

Bonnie Carpenter
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EDUC 650-802
Mini Ethnography

Introduction

This ethnographic exploration is designed to explore the cultural phenomena within the paracycling community through observation from the point of view of the athletes with disability. The cultural portrait provided within this mini ethnography is based on observations from June 24, 2018 during the Tour of America's Dairyland bicycle race. Specifically this project focuses on the para-cyclists (as known as hand-cyclists) who participated in the National Para-cycling Championships series.

Physical Characteristics of the Educational Site/

Cultural Behaviors, Knowledge, and Artifacts

The observed event took place in Waukesha, Wisconsin which is a middle class, predominately white suburb of Milwaukee with a population of approximately 70,000. While direct observations were made at this location, the event extended over several days in multiple southeastern Wisconsin locations. These facts are important in understanding the context of observing certain behaviors within the larger whole of the extended event. Interactions between individuals, race organizers, and spectators may be affected by previous unobserved exchanges.

The Carl Zach Classic Race held on June 24th was a part of an 11 day event that moved between Southeast Wisconsin cities each day. Each of the 11 days consisted of 9 or 10 races with competitors divided into multiple categories. Specific to the hand-cycling category, there were two divisions or H or C races. "Men" and "Women" stand as two separate categories but race on the same course simultaneously. The able-bodied male categories are determined by 2 factors: age and a process for acquiring points based on racing experience. Registration in the

para-cycling event is determined by the official U.S. Paralympics sanctioning body. Athletes in this category are registered prior to the event by submitting the National Medical Diagnostics Form to U.S. Paralympics and are considered eligible if they display the one or more of the following: impaired muscle power, impaired passive range of movement, limb deficiency, leg length difference, short stature, hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, vision impairment, or intellectual impairment. Levels within each category and determination of the categories is dependent on specificity of disability. There were 20 male cyclists in the H or C categories and no women for this race. Events for visually impaired athletes were not included in these events.

In the downtown location, parking was mostly on the street however the local library and middle school provided larger areas for both spectators and participants. The para-cyclists had a reserved parking area which was located at the United Church of Christ parking lot, adjacent to the race route. This parking lot was available to racers after the church activities were completed for the day but also after the full day's racing activities had started. This category of racers were the only group to have a segregated racing area.

Behaviors

Based on direct observations and interviews with participants, the individuals participating in the race did not display different behaviors than other able-bodied racers. Their pre-race banter, race debriefing, and equipment preparation process were consistent with able-bodied cyclists, however their equipment was specialized and thus the way the equipment was managed was different. Their preparation may have taken a bit longer, however each cyclist's methodical processes are varied it was hard to find a consistent pattern regarding setup. The cyclists I spoke with were eager to share their experiences and spoke highly of their competitors. Based on conversations with the cyclists, their equipment had many of the same features as able-

bodied participants (frame composition, component options, etc.) however the shape and design of the cycle showed the most differences.

The amount of similarities between the observed athletes and those of other categories was remarkable. Both groups went through physical and psychological processes to prepare for the race event. With that said, one noticeable difference was evident and it occurred at both the event and at an event the following day. The group of disabled racers seemed “less competitive” and more congenial with one another. They socialized with more ease and genuine pleasantries about their whole existence. Rather than focusing on the race, they often spoke of their travels to the event or other interests.

While I could not assess each participant’s connection/reason for their disability, many seemed to have become disabled due to a traumatic injury. This was only evident through label identifiers like PVA (Paralyzed Veterans of America) signage. As Kreston discusses in the writing “Disability as Part of Diversity Curriculum” one’s connection with disability is very personal and individualized. This is significant in that there are cognitive differences between individuals who have lived from birth with their disability versus those who were injured or are considered temporarily disabled. Through direct observation of behaviors it was difficult to isolate specificity of their disability. At the level of national competition, most athletes have proved competent in the sport. Each athlete demonstrated pride, as consistent with able-bodied athletes, in their successful physical accomplishments.

Throughout the US, para-cycling events fit within the realm of “Special Olympics.” These athletes are confined to segregated events and the number of sanctioned events for able-bodied athletes far outnumber the events for para-cyclists. While there is evidence of corporate sponsorships or endorsements, the para-cycling events do not compare in overall funding. The

sympathetic approach is taken more often with these events and organizers view their support as charitable rather than legitimate. Clearly the privileged group within the cycling world are able-bodied athletes.

Power and Privilege

Within the context of cycling, power and privilege have a significant influence. There are definite distinctions between dominant and subordinate groups. For example, there are many organized competitive and noncompetitive events organized for able-bodied participants and only a few for individuals with disability. Even within the categories of disability, there are subgroups of the subordinates. Not all events have categories for visually impaired athletes or those in need of tricycles. While the para-cycling community has been active advocates for their needs, other disabled classifications are still underserved. Also in the regard to dominant culture, accessibility to the sport is influenced by the dominance matrix. Those individuals of lesser economic status will not be able to access or purchase the needed equipment to participate. Most of the necessary equipment needed for Paralympic events is custom built and is not easily available in every community.

Explicit and Implicit Rules in Operation

In terms of explicit and implicit rules, there are several observations to be made. The explicit understandings and historical perspective is outlined in “Ableism: Introduction” by Castañeda, Hopkins, and Peters and witnessed through the many prejudicial views and context of what it means to be “handicapped” within the U.S. culture. The tacit or implicit rules are harder to identify yet are seen in the statistical data pertaining to this event. While there were 20 cyclists of disability, there were hundreds of able-bodied participants. There were 9 races for able-bodied competitors and only 2 for the disabled. While implicit bias is more difficult to see,

Kreston's article highlights the perspective of both the able-bodied and disabled. Oppressive factors come in a skewed manner as able-bodied individuals try to help or alleviate the needs of disabled, also known as "oppression of kindness" (p. 174). Implicit bias for this group is interwoven between both the oppressed and oppressors as each comes to understand their relations to the other.

Self-Understanding

My previous experiences with cycling events have focused on the able-bodied perspective. From experiencing the "other," I have learned that my views are far more sympathetic than empathetic. Kreston's "oppression of kindness" was easily evident in my previous views on cycling events for athletes with disabilities. I favored the separate but equal approach to the sport. In reflecting on Kreston's words along with my event notes, my intellectual and emotional processing aligned with other professional caregivers mentioned in Kreston's case studies. I perceived my support of the event as charitable and thus good. This view is more exclusionary and sets athletes with disabilities apart from the able-bodied cycling community. After completing this assignment, I can easily see opportunities for normalizing across oppressed groups in sporting events.

Resistance

I could not identify any resistance within my own behaviors but it was easily identified in my daughter's behaviors. These observations validated the results of the implicit bias testing I took earlier in the term through Harvard University's Project Implicit project. I slightly favor able-bodiedness over those with disabilities. We watched and observed racer preparation and behaviors for some time and then moved into the parking lot to interact with racers. Our first interaction was with a middle aged male from Texas. He had completed his set up and was

waiting by his bike. I initiated the conversation and asked questions about his racing equipment, specifically his bike. He was in his wheelchair during that time and my daughter was hesitant to talk with him. Specifically when he offered for her to sit in the bike, and she hid behind my leg. She is often shy in new situations, and this behavior shows the resistance to new and different encounters that is common of many individuals that are isolated from individuals with disabilities. As we talked she became less resistant, but she was still guarded in the interaction. After moving onto another section of the setup area, she was interested to learn how he moved between the driver's seat and his wheelchair. She would ask me the questions, but not him. From this observation, I assume that non-disabled are curious to know what it is like for the disabled.

Dominant vs. Subordinate Groups

Whether from fear or guilt, there is disconnect in the dialogue between dominant and subordinate groups. The more isolated individuals are, the more isolated they become. Authentic and open conversation between the various levels of ableism needs to be addressed so that stigma and fear can be curtailed. Building allies is an important part of moving forward. "An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression" (Peters, Castañeda, Hopkins, and McCants, p. 532). In this writing, the authors advocate for the questioning of and actions against historic patterns and practices.

Patricia McIntosh verifies the idea of disconnect in her paper, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack," able-bodied individuals are taught to not think of the implications of disability. "White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (p. 2). Prior to this ethnographic experience, I failed to acknowledge the privileges I have in society as an able-

bodied individual. The implications on my daily life are exponential and effect every aspect of daily living.

Models for Change

In thinking about the MCOB model for change presented by Jackson and Holvino, the Tour of America's Dairyland is working in the realm of Transitional between Compliance and Positive Action. Event organizers are actively committed to a special effort to include para-cyclists in the event. They have moved passed the phase of compliance as they actively pursued the National Championship status, provided stipends to attract athletes to the event, and scheduled the race during prime times for spectator exposure. While there is more to be done to move the event from Transitional to Multicultural, there is progress from previous exclusionary models.

My able-bodied perspective on disabilities was reinforced in my upbringing as I classified the disabled as "less than" or "elderly" and who deserved my sympathetic attention or volunteer assistance. After completing this assignment, I can see relevance and necessity for equalized opportunities. Examples of equality could include an event for both abled-bodied and disable cyclists competing together on hand-cycles regardless of the physical capacity of the individual athlete or even sharing the same reserved parking for all groups in order to facilitate greater conversation across segregated groups.

Conclusion

Ethnographic study provides insight and observations that deviate from our habitual norms. By observing this specific event, I can see the need for equalization of sport opportunities for individuals with disabilities. I also see the importance of opportunities for inclusionary experiences for all youth. "We are more alike than we are different, and that

concept, I find helps normalize the disability experience more than any other” (Kreston, p. 186). Building empathetic understandings requires authentic interactions which highlight human commonality.

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