Empowerment of Cyclist Collective Identity in the Social, Safe, and Celebratory Spaces of Critical Mass

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Garrett Thomas Dahl
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This thesis titled

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of Critical Mass

by

GARRETT THOMAS DAHL

has been approved for

the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

and the College of Arts and Sciences

________________________________________________

Stephen J. Scanlan

Assistant Professor of Sociology

________________________________________________

Benjamin M. Ogles

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to understand the formation of activist collective identities within the temporary biketivist spaces of the Critical Mass cycling event. I collected data through participant observation in Critical Mass rides in Athens, Ohio, Columbus, Ohio, and Minneapolis, Minnesota from June of 2008 through February of 2009 in addition to semi-structured interviews with cyclists. These methods elicited data that speaks to the relationship between police, automobiles, and Critical Mass cyclists. While the Critical Mass and automotive majority exhibit a contentious relationship that solidifies cyclist collective identity around a common opposition, police play a more complex role of enforcer, referee between automobile and cyclist, and fuel to the carnival of transgression. As Critical Mass expresses emergent collective identities within an auto-centric cultural environment, a social, safe, and celebratory space allows for actualization of social movement tactics and goals.

Approved: ____________________________________________________________

Stephen J. Scanlan

Assistant Professor of Sociology
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Critical Mass bicycle movement has been raising awareness for the rights of cyclists, implementing an alternative to the culturally dominant “autopia paradigm”,¹ and empowering experienced and novice cyclists alike in cities around the world on the last Friday of every month since its 1992 inception in San Francisco. Critical Mass creates social, safe, and celebratory spaces that make possible cyclist empowerment and cyclist identity solidification. It is the unique nature of the Critical Mass protest being a mobile demonstration where cyclists enjoy strength in numbers and a subsequent reversal from automotive dominance to “velorution” that allows the opening up of space to occur. Conflict and traffic delays are common for automobile drivers who have run into the throng of bicycles. In addition to the automobile’s role in Critical Mass, police play a mixture of roles including both movement intimidator and referee between automobile and cyclist.

Cycling culture contains a vast array of types of riders who approach cycling and the Critical Mass differently. Critical Mass is not represented only by anarchists nor dominated by an anarchist paradigm as argued by Ferrell (2001). The spandex rider, recreational rider, road racer, ally cat racer, courier, and commuter² come together for

¹ The idea of autopia refers to the car driving culture that has emerged and dominated social, cultural, and urban landscapes over the 20th century (Lewis and Goldstein 1983:89) Automobiles are the preferred method of transportation by most people, while an entire structure of roads, industry, and social support enable the dominance of automobiles over other forms of transportation. The concept of autopia is also further elaborated in the following literature review.

² These various cyclist types are seen in Critical Mass rides and were present during participant observation and represented in interviews. Some cyclists span multiple categories, but no one identifies with all of them. The spandex rider refers to the wearing of spandex often for exercise based cycling. Road racer, ally cat racer, courier, and commuter all refer to various cycling activities including commuting, racing, or occupation based riding.
Critical Mass. The collective identity of the Critical Mass encompasses all of these types of riders who coalesce over the experience of “velorution”\(^3\) within the social, safe, and celebratory spaces that are created in Critical Mass. I examine Critical Mass and its diversity of cyclist types through semi-structured interviews and participant observation with Critical Mass riders and non-Critical Mass participating cyclists. In doing this, I explore the relationship between Critical Mass, the police, and the automobile driving majority while discovering how social movement collective identities are constructed, solidified, and empowered within the social, safe, and celebratory spaces that are created by Critical Mass. Polletta (1999) refers to these as free spaces and activist havens and I elaborate this, utilizing Critical Mass as a strategic research sight. The diversity of cyclist types with disparate backgrounds along with the three different geographical regions where participant observation occurred, serves the main research objectives of exploring social movement collective identity empowerment within activist havens and free spaces (Polletta 1999) very well.

Polletta and Jasper define collective identities as being shaped in communities by similar interests and solidified through interaction with oppositional figures among others:

> Collective Identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed (2001:298).

\(^3\) Velorution refers to the replacement of automobiles with bicycles as a legitimate form of transportation. Velorution may arguably occur when cyclists become so great in numbers that the auto-centric urban landscape is reversed and taken over by bicyclists.
Aligning with the above definition of collective identity by Polletta and Jasper (2001), the collective identity of cyclists that is nurtured within the social, safe, and celebratory spaces created by Critical Mass is based on participant’s similar interests in cycling, and also emerges out of the interactions among cyclists and their opposition, which in the case of Critical Mass is the automobile. Polletta and Jasper’s conceptualization of collective identity works as a foundation for my argument that Critical Mass utilizes a unique mobile demonstration which opens up free spaces or activist havens (Polletta 1999) outside of the dominant automotive paradigm where cyclist collective identity can be constructed, solidified, and empowered. The celebratory, social, and safe space created by Critical Mass works to facilitate a space where cyclists are free to pleasurably rejoice with other cyclists in what was before Critical Mass, an auto-centric spatial arrangement dominated by cars.

Collective identity as described by Polletta and Jasper (2001) is constructed within communities that interact with a variety of audiences including allies and opponents, police, and pedestrian bystanders. Arising from interaction with these various audiences, the collective identity of cyclists is empowered, constructed, and solidified against their common opposition of autopia within spaces of social interaction, safety, and celebration. In accord with Taylor and Whittier (1992) who posit that within social movement communities, collective identity “affirms members’ common interests in opposition to dominant groups” (qtd in Morris and Mueller 1992:107), I argue that the common opposition of automobiles in Critical Mass is affirmed by the collective identity that cyclists nurture within social, safe, and celebratory mobile spaces. In doing this, I
combine the ideas of collective identity formation by Polletta and Jasper (2001) with Polletta (1999) who argues that the creation of activist free spaces or havens allows for like minded interaction of social movement communities outside of the hegemonic autopian cultural ideal. In the case of Critical Mass, cyclists are free to interact with each other and create bonds in a social movement community that rejoices and celebrates its ability to feel safe and socialize outside of the dominance of autopia.

As Taylor and Whittier (1992) note, “Maintaining an oppositional identity depends upon creating a world apart from the dominant society” (qtd in Morris and Mueller 1992:178). This world apart from the dominant automobile driving order aids in the empowerment and solidification of cyclists who are afforded a space to celebrate, interact with fellow cyclists, and experience a bubble of safety and pleasure not possible without the presence of fellow bicycle riding comrades. The spaces of social interaction, safety, and celebration occur both in plain view of automobiles and also within close proximity. I explore the relationship between these two groups along with the role of police and the way Critical Mass empowers “biketivist” collective identities within the rolling party of Critical Mass in the pages that follow.
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ON CRITICAL MASS

Introduction

The phrase Critical Mass refers to the swarm of cyclists who navigate automobile dominated urban landscapes throughout the world on the last Friday of every month at or around 5:00 pm (Carlsson 2002:7). Critical Mass rides are celebratory and evoke a party-like atmosphere where cyclists can protest previous autopian spatial arrangements through a type of stylistic transgression that can include music, streamers, signage, and costumes. Critical Mass rides occur in hundreds of cities and attract anywhere from a few bicycle riders to thousands (Carlsson 2002:6). The Critical Mass is known to be leaderless and without official organization (Carlsson 2002:11) while awareness of it arises from a variety of places including the Internet, fliers or “xerocracy”4, media coverage, friendship networks, and word of mouth (Ferrell 2001:111).

There is no single founder of the Critical Mass movement. Discussions about a celebratory group ride occurred over a period of 6 months in a San Francisco Bike Coalition Meeting (Carlsson 2002:8). The Critical Mass has evolved and continues to be shaped by every rider’s participation in the movement. It is not a typical social movement (Goodwin and Jasper 2003:3)5 with rules, regulations, an organization, leaders, and followers, but rather a spontaneous creation of countless individual experiences and moments that seeks to redefine the possibilities of the urban experience.

Typical social movement elements exist, such as goals that include raising bicycle

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4 This is a method of “do it yourself” (DIY) media that democratizes the ability to disseminate information (Ferrell 2001:111).

5 “A social movement is a collective, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, power holders, or cultural beliefs and practices.” (Goodwin and Jasper 2003:3)
awareness; however, the means of Critical Mass (celebratory group bicycle rides) are also its goal (redefining urban space). Even though Critical Mass empowers and affirms participants’ various everyday cycling activities, the creation of temporary moments of celebration, rider safety, and social interaction in the “rolling party” works as both social movement tactic and outcome.

What follows is an examination of the literature on the Critical Mass and how it alters urban landscapes from hostile autopian environments, into social spaces, safe spaces, and “carnivalesque” reversals of cyclist identity affirmation and empowerment (Bakhtin 1984). As Presdee argues, “carnival comes from the ‘people’ in collusion with the state” (Presdee 2002:7). That is, Critical Mass, police, and automobiles come together to “exhaust a need for genuine revolution, effectively letting off steam until the next festive season comes around” (Presdee 2002:7). In the case of Critical Mass, the next festive season comes exactly one month later when it once again takes over the streets for a few hours per month. During this carnivalesque reversal, cycling activists may revel in their ability to safely socialize and interact outside of the culturally dominant autopian paradigm. It is at this time that the social movement community’s collective cyclist identity is empowered and solidified in direct opposition to automobiles. Cycling activists in turn take with them the empowerment into their everyday cycling activities.

Reinforcing and expanding work by Carlsson (2002), Ferrell (2001), and Furness (2007), the redefinition of space is very important to Critical Mass and its goals. The social, safe, and celebratory spaces created in Critical Mass where cyclist collective
identity affirmation occurs is where I depart from and contribute to the existing literature on the Critical Mass, while making a more comprehensive connection to the social movements literature. These sentiments are expressed within the findings section of this study and include feelings of safety, increased social interaction, and joy within the new spaces in which Critical Mass temporarily opens up. I use the work of Polletta (1999) on “free space” and work on collective identity empowerment in new social movements (Polletta and Jasper 2001) to inform the connection of collective identity formation in new social movements and spaces away from the dominant paradigm in which this is made possible. First it is important to explore the role of autopia and policing in Critical Mass.

An Anarchic Style

The very nature of Critical Mass being an indefinable and leaderless movement speaks to the idea of anarchy and outlaw cyclists taking over city space. Anytime someone has tried to take control of the mass, they have been unsuccessful (Carlsson 2002:73). The Critical Mass is led by everyone and by no one at the same time. Ferrell (2001) describes the mass as something that is not a “centralized organization” with “top down leadership and statehouse lobbying. Rather, it is one characterized by interwoven but largely autonomous groups and events; by the sort of ad hoc organizing committee; by an affectionate appreciation of “organized coincidences” and spontaneous direct action in the streets; by a sense of playfulness, of celebration and decoration, in bringing out the “inner fabulousness” of yourself, your bicycle, and your politics.” Although not
necessarily led by pure anarchists, it is a movement defined and enlivened by their politics (Ferrell 2001:96).

For some in the movement, Critical Mass is a pro-bike, anti-car demonstration that seeks to undermine the automobile’s dominant presence while for others it is a “friendly social cruise” (Carlsson 2002:73). Many cyclists fall somewhere in between where they seek to work with the traffic, and boast the slogan, “we aren’t blocking traffic, we are traffic!” Carlsson describes the experience of Toronto, Canada cyclist Guido Bruidoclarke, noting the level of aggressiveness and confrontational spirit of the Critical Mass as decreasing significantly since 1992 into more of a social and political critique on wheels:

In comparison with today, the early Critical Masses were crazy. There were definitely more confrontations with drivers, fistfights, and property damage. One Critical Mass had a messenger bouncing his back tire off the front of a bumper of a car, while other participants rocked the unfortunate car back and forth in an attempt to tip it over. But over the years the Critical Mass matured and changed and became a little more peaceful, but still confrontational. (Carlsson 2002:39)

This changing nature of Critical Mass from anarchy to disobedient bike parade is interesting as automobiles and cyclists coexist and negotiate each other’s presence. This may ultimately result in a settling of cyclist and automobile identities and an acceptance of each other within the same cultural and physical space.

Ferrell (2001) explores the anarchist tendencies of the Critical Mass with discussion heavily orientated towards the influence and presence of the outlaw cyclist. Ferrell’s analysis works to the detriment of the true diversity of cyclist types who actually participate in Critical Mass and coalesce over a cyclist collective identity in opposition to
automobiles within the new spaces of Critical Mass. One mass rider, “20 Inch Crank” a “bicycle militant” with what Ferrell touts as “an arrest record a mile long” shares cycling adventures and stories of police interactions (Ferrell 2001). While some might view 20 inch Crank as radical, the flank effect described by Furness makes other less provocative cyclists seem moderate and perhaps even legitimate (Furness 2007:312). Indeed, the movement may have a few radical outlaw cyclists, but this actually legitimizes the more moderate cyclists, making their demands more reasonable.

Furness (2001) along with myself, thus provides an additional perspective that all different types of people participate in Critical Mass, and the radical flank effect led by the militant cyclists discussed by Ferrell, allows for the “changing perceptions of the act of cycling itself” (Furness 2007:312). Cycling is thus presented in a different light that illuminates its possibilities outside the realm of competitive cycling (racing) or the rationalization of cycling as a tool for commuters (Furness 2007:312). Critical Mass takes cycling beyond commuting, racing, or anarchy to create a space where different types of cyclists can come together and solidify their similar cyclist collective identities against a common automotive opposition.

The enlivenment of Critical Mass through the politics of anarchism as stated by Ferrell remains important to its style. Nevertheless, the ability of Critical Mass to alter the very meaning of cycling and be attractive to non-cyclists (Furness 2007:312) is important to its ability to mobilize participants around a collective identity that appeals to different types of cyclists, new potential participants, and the general public to be sympathetic to the goals of the movement.
**Autopia**

The dominant paradigm of autopia gives the automobile the “right of way” in terms of urban spatial arrangements and normalized cultural practices and is the primary opposition that Critical Mass must negotiate. Autopia is the hostile, dangerous, and environmentally deleterious opposite of the Critical Mass. Critical Mass has emerged as an undermining force that automobiles must reckon with.

A large part of the emergence of autopia’s cultural origins in the late 19th century can be ironically attributed to the explosion of the bicycle in the 1890’s. “The greatest contribution of the bicycle to the implementation of the automotive idea is that it made the average person aware of the possibilities of individualized, long distance highway transportation. It created a demand that neither the horse nor the railroad could satisfy” (Flink 1975:8). As illustrated in 17th-century New England, the Quakers and the Puritans “shared so many features in common . . . that they had to publicize the few crucial differences as noisily as they could” (Erikson 2005:126). “Puritans and Quakers were so much alike that we think at once of the old saying: there are no enemies as bitter as variants of the same species” (Erikson 2005:126). Erikson’s description of the contentious relationship between Quakers and Puritans is easily paralleled today as automobiles and cyclists loudly and bitterly spotlight their differences through honking, cursing, or other contentious behavior. Their historic roots are grounded in a similar cultural milieu of individual stylistic expression, making them variants of the same

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6 Furness (2005:404) describes the historical connection between identity, bicycle technology, and hostile forces of opposition that continue today: “Tricycle riders distanced themselves on moral and technological superiority fronts while a stigmatized moral and social identity has followed bicyclists from the 1800’s through today”. The stigmatized moral and social identity of bicyclists in comparison with the tricycle is juxtaposed with today’s normative ideal of the automobile and its dominance over the bicycle.
species. Police also aid in spotlighting the differences between automobile and cyclist as they enforce the boundaries of each group.

Rationalization, industrialization, and standardization were crucial to the emergence of the automobile in the early 20th century as the United States saw a rapid development of automobile culture (Flink 1975:32). Before this emergence, the streets of New York City for example collected 2.5 million pounds of manure, and 60,000 gallons of urine each day coupled with the removal of 15,000 dead horses per year (Flink 1975:34). The autopian alternative seemed very attractive at the time, though today the clogging of streets by cars has emerged in the absence of the horse and its byproducts. Critical Mass emerged as a response to the current cultural dominance of the automobile.

The presence and risk associated with death and destruction caused by automobiles is a part of modernity. “Memories of accidents plague our highways and haunt the paths of our journeys. Every bad stretch of freeway and blind corner has its ghosts, casualties of automotive carnage” (Brottman 2001:xi). The dangerous potential of automobiles in creating death and injuries is certainly a part of autopia whether behind the wheel or walking on the sidewalk. The weight and speed of automobiles is cause for injury and death of drivers and bystanders. The polluting effects, speed, and heft in which automobiles operate make cycling an obvious de-facto opposition.

As of 1997, the planet contained 38.4 million miles of asphalt roads and parking lots (Holtz-Kay 1997:83). In addition to the car itself, surrounding industries and the culture of driving also has a large impact on the reliance and preference of four wheels instead of two. The earth has been altered for the purpose of driving. The impacts
include the run-off of oil and antifreeze, depositing of salt, 20 million discarded cars per year, leaky oil ships, road kill, oil production and refinement, and all other supportive automobile industries that make up the wide reaching swath of autopia’s effect on society (Holtz-Kay 1997:83-99).

This historical comparison between automobiles and bicycles shows that bicycles and automobiles emerge from a similar cultural foundation. The creation and construction of normative community boundaries based around dissenting behaviors is inevitable where groups seek to differentiate themselves.

**Policing and Authority**

In addition to the automobile, police presence serves as the other primary opposition or agitator to Critical Mass. While automobiles are the direct opposition to Critical Mass and its primary reason for existence, police play a more complex and perhaps confusing role. Police may intimidate, threaten citations, make arrests, use pepper spray, and alter the Critical Mass event’s possibilities and routes. The police are an important player in the creation and performance of the Critical Mass and how it looks and feels. While acting as referee between automobile and bicycle, police also serve to intimidate and enforce. As Critical Mass cyclists gather in their meeting places in cities around the world, so do police and squad cars. The police are a part of Critical Mass and help shape the way the movement looks, feels, and impacts culture and collective cyclist identities. Police and the Critical Mass engage in almost direct oppositional reaction, thus mirroring each other and acting as symbiotic players.
Ferrell (2001) describes the proportional response to new forms of organized social disorder. As movements tactically innovate, authorities must also evolve and develop new ways of maintaining control and stability. “As new forms of protest and ways of doing politics develop, those who are most threatened by them must find a renewed commitment to the sorts of social and legal controls that will preserve their positions. As always, law and crime, control and resistance emerge each in the image of the other” (Ferrell 2001:97). Ferrell illuminates and exemplifies the idea that Critical Mass is mobilized and cyclist’s identities are solidified in opposition to police enforcement. In addition, Marx and Gillham introduce the idea of “reciprocal and neutralizing effects” where the actions of one side reciprocally emerge from the other in a “hostile dance” (2000:223). Furthermore, and more broadly, Marx and Gillham (2000) cite Simmel who argues that conflicting social groups begin to resemble each other. The actions and provocations of police can actually create even stronger resistance and greater empowerment of collective identities, unintentionally heightening resistance in demonstrators and bystanders (Marx and Gillham 2000:223).

Marx and Gillham (2000:215) further point out that one size fits all tactics remain difficult in demonstrations that draw a diversity of participants, and protest events like Critical Mass create strange bedfellows where common ground is found among groups opposing common enemies. Like the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle where a union worker exclaimed “steelworkers and turtles united at last” (Marx and Gillham 200:225), the Critical Mass contains a diversity of activists who opposes the same targets. Like other protest events, cycling activists in Critical Mass come together,
interact, and protest as one voice with the event acting as a social magnet that draws participants from the broad cycling culture. As a result, police are forced to deal with a more flexible and democratic leadership structure that elicits difficulties in attempts at negotiation and control.

While police recognize the importance of protecting normalized spatial arrangements, the disruption of these social spatial routines is a large part of the nature of Critical Mass (Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham 2005:238). Police today “would be largely impotent without the capacity to create and enforce boundaries and to restrict people’s mobility in and around certain areas” (Herbert 1997:11). In addition to protest being physically spatial, it is also spatially contentious in a cultural way. Police do not want protest participants to be able to reframe the cultural meaning of spaces (Noakes, et. al. 2005:238). The implications of this to the Critical Mass are enormous because cyclists compete for culturally meaningful public space where they have the freedom to carve out their own niche outside of the dominance of automobiles.

Presdee (2002:7) argues that police add to the excitement and jovial nature of the carnivalesque. Marx and Gillham (2000:224) describe how this “excitement effect” contributes to a “seductiveness” of protest where “helicopters and searchlights . . . sirens, and the sight and smell of gas filled streets” combined with often vibrantly ornamented protestors which in addition to aiding in the excitement of protest, may draw additional people to the event. Police contribute to the atmosphere while cycling activists empower their cyclist collective identity within their new social, safe, and celebratory activist haven.
New Urban Spaces of Socialization, Safety, Celebration, and Cyclist Identity

Affirmation

The Critical Mass alters the meaning of the urban landscape through creating a “parade” in a setting that traditionally supports only the automobile while giving cyclists an alternative experience as they move throughout the city. The carving out of spaces by Critical Mass within autopia allows cyclists to socialize with other cyclists, pedestrians, automobiles, and gawkers while allowing for the possibility of revelry and celebration (Ferrell 2001:125). Critical Mass enthusiasts Beth Verdekal and Jim Swanson argue that Critical Mass is a:

- social space, a street space where people can converse, and talk, and interact … By riding slowly and in a relatively tight formation so as to more effectively interrupt auto traffic, we also set a leisurely pace for ourselves and our bicycles on the line, confronting automotive dominance through direct action, we invent the impossible: an island of safety, calm, and conversation in the middle of a busy street (qtd. in Ferrell 2001:125).

The cyclist-friendly safe spaces of Critical Mass make many unique social experiences possible. Conversations and new friends are found within the new definitions of urban space that Critical Mass creates.

When the ride is over, the spaces carved out by the mass revert back to their old forms, but the memories, conversations, and interactions that would not have been possible under autopian conditions live on (Ferrell 2001:115). Lacey describes the fluctuating tendencies of sense of place and activist identities and how “the establishment of temporal zones or spaces of social justice enables activists to elude the shackles of the relationship between identity and place” (2005:408). This new sense of place realized in Critical Mass opens up the possibilities for cycling identities to flourish.
and actualize as temporary zones of social justice allow for Biketivists to indeed elude the shackles of the connection between autopian spaces and their minority status as cyclists. The sense of place that exists in a traditional activist’s surroundings can be usurped by the creation of the traveling carnival within the unique nature of Critical Mass as a mobile demonstration.

Utilization of a mobile demonstration using a temporary autonomous zone or TAZ (Furness 2007:308) allows Critical Mass to build a sense of community and stronger and more solidified collective identity. Furness describes the ability of Critical Mass to create a TAZ that dodges state oppression while liberating parcels of topography from modern iron cage-like tendencies. The TAZ is “an uprising which does not engage directly with the State.” TAZ is a “guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere, before the State can crush it” (Furness 2007:308). While there is certainly a redefinition of urban space through the creation of TAZ, the role of the state in “crushing” the movement is debatable as I discuss below.

This liberation of space through mobile celebratory demonstrations allows riders to build stronger connections with others within the cycling community while pushing social movement goals:

Critical Mass offers a change, if only for a few moments, in the domination of the streets. In place of tons of steel and glass is a rolling community of people who can talk to each other and experience safety in numbers. This experience can forge new networks of like-minded people, it can enhance one’s identity as an activist . . . (Furness 2007:308)
The ability of Critical Mass to move freely within urban space while circumnavigating authorities’ attempts at containment allows activists to create an oppositional “counter-cultural capital” accumulation (Presdee 2002:47). “Through Critical Mass, activists share stories and common experiences, and use this as a basis in order to develop new activist networks and new modes of resistance” (Furness 2007:308). Critical Mass utilizes a mobile protest while allowing for new possibilities in the realm of social movement collective identity formation.

Critical Mass does not just talk about creating social change. Rather it is a movement driven by action and participation where the means are the goal and the journey is the destination. In this sense the social movement tactical repertoire is synonymous with the movement itself (Ennis 1987). Critical Mass participant Adam Kessel expresses why he rides in Critical Mass:

I ride because I find the mass creates a temporary autonomous zone . . . a place where bicycles do have the right of way-and not just on paper; a non-imaginary safe, quiet, clean, and fun use of the public good, the streets which we all pay for and the air which we all breath; a place where the streets are designed for bicycles, not cars. Critical Mass does not ask the question of whether bicyclists should have “equal rights” to the streets, where “equal rights” means “just like cars”. Instead it presumes that the public space should be for us, the people, and then gives the cars a chance to figure out how to fit in (Carlsson 2002:109).

Spatial arrangements in the city are transformed as the Critical Mass moves throughout previously autopian urban landscapes. “The reworking of the streets is important, the event contests and symbolically at least takes control of the public domain” (Presdee 2002:12).
Celebration and the Rolling Party

Creating a spirit of celebration and “bike pride” is a way in which cyclists strengthen collective movement identity around overcoming the hostile autopian “urbanscape”. The Critical Mass ride “was a rolling street party, a celebration, and the feeling was in the air like electricity” explains Jim Dyer (Carlsson 2002:141). Preconceived notions of what a protest looks like can be supplemented and altered with what occurs in the Critical Mass. Carlsson (2002:141), for example, explains Dyer who describes his first ride in 1993, “If it was a demonstration, it was a new and very much improved form of it”. The look and feel of this type of protest brings an element of celebration that further stylizes protest (Ferrell 1993).

Presdee describes the carnivalesque, as a performance of excitement and transgression. Presdee cites joy riding in automobiles, sado-masochism, raves and dance parties, festivals, and roller skating “take back the street” rallies in Paris as examples, and the Critical Mass certainly fits in this category (Personal Communication 2009).

In France it is no surprise that the performance of carnival has also attempted to reclaim the streets. The Friday night and Sunday morning mass inline roller skating (sic) on the streets of Paris totally disrupts movement in the city. An average of 30,000 people of all ages embark on a route even unknown to themselves as they twist and turn at great speed through the most congested streets of Paris. Their sounds of jubilation at the sheer joy of carnival can be heard for miles. Predictable the authorities are close behind as the law is prepared for change, and strengthened to criminalise the use of rollerblades on the roads. (Presdee 2000:52)

This vivid description of a roller-skating take back the street parade parallels Critical Mass well as both activities utilize joy and disruption of public space while police give chase. This ability for Critical Mass to turn upside down the rhythm of city life while
undermining the power of authority occurs in its celebratory nature. The police and automobiles are forced to deal with a new more spirited activist energized by his/her new social space, safe space, and celebratory space.

**Conclusion**

“What confuses those who have not yet experienced Critical Mass is that it does not proselytize one message or forward one agenda. People come for their own reasons, make their own meaning, and go off to further their own visions of a better world” (Carlsson 2002:155). Meaning and goals are created and shaped by what each rider brings to the ride, emerging out of interactions and celebratory spirit of the new spaces Critical Mass creates outside of automotive domination. Critical Mass is an amalgamation of motives and styles brought together by an affinity for cycling and a desire to undermine autopia. Cyclist collective identity is solidified by something more than just anarchy. The common opposition described by Polletta and Jasper (2001) along with the activist haven or free space described by Poletta (1999) is important for members of the Critical Mass social movement community. The boundaries of social life within autopian urban landscapes are pushed towards velorution while Critical Mass as a “new social movement”7 becomes critical for how social movements come to value legitimization, emergence, construction, and deconstruction of new identities and culture.

While negative publicity and perceptions of all cyclists can be undesirable to cyclist collective identities, Critical Mass opens the debate and considers issues such as

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7 As I discuss in the following chapter I am referring here to new social movements in a theoretical sense that place emphasis on legitimization of emergent identities and culture.
the effects of automobiles on culture, environment, and social life. Critical Mass shines a light on many issues that are largely ignored by global civil society. The radical flank effect that Critical Mass can cause brings the issue of cyclist rights, environmental degradation, and use of public space to the forefront. Through Critical Mass, cyclists can empower themselves and their DIY lifestyles while pioneering new possibilities for the urban experience. Celebration and the creation of spaces of socialization and dissent allow cyclists the ability to increase their “we-ness” while facing oppositional forces.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Critical Mass is both unique and generalizable to social movement dynamics and theory. The cultural dissent involved with its goals and tactics forces actors outside of the movement such as automobile drivers, the police, and policymakers to acknowledge the movement and its demands. At the same time riders take away from their experience the emotions, memories, and empowerment of what transpired at the rolling party into their biketivist everyday lives. In doing this, Critical Mass as a new social movement blurs the lines of social movement participation and lifestyle where riders practice their social movement tactic in their everyday lives to attain social movement goals. Explaining the way in which new social movements legitimize emergent collective identities while also emphasizing the importance of “social space” or “free space” to this process is the goal of this theoretical considerations section.

A clear definition and understanding of new social movements is necessary first to grasp the importance of collective identity and space in contemporary social movements. Critical Mass exists in a framework of new social movements that seek recognition of emerging collective identities, empowerment of identities, identity as strategy, identity as goal, and the deconstruction of identities (Bernstein 2002:87). Bernstein (2002:86) further argues that the emerging importance of identity in new social movements results because of the “declining significance of class, religion, and family ties in a “postindustrial” society”. According to Goodwin and Jasper (2003:335), the search for identity in new social movements epitomizes social movements in a post-
industrial society the same way the labor movement owed its grounding within industrial society.

Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield (1994:7) define new social movements as “associated with a set of beliefs, symbols, values, and meanings related to a differentiated social group; with the member’s image of themselves; and with new, socially constructed attributions about the meaning of everyday life.” Other aspects of new social movements include a blurring between collective and individual culturally expressive tactics and goals, involve personal or intimate aspects of people’s lives, use radical methods that disrupt dominant norms through dramatic displays, are locally autonomous, and operate in a decentralized and democratic organizational structure (Johnston et al. 1994).

Furthermore relating to the importance of space, social movement actors in new social movements aim to produce “new social spaces” (Johnston et al. 1994:11) where emergent identities and lifestyles may be experienced and defined.

Along with the new social movement paradigm shift discussed above, collective identity formation and solidification is another important theoretical foundation for my overall argument. The creation of free spaces or activist havens (Polletta 1999), nurtures and emboldens the ability of cyclists to strengthen their collective identity. Taylor (2000:274) defines collective identity as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity.” In addition to common interest in cycling and cycling lifestyle and the solidarity of the minority in relation to the autopian paradigm, shared emotion in social movements are an integral part of social movement solidification.
Emotion

Jasper (1998) argues that people experience emotions in social movements that either keep them involved or make them leave, or that cause them to join or even mount counter-movements. Further discussion on the role of emotion by Taylor (2000) examines the creation of collective identity in the post-partum depression movement where women experience similar collective stigmatized emotions. Taylor argues that emotions are a part of all social movements, “emotions give the ideas power to motivate people to challenge dominant groups, emotions are the basis of the solidarity that binds participants together in pursuit of a common cause” (Taylor 2000:292). Jasper argues that the presence of emotions do not make the social movement or activist irrational; rather emotions are a natural experience inside and outside the movement (Jasper 1998:421). In fact, activists often take part because of the emotional connection they have with the movement and other participants.

Collective emotions, the reciprocal ones especially, are linked to the pleasures of protest. Most obvious are the pleasures of being with people one likes, in any number of ways. Other pleasures arise from the joys of these activities, such as losing oneself in collective motion or song. This can be satisfying even when done with strangers-who of course no longer feel like strangers. And articulating one’s moral principles is always a source of joy, pride, and fulfillment- even when it is also painful (Jasper 1998:418).

Jasper speaks volumes to the importance of examining the relationship between the formation of cyclist identity and oppositional cultural forces such as autopia and police. Critical Mass activists participate and experience Critical Mass in harmony with their surrounding cycling comrades who inject joy and celebration into their shared experiences. The shared experience of chanting, singing songs, and striving for a similar
goal turns strangers into friends while people come to appreciate each other more than the actual movement.

*Mobilization, Identity, and Culture in New Social Movements*

In new social movements “collective identities become bases for members’ definitions of self; the relation of individual and collective is blurred; movement action is a mix of individual and collective identity confirmations” (Stryker 2000:24). Stryker (2000:23) argues that new social movements utilize a collective search for identity as central to movement activities. Critical Mass also engages in this search as cyclists participate in Critical Mass rides around the world. Social movement actors seek to forge and empower new identities in an emerging cultural milieu through their social movement’s goals and tactics. Furthermore, the boundaries between activist lifestyle and instrumental movement participation become a, “pervasive everyday acting out of identities that are the objectives of movement action” (Stryker 2000:24). In other words, the performance of emerging collective identities within movement activities becomes the goal of movement action which also carries into the everyday lives of movement activists. These emerging collective identities are regularly attacked by modern society according to Johnston et al (1994), thus justifying the need for collective identity defense both within and outside of social movement activities.

Collective identities are also closely influenced by culture. The need to explore this link is important for a greater understanding of social movements. Polletta (1997:433) asserts that culture acts as a toolkit in which people construct new strategies
of action. Movements like Critical Mass that lack formal organizations can use cultural environments to construct and maintain movement tactics and goals. Studying social movement organizations alone is not enough because the culture and collective identities of social movement communities in new social movements oftentimes works as both movement tactic and goal. When people carry social movement activities into their everyday lives as is the case in Critical Mass, there is less of a need for a bureaucratic complex organization. The importance of culture and also collective identity in new social movements can be seen in the way movements “transform cultural representations, social norms-how groups see themselves and are seen by others” (Polletta and Jasper 2001:284). The emergent cyclist collective identity is embedded within a broad cultural ideology of autopia, policing, do it yourself (DIY), and other motivations for participation, thus making the consideration of culture in addition to collective identity all the more important.

Buechler (1993:221) takes into account the importance of broad cultural forces in contemporary social movements:

The supposedly instrumental concerns of movement actors in the resource mobilization framework are always and inescapably embedded in a larger cultural framework or expressive elements concerning meaning, symbols and signification. Until the cultural foundation of such strategic action is adequately theorized, the resource mobilization framework will offer us a very partial view of collective action at best.

Consistent with Buechler, an understanding of the surrounding cultural framework of new social movements is necessary for a greater understanding of movements like Critical Mass. New social movements do more than just mobilize resources for meeting
goals but also work to construct identity and empower its legitimacy within surrounding cultural milieu.

Bernstein distinguishes between movements that “pursue goals in the outside world, for which the action is instrumental for goal realization and identity-orientated movements that realize their goals, at least partly, in their activities.” (Bernstein 1997:533). Critical Mass is orientated internally towards identity while it realizes its goals in its activities. Identity is both goal and strategy for the Critical Mass cycling movement as its tactical repertoire of cycling is appealing in itself, while aligning with “biketivist” collective identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001:284). Polletta and Jasper (2001:284) note that people participate in social movement action because the style and tactic of protest aligns with who they are. In other words, the style and tactic of a protest has become increasingly connected to the identity of the protestor, his or her interests, style, whether he or she will or will not participate, whether he or she will depart from the movement, and to the social movement communities collective identity as a whole. The importance of the intersection between collective identity and social movement is clear as motives for activist’s participation align with the collective identity of the movement.

Overcoming Barriers to Participation

A theoretical understanding of barriers to social movement participation is also important to this study because there are significant numbers of Critical Mass activists who view the police and hostile automobiles as reasons for not taking part. Klandermans (1987) argues that the removal of barriers increases the likelihood of potential social
movement participation. He discusses four different steps for individual social movement participation. The first is becoming part of the “mobilization potential” of people in a society who are sympathetic and targeted for possible mobilization. That is, the mobilization potential is the reservoir the movement can draw from. It is the result of often lengthy campaigns in which a movement propagates its view that certain states of affairs are unacceptable and can be changed effectively through collective action (Klandermans 1987:519).

After mobilization potential is realized, potential social movement participants must then be targeted by mobilization attempts, be motivated to participate, and finally overcome barriers to participation (Klandermans 1987:519). The more people are motivated to participate, the more likely they are to overcome barriers. Social movement participants must either remove barriers to participation themselves or overcome barriers through a high level of motivation (Klandermans 1987:521). Overcoming barriers can be accomplished though the implementation and use of safe spaces in which participants are free to safely express themselves, communicate, bond, and above all solidify their collective identities (Polletta 1999). “Free spaces”, “havens”, or “spheres of collective identity” “refer to small scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups” (Polletta 1999:1). Free spaces include Southern black churches during the civil rights movement, union halls, and bars. These free spaces open up the possibilities for activists to organize and stir up opposition (Poletta 1999). Activist havens recognize the cultural practices of subordinated groups (Poletta 1999) where emergent cultures can be fostered in opposition to dominant groups.
In the case of Critical Mass, the rolling party creates temporary social and safe spaces that facilitate cyclist freedom in relation to their automotive adversaries. Both police and autopia’s attempts at defining the movement and its participant’s biketivist collective identity is slowed by the newly defined spaces of celebration, socialization, and safety.

**Conclusion**

Studying culturally emergent collective identities in movements like Critical Mass that utilize their expressive tactical innovations as a part of movement goals is important for a greater understanding of new social movements and how activists are engaging in contentious activity. The acting out of movement goals within and outside of social movement activities allows for more effective actualization of collective identities in social movement communities while the creation of spaces that nurture the entire process becomes even more important to overcoming barriers to participation.

The goals of new social movement like Critical Mass include the legitimization, construction, and empowerment of emergent collective identity. This occurs within and outside of social, safe, and celebratory spaces that reject the cyclist’s minority status in relation to the automobile. These spaces can be generalized as important aspects of new social movements to freely organize and actualize collective identities in opposition to the dominant culture while allowing for a more clear delineation of community boundaries.
CHAPTER 4: DATA AND METHODS

Venturing into the immediacy of culture and gaining a greater understanding of the situated meanings and experiences of people (Ferrell and Hamm 1998) are essential to social movement research. In this study I chose participant observation and semi-structured interviews to do just that, and it worked well in capturing the perspectives of Critical Mass cyclists. This was a challenging yet very rewarding group to study. There was pressure to obtain meaningful and useful data during participant observations because of the once per month riding schedule of Critical Mass, while rain, wind, and sub-zero temperatures also created challenges for participant observation.

Collection of data occurred from June of 2008 until January of 2009. Six male and six female Critical Mass participants composed the semi-structured interview sample. I immersed myself inside the group’s activities and interviewed ride participants obtaining a rich understanding of the group and its activities. I examine both the perspectives of individual cyclists and the group’s dynamics as a whole, generating a depth of understanding not possible using quantitative methods. Participation in Critical Mass events afforded a greater understanding of the movement itself and its interaction with surrounding urban spaces. I analyze data utilizing qualitative coding methods and scanning through transcripts line by line and highlighting themes.

Additional challenges for this study occurred in the uncertainty of Critical Mass rides. Some of the time cyclists would arrive late to the rides and it would initially appear that there would be no Critical Mass. After waiting with a small group of 3 or 4, a few other cyclists would eventually show up asking if we were Critical Mass, thus commenc ing the ride. Sometimes, cyclists would call their friends to come down to the Critical Mass meeting point in order to gain greater numbers.
Selection of interviewees occurred in three ways. I scheduled semi-structured interviews with Critical Mass participants before, during, and after Critical Mass rides. In addition I approached interview participants and asked if they were willing to participate and selected other interview participants through visiting cycling shops in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Finally, I also selected interview participants through the use of an online web posting on Minneapolis Bike Love, a social-networking website where people interested in cycling can interact through message boards. Interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and occurred in public places. The criteria for selection of subjects were that they participate in, are aware of, or organize the Critical Mass movement in some way. No prior relationship with any research subjects existed other than shared participation in the same Critical Mass ride. All interviews were strictly confidential and I use pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Participant observation occurred at Critical Mass rides in Athens, Ohio, Columbus, Ohio, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Participant observation also occurred at Critical Mass social gatherings and bars after rides. This contributed to an overall understanding of the group’s culture and lingo while also providing extra time to interact with cyclists and gain greater entrée into the group. This allowed for more observation and a feel for the Critical Mass through dialogue that complements semi-structured interviews. A total of seven rides and about twenty hours represent the amount of participant observation. The Appendix includes an interview guide. The interview guide
was used loosely and was mostly relied upon during interviews when lulls in the conversation occurred.\footnote{I obtained full informed consent for interviews but not for participant observation, though I made it known to participants that I was conducting research. I rode alongside members of the Critical Mass on my bicycle but my participation in no way intruded on individual rider freedom. No potential risk was endured by research participants while no potential benefits existed either. Participants received no compensation for their time and no reward or monetary gift.}

Exploring the importance of collective cyclist identity in the Critical Mass involves gaining an empathetic understanding of a movement actor’s thoughts, opinions, experiences, and emotions. This is in keeping with Taylor (2000) who utilizes semi-structured interviews to study collective identity and emotions of women in the post-partum depression movement. White and Fraser (2000), and Roth (2000) also examined collective identity using in-depth interviews in their respective studies of developing working class feminism and the Republican movement in Ireland while Klandermans and Linden (2007) similarly examine extreme radical right wing political movements of the early 1990s, conducting life history interviews in the Netherlands.

Potential challenges of this research style of participant observation and semi-structured interviews is that generalizability may be difficult to attain. However, concrete objective definitions are the antithesis of the Critical Mass, which seeks to break down previously defined definitions and reconceptualize the possibilities for social life. While a larger sample size with quantifiable data from surveys or secondary data analysis would bring forth perhaps more generalized conclusions, my choice of semi-structured interviews and participant observation works well for the story I wish to tell. Attempted achievement of “criminological verstehen” (see Ferrell 2001) alleviates some of these
challenges as I empathize with the perspectives of Critical Mass participants.

“Criminological verstehen is the subjective understanding of crime’s situational meanings and emotions—its moments of pleasure and pain” (Ferrell and Hamm 1998:27). In order to “catch the constructed reality of crime.”\(^{10}\) in the case of Critical Mass, it was essential that I “venture inside the immediacy of crime.” Critical Mass as a movement falls into a legal grey area and crossing into illegalities involved with blocking traffic and civil disruption makes the conversation about crime and cultural criminology relevant.

Future research in marginalized areas of everyday social and cultural life will require degrees of achieving verstehen because of the “closing off of avenues of legitimacy” and construction of “more opportunities for criminological edgework and adrenaline” (Ferrell and Hamm 34:1998). While participating in high speed motorcycle riding Lyng, for example, ingested psychoactive chemicals and suffered “nine broken bones, serious internal injuries, permanent disability, and a body held together with steel straps and screws” (Ferrell and Hamm 1998;234). However, in addition to these severe bodily injuries, Lyng argues that the real tragedy of going over the edge is the researcher’s ability to acquire new knowledge is often totally sealed off because of either physical damage, legal trouble, or any other type of trauma (Ferrell and Hamm 1998;234). There is no doubt that going too far could stifle future research and also cause irreparable physical or mental trauma. My Critical Mass research never went this far into an area where Critical Mass riders or I were ever in serious danger. While

\(^{10}\) While Critical Mass itself may not be considered a crime per se, it is clearly criminalized as police utilize citations, pepper spray, and crowd management tactics. Furthermore, the presence of drugs and alcohol, blocking of traffic, and use of more provocative activist tactics such as riding on freeways presents an intersection of social movement action and illegal activities.
drinking and cycling did occur at Critical Mass events in open view, primary threats to the group occurred in terms of legal or police interference. The risk that police could give riders citations, unleash pepper spray, and or make arrests was small, however real.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} The legalities of the Critical Mass events can be ambiguous and this is a challenge to the research process. While the mass itself is not illegal, certain activities within the mass can be. As the principle investigator of this study, I witnessed illegal activities being perpetrated by Critical Mass riders during my participant observations. I also participated in illegal activities with the Critical Mass group. However precedence for this as seen in Lyng (1998) and Ferrell (1998) justifies my actions as a small sacrifice for research. Lyng argues that engaging in crimes for research that contain victims such as mugging and drunk driving are unethical while crimes such as “blocking traffic in a busy intersection to attract media attention for a political cause … as part of a social movement” are “entirely ethical” (Lyng 1998;243 qtd. in Ferrell 1998;243).
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal the emergence of the redefinition of autopian urban landscapes where the emergence of temporary free spaces allow for the actualization of biketivist collective identity in the face of the automobile driving majority. These spaces exist in the form of social, safe, and celebratory activist havens (Polletta 1999) where biketivists of all different varieties can solidify and empower their collective identity. While helping to fuel the carnival of transgression that is Critical Mass, (Presdee 2002) the automobile along with police represent the opposition through which cyclists empower their minority status on roads. The spaces of social interaction, safety, and celebration are created because of and despite the presence of these two groups. As “biketivists” sharply delineate the boundaries between cars and bikes within the rolling party, cyclist collective identity empowerment carries over into the everyday lives of cycling activists. In addition to exploring the collective identity of cyclists, the function of temporary free spaces in nurturing these identities will also be analyzed.

Collective Cyclist Identities

The connection between cycling, Critical Mass, and forging a more powerful cyclist collective identity is essential to the effectiveness of Critical Mass. There are many different types of cyclists who ride in Critical Mass, all with a variety of perspectives on cycling and the purpose of Critical Mass. The ability for this diversity of cyclist types to come together and feel empowered within and outside of Critical Mass makes the joint experience of dealing with autopia that much more powerful.
What cycling means to a Critical Mass rider takes on very personal and important consequences for how cyclists live and survive in autopian urban space. Minneapolis Critical Mass cyclist Delilah states, “I gave away my bike in grad school and had a year off with no biking and I got really fat and depressed.” Without a bicycle, Delilah was not the same person and she was not involved with other cyclists. An Athens, Ohio Critical Mass organizer argues, “We are kind of a tight knit community. We are a small group still so that means we can have a lot more fun with each other and interact at a really intimate level.” The intimate closeness of Critical Mass within its community can be seen in how they take care of their own.

Alfred comments on how he can tell the difference between a cyclist and a non-cyclist through social interaction and cultural symbols. “You can tell right away. By the way they act, the way they dress, by the way they bike, by the way they talk . . . Bikers are kind of sweaty and they have their pants rolled up. This is a bag that a courier uses . . . You can tell by someone’s bag whether they ride a fixed gear.” Here we see that cyclists judge, critique, and use visual cues of cycling identity to differentiate themselves from the automobile driving majority. Jasper and Polletta argue (2001:285) that “Collective Identities are expressed in cultural materials-names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on” and findings reveal this in the Critical Mass. The community boundaries maintained not only by cars, but also by cyclists who differentiate from the automotive driving majority in manner of appearance (clothing), the way urban space is experienced (owning the space by traversing through canyons of buildings), attitudes, lingo, and various other cultural artifacts.
The cycling community, culture, and identity that have emerged in opposition to the often hostile automotive majority is protective of other cyclists. Minneapolis cyclist Marco describes the funeral procession he and a group of cyclists had for another cyclist who was struck and killed by an automobile.

There was an installation for a guy named Tommy Volvo who got hit up on Broadway and Queen or something so they got a bike, a junk bike and disabled it . . . to make it worthless, spray painted the entire thing white and then put it on a bike trailer and we had a procession from the Stone Arch Bridge up through North East, up to the site where that guy got killed and you lock the bike to a sign of his name and date. It’s supposed to be a reminder of the person killed. It’s a reminder for drivers to watch out.

The cycling community expresses their solidarity by remembering their fallen brethren whom they did not even know personally. They only knew that he was a cyclist, and this bond brings the community of cyclists together. This reinforces Jasper and Poletta’s (2001) notion of “identity work”. Taylor and Whittier (1992) would furthermore refer to the funeral procession as a “boundary setting ritual” where challengers strengthen internal solidarity in confronting the strength of the majority.

What it means to take ownership over the streets while traversing auto-centric spatial arrangements is unique to the cyclist experience. The level of joy and emotional release experienced by cyclists who interact with urban landscapes differently from cars is important to why a cyclist maintains his or her marginalized minority status. Alfred describes the ownership of the streets he and fellow cyclists have during times when automobile traffic subsides. Riding through the streets at night provides him with an ownership of urban space and an experience all his own that is unique to the cyclist’s presence in autopian urban landscapes.
It’s yours and it’s beautiful and there are these huge canyons of buildings. It was amazing, the landscapes, buildings everywhere and you are riding, and you own it. A place where a cab would run you over Friday or the day before, you know on a Friday night at three in the morning, it’s your space and you own it and you can it’s really beautiful and so on a bike you kind of own that space so it’s really, that is what I remember is one of the best parts of riding and experiencing the world differently, it’s a really different. Kind of seeing it from a vantage point that I was never able to appreciate in a car. In a car you are too caught up you know?

What it means to cyclists to be able to experience urban space in alternative format to being stuck behind the wheel of an automobile is important. For avid cyclists and Critical Mass riders like Alfred, the difference between their cyclist’s identity and the automotive majority is tied to the sense of place experienced as they create moments of safety, pleasure, and social interaction within urban spaces. It is important to them personally and they take it seriously. As Ernie argues,

I feel more powerful than someone in a car because I am doing my own work to get where I am going so that in turn does you know, make my body stronger you know. Their body is getting weaker being pulled by something.

The boundaries and the empowerment of cyclist communities are important to cyclists in Critical Mass as cyclist’s like Ernie use the bicycle’s function of exercise to differentially empower himself in relation to automobile driving counterparts. The link between the bicycle technology and cyclist’s identity within the cycling community and in the face of the automobile driving opposition is important to the way Critical Mass differentiates itself. Jasper and Polletta (1997) utilizes the term “tactical identity” to describe activists who are fond of particular styles of collective action and the bicycle is a powerful tool that works as a major portion of the Critical Mass tactical identity, solidarity, and collective identity that surrounds it.
The automobile and police opposition facing Critical Mass feeds the collective identity of cyclists while bystanders and other audiences also contribute. The shared interest in cycling and the unique experience that only a cyclist may have as he or she weaves in and out of traffic at high speed affirms and solidifies his community. “It’s just a part of who I am and what I do. And a lot of my life revolves around bicycles . . . I stick with it because I like the way I feel.” This reinforces the idea that emotional connections are important to collective identity (Jasper & Polletta 2001). This experience of collective emotion remains important in considering the rolling celebration to which I now turn.

Celebration and the Rolling Party

The pleasure of protest can be seen in Critical Mass collectively where protest resembles a rolling party. While riders experience and perceive their emotions differently in Critical Mass, the pleasure of protest, excitement of the carnival, collective joy, and fulfillment of expressing similar interests is gratifying for cycling activists. The ability of Critical Mass to alter traditionally auto-centric spatial arrangements into a celebration of cyclist identity affirmation is central to its purpose.

“I think it’s just an excuse for some chaos” argues former Chicago bicycle messenger Alfred. Rex states, “It’s some kind of party, some kind of celebration”. The ability for cyclists to experience joy and celebration in the Critical Mass is crucial for their development of empowered cyclist identities. Xena argues, “You may not be able to judge the success levels with like improving bike friendliness. But this time people are
getting to take over the streets! They are having fun, it’s really empowering that way.”

Xena exemplifies the intersection of joy and collective identity empowerment, though uncertain of the importance of the impacts of Critical Mass on changing automobile friendliness towards cyclists. While highlighting and focusing inward on social movement identity empowerment, the simple act of taking over the streets and having fun takes precedence.

From tying balloons, adding streamers, creating signage, and screaming chants in unison, the party atmosphere is important to the ability of Critical Mass riders to feel a sense of joy in urban spaces that might normally produce fear and anxiety. This was the case in all three cities in which participant observation took place, each exhibiting a celebratory nature and the creation of social and safe spaces of collective action. The collective emotion and song of Critical Mass, for example, has an invigorating effect on riders linked to the “pleasures of protest” (Jasper 1998). The intersection of celebration in protest and empowering cyclist collective identity is an important part of Critical Mass and its ability to successfully forge a more powerful cyclist identity

The atmosphere of the city and the spirit of the Critical Mass coalesce as both infect the other with positive vibes. As Xena notes,

I would say in the summer when it’s warmer there is a few people who have really loud music. Also, when it’s warmer and there is more people outside, the majority of pedestrians get really excited and that is really nice. And another thing I have noticed, taxi drivers honk and wave which is interesting.

Critical Mass changes the perception of gawkers and pedestrians towards cyclists as its spirit is infectious to its surroundings. The celebration creates a hybrid focus both inward
on emerging cyclist identity, and outward on the urban context. Pedestrians, taxis, and fraternity house occupants on the front porch of homes in the college town of Athens, Ohio, for example, cheer, clap, and yell (“who is winning the race?! What is going on here? Come look at this!”) as Critical Mass traverses city space and changes the perception of cycling and cyclist’s identities by people outside of the movement, while also solidifying cyclist collective identity within.

Using bikes to create a symbolism of what dominated city landscapes before the automobile is an effective way Critical Mass celebrates the bicycle and empowers the riders with the carnival. “Yeah and they dressed up, some people dressed up their bikes. They converted a tandem bike and made it look like a horse. People were riding the horse!” exclaims Critical Mass rider Mick. Critical Mass participant Red also notes this reversal of bringing cycling technologies back to the days of the horse: “I think bicycles and horses are going to take over the automobile. One day when we meet Mad Max levels of um, you know gasoline shortages. It will be bicycles and horses.” Reversing the symbolic dominating presence of automobiles back to not only bikes, but horses greatly illustrates the ability of Critical Mass to alter the meaning of urban space through celebration. Costumes, chants, signage, and symbolic reversals of cultural artifacts fuel the pleasure of protest while also accomplishing the goal of redefining urban spaces. These new spaces are in the case of Critical Mass temporary activist havens where cyclists can actualize their full cyclist collective identity.
Taken together, findings here connect with Presdee’s (2000) conceptualization of the carnival of transgression\(^{12}\) and the extent to which the Critical Mass expresses a party-like atmosphere. Critical Mass is a celebration of cyclist rights in opposition to the dominance of cars that exhibits “elements of the performance of pleasure at the margins in opposition to the dominant values”—in this case the automobile (Presdee 2002:10). The reciprocal collective emotional release brings cyclists together through shared revelry and common interests in cycling while allowing for the pleasure of protest (Jasper 1998). This reinforces Taylor (2000) who argues for the solidifying impacts of collective emotional joy and protest against a common opposition to their targets of collective action (Taylor 2000:229).

**Safe Spaces**

The Critical Mass opens up “spheres of collective identity” (Polletta 1999) where communities and movements can operate outside the control of dominant groups. The fear a cyclist has of being struck and severely injured by an automobile when riding alone is alleviated by the buffer zone of the Critical Mass and its safe space. Furthermore the feeling of safety allows for the possibilities of strengthening cyclist collective identities.

Fostering a feeling of safety and security is important for cyclists who navigate auto-centric urban spatial arrangements. As Rex argues, “I don’t really feel that um I am dangerous while I am biking or in danger I guess is a good way to put it. I do have close

\(^{12}\) Much of the energy and emotion involved with traditional protest is released in Critical Mass and can actually stifle real revolution (Presdee 2002:7). However Critical Mass and other carnivalesque events like it are no less desirable, pleasurable, and worthy of activist participation in their “second life” (Presdee 2002:7).
calls but they are rare. In Critical Mass it’s so rare itself.” Riders feel safe in the face of the automobile driving opposition and this is one of the primary benefits in which the means of the rolling parade also work as the goal. “When I’m inside the mass um, I feel, its weird combinations, I feel safe in close calls. Whereas, I guess when I’m riding alone it’s a lot of like cars cutting you off or really close passing you with no clearance and I will get [mumbled] because there is like 4 or 5 bikers on each side of me.” Xena expresses a similar sentiment: “I feel more safe on the ride because there is bikers all around you. Just being in a big group like that feels safe.” Cooper also argues that a feeling of safety permeates the Critical Mass (“You know doing it in a group is really nice because you feel really safe with all the other cyclists”) while Jeanna states “Yeah you have a buffer like there is other bicyclists that could get hit before you.”

The effects of riding in the Critical Mass and its temporary safe spaces go further beyond the actual ride itself and spillover into the everyday lives of cyclists. This empowers the novice cyclist and gives them a feeling of safety on their bicycle in their everyday commutes and solo joy rides even though they may not be ensconsed within the immediate presence of the group. Exemplifying this, Rex states “I was scared about biking in Minneapolis. My first few Critical Masses I was wow! This ain’t so hard! Even though, I don’t have a hundred people around at all times, it took away my fear a little bit.” The feeling of safety carries over and allows cyclists to alleviate their fears of the automotive opposition. Marlo also expressed the utilization of Critical Mass for empowerment over autopia outside of Critical Mass rides. Marlo planned a bicycle trip down the coast of Washington, Oregon, and California, explaining that the Critical Mass
experience empowered her to complete such a long ride. “Having that security with me really helped me feel comfortable about you know deciding to bike all the way down the coast.”

The creation of safe spaces also contributes to the togetherness and sense of solidarity among cyclists. When facing a barrage of police during a Minneapolis, Minnesota Critical Mass, Flipper discusses the need for fellow riders to watch out for one another: “You take care of each other especially when the mass gets to be 1,000 people strong. Anyway, this guy and I, he and I went to the sidewalk and it was like the second I flipped his bike upside down to work on his rear wheel, that is when the mace started coming out.” Added vulnerability caused by use of pepper spray made the sense of togetherness between Flipper, her friend in need of a bike repair, and the rest of the Critical Mass much more powerful and close knit. The safe zone of Critical Mass became compromised by the use of pepper spray by police, however Critical Mass participants were still able to protect each other. Furthermore relating to protection of fellow cyclists in the safe spaces of Critical Mass, Rex argues that the reason for his continued participation in Critical Mass despite his years of cycling experience is both for a feeling of nostalgia, and to provide novice riders with someone to look up to. Rex’s decision to continue in Critical Mass stems from his paternal desire to show novice riders the ropes and protect his fellow cycling brethren.

In the Critical Mass, safety in numbers creates a padding, buffer zone, or similar haven where space is used as a bonding mechanism against the automobile driving opposition as in Polletta (1999). The relatively slow moving mass allows for new
possibilities in the realm of new friendships and pleasure all while forging a more powerful biketivist collective identity.

**Social Spaces**

The ability of Critical Mass cyclists to be social and interact with their fellow masser, environment, pedestrian, and automobile driver is important to what Critical Mass is all about. In this section I articulate Polletta’s (1999) conceptualization of free space even further to include the idea of social space.

Xena describes a summertime Critical Mass where she arrived to the mass alone, but knew she would meet other participants with an interest in cycling. “Everyone else was with their friends. But it’s still easy to be social when you are biking with other people.” Xena interacted with other cyclists through the social spaces that Critical Mass creates. The pleasure of protest even among strangers is important here in that protest can be “satisfying even when done with strangers-who of course no longer feel like strangers” (Jasper 1998:418). The people and social interactions involved with protest are just as important if not more so than what the movement actually stands for. Rex describes his initial feeling of isolation as a bike commuter when he first moved to Minneapolis. Because of Critical Mass, Rex argues, “I could feel like I was not the only person out there doing it.” Rex extends this, discussing in more detail the isolating characteristics of autopia in comparison to the social possibilities of cycling that Critical Mass exemplifies:

Um, for one a car is kind of isolating, you can’t have a conversation. Or it’s hard to have a conversation with someone beside you in your car.
Like you can’t drive along and be like hey! And I have run into people I
know on a bike I just pull over and start talking to them. Or people I don’t
know, you just smile . . . say hi or whatever.

Such social interaction potential is essential for forging and solidifying a collective
cyclist identity.

Carving out a social space for the cycling activist’s identity in opposition to
automobiles is thus an important part of the Critical Mass. One reason for this is the
empowerment of cyclists on city streets that can result, to which Rex states “I think
(Critical Mass) empowers people who may have not have been empowered otherwise to
feel like as cyclists, they have a right to be there.” The cyclist’s identity is something that
must be forged and injected into the everyday autopia. Jeanna argues, “There is more
people out there like you with your passions and that definitely would affirm anyone with
that passion . . . I feel empowered.” Furthermore, she adds, “everyone goes to have a
good time with other likeminded people.” Cyclists can go to Critical Mass and feel a
sense of togetherness within the biketivist community. The knowledge gained at Critical
Mass that there are other people with similar interests and passions for cycling is valuable
to the Critical Mass experience. Jeanna states, “It’s like whoa there is more of us that are
all about this lifestyle and it’s encouraging.” The social spaces opened up in Critical
Mass allow cyclists to develop a biketivist community in which they can interact and
bond with others during and after the Critical Mass rides.

Red expresses his thoughts on the community ideal, illustrating the boundaries
between autopia and Critical Mass

Yeah! You notice other bikers riding around and you sort of see them all
the time and you get a sense of community versus in a car all you see is
another car, you don’t see their face. So I think biking in general just builds a great community feeling you know? Like when you ride your bike around a city you feel connected with the city. When you are just driving around I don’t think you feel the same connection.

The social aspect of cycling strengthens the bonds between other cyclists in conquering autopian urban spaces.

**Autopian Opposition and Cyclist Collective Identity Solidification**

The autopian urban spatial arrangement of the city is the primary reason for Critical Mass. Undermining the auto-centric occurs despite swearing and swerving automobile drivers. Critical Mass and its focus both inward on solidification of its own identity and outward on usurping the automobile’s hegemonic cultural presence, makes Critical Mass an interesting new social movement. While representing a symbolic necessity for the existence of Critical Mass, automobiles also solidify cyclist identities around a common hegemonic cultural opposition. The normative ideal of driving a car to and from point A and B in the culture of autopia creates and strengthens a marginalized identity around the technology of the bicycle and the activity of biketivism.

“Get off the fuckin’ road bitch!” “Fuck you!” and “Get on the fuckin’ sidewalk!” are a sampling of the phrases Flipper has heard while cycling. How does hearing such threatening language make a cyclist feel? Red argues in an interview from Columbus, Ohio:

I think it’s a good thing that it pisses drivers off because drivers just get, well Critical Mass typically if it pisses drivers off it just makes them use to being pissed off so in a large group they aren’t going to do anything. Yeah, and they won’t like do something aggressive towards the lone biker
on his normal daily commute. So I think it’s a good thing that it pisses people off a bit.

Red’s depiction of the angry driver is turned upside down with signage and carnivalesque reversal (Presdee 2000). Jeanna, who utilizes signage and chants that say “Honk if you love bikes,” articulates this. “That usually shuts them up” she chuckles. This playful reversal of meaning and co-optation of oppositional anger alters the impact of the automobile horn and empowers the cyclist to alter the meanings from “Get off the fuckin’ road bitch!” to “bikes are your friends” notes Alfred. The persecuting hostility against the cycling community by automobiles and the empowerment of cyclists in opposition to their common enemies connects with Erikson who notes, “The Quaker movement was nourished by the cruelties of its enemies” (Erikson 2005:125). The aggression of automobiles nourishes the we-ness of cyclists who become more empowered against a common opposition.

As a participant observer in Critical Mass, I became a part of the bicycle riding milieu. In a text message, Critical Mass rider Ernie informed me that there would be a “peaceful bike rally for civil justice wed. @ 8:30. A woman hit by a turning car while going straight being ticketed. Bring a bike to ct.house”. This call to other cyclists in the Critical Mass social network for a rally in support of a fellow cyclist is in opposition to police who issued the cyclist a ticket and the automobile that struck the cyclist. Cyclists are banding together to protect their bicycle riding brethren while collective identities in the Critical Mass movement against the automotive opposition contribute to both cyclist identity construction and solidification.
Police Opposition and Cyclist Collective Identity Solidification

The presence of police in Critical Mass has evolved to be a normal occurrence. The police play the role of moderator and enforcer between automobile and cyclist, while they also become a significant contributor to the rolling party of Critical Mass. Some cyclists are comforted by the presence of police and support their presence. However, this further validates the argument that police opposition makes the performance of Critical Mass possible. Less aggression in Critical Mass cited by Carlsson (2002) was a natural process that evolved to include the police in its rides. Critical Mass participant Xena states, “after awhile, you just stop caring, or not caring as much” about the presence of police. Rex reinforces this perspective noting the role of police. “Yeah, it’s a party too. The cops are there.” The police are a part of the Critical Mass and aid in the creation of how the Critical Mass feels and looks. Some riders do feel intimidated by the presence and actions of police and the potential for repression; however, they participate anyway. Flipper argues, “In the beginning I went because it was a fun way to be a part of bicycle advocacy. Just being a part of the mass. And now it is just stressful because of the police involvement.” The police as a barrier to participation affects how and if cyclists participate in Critical Mass, however the way in which police use flashing lights, sirens, and even give citations, helps fuel the Critical Mass as a carnival of transgression. This works to nurture the celebratory space that Critical Mass creates.

Presdee’s argument that police add to “the excitement of the circus” (2002:7) fits with the thoughts of Critical Mass rider Rex who notes: “They weren’t there to do a mass arrest, they wanted to keep things in line. It was actually kind of comical because
there were dozens of bike cops, a few squad cars, a police van, a news helicopter.” The massive police presence at this ride highlights the idea that the police’s role in Critical Mass adds to the excitement of the circus. At the same time it also legitimates the ride—something important to reinforcing the collective identity of cyclists. Meanwhile the celebratory space of Critical Mass is also legitimized and attracts sympathy for their activities from the public. Cycling becomes an activity of cultural expression in opposition to the rules order and sobriety and this occurs because of the police opposition.

Police vans, squad cars, and helicopters with their accompanying flashing lights, sirens, spotlights, and buzz followed a Critical Mass ride around Minneapolis of about 30 riders for 45 minutes to an hour time during a November 2008 participant observation. The police were truly part of the parade that cruised through the University of Minnesota and up and down 1st Avenue in front of the Target Center. With only a turnout of 30 riders, the police almost outnumbered the cyclists, creating more of a supportive environment than an intimidating one. Furthermore, the police created an “excitement effect” (Gillham and Marx 2000:224) adding to the thrill of the event. Because of the flashing lights, spotlights, and sirens, it was almost as if the Critical Mass was being ceremoniously ushered through the streets in the face of the automotive opposition, while police served to empower and legitimize the Critical Mass against its autopian adversary.

Erikson describes the historical trial and punishment of offenders within the public market place where crowds could participate. “Today, of course, we no longer parade deviants in the town square or expose them to the carnival atmosphere of a
Tyburn” (Erikson 2005:12). This is debatable given that today’s Critical Mass is exposed to a carnival atmosphere aided by the police. In addition to the newspapers and television stations that draw boundaries in today’s media (Erikson 2005:12), the drawing of lines of morality in the “public square” is seen as the police escort cyclists and play referee between them and automobiles. The crowds in the trials in the markets described by Erikson are easily replaced with the automobile driving majority, as auto-centric spatial arrangements are temporarily broken. Police approve and affirm both sides, right to urban space while enforcing the boundaries of each community.

Minneapolis Critical Mass rider Mick favors the presence of police in Critical Mass because “they made it a little more orderly” adding that the cyclists played “cat and mouse games” with the police squad cars. This parallels Erikson who points to the relationship between police and criminal, “making countermoves in the same game” (2005:20). The moves and countermoves of police and cyclist as described by both Erikson and Mick shows the intertwined relationship between police and Critical Mass.

As Ferrell notes, “... law and crime, control and resistance emerge each in the image of the other” (2001:97). This theme is seen as police and the Critical Mass interact with each other while the former maintain the boundaries between automobile and cyclist.

**Discussion**

Critical Mass exemplifies the solidifying strength of the social, safe, and celebratory spaces where activists empower themselves around a common opposition. Despite the presence of many cyclist types, the Critical Mass provides we-ness for all
bicycle riders who feel as if their experience is not isolated. Cyclist rights to the road are confirmed and the vast cycling community is visible to not only drivers but also other bicycle riders. Critical Mass can thus serve in providing greater understandings of collective identity and empowerment in new social movements.

Presdee notes that Critical Mass serves the purpose of a “playful and pleasurable revolution where those normally excluded from power may lift their voices in anger and celebration” (2002:7). New opportunities for marginalized collective identities to usurp the dominance of the majority are essential for the construction, empowerment, and maintenance of social movement identities attacking dominant cultural paradigms. As Flipper claims, “29 or 30 days out of the month we have to yield to automobile traffic and two hours a month, one day a month, we ask that they yield to us. And I think that is just a beautiful thing.” The construction, solidification, and empowerment of cyclist collective identity in opposition to automobiles occurs within a broad cultural foundation with a history of biketivism and Critical Mass carries this torch towards velorution.

Movements that have a pre-existing structure which grow within pre-established organizations and social networks are in a much better position to mobilize human capital than movements that seek to mobilize isolated people (Snow and McAdam 2000:63). If there is an existing group of people with known identity commitments, it is easier to appropriate their services for movement goals. Thus, a sympathetic culture and public advantages emergent activist collective identities as the seeds of mobilization growth are already in place.
When the Critical Mass began there were over a hundred years of cycling history and millions of people who already rode bicycles on an everyday basis (Furness 2005). The expressive and tactical use of “biketivism” was ripe because tactical repertories utilized by Critical Mass to “invert the function of space” (Furness 2007:305) have long been practiced since the days of the Situationists, Flaneurs, and Surrealists (Furness 2007:305). Critical Mass as an identity movement that emphasizes “dominant cultural patterns and gaining recognition for new social identities, by employing expressive strategies” (Bernstein 2002:86) affirms and empowers collective cyclist identities through the use of tactically innovative “biketivist” strategies, that contribute to greater mobilization of a wide variety of cyclists.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Extending work by Ferrell (2001), Furness (2007), and Carlsson (2002), I argue that Critical Mass redefines the possibilities of the urban experience while allowing for a new temporary celebratory social space for cyclist empowerment that directly undermines hegemonic autopian cultural patterns. I emphasize the importance of empowering, solidifying, and constructing cyclist collective identity within the safe, social, and celebratory spaces that Critical Mass creates. This occurs as both social movement tactic and goal and for Critical Mass, the journey is indeed the destination.

It is essential to deconstruct the idea that Critical Mass riders are a homogenous group of only anarchists or commuters, or racers. Rather, Critical Mass is made up of cyclists with varied backgrounds and interests. This is significant to exploring the bonding mechanism of biketivists in coming together and coalescing over something greater: the right to share space within traditionally auto-centric urban spaces. The tactic of redefining space and carving out a niche for an emergent collective identity in the new social movement of Critical Mass also works as social movement goal. Social spaces, safe spaces, and celebratory spaces erupt and take over what was before a space dominated by cars. Critical Mass cyclists are allowed to communicate, bond, and experience emotive joy over their ability to express themselves in the new cultural milieu in which they have created. The construction, empowerment, and solidification of cyclists and their collective identities as cyclists occur not as commuter, anarchist, or racer, but rather in opposition to common enemies. This reinforces Polletta and Jasper’s

Combining these two elements provides an interesting backdrop for how new social movements are grown, nurtured, and made sustainable. The physical and cultural space in which Critical Mass exists is essential to its sustainability as cyclists use the temporary social, safe, and celebratory space to bond and empower their collective identity not just as commuter or anarchist, but as a cyclist who shares a common minority status in relation to the domination of automobiles on city streets.

While autopia is both the enemy of Critical Mass and its raison d’être, Critical Mass participants express their disdain for cussing drivers, but also the empowerment that arises because of the new possibilities. These new possibilities include the ability for cyclists to feel safe on what was before their first Critical Mass, a lonely experience of millions of cars versus a single cyclist’s effort to peddle. After a cyclist participates in Critical Mass, he or she knows there are hundreds and thousands of other cyclists who share an identity in opposition to autopia. As Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue,

Collective Identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed (2001:298).

The emergence of collective identity in Critical Mass occurs because of the automotive opposition and the minority status of cyclists.

The role of the automobile is important, however police also play a role in Critical Mass. Police act as movement intimidator, law enforcer, referee between automobiles
and Critical Mass, fuel to the carnival of transgression, and sometimes as seen in the
Minneapolis, Minnesota rides, ceremoniously usher cyclists through the streets as police
on bikes actually “cork” intersections. In addition to the perspective of cyclists, future
research should utilize semi-structured interviews to gather the viewpoints of police
officers and their experiences with Critical Mass.

This study goes beyond the previous foundational work of Carlsson (2001),
Ferrell (2002), and Furness (2007) to include a perspective that informs a greater
understanding of new social movements in contemporary society. The ability of Critical
Mass to create free spaces away from the dominant paradigm more greatly nurtures the
capability of the movement to empower and solidify cyclist collective identities, not as
anarchists or spandex riders but as cyclists with a common automobile opposition. It is
this opposition that is the glue of solidarity that fuels a “we-ness” within this new social
movement. This is made possible by the celebratory spaces, social spaces, and safe
spaces that create a “sphere of collective identity” (Polletta 1999) away from the stifling
affects of the dominant cultural milieu.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

How are you today?
How did you hear about the critical mass?
How many rides have you participated in before?
Have you participated in the Athens, Ohio critical mass before?
What types of experiences have you had in the critical mass?
Were they positive or negative?
Talk about what you are trying to accomplish while participating in critical mass.
Have you had conflicts with anyone or anything while participating in the critical mass?
Do you know other riders in the critical mass?
How do you feel when riding in the critical mass?
Have you dealt with any conflicts with police in the critical mass before?
Conflicts with motorists and pedestrians?
How would you describe your presence on a bicycle on the streets of Athens not on a critical mass ride?
Conversely, how would you describe your presence on a bicycle on the streets of Athens on a critical mass ride?
What kind of bike do you have?
Does riding in the critical mass make you consider aspects of urban life and the way cities are structured in different ways from when you are in a car or on foot?
Do you feel vulnerable in the critical mass?
Do you feel empowered in or by the critical mass?
How does the critical mass sustain itself?
Describe the critical mass in detail.
What is your motivation for participation?
What do you think most other riders motives are for participation?
How do you feel about rider safety?
How would you describe leadership in the critical mass?
Do you view critical mass as a social movement?
Do you feel like you are redefining any sort of cultural meanings in terms of what it means to exist, move within, or interact with urban space through the critical mass?
How do you interact with drivers or other people and social institutions that must share the same space as the critical mass?
What types of things do police do if anything to control, suppress, or negotiate with your collective group?