

CHAPTER 12.

WOMEN-ONLY BICYCLE
RIDES AND FREEDOM OF
MOVEMENT: HOW ONLINE
COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES
OF LOCAL COMMUNITY
MANAGERS SUPPORT
FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS

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This chapter examines the rhetorical practices of a group of women bicycle riders, Staunton, Virginia's Women on Wheels, who wanted to create a safe and welcoming space for women new to cycling. At first glance, a "women's only" cycling night, a separate "Women's cycling group" Facebook page (with male members) and a website wouldn't necessarily represent activism, but as Rachel Aldred, et al.'s (2015) statistics suggest, "in low-cycling countries, cycling is not evenly distributed across genders and age groups" (p. 1). For Crow, the Staunton group creates a low stakes environment in which women can begin to bicycle within a community of welcoming cyclists. Drawing on contemporary research in mobility studies, particularly focused on women cyclists and discipline-specific discussions about online activist strategies in social media venues such as Facebook and Twitter, along with relevant conversations in material rhetorics, this chapter documents one community's take on contemporary community literacy practices.

Whether in Britain or the United States, contemporary reports on bicycling and women studies indicate that women ride bicycles at lower rates than men. The League of American Bicyclists marks the number at 24% of all cyclists (Jones, 2015) based on the 2009 National Household Travel Survey (Milne, 2014), num-

bers similar to those in Britain (Lacker; Aldred, 2012), but in England, columnists are quick to point out that just across the way, Denmark and the Netherlands boast gender equity in bicycle usage. They use those percentages to argue for safer infrastructures in England (Lacker; Haddad, 2010; Aldred, 2015). In the States, some research suggests that women would cycle more if issues of convenience, infrastructure, and bike friendly places were addressed (What would cause you, 2011). Of those three, infrastructure is often cited as the leading reason that women don't cycle (Broache, 2012; Chalabi, 2014). However, Liz Cornish Jones (2015) reminds readers that the solutions require more than an improved infrastructure for bicyclists. As she notes, women's reasons for not cycling also are dependent on "complex equation of interlocking variables" (p. 6). In addition to risk concerns, women are "more likely to travel with passengers, often small children" (p. 5), more likely "to commute to work or run errands than men" (p. 5; Akar, et al., 2013, p. 349), and Jones encourages readers to consider the importance of understanding how "sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, classism" (p. 5) participate in women's choices. These factors affect a woman's decisions regarding transportation and influence her freedom of movement.

While some of the disparity in numbers may rest with children and errand obligations, in the Netherlands, women still participate at the same rate as men, while still attending to family needs. Companies and institutions, aware of the health costs associated with immobility, understand the importance of creating bike friendly and walkable cities, accessible to all members of a community (Step it Up, 2016; Florida, 2012; 2014). In the States, in locations in which the infrastructure has been radically improved, but women aren't yet participating in numbers comparable to the men, companies like Citi-bike in NYC, explore different methods to raise women's rentals of their bicycles from the current 21% (Fitzsimmons, 2015). Specifically, they have explored the possibility that women might consider participating if they could try out bicycling in a low stakes, low speed environment, surrounded only by other women.

Women, these articles argue, might well take to the streets even in locations with a paucity of adequate infrastructure if only the right kind of encouraging community existed. While most of the attention is focused, in national articles, on large city streets, similar arguments would hold for small towns like mine. In the midst of two new county bike and pedestrian plans that are helping to raise awareness and shape policy, a local women's bicycling group has explored a range of strategies for encouraging women and in 2015 moved to "women-only" rides, a decision that reflects a larger trend whether in the states or in England where similar groups are flourishing. In fact, Citi Bike has chosen to collaborate with local women cycling groups (Fitzsimmons, 2015) as one approach to their marketing agenda. Whether in rural or urban spaces, women who already have the habit

of bicycling may be puzzled by these groups and wonder about their necessity (Haddad, 2010), but women only bicycling communities seem to be beneficial because women find these venues more conducive to building “confidence” and because women may want “to ask gender-specific questions, from tips on what to do when skirts get caught in back brakes, to the more intimate issues regarding saddles and underwear” (Diane Foster, interviewed in Haddad, 2010).

Women also may want to ride with women for an increased sense of safety in numbers, a worry about being dropped on a ride, and a concern with cycling compatibility. Dawn Foster argues that “cycling alone on roads, especially in cities, can be unnerving and whenever I’ve ridden with male friends I always worry I won’t be able to keep up” (Cited in Haddad’s blog, 2015). This desire for a women’s only space has seen the growth of funded projects like the women only “Breeze” rides in Britain (Lacker) and Cycletta, a group focused on women only event rides in England (Haddad, 2015). The approach is similar perhaps to a range of organizations formal and informal in the States that include “women on wheels” groups, and racing support sites like Girl Bike Love and Cyclofemme (supported by the League of American Bicyclists). While these groups and their rides predominantly are focused on pleasure and exercise, they may eventually lead women to try commuting or to participate in local infrastructure improvement initiatives. In the nineties, texts like *Meeting at the Crossroads* (1992) and *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986) proved helpful for understanding how a range of women internalized messages regarding appropriate risk-taking for women, and these texts continue to seem relevant in trying to understand the strategy of women-centric events like the Disney marathons and this local group’s experience.

At first glance, bicycling may not seem like an obvious venue for feminist rhetorical interventions in the United States; however, social and physical mobilities intersect with material and cultural capital (Zayas & Stanley, 2015; Urry, 2012; Aldred, 2015), shaping the options for how women literally move from place to place. As feminist scholars we participate in a very different “moving whole” (Bennett 2010), a very different relation to mobility depending on region, and whether we inhabit sub/urban or rural environments, depending as well on a range of identity markers that may or may not allow us easy passage. We also witness others’ freedom of movement and know implicitly who can move where, who can literally travel easily across the country in an automobile without much fear of being pulled over by the police, who can afford the financial costs of evacuating a city during a hurricane, who is welcome on sidewalks or on bicycles in various neighborhoods within a range of towns and cities. Literal physical freedom of movement plays a part in an individual’s shaping of her imaginary regarding social mobility, and factors into an individual’s relationship to health and happiness (Florida). In many ways, studying women’s choic-

es for transportation, I'm reminded of Linda Brodkey's text, *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only* (1996). Women, choosing alternative forms of transportation, raise, through their placement of themselves in the roads differently, questions about the kinds of stories that are appropriate regarding mobility and freedom of movement. Some would argue that when we accept and defend car-centric framings for transportation policy, we stack the deck against the possibility of increasing social interactions (Aldred, "Disappearing Traffic" (2015); Appleyard's traffic map in Britton (2011), and limit a person's literal possibilities for moving. Street design is intertwined with social mobility whether in cities or small towns and in both venues, sidewalks, separated bike lanes/roads, and public transportation exist intermittently, affecting the possibility of safe transit for those not able to afford access to their own or others' motorized vehicles.

In addition, in the States, motor vehicle crashes remain one of the leading causes of death with 33,000 deaths in 2013 alone (Key Injury, 2015), a risk that a recent study suggests, disproportionately affect the poor and uneducated for a number of potential reasons, not the least of which is limited access to newer cars with better safety features (Badger & Ingraham, 2015), but instead of an impatience with these mortalities that one can find in the Netherlands' responses in the seventies (Powers, 2013; Van der Zee, 2015; Jordan 2013), in the States, we seem to take these risks as necessary for our economic stability. What would it mean for us as a nation to respond to these deaths and to global warming concerns with goals that move us "Beyond Traffic" (Jaffe, 2015). The last Department of Transportation budget proposal submitted by President Obama to congress shifted "away from car reliance toward the type of mobility system better suited to cities" (Jaffe, 2016). If one expands this emphasis to rural spaces as well, significant transformation of streets could mirror changes in street design in New York City (Sadik-Khan, 2016).

As it stands now, whether in cities or rural venues, if we suggest that more people might consider bicycling as a viable means of commuting to work, we may hear people say that traveling by bike is too risky because of distracted motorists (Sadik-Khan, 2016), and instead of creating reasonable changes to existing infrastructure that would improve safety (see, for example, Macon's pop up bike lanes (Rogers, 2016) or Sadik-Khan's description of NYC in her Ted talk 2013), contemporary news coverage often report bicycle / motorist crashes with strategies that implicitly and explicitly suggest that the bicyclist shouldn't have taken the risk in the first place. In the coverage of crashes, in other words, often the onus for safety rests with the cyclist (Weiss, 2015). Were her clothing choices bright enough? Was she visible? Instead of asking local transportation authorities to make relatively inexpensive changes that would radically improve safety for all users on roads, the inclination has been to see bicyclists as taking unnecessary

risks, simply by choosing to be on these roads that car-centric perspectives would see as exclusively devoted to motorized travel. Given what we also know about how women and men are trained to take up and engage with risk differently, we can anticipate that women may hear these risk messages differently than men and might be more inclined to limit their activities accordingly (Slovic, 1999; Harris, Jenkins & Glazer, 2006).

BICYCLE ADVOCACY, FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AND FEMINIST RHETORICS

Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel . . . the picture of free, untrammelled womanhood. Susan B. Anthony (qtd in Women's Rights Movement, 2013)

Throughout my career, I have been interested in adult literacy centers, and the politics of defining and teaching functional literacy. This interest has morphed as different technologies have intersected with literacy instruction. Wanting to explore embodied literacies, I chose to become certified to teach people how to bicycle more safely on roads. As Royster and Kirsch (2012) suggest, my interest reflected a trend in field—"scholars are much more willing to . . . "identify material practices that may not include written words (though perhaps stitched words), and expand the genres we consider worthy of study" (Kindle 897-900). Like all of my other experiences volunteering in literacy centers, this experience has been a humbling one, as I discover just how complicated a functional literacy can be. I have struggled to explain to new riders how to use their bodies to speak a particular message when cycling on roads. I try to speak to the set of possible moves that might help a person to join the flow of that traffic, try to talk about how one reads and assesses others' messages as one travels, try to show, with demonstrations, how to move one's body as if one were a large sign, indicating one's intentions.

Riding a bike requires an embodied way of knowing. Not only must one learn to balance and propel the bike forward, but cycling requires repetitive scanning, in order to adapt to a constant set of changing environmental factors. It requires understanding the ability to read "text" as including a range of alphabetic signs, images, lines on the road, and movement created by other participants, or in Kristie Fleckenstein's framework from *Embodied Literacies* (2003), it requires the ability to enact an image that produces the desired relationships.

Her idea of the play between imagetext and relationships seems an apt description of what happens on roads in the complex ecology of imagetexts articulated there, for all motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians. A female bicyclist may not feel comfortable taking up the smaller space offered by a bicycle when negotiating with large motorized vehicles. However, women who take up bicycling in women only group spaces may find that they more easily learn to embody a message that informs other motorists and bicyclists of intentions through the set of the shoulders, through the maintenance of a clear line, the wheel a consistent distance from the curb. If a woman joins a group of five women cycling, and all five women signal to cars behind them their intent to make a left turn, she can feel more secure with the safety in numbers, and can, over time, accumulate the knowledge to create a larger presence when out on the roads alone.

At first glance, this essay's focus seems nothing like the courage needed to enter a race for a national office as Angela Zimmann describes (Chapter 16, this collection), or the kind of the courage Jessica Ouellette's study (Chapter 14, this collection) examines. Compared to the complexity of interactions in social media, given the challenge of negotiating highly charged political statements in transnational spaces, a bike ride seems tame in comparison. However, the very act of getting on a bicycle, of taking to the streets and suggesting an alternate form of mobility in a country that remains steadfastly car-centric requires a certain courage. When these women take a weekly ride, hoping to negotiate with people driving machines that could easily kill or harm the riders, that very act is one that could have radical future implications. These small recreational trainings in alternative forms of transportation might help local women to then turn to local advocacy, altering the strategies that have enabled mobility almost exclusively for those rich enough to afford automobiles.

In what follows, I focus on my local women's cycling group who frequently ride out together on the town's streets and rural roads. I suggest that in the small acts of facilitating group rides, in these simple practices, one community is in the process of shaping the possibility for much more (echoing here the hope of "tacking in" from Royster and Kirsch's text). I also hope to suggest the importance of understanding subtle and not so subtle nuances in seemingly monolithic audiences when considering online community management strategies. While companies like Citi Bike might want to collaborate on women's cycling face-to-face events, it matters to also study how local women's groups promote bicycling through their communicative practices. In other words, if we want to understand how women come to adopt these embodied literacies necessary to move on bicycles within existing transportation infrastructures, it's not enough to pay attention to the very literate demands necessary to create the embodied text (Fleckenstein, 2003; Marvyn, 1994) on the road. To see how these women

learn the genres of the road, we need to pay attention to how local women leaders in these groups become social media community “managers” (Swarts, 2015; Blythe, Lauer and Curran, 2014) creating the online communicative practices that facilitate local action.

MOVING LOCALLY

In deciding on an organization for this essay, I chose to begin with a broader overview of bicycling and women’s participation there, in part because cycling isn’t a typical topic in our field, and while a woman’s right to move freely about the country both literally and in terms of social mobility matters to women rhetoricians, I hoped that “tacking out” might provide a context, a “broader view,” in which to situate a “tacking in” that “simulate[s] an interactive encounter with women who are not us, that is, the women whom we study” (Royster and Kirsch). While at first glance I might seem to fit the population of women I studied, one of the interesting outcomes from this research was a growing realization that part of these women’s success came from the ways they understood the nuanced challenges of women who are not like me, who have chosen other life frames, different from my own, ones that affect their ability to pull out their bicycles and ride.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE GROUP

In 2012, a local woman, new to bicycling as an adult, created a Facebook group for women cyclists in our town. At the time, the other Facebook group, the general Staunton Cycling group was dormant, though with the rise of the posts on the women’s group, the other site began to have more general posts. The women’s group quickly began to have members, and they used a range of strategies to announce themselves. I found out about the group at the winter holidays, walking around the downtown park because the women cyclists had contributed a decorated bicycle and information about the group. I joined the group and occasionally participated in rides, following the calls for rides and seeing the pictures of riders out on the road. My research interest emerged because the third year’s season was far more successful than the earlier two years’ organized rides, and I wanted to understand what had happened. In the third year, the leaders changed their approach. Instead of calling many rides which included at least one beginner ride and one more advanced ride on different days each week (which meant they committed to attending those rides as well), they consolidated to one night, offering two rides—a short one and a long one, both leaving from the same location which allowed the leaders to commit to leading fewer rides. They moved the

starting point to the same location for every ride—a brewery that was opened before and after the ride, facilitating any needs to use restrooms and encouraging a social opportunity after the ride. These changes of strategy consolidated and simplified the message. They might change up the routes, but the group's venue, time, and type of rides wouldn't. In terms of online messaging, they notified the entire group on Facebook that these rides would be women only. They also started a listserv for women who weren't members of the Facebook group, or who weren't seeing the group's announcements in their Facebook Feeds.

In order to understand why these changes might have made a difference, I began this study by first logging every post, every like, every reply from July 2012 until August 2015. In the first year, three women, initial leaders of the group, posted most frequently and they reflected the identity markers of the community's membership: these three were married to men, were in their thirties and early forties, and had children still under their care. Most of the women in this group were predominantly heterosexual; most were married or divorced, between the ages twenty and sixty with the lion's share in their thirties and forties; many had children living at home; most were juggling a career, husbands, and children's activities. This group was predominantly white, predominantly marked as what counts as the middle class. The vast majority of the members, if not all, drove automobiles, and most lived within the town or nearby.

This women's group, located in the Shenandoah Valley, formed in 2012, at a point where women from these age groups and class locations were increasingly present on Facebook, and could quickly and easily track messages and posts through their cell phones (Duggan & Rainie, 2012; Duggan & Brenner, 2012). According to information on the Facebook page, the group aimed "to connect women cyclists within and around [the town] to ride with." In explaining the group on the external website created by one of the three women who started the group, the leaders summarized the online community further: "By empowering women with this connection to one another, women in the group noted that they were riding more frequently both within the group and on their own." In July 2012, several joined by way of invitation and word of mouth, and by the following year, the group counted over a hundred members.

While it may be feasible for a local women's group to maintain a vibrant organization without social media, any attempt to understand this local group requires a focus on the digital venue. For the leaders studied, they demonstrated an awareness not only of the targeted audience but a growing understanding (over the three years studied) of the possibilities and limitations of organizing rides and building community through social media. As several studies of social media have suggested, local groups often draw on social media in order to facilitate local face-to-face interactions and not as a means of connecting to strangers

(Hinton & Hjorth, 2013, p. 3). For these leaders, the more familiar they became with the venue selected, the more they played to its strengths and developed other resources for its weaknesses, demonstrating their increasingly sophisticated ability to act as social media managers (Blythe, Lauer, & Curran, 2014) or community managers (Swarts, 2015; Frith, 2014) skilled at moderation. I discovered, by reviewing and categorizing all of the interactions, that these leaders tried in multiple ways, in multiple configurations, to reach out and draw in riders. The success in year three could be attributed to these women who never seemed to tire of trying different strategies in the first two years, building off of small successes, figuring out what worked. While they changed many different face-to-face variables—location, time, course, frequency—their communicative strategies stayed steadily focused on their group's goal. In other words, their styles for interaction didn't shift.

For the purposes of this venue, I want to focus on only a few issues, ones that suggest viable communicative strategies for local feminist interventions, and ones that highlight, in that tacking in, the differences between my ways of communicating and these women's ways, women who face different negotiation challenges than I do. I've been most interested in the ways this local group shapes its discourse in the midst of a predominantly heterosexual audience, living on the edges of what most would see as the South, a group of people with advanced degrees in a range of white collar professions. At a logistics level, I could have predicted some of the patterns and strategies for the group, but at the level of basic interactions amongst women and between men and women, I live in different social circles and communicate differently enough that I fear I might have alienated people, were I managing such a group without first understanding some of the community norms. As an academic from the Midwest, and as a queer woman, as someone who has chosen not to have children, I think I entered differently. In addition, bicycling has always been an activity I've enjoyed from early childhood until now. Mostly, I have chosen a bicycle as a form of recreation, though at times when I was in college and extremely poor, as transportation, and as a result, I am accustomed to riding out alone. Many of these women started cycling again only recently, in their thirties and forties. Because of my experience difference, I often forget the work involved in reaching a level of comfort about cycling on city streets, but the facilitators of this group were keenly aware of how it feels to start riding on city and rural streets as adults.

WHAT WORKED, GENERAL STATEMENTS

This group has obvious successful strategies. The three group leaders communicated a very specific goal—to offer more opportunities for women to ride out

with other women. They were savvy about the medium, posting frequently (but not too frequently), calling predictable rides, encouraging others to call rides, and they each chose a role that increased the chances that the group's posts would make it into individual group members' feeds, according to the strategies available through Facebook in those years. Not only were they good at articulating the goal, and developing a method for calling rides, but each of the women took a role—one in community advocacy for improved infrastructure, one in announcing formal riding events in the region, and one for taking the time to encourage participation by responding to almost every post offered in the group, whether by "liking" the post or by commenting.

They decided on their goals, and their roles, and they decided, as well, on their tone. *This was a site that would encourage riders.* They decided to offer two rides a week, one challenging ride to reach a population of more experienced riders, and one beginning ride. People would indicate, in the first two years, whether they would attend so that the leaders would know whether to wait for riders, and in those first two years, people who indicated that they would attend, might also frequently post to the group, indicating a last-minute challenge and the need to drop out for that day. These leaders had a clear agenda: *no shaming* anyone for changing their mind about their availability for participating at any point in the process. In all the posts, over the first two years, with numerous people indicating that they would attend a ride and then dropping out, the tone of the responses to those cancelations is positive, a message of "next time," implicit or explicit in every response. *They maintained an encouraging and supportive tone for women* who were often juggling far too many responsibilities and who couldn't predict how others' changes in schedule would affect their own. *They requested informal feedback, often on the rides.* The leaders checked in frequently with riders, trying to assess what might create a better bicycling environment, and in their attempts to address concerns, they tried a host of different meeting points, times, and types of rides. They kept tinkering with rides that weren't working, and kept approaches that worked. *They also offered formal assessment* through an online survey after the season's end and made changes based on findings. For example, after the second year, when they realized that the algorithms weren't functioning for some of their members, they added an old-fashioned listserv, and started duplicating calls for ride in both venues.

COMMUNICATIVE CHALLENGES—GENDER

For a host of reasons, the leaders chose to move from rides attended predominantly by women to an announcement of Women Only rides at the beginning of the third season. Anyone could call a ride on any day at any location and

include men in the call, but on Wednesday nights, only women were welcomed. The combination of a women's only ride that began and ended at a brewery, together with the decision to hold the harder, longer ride on the same night as the shorter, beginner's ride, and to announce those rides in two venues, seemed to work. Numbers jumped from 3-5 regular riders to between 15 and 30 riders. We might conclude that *face-to-face meeting points matter, that habits are formed by keeping many variables constant, that people want to be able to select a hard or easy ride at the time of the ride*, depending on how they felt after a long day. But what role did the gender only rule play?

The question of gender was one of the first challenges faced by the organizers. On the first day of the Facebook group's, one of the first posts came from a man I'll call Scott who wrote: "By its very title, it would seem that my genitalia disqualifies me from the group/rides. [frown emoticon] Boo-hoo." The leader (who I'll call Nadia) responded with the following encouraging comment: "Perhaps we should change the name to ladies and gentleman [sic] riders who are kind enough to ride at our meager paces." When I think about this response, I consider what I might say, in the same situation. While I would have responded politely, I fear that I wouldn't have been so welcoming and might have alienated a fair number of women who wouldn't have felt comfortable participating because their husbands were also reading interactions online, and it mattered to be welcoming to these men. To contrast, the leader's response conveyed a welcoming gesture that afforded this man and many others to join and follow along with the ride information posted to the group. Men felt comfortable calling rides and joining in on rides. It reminded me that in discussions of women's ways of communicating, even with a seemingly uniform population of people—predominantly white women of similar age groups with advanced degrees and living versions of a middle-class reality, we can miss the nuances of "woman." We aren't all the same, and I wasn't quite sure whether some of my ways of speaking were because of a queer framing, because I don't think about a male husband as weighing in on my bicycling activities, because I'm not really from the south (this region), or because of my academic enculturations.

While the group remained welcoming, after two years, leaders decided to experiment with this question of women only rides. On February 19, 2015 as the leaders turned towards the start of the next season for riding, the leader Nadia made the following initial announcement:

Calling all Women Cyclists Join Us March 18th at 5:30 for some shop talk at [the local bike shop]. Come learn how to change a tire and hear about safe road cycling in groups in anticipation of our new Group ride. Women On Wheels A

new Wednesday evening women only group ride! Rides begin
 March 25th Drinks afterwards at [the local brewery]

On March 12, 2015, Nadia sent out a reminder about the shop talk, and then added this sentence: “If you want to receive emails about the route we will be doing each week please email groupemail@gmail.com and we will add you to the group ride list.” One man liked the post, and Nadia sent out a friendly note: “Sorry, [Name of rider] we dearly love you but you are not invited. Muah,” and he responded with: “Ha ha, I wasn’t coming, I am just glad you all are doing this type of stuff!!!! You all have a bunch of fun!!”

In February, another of the leaders posted an announcement about the formation of an email listserv and asked for women’s interests when they signed up for the listserv, emphasizing that there would be two venues—Facebook for general calls and the listserv for the women’s only ride. One of the husbands responded with: Count me in!!!, and Nadia responds with: “These rides will be for ladies only. We love our men and are happy to have them join in afterwards for a drink but Wednesday rides will be women only!!! Yes, we are being exclusionary.” The husband responded with “OK, let me know if I can help out in any way,” and another husband also echoed that sentiment: “Interested in helping.”

When announcing the listserv after two years of exclusive reliance on Facebook, they addressed a challenge they were experiencing with Facebook’s algorithm—not all the people in the group were seeing the posts. And not all the women interested in the group wanted to be in the Facebook Group or they weren’t on Facebook. But it became an opportunity for them to also emphasize the shifting nature of the rides, and by this time, the men who were responding knew that they were welcome to participate in the group—just not ride out on Wednesdays. They understood the group’s agenda, looked forward to the beers afterwards, and were able to accept the terms.

Gender, it seemed mattered. Some women were only willing to consider participating once they knew that their enthusiastic husbands were not allowed to participate. In my informal conversations with the leaders about whether they would continue the women-only rides, they indicated that people who filled out the year end survey felt very strongly about keeping the women only rides. They wanted a place to ride and a time to ride with other women, at paces they enjoyed, without feeling like they were slowing down their husbands. Were I announcing the shift to a women only ride, I suspect that my language would match that offered by group leaders, but in the exchange with the individual men, I think I would have failed to include enough endearing terms—“we dearly love you;” “we love our men.” These words would not come to mind, but clearly the men felt seen and wanted to offer support.

Were I group manager, I fear that I would have failed not only with the men but also with the women. When I discuss this research with friends, and I say this statement, sometimes I'll get a puzzled look from someone, and I'll offer a small example—I realized, in studying this group, that I try never to use the word “ladies,” but these women often leaned on this word. While posts referred to women several times, but predominantly when linking to an article about women. To contrast, ladies was used in a range of situations, mostly as an introductory address but also some of the following kinds of instances:

What time were you *ladies* thinking? Have fun ladies! You *ladies* have fun this afternoon; No centuries, *ladies*; *Ladies* (& Gents)—I'm new to biking again (what fun!). I nominate the fast *ladies* do a race in Waynesboro!; all pretty darn fast *ladies* are the folks I have heard from so far; We have a bunch *ladies* racing in Page County Saturday! Fourteen *fabulous ladies* *rocked it!* (etc).

While people also relied on the word “guys” (and with more frequency), which I might use, the words “darn fast ladies” would never be something I would write. I never would think to use the combination of “fabulous ladies” and rocking. Were I to take up a role of social media manager for this kind of group, having chosen to study the language choices carefully, I realize that one could learn the codes. I learned, from this study, that a new social media manager might benefit from studying the habits of posters—what words they use to address one another, how they welcome members or inform members that they're not welcome at some events.

In this group's case, the specific strategies for addressing the secondary audience draws on face saving gestures that afford men the ability to remain supportive. For the primary audience of new women riders, the leaders and participants are far more nurturing than I would expect. For example, every year, at least once or twice, new women riders post a query, asking about distance and speed. Sometimes when they ask, it's clear that they have no idea how quickly they ride; they have no speedometers. When the answer includes mph, the thought of a short ride—typically 10 miles—may intimidate but the rider also has no sense of distance. Once on the bike, 10 miles can pass very quickly. This group has had to hone its message on this repeated query. While the group routinely calls out rides, they try to encourage new riders who often join with very limited experience riding bicycles as adults. For example, in 2013, The following post and replies offer a typical example of this kind of exchange:

Jessica: What exactly is a “beginner ride”? I am hoping not to

bite off more than I can chew?

Hailey: 10 miles ish. You never know until you try [smile emoticon]. All bikes, hybrid, mountain, road welcome.

Nadia: We'll get you through; it's a hand-holding ride!

Jessica: I might need a pre-beginner ride [smile emoticon]. Perhaps I can work up to beginner by the time it gets warm-ish.

Melissa: Hi Jessica- I will ride with you and turn back with you whenever you want. I plan on riding the beginner ride tomorrow morning.

Nadia: And I'm doing today's (Wed) 5:30 ride from Valley Dance Theatre, and I can turn around, or stop and rest, whenever too.

Jessica: You guys are very kind and welcoming. I may attempt it next week.

New riders may in fact be intimidated by the thought of Hailey's casual statement of 10 miles, and often, with new riders, a sense of mileage and speed fail to help assess preparedness. Trying to reassure new riders is difficult because the new riders don't want to be a burden to the more experienced riders. However, the group members are sincere in their desire to help new riders. Melissa in the above example offers to ride with Jessica and turn back at any time; Most of the women in the group rode when they were young, until early teens, and many took up bicycling again when they joined this group, so they're not too far away from their own memories of starting to bicycle again. Nonetheless, this encouragement exchange is a challenging one, perhaps the most challenging of the types of communications for the group because it requires an embodied experience to assess preparedness. Because this exchange occurs yearly, by 2015, the message is shaped more clearly:

Ann asks: On average, how fast do the weekly rides go in mph?

Nadia responds with a message that's a little more developed than the answer in 2013: "We are not about speed. Our motto is no one is left behind. If I had to guess the 11-mile route averages 11mph and 20 mile Route averages 13mph. But again, speed is not the goal, getting out and riding safely on the road with women is the goal.

Hailey echoes Nadia's encouragement: "Come join us! Come out and ride! We'll let you ride any speed you want."

If a person then said that she couldn't meet at the time the group is riding, invariably someone will post a message asking for potential times the individual could ride. Consistently, this group indicates a desire to welcome new riders. For a community, trying to be welcoming, this response fits with the group leaders' approach to communication. This group responds, across the board, with encouragement, an approach established in the first interactions amongst the small group of initial leaders and continues in the three years of posts studied.

Community managers of this online social media group offer an example of a consistent message for the audience, a willingness to revise and rework their approaches for encouragement, and an ability to revise and rework venues and ride formats based on assessment suggest viable strategies for others engaged in community management online.

Their commitment to bicycle advocacy may not, at first glance, seem like a social justice movement, a feminist intervention, but in a climate in which women opt out of sustainable transportation not for a lack of interest but for a range of other concerns, this set of small moves matter. They open the space for women to have more freedom of movement. In addition, this group has led to women participating in local infrastructure interventions. Several of the leaders have volunteered with the city's advisory committee on bicycling and pedestrian concerns; others have signed up to learn how to teach bicyclists how to ride on roads.

When a woman decides that she can expand her mobility options to include bicycling, when she begins riding, worrying over speed and distance, and then gains the confidence to develop into someone who leads bicycling rides, that labor is an example of embodied literacies reshaping local possibilities not only for herself but for the larger community as well. This brief look at a local group suggests that freedom of movement might begin because of the safety of a welcoming women's only community.

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