

"It's all about the journey": women and cycling events

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose

This article develops a gendered understanding of women's experience of a mass cycle tour event. The research findings have implications for how active tourism events are conceptualised, promoted and managed as gender inclusive.

Design/methodology/approach

This research uses an ethnographic approach to explore women's experiences of a cycle tour event. Qualitative data is analysed through the conceptual framework of post-structural feminism.

Findings

Key themes included the meaning of women's cycle tour experience as a 'shared journey', the centrality of the 'body' in event design (comfort, safety, enjoyment) and an event culture of 'respect' (encouragement, skill development, knowledge sharing).

Research limitations/implications

This research is based on a particular sample of women who were largely Anglo-Celtic, middle to lower middle class and middle aged Australians. Hence, this research does not claim to be representative of all women's experiences. Given the strong focus on quantitative research within event management this research identifies the need for qualitative and feminist approaches.

Practical implications

The research findings identify a number of gender issues for professionals to reflexively consider in designing, promoting, managing and evaluating mass cycle tour events.

Social implications

Developing a gender inclusive approach to events can broaden the participant target market and address equity issues relating to women's participation in physical activity and encourage.

Originality/value

There has been little exploration of the gendered experience or management of events in the literature. Hence, this article contributes to empirical research and theorising of women's experiences of active tourism events.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Cycle Tourism, Ethnography

'It's all about the journey': Women and cycle tour events

Introduction

With the growth of event management as a multidisciplinary field there has been surprisingly little focus on the question of gender in relation to both participant experiences and management issues. The lack of gender research and feminist analysis of event experiences stands in stark contrast to the range of research and theory that has developed in the allied areas of leisure, tourism and sport studies (C. C. Aitchison, 2003; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Wearing, 1998). In response, this article contributes to the development of a conceptual and applied understanding of the gendered experience of events. We draw upon empirical findings from a qualitative research project on

women's experiences of a mass cycle tour event to examine how gender is significant for reflecting upon the 'design, production and management of planned events' (Getz 2008: 404). To avoid the trap of empiricism that faces many new applied fields of study, we argue that emerging knowledge in event studies needs to critically engage with participants' event experiences in order to develop management strategies that address inequities in participation.

In this article we respond to the recent call by Holloway, Brown and Shipway (2010) for more qualitative research that aims to understand event experiences. We extend this focus to examine how meaning is created through the embodiment of gender identity and power relations. While acknowledging the important early work in event studies we seek to move beyond the traditional 'supply/demand' binary (Deery & Jago, 2005; Hanlon & Jago, 2000), to focus on the meaning of a mass cycle tour event for women travelling through regional Queensland, Australia. The temporal and spatial characteristics of event experiences are well acknowledged, hence we argue that it is important to understand the gendered specificity of 'active' events like cycle tours. We therefore draw upon gender theory and research in cultural, leisure and tourism studies (Aldred, 2010; Watts & Urry, 2008; Wearing, 1998) to consider how women's experiences can be incorporated into event knowledge and practice.

Literature Review

Background: The growth of cycling

Cycling generally is on the rise. In Canada there has been a 42% increase in the number of daily bike commuters between 1996 and 2006; and in the US the total number of bike

trips have more than tripled between 1977 and 2009 (Pucher, Buehler, & Seinen, 2011, p. 451). In Australia the sale of imported bicycles exceeds that of cars and is estimated to be worth \$239.9 million in 2008-09 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Internationally, bicycle output since 1970 has nearly quadrupled, while car production has roughly doubled (Roney, 2008). Government tourism authorities are also targeting cycle tourism as a niche area with growth potential in response to the estimated \$2.4 billion expenditure in 2010 associated with this market (Tourism Victoria, 2010). While cycling has grown to become the fourth most popular sport or recreational activity in Australia, like in North America and the United Kingdom, women are still underrepresented and experience a range of gender constraints to participation (8.2% for males compared with 4.9% for females) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010) (see also Furness, 2010; Garrard, 2003). In the US almost all the growth in cycling has been among men between 25–64 years old, while cycling rates have remained steady among women (Pucher, et al., 2011).

Internationally, mass cycle tour events (with between 200-5000 plus participants) have grown in popularity over the last ten years and this is part of the broader growth of event tourism that has been described by Getz (2008) as 'spectacular' (see also Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010). One of the first formal bicycle tours in the US was organised in 1976 by the American Cycling Association. The history of the Association's mission is summarised on their website:

These idealists not only wanted people to ride bicycles but also to travel very long distances by that mode and to see the nation's landscapes, history, and people from that vantage point (in Pesses, 2010, p. 5).

Pesses, in his analysis of journal extracts from bicycle tourists in the US, discusses the bicycle tour in terms of the desires of tourists who seek 'a sense of place or a sense of freedom' (Jackson, 1994 in Pesses, 2010, p. 6). For him, this is an explicitly American concern with the tensions between the 'American dream' and a fixed, 'rooted' place, and the 'call of the frontier that demands mobility' (Pesses, 2010, p. 4).

In the context of this research we find that in contrast to many traditional sport clubs that are experiencing declining membership, Bicycle Queensland as the not-for-profit bicycle association that organises the Cycle Queensland tour, has grown rapidly. Membership has doubled over the last five years to reach over 10, 000 members (Bicycle Queensland, 2009). Yet, women still do not participate in equal numbers on the Cycle Queensland tour although there has been a slight upward trend (2008 : 36%, 2009 : 39%, 2010 : 40%)(personal communication 12/4/11). Mass cycle tourism events offer a unique active holiday experience that can engage and promote women's involvement in cycling and physical activity more generally. One of the few studies on the motivations of mass cycle tourists that was conducted by Australian researchers Ritchie *et al* (2010) identified gender differences. This research highlighted the need to better promote social aspects (fun, socialising) and intellectual benefits (discovery) of physically challenging event experiences to increase women's participation. More broadly there has been little qualitative or quantitative research that has specifically

explored the gender issues and relations that shape women's participation in, and experience of, mass cycle events.

With the rise of government policies and health promotion strategies aimed at increasing physical activity there is growing interest in the role of mass recreation events, including cycling (see also Bowles, Rissel, & Bauman, 2006; Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, & Kaplanidou, 2011). The issue of community activity is becoming more pressing in light of the most recent national data on sport and recreation participation in Australia that indicates a decline over the past five years (from 66% to 64%). This decrease has been influenced by a specific drop in female participation (from 66% to 63%) and persons aged 25-34 years (from 75% to 69%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Hence, there is an opportunity for event managers to develop more gender inclusive approaches to event planning, promotion and operations as a strategy to increase women's participation, and hence participation overall. In a report identifying the public health benefits of cycling Bauman *et al* (2008, p. 599) recommended that 'Government support for cycling events should be provided, to act as an entry point for new cyclists'. In terms of the organised nature of multi-day mass cycle events it may be the tourism experience that provides a different 'entry point' for less experienced women cyclists. The cycle tour provides a specific focus for thinking about the intersections between the domains of health and wellbeing, leisure and tourism as they come together in the management context of an organised mass event.

Gender and Events

Despite the growth of event management and event studies there has been little attention paid to theoretical questions about gender differences or similarities, identities and experiences (exceptions include the sport tourism work of Gibson, 1998; Green & Chalip, 1998). Gender has tended to be constructed primarily as a 'variable' in quantitative research. When gender differences are explored through qualitative or quantitative event, and event tourism, research it is usually through descriptive generalisations about how women's event participation, spectator practices or perception of impacts are seemingly different from those of men (see Po-Ju, 2010). Without an analytical focus on gender the event field risks perpetuating knowledge that assumes the masculine subject of events as the implicit 'norm' (for example Funk, et al., 2011 ignore gender in mass event participation). In relation to event management practice this oversight can result in a lack of understanding about how to design, plan, market and manage event experiences that are inclusive of women as participants or consumers. Ignoring gender may also lead event managers to perpetuate sexism, discrimination or more subtle forms of exclusion and this in turn may contribute to the failure to achieve revenue or social policy related objectives concerning diverse community participation.

The absence of gender in event studies is curious given the large number of women employed in event positions (Robson, 2011), yet this suggests an even greater need for 'reflexivity' about the relationship between certain types of events and gender in event work and experiences (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011). We aim to further conceptual and applied knowledge about gender by focussing on mass cycle touring as a 'non-traditional' event for women. Hence, we explore through ethnographic research how women negotiated gender constraints in order to participate and what cycle

touring means to women in terms of their sense of identity in relation to the event experience. The research findings also identify how the cycle tour event could be managed in a more inclusive way to further increase women's participation and enjoyment. Research into women's event experiences can contribute to developing a different epistemological basis for event management that embraces the complexity of gender relations and a critical understanding of the meaning of participation. We would like to extend Holloway *et al's* (2010: 82) recent call for 'future research into the social and emotional world of event participants' to include a greater focus on gender.

To address the gender gap in event studies we draw upon the related discipline areas of leisure and tourism studies where there are well established traditions of gender research and a growing body of feminist theory (C. Aitchison, 2005; C. C. Aitchison, 2003; Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007; S. Fullagar, 2002; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; Wearing, 1998; Wilson & Harris, 2006). From a range of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary approaches feminist work has opened up epistemological questions about gender in relation to the construction of knowledge, the complexity of power and the value of different methodologies. The areas of event studies and event management have much to gain from developing a more critical and analytical approach to understanding how gender experiences, inequities/constraints and identities are constructed within specific and broader socio-political contexts. While there is not space here to detail the different feminist analyses of gender inequities and the construction of women's 'difference', Kinnaird and Hall (1996: 2) have provided a useful starting point, reflecting on how event 'processes are gendered in their construction, presentation and consumption, and

the form of this gendering is configured in different and diverse ways which are both temporally and spatially specific’.

Post-structural Feminism

What is at the heart of feminist research on gender is a concern with the effects of power and inequity on women’s experience of and ability to participate in leisure, tourism and events. Power is conceptualised in a variety of ways that include the broad effects of patriarchal social structures and cultures that contribute to systemic inequalities (the division of paid and unpaid labour in workplaces, homes and families, income, access to leisure time and space, the effects of abuse and violence)(see Wharton, 2005). Over the past few decades developments in feminist theories of leisure and tourism have been influenced by the ‘cultural and post-structural turn’ within sociology, cultural studies and geography (C. C. Aitchison, 2003). Within this approach power is conceptualised (via Michel Foucault) as a dynamic relation that shapes knowledge about what is considered to be feminine or masculine (who one is) and hence constructs normalising discourses about gender identity (what one does). Feminists have also argued that within western cultures gendered power relations have historically been structured by dualisms that value one side *over* the other (man/woman, strong/weak, culture/nature, reason/ emotion, autonomous/responsible for others)(Butler, 2004).

In terms of understanding how event experiences are gendered a post-structural conceptualisation of power is important for moving beyond ‘zero-sum’ formulations

(power as a thing that can be held)(Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1991). Power is understood as 'productive' of everyday relationships, norms and ways of enacting gender identity that are culturally valued as 'natural or normal'. Power works in many ways to 'discipline', regulate and constrain the actions of individuals who step outside of or question social norms and gender conventions. For example, gender norms about 'care' create expectations that women will 'service' the leisure of children and male partners at the expense of their own leisure preferences. This feminised ethic of care also underpins many heterosexual men's sense of entitlement to their own leisure time and space. Contemporary work on masculinity that is informed by feminist thinking has also begun to examine the differences between men and how masculine norms constrain gender relations and identity for men *and* women (Pringle, Kay, & Jenkins, 2011). Hence, the importance of examining the complex dynamics of gender and power in terms of how individual choices about events are shaped by broader discourses, norms and institutions. In relation to women's leisure, power is also exercised in ways that enable freedom to be pursued through resistance to, and questioning of, the legitimacy of gender norms. For example, Wearing's theorisation of leisure as potentially enabling for women has resonance for thinking about the transformative potential of events as,

spaces, physical and metaphorical, where women can explore their own desires and pleasures and perform acts which allow them to become women in their own right, to constitute diverse subjectivities and femininities which go beyond what women have been told they should be (Wearing, 1998, p. 149).

Post-structural feminism is not simply the inclusion of women's perspectives, nor is it a theory whose sole purpose is the advancement of women's right to be treated 'equally'

(equality assumes the masculine as the ideal). Rather, post-structural feminism offers a 'way of troubling' conventional (often masculine) ways of thinking about how events are planned, promoted and managed from a different standpoint. This does not imply that all women experience gendered power relations in the same way. Rather, gender is significant in shaping how women experience their 'difference' from men as well as shaping their difference from each other with respect to the intersection of class, ethnicity, sexuality and disability categories.

Methodology

Along with a focus on power relations post-structural feminism has contributed to a gendered understanding of embodied experience and this is particularly relevant for conceptual and methodological approaches to events (see Grosz, 1994). The rise of events as a particular leisure or tourism form has been identified as a significant aspect of the growing 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Hence, there is a need for event professionals to consider how events are experienced through the lived body, produce different meanings for diverse participants and are managed to become more inclusive spaces for a range of gendered identities. As Holloway *et al* (2010) have detailed in this journal, there is an emerging multidisciplinary research literature that moves beyond descriptive accounts of (sport, tourism or cultural) event and festival experiences to develop more nuanced analysis of sub-cultural practices (Goulding & Shankar, 2011), sensory ways of knowing (Duffy, Waitt, Gorman-Murray, & Gibson, 2011) and gendered embodiment (Cronan & Scott, 2008; Finley, 2010). This diverse range of qualitative methods and theoretical analyses of the lived and constructed nature of event experiences contribute to deepening the epistemological basis of event

studies. This knowledge can inform the development of a more 'reflexive' approach to event management practice that critically examines how gender is conceptualized at all stages of event planning, management and evaluation.

The Research Context

Cycle Queensland is a fully catered nine-day holiday on two wheels. The event is designed to let you have fun and enjoy your cycling. All your needs are taken care of by our team....Our tent city has first aid, mechanics, bike shops, masseurs, a general store, tourist information, licensed café, toilets and hot showers. We serve up three generous meals a day and even transport your luggage...All you have to do after a day on the bike is collect your bags and put up your tent. In the afternoons and evenings there is plenty to do and see: take a tour, party-on at the local inn or just chill out at the picturesque campsites. (<http://cycleqld.bq.org.au> accessed 2nd August, 2010)

In 2010 the first author accompanied over 1000 cyclists and 150 volunteers and event staff for nine days to 'cycle away from the everyday' through the rural terrain and small towns of regional Queensland. Cycle QLD was actively promoted as an inclusive, non-competitive event through images of male and female riders of different ages and riding styles in brochures and on the website. All cyclists followed a planned route and options were provided for riders wishing to ride further on particular days (between 50 to 100 kilometres per day). The tour was flexible enough to allow individual, couple or group participation where fundraising could be undertaken independent of the event

organisers. Days began early and were designed to allow for most riders to be finished by the mid-afternoon to enable exploration of the local community (shops, pubs, fund raising events were held) and some tours. Event organisers work closely with local councils, towns and community groups to ensure social and economic benefits arose from the tour. The touring cyclists inject cycling enthusiasm and funds into these local communities (Faulks, Ritchie, & Dodd, 2008), some of which are too isolated and remote to attract any other type of tourism. In 2010 the tour was affected by some challenging risk management issues with bad weather and several days of rain that resulted in one day where the road was closed due to flooding.

Ethnographic method

The research project emerged out of the first author's previous experience of having twice completed the tour event and a desire to explore how the event could become more gender inclusive to increase women's participation. Although nine days is a relatively short period of time over which to conduct ethnographic research, the approach was chosen to enable the first author to gain a richer insight into the gendered culture of the cycle tour. Like similar ethnographies of intense leisure experiences (Humberstone, 2011; Sparkes, 2009; Watson & Ratna, 2011) this method enables an understanding of the embodied duration and sensory nature of the liminal experience and allowed meaningful engagement with women riders in a variety of ways (covert observation of general riders and overt observation, discussion and interviews with participants). Holloway *et al* note that 'using the twin methods of participant observation and interviewing offers an unparalleled insight into participants' world that is typical of ethnography' (2010: 78). While there is not space in this article to discuss

the debates within ethnography about questions of representation and access to participants' 'truth' (Atkinson, 1990; Denzin, 1997) the approach taken in this study assumed a constructionist view of the research process. The first author acknowledged the mediating effect of the context, her cycling experience and feminist literature, on her ethnographic gaze and interpretations. Immersion in the cycle tour experience was essential for enabling rapport with other women as they made sense of their own gendered realities during in-depth interview discussion of what had happened on the road or in camp. More informal discussions and exchanges about the ride experience with interviewees and general tour participants complemented the interview material and observations.

Extensive field notes were taken at the end of each day to record observations of gender relations within the camp routines (meals, camping, socializing, bicycle maintenance), the cycling experience and breaks, as well as interaction with the countryside and rural communities (taking photos, shopping, talking). Attention was paid to the way in which women used language to describe their event experiences and create meaning about their sense of identity as cycle tourists. From this post-structural perspective the meaning of an event experience is not considered to reside psychologically 'within' the self. Rather meaning is shaped by the mediating effects of discourses that influence how individual women interpret their own enjoyment or dissatisfaction in relation to others (M Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Hence, ethnographic research can provide event managers with a deeper understanding of how women experience the event 'culture' through gendered norms, interactions and conversation that could otherwise be missed in surveys or even interviews where gender was not a focus.

Recruitment of interview participants occurred through an email invitation sent by Bicycle Queensland and 40 women responded. Within the project time constraints a total of 17 in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with women riders aged between 27 and 71 years, some of whom were first timers and others who had extensive cycle tour experience (see table 1. below).

[insert table 1 here]

For those women with previous experience of the cycling event semi-structured interviews were mostly conducted during the tour and those without experience were interviewed during weeks following to enable them greater time for reflection. Participants were asked what cycling and cycle tourism meant to them as women, what they enjoyed most and least about the event, how well they felt the event organisers had encouraged women to ride and what aspects of the tour could be improved to increase women's participation. All participants were sent copies of their transcripts and a summary of the findings (a number of women wanted to know more about other women's experiences and how to promote greater participation within their own communities).

Using an inductive approach a thematic analysis was initially completed to identify the meaning women constructed about the event experience, gender constraints and issues

as well as ideas about changes to the event to improve gender inclusiveness (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). In addition, a more reflexive approach to interpretation was used to identify 'how' women drew upon language and discourse to make sense of and hence construct their experience (M Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; J. Law, 2004). The themes we focus on in this article include how women valued the event 'journey', how women challenged gender constraints, and the importance of an inclusive community. We also outline the implications that a focus on gender has for event management practices and theory. Throughout our analysis we explored how women negotiated gender constraints in order to participate and how aspects of event organisation detracted from or enhanced their experience.

Findings

The majority of women interviewed were from an Anglo-celtic background, heterosexual (one self-identified as lesbian) and differed in age (with the majority over 50). Eleven were experienced cycle tourists while six were first time riders on this kind of multiday tour event. They came from mixed social backgrounds with seven women residing in regional or rural areas in different States of Australia (one New Zealander) and ten residing in cities or large urban areas. Four women attended by themselves (some meeting up with friends or an organised group), another four came with their own self-organised group (often a bicycle user group or fund raising group of friends), three came with a female friend and six came with their male partners, including one woman who was also riding with her 3 children for the ninth year in a row. While there are commonalities related to gender norms, institutional structures and relations that shape all women's lives in particular ways it is important to acknowledge that 'women'

are not a homogenous category. The differences *between* women need to be considered in relation to the event experience as gender identity is also shaped through the intersections of class, sexuality, ethnicity, geographic location etc (see Watson & Ratna, 2011).

Women's responses about their experience of the tour and the organisation of the event were overwhelmingly positive. Both new and experienced cyclists identified a range of benefits that arose from their experience of the cycle tour event. These benefits included: increased fitness/ strength and relaxation away from everyday pressures, social interaction with new and existing friends, 'me' time to commune with nature/ spirituality, a sensory experience of new places, learning more about cycling, reducing one's environmental impact and contributing a positive social/economic impact on rural communities. In particular, the event organisers were praised for their work in organising a successful tour given the challenging weather and risky conditions at times. A number of women who had experienced similar events in other States repeatedly commented on their preference for how Cycle Queensland was managed. Although there was an apparently high degree of satisfaction with the event participants also identified a range of gender constraints and some aspects of the tour that detracted from their sense of feeling included and respected as a woman cyclist. We present our findings in two sections, first, we examine participant experiences and second, we explore the implications for event management in cycle tourism and event research.

Women's experience of the cycling journey

I like the idea of the journey, rather than an event - I don't mind events, but the idea of travelling as part of cycling was really good for me. (Kim, aged 60).

I could actually see the local area. I could look at the sun coming through the clouds over some valley, or down some creek, or through some grove of trees ...you could get a real sense of the local geography and just enjoy it. (Jane, aged 51)

Participants described their desire to experience the nine day journey through the language of the body and sensory engagement with the rural landscape. Emphasis was placed upon the intrinsic value and pleasure of cycling as a temporal mode of travelling 'in the moment'. Enjoyment of the cycling journey was not described in terms of a specific destination (attractions or identity) but rather as a form of mobility through which to feel, taste, see, hear and smell Queensland rurality (places and local people they would normally have no 'reason' to visit and meet). This is similar to the notion of 'embodied empathy' (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003) that persuades tourists to go back to a specific destination. However, here it is not the destination so much as the journey and the experience of mobility that was important for our participants. In privileging the journey over the destination, our participants express how central movement is in everyday life (Urry, 2007). Authors such as Hannam (2008) have acknowledged the 'mobility turn' in the field of tourism, yet this alternative way of theorising experience has not made such inroads in the event management literature. In thinking through movement, rather than structures or endpoints, dominant masculine

modes of thought are challenged, making room for women's experiences of mobility. Elsewhere we have written about how women articulate cycle tour events as a form of 'slow travel' that was physically challenging, socially engaging and leisurely in terms of pace (with the absence of competition) (S Fullagar, 2012). The preference for a leisurely journey rather than a 'sport' event was often commented on by women of different ages as they felt the non-competitive ethos was inclusive of their cycling preferences and different capacities. Leticia (aged 35) said, 'I'm not a race person. I (prefer to) enjoy it (as a) leisurely type thing... I push myself because I want to be challenged as well'.

Jean (aged 68) commented on how the event design (route planning and vehicle support) enabled her to participate at her 'own pace' and feel 'safe',

Nobody knows when you leave or when you get in... a lot of the blokes have been in town for hours at the pub so then they straggle in the afternoon at the same time you're coming in. So there's no competitiveness about it at all. You don't feel pushed. There's always that proviso that if you can't do it you can stop and get in the SAG^[i] wagon. There's always heaps of people around...(to) give you a hand.

This discourse of safety *and* comfort was important to many of our participants. The risk management protocols (ambulance and police escort, volunteer signage, SAG wagon, nightly briefings about road conditions, education sessions on riding and bike maintenance) developed for the event were interpreted by participants as central to a culture of safety. These protocols enabled women to enjoy the element of risk taking in the cycle challenge but importantly helped to systematically address the gendered

context that influenced some women's lack of confidence in their own ability. In a discussion of safety at events Low (2000) states,

when we are at a major sporting event... our safety and comfort depend crucially on our fellow crowd members and on the design and operation of the facility we are in (2000, p. 465).

A cycle tour event does not have a 'facility' where the event is staged; rather it uses spaces usually determined for other purposes, roads and fields. These spaces are transformed from mundane, everyday infrastructure, to safe spaces of enjoyment. Like street festivals, transforming roads and other public spaces into safe and successful event spaces is a challenge. Tomsen and Markwell (2009) found that in the case of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras participants felt comfortable at the event itself, but it was after the event that women felt unsafe and safety was a concern at some level for many participants. Their report on safety at gay and lesbian events is one of the few studies that take gender into account in exploring participants' and organisers' constructions of risk and safety at an event. Yet this study, with its focus on gender, interpreted safety through a specific discourse of criminality. In contrast the women in our study mobilised a discourse of risk that was connected to their desire to feel safe when undertaking a physical challenge, and the collective context alleviated concerns about the risk of violence.

A cycle tour event has many risks that need to be managed and one of those relates to the physical challenge that one thousand riders undertake over 600km on public roads in either hot or wet weather conditions. Participants spoke extensively about the

embodied challenge of the event in terms of their own sense of physical capability as women (and as older women). Contrasting the event with competitive sport Kim (aged 60) described it as 'A personal challenge... it takes it away from being an external challenge where you're judged by others, to a challenge for yourself'. Pam (aged 43) spoke more specifically about her different sense of identity as a strong, competent woman. This gendered cycling identity was formed through Pam's repeated involvement in the event (nine times with her three children and husband) and could be described in relation to a serious leisure or tourism event career (Shipway & Jones, 2007). Pam stated, 'I enjoy the fact that I can do it - that I'm a 40 something year old woman who can do that and not a lot of 40 something year old women do that...I'm not a "girly girl", I'd rather be that person on the bicycle I guess and that makes me feel a bit special I suppose in some ways that I've chosen that'. In her response Pam was critical of gender norms that relegate women to passive roles and she found pleasure in resisting those stereotypes (Shaw, 2001).

Kim (aged 60) also commented on her sense of being able to exercise power through her participation in an adventurous experience, 'I feel very powerful on the bike; I feel very good on the bike'. These findings also support those of researchers such as Little and Wilson (2005) who identified how adventurous pursuits enable different gender identities to be experienced in ways that challenge gender constraints, such as those norms that value women's appearance over their embodied capacities. Recognising that women's construction of cycling as a physical challenge is gendered in ways that challenge norms of passivity or weakness (which is different for men as physical challenge is a normative aspect of masculinity) enables event managers to think about

how they promote and market cycle tours. For many women participating may be more about 'stepping out of your comfort zone' or 'enjoying the feeling of going beyond what you thought you could do'.

Challenging Gender Expectations

A number of women connected their lack of confidence to gender inequities in their early leisure lives and socialisation as girls. Many were not taught to ride a bike as a child, encouraged to develop mechanical knowledge or to develop cycling skills. Womack and Suyemoto (2010) have written about these constraints that women in competitive cycling experience. To think about cycle tourism we turn to the famous essay of Iris Marion Young, 'Throwing like a girl' (1990) in which she provides a phenomenological analysis of how women learn to embody gender norms that limit their movement and motility. It is not an innate feminine 'essence' that explains the different capacities of males and females to move their bodies, but rather the particular sociohistorical *situation* they find themselves in (2005).

Events, as situated in a very particular time and space, are opportunities for a different 'situation' to be created and sustained. Yet, for many women being able to take time and space for themselves away from their gendered responsibilities at home and work was also a 'pre-event' challenge. Jean (aged 60) talked about how her anticipation of the event was a motivating force, 'It gives me something to look forward to. It gives me something to do for me that's "my time" and I get a lot of satisfaction out of doing it'. If we view the liminal time-space of the event as a mobile 'personal space' (Wearing 1998) we can understand the value of a cycle tour that allows women to move beyond

normalised gender scripts (an 'other focused' identity as wife, mother, carer or daughter). These normative gender scripts about what 'good' mothers, grandmothers and women do (or more accurately don't do in terms of their own leisure) construct a gendered ethic of care that places the needs of others first. As Kay (2003) has argued in the context of heterosexual family norms, women risk 'losing' their identities without opportunities for leisure. Unlike Pam who took her family with her on the ride, Jane (aged 51) was equally as keen to ride but experienced the constraining effects of a gendered construction of care as she had waited eight years to do the ride, 'the decision was based on my daughter being - my parenting responsibilities - being at a level where I could leave my child at home for nine days with the other parent basically'.

Against the context of normative gender expectations and a range of constraints most women in the study identified the organised nature of the event (fully catered and supported) as highly desirable. Lucy (aged 56) echoed a comment made by a number of women, 'I've got nine days without having to think of cooking'. The provision of catering and a limited range of accommodation options (camping, some provision of tents and some motels), along with organised transport and bicycle (dis)assembly options were commented on by women as positive features. Molly (aged 56), like several women who attended without a partner valued, 'the total care that's taken, you're just like a kid. They give you a list of what to take and all you have to do is get here and ride your bike'. The organised nature of the event provides women with some freedom away from the gendered responsibilities of home that frequently constrain leisure and tourism opportunities (Kay, 2003; Little & Wilson, 2005). Our analysis of the gendered space of the tour event illustrates how women valued the change in everyday routines (meal

time, cleaning, organising) that they would usually assume responsibility for at home in their heterosexual relationships and families. This experience can be contrasted with those men who generally find the provision of meals and organised routines to be an extension of their home life.

The Importance of an Inclusive Community

The event experience was also highly valued by participants because of the sense of identification and emotional connection with a 'cycling community' that arose from opportunities for social interaction with other riders, volunteers and community members. The social atmosphere of the ride was encouraged by event organisers and linked to the non-competitive ethos which helped foster an emotional sense of belonging and inclusion (see also Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). As research on women's leisure has previously suggested the experience of friendship was highly valued (new friends and reconnecting with older friendship networks)(Green & Chalip, 1998). Pam (aged 43) who was cycling with her husband and three children emphasised how significant the social aspect was for their family experience and her own self-identity,

The thing that struck us the most - again we were fairly shy people - didn't have a lot of friends - the thing that struck us was that here we were mixing among like minded people. That was the thing - we all had a common interest and I suppose as much as we were in awe of other people and their riding ability, they were in awe of us and having our kids and that sort of thing.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to address the complex concept of 'community', it is important to note the fluidity of relations and the importance of identification and emotional connection – if only for the duration of the tour itself – for our participants. Western societies are subject to critique in relation to the values of individualism and consumerism (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Giddens, 1991) and the 'breakdown' of traditional notions of 'community' (Putnam, 1995). However, our participants experienced a feeling of 'community' and sociality based on affective and identity based relations (rather than kinship, class or geography), a type of relation sometimes labelled 'neo-tribal' (Bennett, 1999; Maffesoli, 1996; Sweetman, 2004). The importance of understanding cycle tours as affective communities is reflected in the way women in our research described new and enduring friendships as integral to their enjoyment and feeling of inclusion.

Many of our participants spoke of a type of 'immersion' in the cycling event. A complete mind and body experience where they could enjoy the pleasures of the daily ride *and* socialising with other riders as they shared food and entertainment provided at each destination. Living in close proximity to others and negotiating everyday relationships provided a fluid context for women who articulated a sense of belonging to the 'Cycle Queensland' neo-tribe. This collective sense of identity was proudly displayed through branded clothing and was defined in part by the experience of travelling together through new places each day as 'strangers'. Yet there were also multiple forms of identification with different neo-tribe identities that were performed via small group affiliation (local BUGS, fund raising causes, friendship networks). These group identities also reflected diversity and gender specific differences between women's identities

(lesbian friendship groups, a group of Indian-Australian women on their first ride, older women's in BUGS).

Some women contrasted their enjoyment of the social and leisurely ride against other kinds of sport events that they saw as defined by a masculine culture of speed and competition (see also O'Connor & Brown, 2007). Molly (aged 56) recounted how she preferred to ride without her husband as he was more interested in how fast he could cycle than experiencing the journey. Pam (aged 43) also reflected on this point, 'I like to say I'm a recreationalist cyclist or a touring cyclist. A lot of the one day events, I don't like to do anymore because they're such a race. It's all about getting in quickly and the social aspect of it gets lost.... Whereas on something like Cycle Queensland you get your morning tea, everyone's friendly and chatty'. A number of participants spoke about a culture of competitiveness that was evident at times on the ride as 'intimidating' and it personally affected them. Molly commented, 'they [some male riders] wait for you at the top of a hill and you feel so guilty if you can't keep up' (aged 56). Even off the bike some women commented about competitive conversations between men and how the race to the food queues led them to feel invisible. In addition, this subtle sense of exclusion was also mentioned by several participants in relation to another gendered issue about mechanical support on the tour. Women often spoke about a lack of confidence with their mechanical knowledge of bikes and how this was a gender constraint they were keen to overcome. However, a number of women encountered an impatient male mechanic on the ride when they needed assistance and this generated a range of responses from anger to intimidation. Lorna (aged 52) commented,

I've actually spoken to a couple of women who have had the same experience with the same man...[who] is really condescending. I had the same experience with a mechanic on [a different tour], and it really annoys me. Because they speak to you like you're an idiot, and I think, well don't come - don't put yourself forward for it if you have that sort of attitude... I thought if you want women to come - men and women who don't know much about bikes - you can't speak to people like that.

Lorna's response highlights in a more obvious way how insensitivity to gender differences (and some would say sexism) negatively impacts on the inclusive culture of the event. This presents a challenge for event organisers who rely upon outsourced support services such as bike mechanics. The issues of masculine competitiveness and mechanical support were the two key gender concerns that affected women's experience on the ride. Event organisers did work to explicitly counter the competitive aspect of cycling culture by emphasising respectful riding, encouraging a friendly atmosphere and creating opportunities for social interaction amongst diverse participants. Overall the event was regarded by women as inclusive of their different abilities, ages (more older than younger riders), sexual orientation (heterosexual and lesbian couples and groups were visible) and to a lesser degree cultural diversity (the majority of cyclists were of Anglo descent).

Implications

Implications for Event Management

The idea of creating an inclusive event culture was mainly articulated by our participants in terms of sharing knowledge about cycling between women. This was mentioned as a solution to some of the issues experienced on the tour and was a way of ensuring that the women around them felt safe. This focus, on safety and sharing seems key to women's experience of the tour. In general, women are consistently found to be more concerned about safety and risk than men (Gustafson, 1998). In our research Joan (aged, 60) had come on the tour on her own and had little experience cycling the long distances required. She enjoyed herself over the nine day event and was keen to pass on her experience to other women who might be concerned about risks and safety, stating, 'I like to let them know and let them know what I've gone through so that then I can pass it on to them and say, well this is what you do; don't be frightened when this happens or whatever'. Dale (aged 45), a very experienced cyclist reinforced this theme around sharing, stating that it was important to pass around 'word of mouth, showing pictures, sharing experiences, telling people where you go and what you do'.

Already Cycle Queensland has acknowledged the importance of 'showing pictures, [and] sharing experiences' via their website, including images of women and men on the tour and a comprehensive 'frequently asked questions' section in their official handbook (Bicycle Queensland, 2011). However, this practical information could be enhanced through the inclusion of diverse images and experiences that addressed women's particular concerns with risk and their desire for sociability. Very little research addresses event participants' risk perception (as opposed to event managers' risk management strategies) and the effect this has on their participation (there are a few exceptions, for example Qi, Gibson, & Zhang, 2009). The women on the tour wanted to

be able to share their experiences and knowledge – mechanical, cycling related, safety, geographical, and specific to this type of event – with others.

For women travelling alone, and for those women who disliked the competitive aspects of cycling culture, or who were not very experienced cyclists, being able to share the experience with other women was vital. Yet making connections with other women was not always easy and participants came up with some innovative ideas. These included addressing a lack of mechanical knowledge, and ways of connecting with other women prior to the tour in order to develop supportive friendships with other cyclists. Some of these suggestions were:

- Holding preparatory workshops for women before the event (ride training and fitness, camping, safety, cycling gear, riding with kids, basic mechanics);
- Facilitate networking (facebook, workshops, webpage) to encourage single women to identify others who would like travel companions, offer a 'buddy' system for first time riders and have riders submit average riding speed to match up riding bunches; and
- Create more visible links with local bicycle user groups and women's cycle groups to offer support pre-tour and post-tour networks.

Another solution put forward by one of our participants was to market the event directly to women. She stated, 'promot[e] it as something that women can do', particularly 'young girls - at teenage years to get young girls cycling, especially if they cycle with mum or dad - I think that's absolutely fantastic' (Sally, aged 57).

Promoting the event directly towards women of different ages and highlighting the accessibility and support available on the tour would be a first step in applying a gendered approach to event management. Other practical suggestions to improve the event experience for women on the tour identified by our participants was the importance of offering more 'camp easy'^[ii] places (currently a limited ballot system) as not all women have camping experience or equipment. In relation to the concerns about mechanical knowledge and support on the ride women identified the need to have more (gender sensitive) mechanics on the ride itself, not just at the stops, as well as holding pre-event 'hands on' mechanics courses run by and for women to develop confidence and knowledge.

Research in event management has grown in recent years, with a particular focus on operations, marketing and management (Foley, McGillivray, & McPherson, 2012). While the focus on 'how to' is imperative there has been little consideration of how to manage events in a gender inclusive way. In our study women identified issues and concerns about the cycling tour, and also important insights and suggestions into how the event could become more inclusive in relation to event planning, management and promotion. Talking to women about their experiences of gender inclusivity allowed them to articulate their thoughts and ideas for improving the event, not only for themselves, but for other women who may not have the confidence or skills to engage in this type of multi day cycling tour. These suggestions can inform event planning and operations to attract more women to cycle tourism events. Taking a gendered approach can also enable event managers to provide a socially inclusive experience that has broader reach

in meeting diverse participant desires – for social connection, a leisurely pace and physical challenge.

Implications for Event Research

In the event management field, if we can understand the culture of an event we can more effectively manage an event experience. The findings from this research may be useful for thinking about how ‘inclusive’ cycling events and tours can be designed, marketed and managed to encourage women, children and people of different ages and abilities. This article has responded to the call from Holloway *et al* (2010), Getz (2008) and others in promoting the use of qualitative methods in event research. Qualitative methods allow researchers to gain invaluable insight into the life worlds of event participants, in turn allowing event managers to better understand complex meanings, identities and gender constraints. Just as within the field of management studies where gender and women’s perspectives have become key to understanding diverse and inclusive management styles and successful leadership (Rosener, 1990), the field of event studies or event management (Getz, 2007) requires a deeper engagement with gendered experiences of events.

In this article we have argued for the incorporation of women’s experiences into event knowledge and practices. By taking women’s experiences of events seriously event management practitioners and researchers can better plan for and respond to women’s concerns and desires. In bridging the gap between theory and practice we have demonstrated how a gendered approach to event management studies could be advanced. Through qualitative interviews and ethnography we have been able to

explore the way women negotiated gender constraints in order to participate in a mass cycle event. This in-depth knowledge of women's experiences can contribute to the planning, promotion and management of multi-day events where women's participation has historically been seen as marginal. Cycling, and to a lesser degree cycling events, have traditionally been associated with endurance, strength and competition (Wörsching, 2007). Yet for many of the women interviewed their participation was driven by more diverse desires: for sociability, a relaxed pace, challenge and 'time out' from their gendered roles and responsibilities to others.

Conclusion

Our analysis of women's accounts of the Cycle Queensland tour has identified a common desire to experience 'the journey' as an embodied challenge and social space, rather than as a competitive sport event or in terms of a tourism destination. In the context of multiple gender constraints, women identified the pre-event challenge of negotiating competing demands and desires in their work, home, social and leisure lives. The cycle tour event offered a leisure-tourism space where they could step out of, or ride away from, the pressures to be 'doing it all' (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). The particular characteristics of the cycle tour event (physically challenging, non-competitive and highly organised) enabled women to experience the freedom 'from' gendered routines (meal preparation), as well as freedom 'to' embody a cycling identity as capable, socially connected and adventurous. The risk management protocols employed during the event influenced women's construction of mobility and personal challenge in relation to a sense of safety on the road. Drawing upon a post-structural perspective we suggest that cycle tour events figure as liminal spaces that can enable

different gendered identities and experiences of mobility to co-exist (C. Aitchison, 2005; Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1998). It is through an in-depth understanding of women's experiences and the gendered construction of meaning that event managers can develop a more reflexive approach to planning and management. Getz (2008) has identified some key questions for event tourism research, theory and management that can be modified to include gendered meaning. For example, 'What leadership, planning and decision-making styles and processes are most effective for "*gender inclusive*" event tourism development? (Getz 2008: 418, italicised text added).

Signing up for a nine-day cycling event, travelling 80 kilometres per day with 1000 other people, is a daunting proposition for many. Yet for the women involved in this study it was a highly rewarding experience of meditation, relaxation, challenge, nature and friendship. Despite their positive experiences of the tour our participants identified aspects that might exclude women from participating. For example, an overtly competitive masculine culture, insensitive mechanical support and lack of knowledge as well as logistical challenges in attending a multi-day cycling event. Participants articulated how these issues could prohibit some women from enjoying the event, and even dissuade some women from considering mass cycle touring in the first place. In developing a gendered perspective on these types of events, organisers could consider privileging aspects of the event experience that were valued by women on the tour. Adopting such a reflexive approach to event management involves a critical consideration of how gender is a socially constructed and lived aspect of identity that shapes women's event choices and experiences. In this way different participant meanings can be recognised and incorporated into planning, for example, the

opportunity for leisurely riding, as opposed to a focus on the end destination, and increased opportunities for women to network and share with each other. One of the most frequently reported problems faced by women in organizational settings is limited access to informal interaction networks (Ibarra, 1993). Enabling women's access to informal networks, where they can connect with other women before the tour and where experiences can be shared also contributes to a more inclusive event. With increased opportunities to interact, women can also support one another to enjoy the event and address specific challenges that may constrain their participation.

Event managers and researchers can benefit from developing a gendered approach to event management in terms of improving the overall quality of the event. As has been demonstrated in the fields of management (M. Alvesson & Billing, 1997), leisure (Wearing, 1998), sport (Hargreaves, 1990), urban planning (Pain, 1997), and transport (R. Law, 1999), conceptualizing gender allows researchers and practitioners the opportunity to imagine and create more inclusive spaces for everyone: children, older people, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, men *and* women. As an emerging field, event management faces the challenge of developing critical approaches to knowledge that can enable practitioners to reflect, plan and implement more inclusive, sustainable events. A post-structural approach to gender, and its relational focus on individual and collective identity (addressing questions such as 'who am I' and 'how do I belong' in relation to this event experience) is a theoretically rich way forward for researchers to begin unpacking the more nuanced aspects of events that cannot be easily 'measured'. Event management / studies is well positioned to extend feminist insights from tourism and leisure studies in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the specificity of event experiences as gendered spaces, temporalities and forms of mobility.

Developing the theoretical basis of event management is thus crucial and this requires situating analysis of the personal event experience (and its organisation) in the context of broader social institutions, cultural norms and everyday relationships.

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ⁱ SAG stands for Support And Gear, or Support Aid Group and is a vehicle that rides behind the tour providing support for any riders that need it.

ⁱⁱ The 'camp easy' option for accommodation meant that riders would have their tent pitched ready after each days ride and then packed down in the mornings, saving time and hassle.