to wait approximately 25 minutes between warming up and actually racing. The consequences of this delay are physiological, emotional and material. Racers who warm-up within five to ten minutes of their start are more physiologically prepared for competition; warm-ups prime the body to efficiently flush lactate-acid build up, enable athletes to accelerate faster and for longer periods of time without recovering, open-up physiological systems needed to reach and sustain elevated heart rates, and raise athlete's body temperatures gradually. Emotionally, the longer an athlete sits on the start line, the more she/he might lose focus, is open to self doubt or intimidation by other athletes, and the more she/he is subject to "nerves." Materially, athletes

who are forced to wait extended periods of time before starting confront weather conditions. For example, if the race is early in the morning during early March the temperature is likely to be cold. Alternatively, a race may be held in the middle of the summer with temperatures reaching 95 degrees. Thus, athletes who need to stay hydrated are often unable to do so.

Betty, an expert racer, experienced such a consequence, as a result of race structure and the subsequent time delay for women racers. In June 2004, at a NORBA-sanctioned race in Hillsville, she and I stood beside each other under the hot summer sun in the middle of a clear-cut field and waited for our race to start. After the official organized all racers into the order in which they would start, she and I, along with all the other female pro/expert racers, waited for our turn. As the last group to go, we waited in the field without any shade for a half an hour, the last 10 minutes of which we were all alone except for the official. Following the start of the last of the men's categories, we stood in silence, occasionally shifted position and drank water in a vain attempt to cool down. Then, Betty turned toward me, and held two empty water bottles inches from my face.

She shook her head and said, "I've run out of water before we have even started, standing in the middle of this fucking field." I did not respond to her comment: I knew she did not have time to go and get more water and I was not far from being in the same situation myself. I watched as she put her empty bottles back into the water-bottle cages on her bike. A few minutes later, we started our race.

After the race, I went to my car to change clothes. Jake, a "pro/expert" man, approached me to ask what happened to Betty. I told him she dropped out because of dehydration. He replied sarcastically, "Yeah, none of us were hot out there, just Betty." Jake implied that Betty

dropped out because she could not handle the tough conditions of the race and held Betty individually responsible for her "weakness."

During the awards ceremony, Betty sat on the ground and waited for those she drove with to receive their awards so she could leave. I sat next to her and asked how her race went, not mentioning that I heard she dropped out. She sighed and told me she could not finish because she started "having chill bumps" and recognized them as a sign of dehydration. She told me she was upset about spending money to race and waking up early "for nothing." Betty followed this comment by saying, "I learned a lesson, I guess. Next time I'll prepare better; I knew it was going to be hot but I didn't anticipate how *much* water I'd have to drink in preparation. At least I didn't do this at a National"[3] (emphasis Betty's).

Both Jake and Betty understood Betty's dehydration and subsequent "DNF"[4] (did not finish) as Betty's fault. Neither racer reflected on how the race organization might have affected her performance. In addition, the message that is actively being constructed and sent to Betty, as well as to all the women standing in the scorching hot southern sun, was neither positive nor inclusive. Betty was effectively being told that her race was not important, that she was low on the hierarchy, and she suffered the consequences accordingly as her fault.

Race structure affects the female racers in many other very real ways. For example, by the time the women's category begins the last lap of their race, most of the other races have already concluded. This leaves women still racing while fans, volunteers, and even impatient officials have left or are beginning to pack up. Fans watching the races are generally the

[3] By "Nationals" Betty is referring to NORBA's race series where competitors earn points to move to a higher race category. These races are usually held in Utah, California, Colorado, Idaho and West Virginia, where attending demands not only a large time and monetary commitment, but also a lot of training and preparation.
[4] On the list that is posted announcing the finishing order of racers, "DNF" is placed beside the names of competitors who dropped out of the race. From this practice, DNF is a part of cycling's vocabulary.

significant others of racers, and larger numbers of men than women race. In mountain bike racing, this means that most fans are girlfriends or wives who come to watch and lend support by cheering or handing out water bottles to their partners as they ride by. When a fan's partner is finished racing, the fan is finished watching and leaves. For women racers, this means that they are still racing after fans, there to see their partner's race, have left. Similarly, volunteers and officials posted in positions out in the woods during the race to perform essential tasks are often eager to wrap the day up. Many times, after the men have come through on their finishing lap, volunteers and officials abandon their posts and head for the finish line to watch. Meanwhile, women are left racing alone in the woods and finish their race unceremoniously, because the spectators who previously gathered to watch the finishes have moved on to change clothes, eat, or prepare for the award ceremony that follows the conclusion of all races. While this exodus of people from the race often leaves women feeling demoralized, at times it also creates technical disadvantages. On many occasions, female racers have gone the wrong direction on a race course because the volunteer assigned to show the way was no longer there to direct race traffic. Additionally, should a woman have an accident or injury, volunteers would not be immediately available to help them.

Another way that race structure compromises women's athletic performances relative to men's, is that once on the race course women are always behind other racers. Therefore, women must always pass other riders, never having the same opportunity as "pro/expert senior" men to race without any other riders in their way. For example, while all categories of racers encounter the issue of passing, it affects women inequitably. The "pro/expert" category races in subgroups that divide the larger category by age and gender, in order of fastest to slowest, and men to women. Professional category men all start in the first group of the pro/expert races and are not

forced to pass slower riders from other subgroups until the last lap when they may catch the tail end of other subgroups' races. Each subsequent men's race starts behind a theoretically faster group. This organization decreases the chances that racers from later starting races will need to pass racers from earlier starting races.

However, the slowest of the male expert groups, junior experts, starts before the entire group of pro/expert women, a category that contains professional women racers who are grouped together regardless of age. Though the theoretical ordering of races within a given category breaks down at many spots, it drastically breaks down at this point; most racers in the female pro/expert field *do* catch up with and pass many of the junior exert men that start in front of them.

This order of operations often significantly affects and disadvantages female racers; passing a slower rider is problematic, because even a swift passing move costs valuable time and may, in effect, allow pursuing racers to catch up. A racer who catches another racer must either wait for a place on the trail where there is enough room to make a pass, and the rider being caught must allow the rider to pass by conceding their position on the trail, in order make room for the other rider to come by. This penalizes both racers: the caught racer must slow and give room for the other to pass and the racer who wants to pass is forced to go the slower pace of the caught rider. An additional complication to this interaction is that a racer who catches another racer must slow her pace; meanwhile, racers in pursuit do not slow down, but ride at their own pace. Consequently, pursuing racers often gain on or even catch riders who were forced to slow down while waiting to pass. Alternatively, a racer who catches another rider may attempt to force a pass move, by aggressively moving beside the rider they are passing and coming over into the rider. This kind of passing move often results in one, if not both, of the riders crashing

into each other and onto the ground. Both types of passing moves I described hinder the passer and the person being passed.

A third way that race structure affects women, is that men, who start 25 minutes ahead on a typical circuit race course where racers are required to complete several laps, catch slower women in much the same way that the fastest women catch and are forced to pass slower men. Complicating the dynamic of men's passes is that many more racers are men than women. Therefore, more men catch women than women catch men. This results in inconveniencing the fastest men who have to pass riders, much more frequently than most women are inconvenienced in this way, as only the fastest women catch the slowest men. Because there are numerically more fast men than fast women, women have more occasion to be "in the way," and an obstacle in the race, and less occasion to aggressively pass other riders. This structurally induced problem results in men disparaging women racers, as well as creating conflict between gender racing categories. Often both men and women angrily exit the race course because of negative passing interactions.

I observed an example of this at a small race in Hillsville. While I looked at newly posted race results after the completion the race, I overheard Greg angrily ridicule a woman racer to his friends after noting the time it took him to finish his race.

> I lost the damn race by two minutes? There is no way! He's never beaten me by that much before…It's that fat bitch's fault. She wouldn't let me pass! You know the one…I finally had to force my way around by pushing her off the trail. She owes me $50![5] I could have caught Sam and gained a spot if it hadn't been for her.

In this field note Greg identifies "her" as the reason he lost time during the race.

[5] The $50 to which Greg refers is the money awarded as prize to the top finishing racers in a particular category.

He sees their interaction as a limiting variable in his success; however, instead of finding fault with the race organization and identifying structural reasons as affecting his performance, Greg vilifies the woman he passed and blames her as the source of his compromised time.

From this discussion, it can be seen that race structure affects many dimensions of race performances and overwhelmingly disadvantages women. I have shown that categories for racing and start orders for competition impact athletes in various ways. In the next section, I show how cycling teams also structure gendered athletic outcomes.

Cycling Teams

Cycling teams are a structural variable found within mountain bike racing, that exist from the recreational to the professional level. Inclusion on a team is sought after by mountain bike racers for many reasons, including increased tactical engineering in races, better social relationships, and greater prestige. While these elements give added function to team membership, arguably the greatest benefits to being on a team are the personnel and funding support. Like many sports, mountain bike racing is expensive. Race entry fees average $30 per race. NORBA requires an annual license ranging from $60 to $125, depending on the racer's category, and most alternative race series also require specific licenses. Transportation to and from events, especially those in other states, can be costly. Cycling-specific clothing is very expensive: shoes cost between $60 and $220; shorts range from $50 to $200; and jerseys cost about $50. Bikes generally cost anywhere from $750 for an entry-level bike, to $5,000 for a quality race bike. This abbreviated list does not include weather-appropriate gear, food, water, or replacement parts. According to *Dirt Rag* magazine, 60% of its readers spent $1000 or more on cycling-related activities in 2002 (*Dirt Rag* 2003).

Team sponsorship helps defray or even eliminate many of these costs and, by doing so, enables and encourages cyclists to continue their participation in the sport. Therefore, team membership and sponsors are highly sought after and coveted. However, despite the usefulness of team membership and sponsorship to all mountain bike racers, regardless of gender, there is much evidence that women are systematically excluded from teams and sponsorships.

The best known American road cycling team in the history of the sport is the former U.S. Postal Service team, lead by cyclist Lance Armstrong. This team was comprised of 28 men, all of its administrators were men, and most of its support personnel were men. Famous mountain bike racing teams include Kona, Power Bar/Trek, Giant and Luna Chix. Kona and Giant are both all-male teams, whereas Luna Chix is an all-female team. In the southeastern United States, the Maxxis professional mountain bike racing team is all men, the Trek/VW team of five includes one woman, and the Hillsville Pro-bikes professional mountain bike racing team is all-men. From the amateur ranks, the Vella Bella team boasts an all-women squad, the CAT team is comprised of 12 men and no women, the Switchback team includes 10 men and no women, and the Go Girl team is composed of five women. Valley Cycles cycling team, a local shop team, includes 12 members, two of whom are women.

While the male bias in these examples could be seen as a reflection of who is participating in mountain biking, I argue that it actually represents, in part, the effects of who receives sponsorship and who is nominated for team membership. When team and company administrators choose cyclists, their choices are (a) often isomorphic and (b) reflect their associates. I observed this kind of selection by members of the Valley Cycles cycling team. The week before members of Valley Cycles team gathered for their first team meeting, I was out riding with four male members of this team when talk turned to their upcoming team meeting. I

asked the group who was going to be on the team next year. Brad immediately told me, "everyone from last year plus all the new guys: the two Johns, Mathew, Nathan, and Justin."

"No new women?" I asked, followed by "Why not?"

Scott jumped in at this point and said, "This team is fun and we want it to include people who we ride with. It isn't that we don't want any girls, but only you, Megan and Beth ever ride with us. If other girls rode with us a lot they could be on the team too; they just don't."

This "old boy network" approach to recruiting new team members systematically selects men as both producers of gendered team make-ups, and as receivers of the benefits of team/sponsorship inclusion. I argue that as a result, many women, who would otherwise be interested in mountain bike racing, are daunted by the economic realities of the sport and are deprived of the benefits of supportive and encouraging teammates.

Conclusion

In sum, NORBA's male focus, race structure and teams affect athletic outcomes. These variables create barriers to women's success within the sport; races actively construct men as superior athletes, while teams offer material and emotional support almost entirely to men, which aids men's racing pursuits. Hence, structural variables of the organizational culture within mountain bike racing differ in the way they advantage men and disadvantage women. However, in combination with organizational dimensions of culture, expressive dimensions of culture also impact gender outcomes in mountain bike racing. Therefore, in the next chapter, I turn to expressive dimensions of culture.

CHAPTER 6

EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: INTERACTION PROCESSES, GENDER REPRODUCTION, AND THE "NATURAL" MALE ATHLETE

In chapters five and six, I focused on organizational dimensions of culture. I showed the Southeastern U.S. mountain bike racing community as a vibrant and salient place to do research, and identified race and team structures as two examples of organizational culture that influence gender outcomes in mountain bike racing. Thus, in this chapter, I turn to the other analytical half of culture: the expressive dimension. Expressive dimensions include values, beliefs and everyday practices, such as interaction and gender performances.

In this chapter, I explore interaction as a process through which gender is both constructed and reproduced. My analysis of my field notes yielded three types of micro-level interaction rituals, during which the construction of men as "natural" athletes is reinforced and women are marginalized: "the boy advantage" (assumptions based on gender); "men: the main attraction"; and "different standards." I discuss each of these interaction types, in turn, starting with "the boy advantage," moving to "men: the main attraction," and finishing with "different standards."

A Prior Gender Knowledge: "The Boy Advantage"

As noted in earlier chapters, NORBA is the most dominant association within mountain bike racing organizational culture. As such, NORBA reinforces gender boundaries by providing a patriarchal blueprint for how races should operate. The NORBA blueprint enforces distinctions between men and women participants, lends credibility and justification to gendered

segregation, and perpetuates the common-sense "natural" notion that men and women do not offer legitimate competition for one another. Thus, in this section, I argue that NORBA's gender rules heighten perceived gender differences during everyday interactions within the mountain bike racing community; in this dialectical relationship, NORBA's macro-level rules inform micro level constructions, which in turn, influence macro-level gender rules.

During my field work, I competed in the first day of a multi-day stage race called "The Singletrack Challenge." The first day's stage was a downhill time trial[6] that started at 4:00 p.m. One of my classes ran over and I was late; I did not make it to the time trial until around 4:30 p.m. When I arrived at the trailhead, where eight to 10 people were gathered, I was in too much of hurry to stop and find out who was winning, or what range of times had been recorded for people who had already completed the course. I quickly rode to the top of the trail, the point from which the race began, where Darrell immediately asked me if I was ready to go because I was one of the last to show up for the race. I nodded and waited in a ready position on my bike as he simultaneously checked his watch while yelling into his walkie-talkie:

"Erin is coming in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1–Go!"

I took off as fast as I could and navigated my way around trees, over rocks, and through the mud. I finally screeched to a halt in front of Harris. "What's my time?" I asked.

He replied, "2:05."

"Oh," I said "Who's winning?"

"Well, it's contested. Brady is winning with a time of 1:42, but he changed the rules mid-race. Everyone was supposed to have one run; he has had three. I only did one, Paul did one, but everyone else has done more. So. . ."

[6] A time trial is a short race where individual competitors start at staggered intervals of time. The competitor with the fastest time wins. This is different from other races in that no other racer begins at the same time, thus attempting to eliminate race tactics and interference from other competitors.

I nodded my head and rode over to the cooler to grab a beer. Brady stood there, still straddling his bike, talking to Nick and Pat. He asked me how my run had gone. I told him it was fine, no major crashes, and asked him, "How the hell can you go faster *downhill* by 23 seconds on a sub two-minute course?" He put his arm around me and said, "Well, it's the boy advantage at work." I pulled away from him, surprised, and said, "Are you kidding me?" Brady shrugged and said, "That is just the way it works. I'm going to do another run." He poured out his half-finished beer and rolled away, leaving me alone by the cooler.

Brady's rationale for the differences in our race times is one which pervades both the organizational and expressive dimensions of culture; his belief that men are biologically faster than women echoes both NORBA's message, and other mountain bike racers' views that men and women cannot fairly compete against each other because of biologically fixed physiological differences. From this logic, it follows that Brady's faster time stems directly from his status as male, and my slower time stems from my status as female. However, that analysis is incomplete; there are other significant factors that influence why he was faster:

- Brady rode the trail many times that day. This gave Brady more opportunity to learn and anticipate the trail. This enables him to navigate the trail more quickly than me; I had only ridden the trail once on this specific day.
- Brady has been riding mountain bikes for 20 years, while I have been riding mountain bikes for only 6 years.
- Brady had the luxury of riding a bike with added suspension, and much more weight, specifically designed to go downhill faster, a "downhill" bike, while I was riding a completely rigid bike that sacrifices speed on the downhills for gained performance on the uphills (this was a downhill time trial).

It is interesting to note that Brady did not ride his downhill bike at any other time during the Singletrack Challenge; it would have been extremely hard to ride such a bike because the other stages contained multiple mountaintop finishes, in which racers had to ride their bikes *up* the mountainside. The weight and suspension of downhill bikes makes them extremely inefficient to ride uphill.

On one mountaintop finish, Brady peered down the mountainside we had just ridden up and reported that he would he "love" to ride his downhill bike down that trail. Chris, a mountain biker who also participates in downhill races, walked over to where Brady was standing. He peered over the mountainside and declared, "Screw that…it would have sucked to ride that thing up here. But, we should do shuttle runs[7] some time."

In light of the gendered mountain bike racing culture in which Brady was situated and had been immersed in for many years, it was hardly surprising that he made sense of his speed as stemming from his gender alone. Though Brady does not directly marginalize me in this interaction, his analysis implicitly communicates that, as a woman, I am not legitimate competition for him or any other male. In effect, then, Brady's comments are de-moralizing and discouraging. Thus, indirectly, Brady does marginalize me because I am a woman mountain bike racer.

Embedded in Brady's gender beliefs, and subsequent gender constructions, are assumptions of differing physical and mental capabilities of men and women's athletic performances. The assumption that women cannot successfully compete with men is both reflected in and reinforced by the way NORBA divides competitors and races, and specifically in

[7] By shuttle runs, Brady is referring to a practice used by downhill mountain bikers. These riders position a car at the bottom of the trail and then drive up to the top of the same trail. Then, all the riders ride down to the bottom, where the car is waiting, and drive up to the top again to get the other car. Downhillers do this to prevent having to ride their cumbersome bikes uphill.

assigning the last race start time slot to the women's category. This organizational method assumes that women starting behind men will not get in the men's way, nor will the women catch any of the men, including adolescent men under 15 and older men over 45.

Owing to the very small numbers of women participating in mountain bike racing, this assumption is rarely challenged and pervades the field at-large. Many racers who encounter challenges to the assumption that women are inferior athletes to men make sense of the challenge in such a way that transforms the challenge into a biological exception to the norm. This tactic succeeds in keeping assumptions that de-legitimize women intact.

I observed this process during an interaction I had with a male mountain bike racer, while waiting atop a particularly brutal climb. The steepness and length of the climb had been easier for some than for others and, consequently, riders who were more fit summited the climb first and waited for the rest of the group to catch up before continuing the 120-mile ride. While we waited, I noticed the group's silence and wondered if the cold kept conversations at bay. Then, an older man with a gray beard, dressed in a bright neon-yellow jacket, caught my eye and approached me. Rather abruptly, and without introducing himself, he demanded, "Are you a pro or something? I've noticed how strong you are during the past few rides."

I replied that yes, I was, but "not on the road, just on the mountain bike."

He said he "figured something like that."

I purposefully asked him if he was a pro in an attempt to shed light on what appeared to me to be an absurdly gendered question. He looked at me with a surprised expression and, with question in his scratchy voice, said, "No. I just like to ride."

This man made sense of what he perceived to be the unusual physical fitness of a woman in a way that fit with his understanding of gender norms and assumptions of men as superior

athletes. In the circumstances that the man and I were in, waiting on the top of a hill for other riders to catch up and thus showing us to have similar fitness levels, the only extraordinary behavior he identified was mine. He explained this anomaly to his gender assumptions by labeling me as out-of-the-ordinary. I was not simply a woman who liked to ride – I was more than that – as he had "figured," I was a pro. This satisfied him that there was, in fact, no "real" threat to his ego. If I had been an amateur, he would have been threatened.

Another assumption aiding gender constructions that push women to the fringes and beyond the field's legitimate membership, is the assumption that women are uninformed and do not know how to be competent mountain bike racers. These general assumptions are manifested in specific behaviors or actions surrounding a woman's ability to mechanically understand, maintain and fix bikes, and to physically train in informed and scientific ways.

I experienced frustration during an interaction in which a man, assuming I did not know how to knowledgably train, lectured me during a particularly hard TRL that lasted over five hours, with two intermediate sprints. The ride was hard and fast; I thought I was not going to be able to keep up with the group at more times that day than any other ride I had been on that season. The cold and the pain kept me from talking, as I was too concerned with trying to not get dropped [8] from the group. The group in its entirety was relatively silent, another indication that the ride was brutal and that I was not alone in my pain.

At about the 4-hour mark, the pace slowed, enabling a short respite. At this point, the young man beside me initiated conversation. He did not tell me his name, or otherwise introduce himself, and I did not make any indication that I wanted to engage in conversation; in fact, I did

[8] The term *dropped* refers to a rider who becomes separated from the group because of his/her inability to maintain contact with the pelaton due to a lack of fitness. When a rider is dropped he or she is left all alone to finish the rest of the ride.

not want to talk at all. He opened by telling me that riding takes "dedication balanced with a lot of recovery…don't underestimate recovery." At first I thought he was just being rhetorical, but then he suggested, "After this ride, you shouldn't ride much this week. Give your body time to recover." Until this statement, I listened without reacting out loud, but at this new suggestion, I became angry and deliberately moved to the left of the group and dropped back to a position beside a different male rider.

This man instructed me on how to train, despite the fact that his comments were unprovoked and at odds with the situation at hand; I had not been dropped, but had stayed with the group of dwindling riders on a ride that clearly marked who was and who was not in shape. As a racer, I had not invited his advice, nor did the context, controlling for gender dynamics, warrant his giving of advice. However, because our gendered selves were a part of the interaction, they guided the interaction in ways deemed appropriate for both of us; he instructed and I listened until I moved.

Unprovoked interactions in which gender assumptions are implicit are commonplace within this particular field; in my analysis, I found this type of interaction over and over again. In talking with other women, I found that unsolicited advice about bikes and training – including assumptions that women would not know how to fix problems that arose – was a very common occurrence. Some women expressed frustration with these kinds of interactions and assumptions. However, many women accepted the assumptions as "facts" and/or took advantage of assumptions about their mechanical and technical abilities; it often meant a man would provide a needed service, such as changing her tire or performing some other kind of irksome task. Many women I spoke with expressed genuine enjoyment and appreciation for the fact that their gender allowed them to pass on certain responsibilities and chores.

On an easy spring ride in the mountains, Susie, a 26-year-old biochemistry graduate student, found herself stopped in her tracks following the familiar popping sound of a flat tire. Everyone present knew the sound and immediately stopped to await a tire change. As she stepped off her bike, Susie swung her backpack to the ground and rummaged through the contents in search of a tube.[9] Meanwhile, Alan, Susie's boyfriend, let his bike fall to the ground, picked up Susie's bike and turned it over with the wheels skyward, in order to more comfortably access the flat tire. A few seconds after Alan did this, all others on the ride settled onto the ground or took the break as an opportunity to eat. After she found her tube, Susie handed it to Alan without a word. Alan proceeded to change Susie's tire; he pumped up the tube, flipped the bike over, and handed it back to Susie. Susie grabbed her bike and thanked him. The group reacted to the cue that they were on their way again and all stood up and remounted their bikes. As we rode away, Joe shouted to Alan, "It took you six minutes, man. You've lost the race."[10] No one else said another word.

The immediate reward of having someone else take care of bike problems is attractive; the rider who accepts help stays clean, expends no additional energy, and avoids learning complicated procedures. The consequence of this convenience perpetuates gendered assumptions about women's mechanical abilities and technical competence; many female cyclists who have been riding for years actually do not know how to change a flat tire or adjust their shifters and brakes, not because they are inherently incapable, but because they never learned how. The rewards and consequences of having another fix your bike work as a self-fulfilling prophecy: men assume women lack essential bike knowledge and intervene when any

[9] Most cycling tires require an inner-tube inside of the tire to contain the air that gives the tire shape and support.
[10] Here, Joe is referring to the time Alan would have lost to his competitors had his tire gone flat and needed changing during a race. Changing a flat is a skill many racers practice, in order to minimize the time they spend fixing a flat during a race.

problems, ranging from flat tires to poor race performances, arise. When viewed from a gender perspective, specific to the patriarchal mountain bike field, these interactions reveal a hegemonic gendered logic. This logic guides interactions that maintain and reproduce the gender boundaries and influences the gender hierarchy within mountain bike racing.

Men: The Main Attraction

As the perceived fastest participants, men who are professional (pro) category racers occupy the top tier of mountain bike racing's socially constructed gendered hierarchy. Segregating men and women participants in races enables and retains the focus of the main event, the men's event, without distraction from women. As the main event, the men's pro race receives the most attention, prestige and legitimacy. The prestige of the pro men's race to the exclusion of any other race, including the women's pro race, was evident at a small race, held at Battlefield Park in Hamilton. The race was patterned after a NORBA-sanctioned race, but was promoted by Performance Promoters. Allured by the prestige of the men's pro race, in this race, I took advantage of the caveat that allows women to race with the men. At this particular race, the men's pro/expert category raced three laps and the women's pro/expert category raced two laps.

After I finished the race I changed out of my blue sleeveless jersey and hot pink riding shorts which I had donned, in order to signify, at a glance, that I was a woman racing in the man's race, in favor of an old black race t-shirt declaring "SINGLETRACK CHALLENGE" across the front, army green shorts and flip-flops. I walked alone from my car, parked in the communal parking lot next to approximately 200 other cars, across the half- brown, half-green field to the huge metal pavilion where groups of racers congregated. Some racers stood loosely together, seemingly waiting for the awards, while others appeared in intimate, tight groups. I

walked through the groups towards the wall where the results of the races were posted,[11] each printout headed with a category label in boldface font. After I found my 14th-place rank out of 30 starters, Lisa, who had won the women's pro/expert race, told me my results were posted incorrectly with the women's results as the last place finisher. Because I did one more lap as a participant in the pro/expert men's race, my race time was longer than the pro/expert women who did one less lap. Therefore, it appeared to whomever had placed my time incorrectly into the women's race category, that my time was longer than all of the other women's race finishers, and, thus I must be the last-place woman.

Lisa told me she had already informed the officials of their reporting error regarding my race finish. While I continued to look at the results and talk to Lisa, three men, two of whom I did not know, told me that my finishing placement was incorrectly listed under the women's race results instead of under the men's. The man I did know, Isaac, told me three times – including once the next day – that I needed to correct the results.

The importance to others that I correct the results to reflect my participation in the pro/expert men's race is noteworthy; though my time and placement in races has been reported incorrectly many times, including times when I had won the women's pro race, but had been reported as that race's last-place finisher, no one had ever brought incorrectly reported and posted results to my attention. The concern others expressed in this situation, where I had raced the men's pro/expert race and had my placing incorrectly posted, did not just come from sympathetic women, but also came from men. In this field note, the symbolic significance of the

[11] After every race, the promoter posts a printout containing three columns that reflect a first-to-last-place rank of each racer's finishing place within his/her category and the time it took for the racer to complete the race. This printout is posted in a conspicuous place for all racers to see. The declared intent of this practice is to allow racers 15 minutes in which to protest and appeal incorrect results to the race officials.

pro/expert men's race is demonstrated by the actors' concern that I be awarded the prestige that comes with "racing with the men."

Further, by racing in the men's race, I stepped over traditional gender boundaries embedded within mountain bike racing and engaged in a challenge to gender boundaries. Consequently, my behavior elicited attempts to repair and preserve the gender boundaries I crossed. However, the tactics employed to maintain gender boundaries were not entirely successful, and were actually protested by another racer.

During the Hamilton race, each time I completed a lap and rode through the staging area, the announcer/commentator sang into his microphone:

"There goes Erin, racing as a man."

The last time I came through the staging area, the male racer who had been trailing me by about 10 seconds during the entire race surprised me by loudly and forcefully telling the announcer, "No, she is racing with the men, not AS a man."

This incident sheds light on the multitude of ways that gender and gender boundaries were actively constructed, challenged and internalized. My own desire and choice to race with the men instead of with the women, to be a part of the main race, confirms the prestige and allure of the pro men's race. In addition, by racing with the men, I made a visible challenge to the taken-for-granted barriers separating men and women in mountain bike racing. Further, by finishing 14th out of 30 racers, and not last, I challenged the assumption that men and women cannot/should not race together. The announcer interacted with this overt challenge to the gender order with banter, which questioned my femininity, embarrassed me, and posited me as a manly woman, as opposed to just another competitor. Additionally, the man who was never able to gain time or pass me over the course of the two-hour race heard the announcer's repeated

comment about my gender, and was affected enough to speak out in defense of both his and my gender, and his and my roles as competitors in his declaration that I was "racing with the men, not as a man."

Another practice that I found clearly illustrated the prestige of and focus on men's racing was the unequal prize-purses awarded to the top winners of each pro/expert category. Seldom did race promoters award money in equal quantities to men and women; out of 40 races that I attended between 2003 and 2005, two of them awarded prize money to men and women's categories equally.

At a well-attended and nationally publicized 12-hour race promoted by Ride Fast Promotions, Emily, an expert racer questioned the awarding of inequitable prize money. In the 12-hour race Emily finished 3rd overall in the women's 12-hour category and received a $100 gift certificate to the Wilderness Outdoor Center's outdoor store, a prize she felt paled in comparison to the $250 cash prize the 3rd place man won. Immediately following the awards ceremony, Emily asked Don Alper about the discrepancy only to find that she was briskly brushed aside with the statement that she had really been "17th overall in the race. If [she] wanted cash [she] needed to race in the men's division and fight for a true 3rd place." In response, Emily retorted that the Web site specified two divisions, a man's and a woman's, for the 12-hour category, and that prizes would be awarded to the top three finishers in each category. She further reminded Don that his Web site did not offer a combined category for 12-hour racers. Don ignored her comment, so Emily, frustrated and on the verge of tears, walked away.

When questioned about the allocation of prize money, many promoters offer the explanation that more men than women race, and therefore men generate more money for their

categories that can then be "paid back" to the men who win. This rationale penalizes women for other women's lack of participation, as opposed to rewarding them for their participation and efforts. Further, this rationale suggests that if women want to change their prize money, they should persuade other women to compete; however, it is the promoter's job to encourage participation and they often do so for the men by offering "prize-purses" (guaranteed monetary prize minimums).

This rationale was offered to Sarah by Mitch, the owner of Stay Fit Mountain Bike Races, after she had she visited the company's Web site and saw that all races promoted by Stay Fit offered a "guaranteed $500 prize purse" for the "pro category." Based on past experiences in which she had won the women's pro race and received $90, Sarah was surprised to see this "guaranteed" prize purse. In an attempt to clarify this policy, Sarah e-mailed Mitch, asking him how exactly he allocated this $500. The e-mail (on which I was cc'd) confirmed Emily's prior experience with Don's inequitable awarding of prize money.

> Sarah: "I have a quick question for you. I recently noticed that on the Stay Fit website there is a statement that guarantees a $500 pro prize purse. Is this prize purse equal for men and women, both getting $500, or is the purse split between men and women's pro fields and how is the split determined if it is indeed split? How does it work" (personal communication)?

> Mitch: "Thanks for your question. We advertise a $500 guaranteed purse for the pro men's class, we don't offer a separate pro women's field yet but if the number of pro women increase in the future it certainly would be a possibility. Right now the pro

women are combined with the expert women and receive the same payout scale that the men's expert classes receive" (personal communication).

In this e-mail, Mitch attempted to rationalize his company's policy of awarding a guaranteed $500 prize purse to the men's pro class, while not awarding it to the women's pro class. He highlighted his arguments with half-truths: He stated that the women pros are combined with experts, but doesn't mention that the men pros are also combined with experts. In addition, Mitch suggested that the quantity of female pros is less than that of male pros, but close inspection of recent races promoted by Mitch reveals that the numbers of women and men pros *are* relatively equal. During the course of my research, I accessed the Stay Fit Web site and looked up the pro fields from recent races. I found that on March 20, 2005, the pro category included nine men and eight women; on April 10, 2005, the pro category included four men and five women; and on May 29, 2005, the pro category included 12 men and 12 women. Lastly, Mitch reported that they explicitly advertised the prize purse as for men only; however, I looked at the Web site and found that the prize-purse promotion was seemingly gender-neutral and simply advertised a "guaranteed $500 pro prize purse."

Mitch's explanation of the discriminatory logic for awarding prizes differently for men than for women is replicated by numerous other promoters, and even most men and women racers. However, the half-truths Mitch relied on to justify the unequal treatment, revealed there are holes in this logic; Mitch attempted to fill these holes with his version of information. This ubiquitous practice of unequal prizes and awards sends the message that men are more valued than women, and deserve more acknowledgement and award for their efforts, even though the participant's efforts may be identical.

Different Standards

When mountain bike racers behave or act in certain ways, they do so with a sense of what is acceptable. In my analysis, I found a pattern of interactions in which women behaved in ways that men in my field notes did not. I argue that these differences stem from a sense of what is acceptable behavior; in mountain bike racing, what is acceptable for women is not just different than what is acceptable for men, but some behaviors that are acceptable for women are *never* acceptable for men. Thus, I conclude that women who are mountain bike racers are held to different and lesser physical and mental standards than those used to evaluate men. Further, I argue that the application of differing standards for gendered racers gives women a broader range of possible behaviors and actions to draw from. However, women who do behave in ways men could and would not often re-produce their own marginalization.

Both men and women in mountain bike racing prize toughness, mental and physical strength, and determinism, and often take these values to extreme ends. For example, I observed one man who separated his shoulder during the first five minutes of his race. Instead of dropping out and seeking medical help, this man continued racing. Whenever he came by his friends on the side of the course, who had finished their races and now watched others race, they exploded into cheers and encouragement. For months after the incident, various riders brought up the event and discursively constructed Benjamin's act as heroic and commendable. Both men and women are evaluated and evaluate others by the degree to which they embody these mountain bike racing virtues. However, the expectation for men to uphold these virtues is unwavering, while the expectation for women to uphold these virtues is very low; manifestations of these differing standards are expressed and taken advantage of differently by men and women.

On a small group ride in mid-winter, Ashleigh, a 38-year-old competent and experienced, but not elite rider, recruited a male cyclist to push her up hills; while this helped her finish the

ride with the group, it also reinforced the notion that women are subordinate athletes. I observed Ashleigh's behavior and consequences of her actions on a group ride in mid-winter.

As I initialed next to my typed name on the paper designed for tracking participation, and picked up a black-and-white map of the ride, I realized that the day's ride was headed for the tiny town of Alto. I immediately recognized it as one of the hardest and hilliest that this group would ride all winter. I looked at the map, traced the mostly northwesterly route with my finger, and headed into the bike shop to buy another energy bar. In the shop, I saw that Ashleigh waited in line at the register, a 12-oz sport drink in hand.

Throughout the ride and particularly after hard efforts up long, winding hills I scanned the group to assess who had not been dropped; I often saw Ashleigh and was amazed she was still with the group, as I knew she was not considered an elite rider. I remember asking myself, "How is she keeping up, when I am in so much pain and struggling not to get dropped?" Then, in the middle of a hill with the pavement continuing up around a bend and out of sight, I saw Wesley push Ashleigh. He rode to her right with his hand on her back and steadily pushed, in order to ensure that she made it up the hill. I did not think much of it until I noticed the same thing happen on the next hill and every hill thereafter.

The next day, I discussed the ride with a co-worker of Ashleigh's and fellow cyclist, Marcus. He asked me if Ashleigh had been on the ride the previous day. I told him yes and mentioned that she finished the day with the group. Marcus then asked, "Was Wesley there?" I said he was. Marcus tilted his head to the left and said, "That's how she stays on."[12] With a roll of his eyes, he went on in a flippant tone to tell me that Ashleigh enlisted Wesley "because she needed him to make sure she didn't get dropped," a task, Marcus said, that included pushing her

[12] By "staying on," Marcus was referring to how Ashleigh was staying with the group as opposed to dropping off the back of the group.

up the hills. I asked him if he knew why Wesley agreed to do this for her. Marcus again shrugged and replied, "Because Wesley's a nice guy and Ashleigh's a girl."

This illustrates a highly gendered activity that Ashleigh was able to conceive and execute because she is a woman; her sense of what was a possible and an acceptable action derived from gendered standards of athleticism within mountain bike racing that are less rigid for women than men. Additionally, Ashleigh received help from Wesley; Wesley would not have aided Ashleigh had he deemed their interaction as inappropriate behavior. Wesley and Ashleigh's interaction on the ride, then, suggested that both actors' notions of behavior appropriate for a group ride coincided. Wesley was free to help Ashleigh, and Ashleigh was free to enlist Wesley's help because, in accordance with NORBA-sanctioned rules, Wesley and Ashleigh were not in competition with each other. Therefore, Wesley and Ashleigh were not constrained by the gender norms or competition rules that inhibit dramatic help/helping of the type in which by Ashleigh and Wesley engaged.

Ashleigh's and Wesley's gender performances actively constructed how to appropriately "do" gender in mountain bike racing. Marcus' description of Wesley as a "nice guy" reflected a positive reaction to Wesley and his helpful behavior. Marcus identified Wesley's motives for helping Ashleigh as a component of Wesley's personality. Further, Marcus suggested that, as a woman, it is appropriate and probable for Ashleigh to need help and, as a man, it is appropriate for Wesley to give Ashleigh the help she sought.

However, in contrast to how he viewed Wesley, Marcus' body language clearly communicated his disrespect for Ashleigh's behavior. Marcus' disdain for Ashleigh's need for help existed, despite his willing acceptance for Ashleigh to receive help from Wesley. As Marcus said, because Ashleigh is "a girl" she did not cross gender boundaries when she asked or

accepted help. Additionally, in Marcus' eyes, because she is a woman, Ashleigh *needed* help with such a demanding ride. Ultimately, though, Ashleigh gained from her interaction with Wesley, she also re-constructed and, for many actors, justified, existing gender boundaries that exclude women as legitimate and worthy mountain bike competitors and racers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on expressive dimensions of culture. Specifically, I explored interaction as a process during which actors re-created gender beliefs, norms and boundaries. I found that during interaction, men and women re-produced notions that maintained men's status as "natural" athletes. I identified three types of interaction which I argued contributed to this process: "the boy advantage" (assumptions based on gender); "men: the main attraction"; and "different standards."

First, I argued that NORBA, and all three types of interaction, have a dialectical relationship. I discussed how in "the boy advantage" interaction, actors understand different athletic performances to be the product of biological advantages or disadvantages; men were advantaged because they were males, while women were disadvantaged because they were females. This biological rational for perceived differences between men and women's athletic abilities and athletic knowledge was the same rational NORBA used to guide how race participants were divided into categories and races for competition.

Next, I argued that in "men: the main attraction" interactions, actors focused on men, men's races and men's athletic performances. I found that during these interactions, male athletes were valorized and men's athletic performances were deemed prestigious. Further, women's efforts were not appreciated or even recognized. Thus, during interactions in which

gender boundaries and the focus on the men was challenged, actors most often attempted to rationalize the focus or dismiss the challenge altogether.

Last, I argued that men and women mountain bike racers are held to different standards. I found that in "different standards" interactions, men and women engaged in dissimilar behaviors that were appropriate to their gender. Men were more restricted in the range of behaviors that were deemed acceptable for women. However, women who engaged in behaviors that did not reflect the same standards as those to which men were held, often reinforced beliefs that women are inferior athletes to men. Ultimately, then, these women re-created their own marginalization.

In all three interaction types, gender boundaries and distinctions were re-constructed and re-produced. Though, at times, gender boundaries and distinctions were challenged, it was rare that these challenges are successful in re-defining gender norms within mountain bike racing. Thus, I conclude that expressive dimensions of culture, and, specifically, interaction, influence women's marginalization in the sport of mountain bike racing.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Gender is often created through interaction between actors embedded in specific social worlds. However, gender is not created within one sole interaction or by single individuals. Gender is constructed through a series of interactions involving multiple actors who are influenced by culture. Culture affects how actors view the world; culture affects actors' values, beliefs, norms, methods of organization, structures and, consequently, interactions. By viewing gender as the result of numerous and connected interactions, the importance of these interactions becomes clear. Thus, research into interaction might yield a better understanding of how gender is re-produced and gender hierarchies are re-created.

In this paper, I have demonstrated the dialectical relationship between actors and culture; I showed that gendered interactions created cultural norms, and cultural norms influenced gendered interactions. I analytically divided culture into two parts: organizational and expressive dimensions (Williams 2005). Each interaction was defined by actors, who invoked gender notions or beliefs, when attempting to make sense of events in ways that adhered to their cultural gender lens. Most interactions were passive events in which gender was unconsciously re-created and re-produced. During these interactions, gender performances appeared natural, as opposed to socially constructed.

However, some interactions were overt challenges to gender constructions. These interactions actively attempted to re-define gender definitions; they did so through attempts to move or bend gender boundaries and blur gender distinctions.

Theoretically, if boundaries and distinctions serve to both include and exclude, and to identify insiders and outsiders, then challenges to gender boundaries and distinctions can be viewed as attempts to resist against prevailing gender norms, in favor of alternative frameworks for interaction (Zerubavel 1991). However, in order for challenges to be successful, they must not simply diagnose problems or disrupt the way things are done. Instead, successful challenges must expose the ways actors make distinctions and maintain boundaries (Zerubavel 1991). For gender, this means that, in order to change the inequitable impact gender has on social worlds, the ways in which actors "do" gender must be revealed as social constructions (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Therefore, in this paper, I investigated mountain bike racing as a hyper-masculine site for research, in order to expose how gender distinctions and boundaries are made within the sport. Specifically, I found that the organizational and expressive dimensions of culture within mountain bike racing actively disadvantaged women. In mountain bike racing, culture influenced the organization, structure, norms, and beliefs that constructed men as "natural" athletes (West and Zimmerman). During interaction, women are constructed as "others." As such, women are generally disadvantaged and marginalized. In my research, I found that women and men within mountain bike racing often perpetuated disadvantaging gender norms through various actions, including reactionary, essentializing and defensive behaviors. However, at other times, women did engage in contestation and attempt to affect change. Rarely, however, in my research, did I find men who challenged normative gender practices that disadvantaged women or advantaged other men.

In my research on mountain bike racing, five elements emerge as patterns of interaction that I argue construct gender and "naturalize" men as superior athletes: races; teams; the "boy

advantage"; "men: the main attraction"; and "different standards." During interaction, mountain bike racers recreated gender boundaries and distinctions; they made sense of differences in men and women's physical and social behavior, and physical and social outcomes, through a gendered lens of difference. Thus, they attributed these differences to biological causes, instead of seeing these differences as social constructions. By viewing differences and resulting gender outcomes as "natural," and therefore uncontrollable, without accounting for social constructions, structural barriers, or differential levels of participation, participants were allowed to justify existing systems of domination, discrimination and sexism. If biology is to blame, there is little-to-no room for individuals to conceptualize gender differently, to make change, or to challenge the system.

In mountain bike racing, I found that interaction was a key in perpetuating patriarchy. Expressive dimensions of culture, such as beliefs in biological or "natural" gender behaviors, influenced participants' social lens. In addition, organizational dimensions of culture, including USA Cycling's and NORBA's rules and governances, incorporated gendered beliefs into their organization and structuring of competitions and races. This blueprint consequently reinforced masculinity and influenced the gendered interactions of individual cyclists; dividing competition by gender embodied the belief that males and females did not offer fair competition for each other. These dimensions of culture informed each other and created a norm of masculinity. Gender, thus, functioned as a means of denoting actual and perceived differences, and was used as a method of and justification for stratification.

Despite many areas in society where participation in a particular social world is mandatory, such as work and education, participation in mountain bike racing is voluntary. I argue that marginalization of women in the sport, and the active construction of gender that

prizes men, discourages women to attempt or to continue participating in cycling. This, in turn, decreases the ability for gender to be constructed differently in interaction, and negatively influences the ability for change to be made in the sport.

This research is a step towards understanding how mountain bike racing continues to be dominated by men, during an era when many other arenas of social life are experiencing an increase in levels of gender equity and equality; generally, this research is a step towards uncovering the mechanisms by which patriarchy works. Perhaps the key to this puzzle is contained in the changing face of how work and play are enacted; in today's society, the majority of activities people engage in are not physical. Work and play that require physical fitness are increasingly diminishing. However, some sports, such as mountain bike racing, depend on physical performances, in which the centrality of a physically fit body is crucial to successful performances. To understand this dynamic more fully, future research is required. Further steps towards understanding the particular gender whys and hows surrounding mountain bike racing may include the following research questions, among others: Why do certain women remain dedicated to cycling? Why do men drop out of cycling? Answering these questions, and others, may bring us closer to explaining the powerful role gender plays in influencing social outcomes.

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