Killing Giants and Fighting Mountains: A case study of cycling in Ontario

Ontario is a city built for the automobile. The city drinks gasoline and breathes fumes, its arteries stretch North to South, East to West. Euclid and Mountain, Mission and Holt flow endlessly with a constant stream of cars. Meanwhile, with no bike lanes, on every sidewalk, under the shade of century old oaks, cyclists of all ages and backgrounds pedal onward with a steady cadence. Who are these riders who haunt the sidewalks with mountain bikes, howl down streets on fixed gears enduring verbal abuse from aggravated drivers? Do they ride out of necessity or choice? Why do they ride bicycles in a city so obviously suited for and dominated by the automobile? These questions of demographics and street design lead to the greater issue of how does Ontario’s biking community, a community that is comprised of disempowered populations, respond to the structural violence inherent in the city’s streets?

The basic need for a safe, efficient and autonomous means of transportation is being denied to those who cannot, for a variety of reasons that we will explore, use an automobile. The title of this research paper: Killing Giants and Fighting Mountains, provides part of the answer to the fundamental question of how riders respond to the dangers of riding in the city Ontario? The first phrase “Killing Giants” is a reference to a group of high school kids who roam the streets of Ontario and neighboring cities on weekly midnight rides on their fixed gear bikes. They call themselves “We Kill Giants” referencing the gigantic scale of the Inland Empire and how they ‘kill’ these vast amounts of space on their bicycles. The second half of the title: “Fighting Mountains” is a reference to the first interview I conducted on biking in the city. In response to the
question of which streets were particularly dangerous, Garrison Bumstead replied
“Mountain. Don’t ride up Mountain, it’s a fight every time.” This perfectly represents the
rider’s dilemma in Ontario; on one hand bicycles can offer empowerment and a form of
resistance against a car-dominated culture, and on the other hand bicyclists exist in a state
of fear and persecution.

Don Mitchell and Lynn Staeheli, two geographers referenced in the literature
review, explored how the ownership of the use of public space was determined by the
dominant social groups. As they define the use of space they exclude other groups from
fully making use of them. In Ontario the dominant group of automobile drivers
determines the use of public streets and in this popular imagining of what the public
streets are for the automobile is placed over the cyclist. The cyclist does not constitute
what the car-culture dominated society defines as the “legitimate public”.¹ The driver’s
domination of public space is contested by many but due to the automobiles position of
power it is treated as the norm. Drivers are placed in this position of power because of the
physical danger they put cyclists in but also because of the structure of Ontario’s city
streets. The lack of bike lanes throughout Ontario excludes cyclists from using the public
space of streets.

Autobiographical statement about experience of researcher leading to topic

My research grew out of my bi-weekly commute to class in Ontario. I was
accustomed to riding through a serene college campus. My first experience of riding to
class in the city of Ontario, down Euclid Avenue was a trial by fire. Armed the following
day with some tips for riding with street traffic I have followed the harrowing bi-weekly

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trek regularly for the last semester. Experiencing the difficulties of riding in a city that is obviously not designed for a cyclist’s needs led me to become interested in those who use bicycles to travel throughout the city on a regular basis.

For two years prior to this research I have worked at Pitzer College’s bicycle cooperative, The Green Bike Program (GBP). I have been an avid bike rider all of my life but since working at a co-op, I have immersed myself in bike culture. As I do not have a driver’s license I rely on the bicycle as my primary means of transportation. The Ontario Wheelhouse was started by members of and with the support of the GBP through donations of funds and tools. This connection, as well as the understanding that with my mechanical knowledge I would have something to offer at the internship, I started working at the Wheelhouse. In order to gain a better understanding of the needs and assets of the community I much of my research has been conducted on the streets, amongst the cyclists of Ontario.

Statement of topic and research question(s)

My research started by asking the general question of who rides bicycles in Ontario and what is the experience of riding in the city. Upon hearing that the Ontario city government has the funds and will to put in bike lanes around Ontario but lacks the knowledge of the cycling community I focused my efforts on finding out where the community could most benefit from bicycle lanes, with the intent of presenting this information to the Ontario city government upon completion. Riding and talking with members of the bicycle community and hearing the perceived injustice and the fear they face from automobiles I became interested in questions of public space and the citizens’
as well as non-citizens’ right to the road.

Purpose and need for study

This research is necessary because it studies the cyclists in Ontario regardless of why they ride. This includes those who ride out of necessity, in other words a population of riders not normally considered in cycling spheres. This study documents their struggle to claim the road as public space for equal access of cyclists. The road is defined by the automobile but this does not stop the need of those who are unable to use one needs for transportation. It also analyzes the use of bicycle to cope with the second-class citizen status of a non-driver or a form of resistance and empowerment.

Practically this study will also detail where bicycle lanes would benefit the community most. The need for bicycle lanes was apparent throughout my interactions with cyclists across Ontario. The vast majority of those I spoke to about my research were very eager to help regardless of their income level or race. Retirees and gang members alike expressed a need for safe streets. I was first saw the enthusiasm of the community early on in the project when I was passing out surveys to cyclists about where they would most like to see bike lanes. A man who I was talking to thought I was collecting signatures to petition for bike lanes, he happily agreed to complete the survey then asked if he could sign 3 other consent forms with the names of his family members so I could count those as well.

Structure of research paper

This research paper first has a literature review of current thought about who owns public space and the legal relevance of this question. This section is followed by an explanation of my research procedures, which will include a discussion of my internship
site, positionality, theoretical standpoint and methods used to conduct research. Next I will present the collected data and interpret my findings, returning to the original research questions and its significance within the culture of Ontario. I will end with a conclusion focusing on recommendations for further advocacy in Ontario.

**Literature Review**

The resurgence of the bicycle in popular culture championed by fixed gear riders have grown in number throughout American cities. With an increasing number of cyclists on the road there have been more accidents and increasing tensions over how the road should be shared. While there are a wealth of blogs, forums and bicycle advocacy attempting to answer this question, as of yet there are no scholarly articles providing their input. However, the debate over who owns public space, of which the streets are only one part of, has been thoroughly explored by social geographers such as Don Mitchell and Lynn Staeheli. Mitchell and Staeheli view public space in parks and city sidewalks in relation to its impact on citizenship and democracy.

Mitchell argues that public space is defined by exclusion. Its function in society is defined by those with a position of power in society, leaving those who are not in a position of power intruders on this space. Mitchell uses the example of Berkeley’s People’s park in his 1995 article *The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy*. The park had historically been a place of refuge for the city’s homeless and for free speech. The parks function had repeatedly come under attack by the University and the city, each assault being fought against by student and city protesters. The park as a space was under attack because it threatened the conventional norms of Berkeley’s society. At the source of this is two opposing ideological views of
what the park represents. The protesters viewed the park as an “unconstrained space” (Mitchell 1995:115) for freedom of expression and life. For the city planners the space should function as “a controlled and orderly retreat where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city” (1995:115)

Exclusion of those who do not fit the “legitimate public” (1995:115) is also present in Staeheli’s work on the city streets of Boulder, where the conflict was between business owners and counter culture locals over who the city streets belonged to. In Boulder the youth were alienated from public spaces due to their age “The rebelliousness of youth, coupled with the fear they can evoke, places young adults in an ambiguous position with respect to the communities in which they are legally citizens.” (1997:35)

Legal status of a citizen is not a determining factor in that citizens right to public space. The following passage demonstrates the legal justification for a vehicles right to the road:

Personal liberty largely consists of the Right to locomotion – to go where and when one pleases – only so far restrained as the Rights of others may make it necessary for the welfare of all other Citizens. The Right of the Citizen to travel upon the public highways and to transport his property thereon, by horsedrawn carriage, wagon, or automobile, is not a mere privilege which may be permitted or prohibited at will, but the common Right which he has under his Right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Under this Constitutional guarantee one may, therefore, under normal conditions, travel at his inclination along the public highways or in public places, and while conducting himself in an orderly and
decent manner, neither interfering with nor disturbing another’s Rights, he will be protected, not only in his person, but in his safe conduct.

However, just as ones citizenship is no guarantee of a right to public space neither are ones legal rights. Direct literature on my topic does not exist but by examining different aspects of how public space is used, and the laws behind them it is possible to construct a lens in which to understand the cyclist’s right to public space.

Site History

Max Kaplan created the Ontario Wheelhouse cooperative in the fall of 2010 as part of the Pitzer in Ontario Program. The Ontario Wheelhouse promotes bicycling within the city of Ontario and it's neighboring communities. The Wheelhouse offers an educational, safe and substance free workspace for the community to learn to use and service bicycles.

The Ontario Wheelhouse is striving to bring transportation justice to Ontario. The Wheelhouse is working to become a self-sustaining community-run space that provides access to an alternative form of transportation to the automobile. The shop is currently working to bring in more community involvement and holding bike workshops for the the day labor population that lives and works in Ontario.

The Wheelhouse receives funding donations from Pitzer’s bike cooperative the Green Bike Program (GBP). Bumstead’s bicycles and local businesses have generously provided donations of tools and funds. Bikes that are donated to the shop are either repaired by community members and put back into the community or stripped for parts to help repair other bikes.
The Wheelhouse has a horizontal leadership structure. Those who have shifts at the Wheelhouse; Matt Goldbach, Max Estela, Max Kaplan, Roger Rawski, Anthony Fuentes, Sylvie Froncek, Nate Riddle work together to decide the direction the shop should focus its efforts. Nicole Scheunemann is also a member of the shop’s leadership. Although she does not have a shift at the shop, Nicole lives at the Ontario House next to the Wheelhouse and helps to coordinate the efforts of shop.

Despite the shop’s horizontal leadership structure, there are internal hierarchies. These hierarchies form out of the close ties staff members who work at the GBP have together. All of the staff members with the exception of Roger Rawski and Nicole Scheunemann work together at the GBP. Because of this the internal hierarchies of the GBP have been grafted onto the Wheelhouse. Fortunately the GBP is a democratic organization with a horizontal leadership structure as well, all the members that work both at the Wheelhouse and the GBP are senior staff of the GBP and work together on the basis of equality. However, this is a group that has been working together for multiple years and sees each other at Pitzer College on a daily basis. This is potentially intimidating for new wheelhouse workers who must find their place in such a tight knit group.

The Wheelhouse is slowly building up a greater role in the community. As of now it is not being used to its full potential but community interest is growing. I have personally seen an increase in those who use the shop from my time spent there. Although most of the Pitzer students that work at the Wheelhouse will not be in Ontario over the summer, community members will keep the shop open throughout the summer.
As high school students will no longer be in school, local student involvement is expected to increase.

Although assimilating into the Wheelhouse was not a difficult process, because I had worked with all the other employees at the Green Bike Program previously, engaging the community proved to be a more challenging prospect. The Wheelhouse has not yet become a well-used community space. Most of the days I worked in the shop no one came by. As the semester progressed more community members came to the shop but not nearly enough for me to gain a comprehensive understanding of Ontario’s cycling community. In order to gain this understanding it was necessary for me to go out into Ontario and interview community members about their experiences.

Positionality

Before detailing my ethnographic research in Ontario it is important to consider my positionality and theoretical standpoint. My relative positionality changed so much depending on who I was working with. By the nature of the project I was dealing with diverse groups of people across the cycling community. Working within this community bikes can be incredibly unifying, especially when discussing the difficulties and dangers of riding sharing the road automobiles. No matter whom I interviewed concerning their experiences biking in Ontario, both those who used bicycles out of necessity and those who chose to ride, all reported that they enjoyed riding. This communal interest lubricated relations at the Wheelhouse itself. The Wheelhouse as a cooperative and safe learning space mitigated much of the power dynamics associated with my position of privilege, as a white heterosexual male. Thankfully in this sense my mechanical knowledge, and my crucial acknowledgement that I am learning as well, was one of the
bigger factors in creating a relationship of equality. I feel that my gender made work in the shop easier, had I been a woman I would have to deal with the stereotypes of a historically male dominated field.

That being said, I do believe my positionality had a negative effect on creating a strong relationship with the workers on the Rancho corner. With my functional but not precise Spanish establishing a strong relationship with the workers was difficult. With some time and lots of gesturing I was able to communicate my points but I was not able to reach the level of joking and easy speech that cements a relationship. Coming to the Wheelhouse and using it regularly would have to be a leap of faith on their part. The language barrier worked against me as did not being a resident of the immediate area. However, over the course of the semester as I became a more common face, the workers seemed increasingly interested in the project.

Although I shared a love of bicycles with the community I worked with, the function of a bicycle differed in our lives. I viewed biking as a right, something I approach with a sense of privilege, one of entitlement to the road. This stems from my knowledge of the law, and being raised in a culture of privilege that gives me the sense of entitlement to take the whole lane while riding and fight back against cars who do not respect this right. For the most part the cycling community in Ontario does not have this sense of entitlement. Cars are usually seen to be “Kings of the roads” with cyclists not having an equal use of space. Discussions of a cyclist’s rights revolve around educating drivers to be more responsible with their power, rather than the cyclists empowerment. Through my time in the field, to be more exact my time commuting to and from the field, I have gained a more intimate knowledge of what it means to be a cyclist in Ontario. This
is an understanding of heavy traffic, unsafe riding conditions and harassment. Dealing with the harassment from cars and understanding it as something that is a fact of life rather than a something you are in a movement to change puts a radically different spin on riding. Dan Koppel phrases this beautifully in his description of undocumented cyclists in his legendary article *Invisible riders* “Most of the riders I met viewed their commute as a battle but exhibited none of the smug antiautomotive posturing many committed middle-class bike commuters wear as a badge of honor.”

I do not have a driver’s license and rely on my bicycle for travel to anywhere in Claremont or the surrounding area. As a result I am biased to accept the cyclists interpretation over that of a car driver’s. While this gives me a unique insight to those in the city who have no choice but to rely on their bicycles for all of their transportation needs, I also do not have the experience of understanding how a driver perceives cyclists on the road.

**Methods and Methodologies**

My methods consisted of ethnographies, interviews and narratives. I conducted ethnographies of the Ontario cycling community through time spent in the field interacting and trying to understand cycling from an insider’s perspective. This involved commuting regularly through Ontario, to understand the daily trials and tribulations of the Ontario bicycle commuter. When community members did come to the Wheelhouse it served as an excellent venue to gain a deeper understanding of the cycling experience. Bumstead’s Bicycles, the only bicycle shop in Ontario, also served as a great way to meet a variety of Ontario riders. Bumstead’s serves as a retail store, repair shop as
well as a location for the social gathering of cyclists. Weekly road and mountain bike
rides leave from the shop and are attended by either Garrison or Lloyd Bumstead.

I conducted informal interviews with cyclists in Ontario. The interviews lasted on
average 10 minutes, and varied in content depending on what the interviewee felt most
passionate about. I recruited participants for interviews in Bumstead’s, the Wheelhouse,
the Rancho Cucamonga day laborer corner and on the streets of North and South Ontario.
For the majority of interviews I would ride around neighborhoods and De Anza Park
looking for cyclists. When I spotted one I would ride next to them and explain the
research project I was doing and ask she/he if they would like to participate. I took notes
by riding with no hands or holding up a tape recorder in one hand. This was an effective
interviewing technique because it immediately established a bond between the
interviewee and myself by identifying us both as cyclists. Furthermore this interview
style was a commentary on the use of the streets as a public space for dialogue and
interaction. This type of interview would not be possible through the separation of a car.
It is only through the public nature of a bicycle that such a dialogue is possible.

Lastly I analyzed narratives to try and understand why people consider events to
be meaningful, such as being harassed by the police or a driver while riding up Mountain
Avenue I have tried to understand why this is meaningful to the author, and what it says
about the state of cycling in Ontario. I found this style to be particularly useful when
interviewees were enthused about the project and would tell stories about accidents or
harassment they have experienced. By analyzing the content of these stories I was able to
draw conclusions about the perceived power relations between cars and cyclists in
Ontario.
I approached my research from a critical theory framework, which is the evaluation of power relations in the area of study. I was transparent about the purpose of my research with all of those interviewed in that it was intended to benefit the cycling community. Through a critical theory framework I analyzed the challenges cyclists face as well as the empowerment cycling can provide. I studied how the physical structure of Ontario’s streets are discriminatory against cyclists, and the feelings of the cycling community in response to this environment. My worldview in this research was advocacy; the work I have done throughout the semester is intended to directly benefit the cyclists of Ontario. Now that my positionality and the methods I used to gather data have been explained I will discuss my findings and analyze the collected data.

Presentation of data

After researching who rides in Ontario I found it was a diverse but linked population of the community. Cyclists in Ontario, a community mostly comprised of Latinos under the age of 50, rode for four usually interrelated or overlapping reasons: age, financial situation, legal status and recreation. The first was age, in that for the youth of Ontario the bicycle offers an incredible amount of freedom of movement for a relatively cheap price compared to the automobile. The bicycle as an alternative to driving was helped by the popularity of fixed gear bikes, commonly called ‘fixies’. The cost of a fixed gear bike totals average 500 dollars from Bumstead’s Bicycles, much cheaper in initial cost, gas and maintenance than an automobile would cost.

For those too young to drive, or not old enough to earn a significant income to buy a car the bicycle offers an incredible amount of freedom. In the words of a young rider on Euclid, when asked why he rode “To get out, freedom”, this same sentiment was
expressed by another young ‘fixie’ rider whom I had to chase for 3 blocks as he raced down San Antonio, weaving through traffic in order to interview him, “It’s fun. I can go wherever I want whenever I want.” For young riders the bicycle functions as a source of autonomy in a car-dominated culture, a culture they could not afford to or do not wish to buy into. The dangers of riding on the street were taken as a challenge of skill. Garrison Bumstead who rides fixed and sells many of the ‘fixies’ ridden in Ontario describes the Ontario “high school kids out raising hell being high school kids”

Another large portion of cyclists in Ontario ride for financial reasons. The cost of buying and maintaining a bicycle are miniscule in comparison with those of a car. The added cost of insurance and gas forces the car out of a practical level for many in Ontario. This reason for biking was cited most at the day labor center in Rancho and De Anza Park by those with unsteady sources of income. The rising cost of gas as a factor, however, was echoed throughout all of those I talked to in Ontario. Especially for short distances, biking and saving gas was the much-preferred method of transport.

Lack of a license was also a primary reason for using a bicycle. As with financial reasons for not driving there were a variety of reasons for not having a license such as being undocumented, mentally disabled or losing their license due to a D.U.I. Many of these categories of Ontario rider-ship overlap are demonstrated by one of the two cyclists I met who use their bikes as a way to transport recycling around the city for deposits “No tengo licencia, no tengo carro y la gasolina también es caro” (I don’t have a license, I don’t have a car and also gasoline is expensive). The following excerpt from an interview with two cyclists in De Anza Park, Jorge works as a painter when he can find work and Sergio works as a push cart ice cream vendor since losing his job.
Max - ¿Porque usa una bicicleta? (Why do you use a bike?)
Alejandro - Por el ejercicio… (For the exercise…)
Sergio – Ja y por la necesidad jaja (Ha and by necessity haha)
Alejandro - Y por la necesidad si, porque no tiene carro. (and by necessity yes, because he doesn’t have a car)
Max - ¿Por que no? (why not?)
Sergio - Porque quitaron, Y ahorita no habido chamba (Because they took it, and right now there is no work)

Sergio mentions that there is no work because he cannot raise the funds to retrieve his car from when it was taken in a police “D.U.I” checkpoint. The police justify these checkpoints by saying they are used to catch drunk drivers but they are conducted as early as 9 A.M. and are locations in largely immigrant communities. These repossessions of these cars has led many of Ontario’s undocumented to turn to bicycles as their primary means of transportation. What I would like to highlight is that Sergio like all of the other people I interviewed during my research expressed they enjoy riding and the exercise they could get while commuting. Some were privileged enough to ride only for recreation rather than necessity but generally those that I talked to expressed that they rode out of a need rather than desire.

The streets that I was told, through surveys and interviews, that most needed bicycle lanes are in order of most necessary were: Euclid, Grove, Mountain, Holt, 4th, Mission, 6th, San Antonio, Central, Campus, Benito, Cypress and Philadelphia. There was a strong desire to see bike lanes placed within the city a point expressed by a man I interviewed below Mission who uses his bicycle to collects recycling: “If there was a bike lane I would feel more safe, knowing that I’m in that lane and a car can’t come in
there, ya know?” Many of those I interviewed answered that they would ride more in the city if there was better bicycle infrastructure.

Riding on the sidewalk rather than the street is the norm in Ontario. Under Ontario city law it is illegal to ride on the sidewalk but there is widespread ignorance of this law. So much so that when I called the police department to ask what the law is regarding where to ride the dispatcher needed to consult her supervisor in order to inform me of a bicycles status as a slow moving vehicle. While it is illegal to ride on the sidewalk the dispatcher informed me that it is not usually enforced and officers will usually only cite the offending cyclist. Riding on the sidewalk is illegal because of the danger it poses to pedestrians due to the speeds a cyclist can reach and the narrowness of sidewalks.

There was an even split in those I interviewed over knowledge if it was illegal to ride on the sidewalk or not. Such was a young man riding up Euclid’s sidewalk reaction when informed him that it was illegal: “Its illegal… For real?” Those that did know it was illegal said they rode on the sidewalk because it was too dangerous not to. This reasoning behind this was perfectly expressed by a woman cyclist I interviewed on Sultana “I know its illegal but its like I tell my husband, I’d rather get a ticket than hit by a car.” The same logic was expressed throughout cyclists in Ontario when asked the same question, usually accompanied by stories of close calls or accidents while on bicycles. For many cyclists I interviewed they felt this law was unjust considering what riding on the street entailed:

I ride the bike a lot on the side walk but for me I feel safer on the sidewalk than I do on the street, because I know a car is not gonna come up behind me or in front
of me and hit me. And I’ll stop, I obey the laws of crosswalks and stuff like that but I feel safer riding a bike and if a cop sees me I know he’s gonna pull me over and give me a ticket for riding on the sidewalk, and I don’t think that’s fair neither.

For Rita, quoted above, like many cyclists who ride on the sidewalk for safety reasons, she feels that she have no choice but to break the law in order to protect herself. Breaking the law however does nothing but transfers the danger onto pedestrians as well as cyclists and severely limits the efficiency of the bicycle as an effective means of transport for people who must utilize it.

Many of the cyclists interviewed in Ontario that did ride on the road chose to ride against traffic. Research shows this is customary in some Latin American countries however, cyclists interviewed cite safety reasons for this practice in Ontario. Robert, who I interviewed on Mission Avenue, explains his reasoning for this “If a car comes to hit me I at least want that opportunity to jump out of the way. Because if a car comes behind me I don’t have that opportunity you know what I mean? Cause if they hit you its boom, you’re gone that quick.” Riding against the flow of traffic is actually much more dangerous than riding with it for a multitude of reasons the most important being drivers are not expecting vehicles to be coming towards them and therefore are not looking for the cyclist. The severity of accidents is higher as well because the relative speed between the two vehicles is higher.

Cyclists who rode against the flow of traffic even though they knew it to be illegal did so for the same reasons as cyclists who rode on the sidewalk. Like riding on the sidewalk bicyclists would prefer to do what is legal but they break the law because they
believe or feel it is safer. Alejandro illustrates that in some cases the problem is lack of information: “En la noche la policía aparro allá, aparro porque no tiene un luz y aprendí eso que necesito caminar como van los carros, no en la otro contrario. Esta bueno eh aprender así las leyes” (One night the police stopped me over there, I was stopped because I did not have a light and I learned that I needed to travel with the cars not in the other lane against them. It is nice eh, to learn these laws.) Riding against traffic was the reason listed for 12 of the 41 (28%) of Ontario’s bicycle accidents in 2009.

Insecurity on the streets was a constant theme for riders in Ontario. Statistics on bicycle safety in the city show good cause for concern. SWITRS, Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System, is California Highway Patrol’s Internet database that records the details of all traffic collisions. In 2009 the database recorded 41 bicycle accidents in Ontario. 36 of the accidents resulted in injury the other five resulting only in property damage. 29 of the accidents were recorded to be the fault of the cyclist, nine as the fault of the driver and the remaining three unlisted. Four of the recorded accidents were hit and runs. A graph of the information is included below:
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<th>Severity</th>
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<td>Bicycle</td>
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<td>Driver</td>
<td>Impropt Turn</td>
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<td>R-O-W Auto</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Felony</td>
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<td>Stop Sign/Gig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vineyard Ave.</td>
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The 12 wrong way accidents were the result of cyclists riding against traffic and therefore were recorded as the fault of the cyclists. The 13 R-O-W Auto were the result of one of the parties wrongly taking the right of way, in eight of these cases the cyclist was at fault. Cyclists were responsible for two of the four accidents that occurred because of an improper turn. Three accidents occurred because a stop sign was run, one of these three was the fault of a cyclist. Two accidents were recorded being caused by drugs or alcohol; in one of these cases the rider was inebriated in the other, the driver was. A cyclist riding at an unsafe speed caused one accident, and received a misdemeanor as a result. A driver hit one cyclist while backing up his/her car, one accident was listed as other hazard, the cause of two others was unlisted but one of those two cleared the driver of blame.

The account of accidents in Ontario is telling of misconceptions about the cyclists role in traffic and the dangerous consequences. What is more important is how riders perceive riding as dangerous and act accordingly to protect themselves. Cyclists that know the traffic laws violated them because they felt threatened by automobiles. An explanation from a worker at the Rancho Day laborers corner illustrates this perfectly “cuando manejas en la calle los carros no respectan, hay mucho accidentes, y mira una bike caminando en la brincita es mas seguro que manejar en la calle” (When you ride in the street the cars don’t respect, and there are many accidents, and you see a bike traveling on the sidewalk is more secure than riding in the street). From my experience of riding in Ontario the atmosphere is hostile towards bicycle riders. Every rider who commutes in Ontario can account times they have been honked or yelled at by drivers, who are often ignorant of the law and believe cyclists to be breaking it when using the
streets. Robert describes a common sentiment of how he feels bikes are treated by cars
“People around here they will hit a bike rider and just take off they don’t care. Compared
to a car they’re gonna stop but bike riders its like hitting a dog, they’re gonna hit
somebody and just take off.” Many cyclists felt that the situation was unjust because
bicycles follow the same rules of the road as cars but are not treated as if they have the
same right to it.

Cyclists who must use the streets to commute or who use them for recreation face
a choice between exclusion from the road or structural violence inherent in Ontario’s
public streets. The result is a climate of fear for the majority of Ontario riders who must
utilize the bicycle because of financial, legal or age related reasons. The coping strategy
of dealing with this structural violence is to break the law. This can be seen in the most
common practice of Ontario riders of traveling on the sidewalk, or in the less common
but still prevalent riding against the flow of traffic. The response of young riders is
unique, in that they use the streets as an avenue for rebellion. The persecution that many
riders feel from the hostile car dominated streets is transformed into ‘raising hell’ on the
city streets.

The majority of Ontario’s cycling community, especially those who would benefit
the most from a change, is made up of those who do not have strong political voices to
call for greater safety standards. The young, the undocumented, those without steady
incomes and surely without the luxury of available time to work as bicycle advocates, do
feel that they have a right to the street but have thus far not been able to express this to
the Ontario city government. The average cyclist sees an unjust system that puts them at
risk and does not see an avenue for change. This is especially true of the undocumented in Ontario who cannot voice their concerns without fear of deportation.

Conclusion & Recommendations

My experiences of riding with and interviewing cyclists in Ontario gave me a new love for cycling and the cycling community. I was constantly amazed at the support of Ontario’s cycling community in helping me research this topic. As a researcher coming from an advocacy standpoint I tried to ride on the street as much as possible. However, some days during rush hour I would start to merge on to Euclid but see the tidal wave of metal careening up the street and decide I would risk the citation and go with the sidewalk. This gave me a strong respect for those that must deal with this on a daily basis and especially the committed cyclists in Ontario that make a point to ride on the street in order to promote awareness.

The Los Angeles County Bike Coalition’s Ciudad de Luces (City of Lights) Program generously provided the resources used. I visited their L.A. office early on in the semester and they proved to be an enormous help in providing direction for my research and as an inspiration for the future of the Ontario Wheelhouse. Allison Mannos was particularly helpful by sharing her experiences and reflections on the process of starting the city of lights program.

Through my time at the Ontario Wheelhouse I have worked to put more bi-lingual resources in the shop. Many of these Spanish resources were handed out to day laborers during bike workshops at the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center and the Rancho Cucamonga Arrow and Grove corner. Most of the resources were scanned from Ciudad de Luces handouts and described how to patch a flat, the rights of a cyclist, how to ride
safely on the street and translations of bike parts. These workshops were designed to teach workers how to fix minor problems with their bikes and to give out flyers for the Ontario Wheelhouse so more complex problems can be addressed there. I would like to thank Eddie Gonzales for his support during this project. He was incredibly helpful in establishing a connection to the both day labor sites and providing far better translations than my Spanish would permit.

I worked in the semester to get funds from the Green Bike Program donated to the Ontario Wheelhouse, in order to buy more tools. I compiled a list of the tools needed and bought them for the shop. These include a fourth hand, cable cutters, spoke wrench, bench vise, lockring spanner, pin spanner and a large adjustable wrench. There is an extended list of what to buy in the future once the Wheelhouse has more funds.

I worked a shift at the Ontario Wheelhouse throughout the semester and during the times that the shop was not being used by community members I cleaned the shop and organized parts into drawers, sifting through the parts to remove damaged ones. When in the area I opened the Wheelhouse at the request of community members whose bikes had broken down unexpectedly. Although the shop was not used on most days that I worked, holding regular hours helped bring consistency to the shop and promoted a good reputation for reliability.

I attended Ontario Wheelhouse meetings that determined shop policies such as the requirements for someone to work a shift at the shop. Working with Lloyd and Garrison Bumstead I helped create a partnership where the Ontario Wheelhouse can buy tubes from the Bumstead’s Bicycles and sell them at the Wheelhouse for the same price, helping us cover the most common needs of cyclists. Lloyd and Garrison Bumstead were
also incredibly helpful in allowing me to conduct interviews with themselves as well as with patrons of their shop. Much of my work involved riding in the community and passing out flyers to cyclists about the Ontario Wheelhouse’s function, hours and location. The fruits of which I began to see at the end of the semester, hopefully to carry on throughout the summer and into the following years.

My study was limited by the time I had to work in the community. Many of the relationships formed, especially at the Rancho Cucamonga day laborer corner, were just becoming workable at the semesters end. Fortunately the Wheelhouse will stay open during the summer and continue to serve the Ontario community by relying on community members to keep the shop open.

Recommendations

Bicycle lanes should be placed where the community feels they are most necessary especially on major streets that connect multiple towns such as Holt, Euclid and Fourth. For those that rely on the bicycle as their only means of transportation these streets offer the fastest routes to reach their destination. Local residents also expressed interest in creating a bike route around Ontario that visited historic sites of the city. In this context the bicycle was always hailed as the brilliant way to take in the history of a city in a way the car could never offer.

As of now the two main bike paths in the local area are The Pacific Electric trail, which stretches from Claremont to Rancho Cucamonga and The Santa Ana river trail, which runs from Chino hills state park to Huntington Beach. Cyclist advocates in Ontario want to see these two trails connected to give access to the beach available from the local
area. There is also potential for creating bike paths inside the city of Ontario itself by utilizing the maintenance lanes next to flood overflow channels that run throughout the city. By converting these maintenance lanes to function as bike paths the city could provide safe routes and connect broad sections of the city with little more cost than removing fencing and no trespassing signs.

During my research I biked from the North of Ontario down to the Police station in order to ask for statistics on cyclist fines. I followed directions from Google Maps – bicycle that took me past no trespassing signs and onto the flood control channels maintenance paths. As I was riding I noticed overlapping tire tracks carved into the sand. Cyclists already use these paths, like other cycling habits in Ontario these cyclists break the law when doing so, these paths should be made available to the public that could benefit from them most. Opening these paths would provide a convenient, safe and cheap way to connect the North and South of Ontario.

The greatest concern for many cyclists was improving education over what the laws for bicycles are and how a bicycle should be treated by cars. Many of the cyclists I spoke to wished for such programs to be put into practice at local D.M.V.s. While the Ontario Wheelhouse does not have the influence that the Rancho DMV can offer it has started a mission of greater bicycle education as a means to create safer streets.

Bibliography