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IDENTITY RE-CREATION THROUGH RECREATION: THE CASE OF THE ALYN CHARITY BIKE RIDE¹

Introduction

In 2005, three hundred and twenty-five middle-aged, middle-class, busy, family men and women spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars preparing for and then participating in a five-day, 400-kilometre, charity bike ride from Israel's Golan Heights to Jerusalem. Participants rode through a blinding rain-storm, down a treacherous snake path, through dense traffic, and up difficult hills for the benefit of the Alyn Pediatric Hospital in Jerusalem. Half of the riders came from overseas and half from Israel.

Charitable sports events aim to engage as many people as possible as participants and fund raisers in support of local or international social causes. This method of raising money was initially used for "walks" in which donors "sponsored" participants on a per-mile basis. Participants earned donations only for the actual distance completed. Such events have evolved and now include fun runs, weekend walks, marathon races, and bicycle rides or tours in support of local and overseas events. Participants now usually pay a registration fee and are required to bring in minimum amounts of sponsorship dollars that are no longer tied to performance. Participation today typically involves a significant commitment of physical, psychological, and financial resources. Despite its proliferation and interesting characteristics, this sphere of activity is surprisingly under-investigated.

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Using the Alyn charity bike ride as the context of inquiry, this paper explores how participants' identities were constructed, dynamically "re-constructed," renovated, and re-created through this sporting event. The study brings together a number of diverse research approaches in order to understand how individuals use the recreational marketplace to produce, exchange, and enact identities. The paper conceptualizes the Alyn bike ride as a "consumable product" used to create, extend, alter, and re-integrate participants' identities and self-perceptions. We claim that the riders' experiences embody meanings of health, strength, and athletics; altruism, charity giving and philanthropy; and/or travel, Zionism, and Jewishness in its various forms. This event was a particularly interesting research site, because it provided the opportunity to understand how these multiple inputs are integrated into a comprehensive enactment of personal identification and self-perception.

There is considerable literature on each of the domains relevant to this study: recreation, non-competitive sports participation, volunteering and philanthropic behaviour, and tourism. No work to date, however, has specifically examined the convergence or commonality of these separate fields of inquiry, in general, nor at international charity sport events, in particular. This study aims to fill the gap.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background for this exploration comprises several fields of academic literature: consumer culture theory and the "consumption" of sports, recreation, and tourism; volunteering, altruism, and philanthropic behaviour; and finally, identity formation, in general, and--because the vast majority of the participants of this event were Jewish--Jewish identity and Diaspora-Israel relations, in particular.

Consumer Behaviour and Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer behaviour is generally framed in terms of a process of product or service acquisition (purchase) and consumption

(use, adoption and dispossession). Most consumer behaviour models present a “consumption cycle” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) that is composed of a detailed sequence of steps including information search, acquisition, consumption, possession, and dispossession processes (e.g., Belk, 1988). Examining these processes more deeply, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) links consumption to broader cultural meanings situated in place and time. CCT explores how consumers actively modify, transform, and appropriate symbolic meanings encoded in goods, services, and experiences in order to fit and manifest their particular personal and social circumstances, identities, and life goals (Mick & Buhl, 1992). From this perspective, the marketplace is a source of inputs, props, and mechanisms with which consumer actors construct individual and collective identities.

Historically, the gender, social class, culture, or cohort to which one was born defined his/her identity. Current cultural conditions, however, provide for considerable fluidity in identity definition (McCracken, 1986). Social actors are free to create identities of their choice on a minute-by-minute basis (Fournier, 1998). The “objects” and “activities” acquired and consumed in the marketplace are used to construct, express, and produce the personal identities and contribute to the life projects, themes, and journeys of the consumers/producers involved. By participating in the consumption process, “consumers” become, in effect, “producers” of their own identity. This self-consumption/production occurs through processes of knowing, using, controlling, mastering, and otherwise acquiring products, services, and experiences (Belk, 1988). While only limited consumer research to date has attended specifically to philanthropic, sport, or tourist activities, these recreational domains certainly represent sources of identity inputs and loci of identity enactments. Thus, conceptualizing an international charity bike ride as a “consumable product” provides an interesting and novel look into consumer behaviour as a source of identity re-creation.

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Volunteering, Philanthropy, and Identity

Participation in and fund raising for an international charitable bike ride consists of both philanthropic and volunteering behaviour. Participants must invest hundreds of unpaid hours in raising funds, training, and traveling to the event, and thousands of dollars to register and travel to the riding location. Research examining philanthropic behaviours has identified motivating factors that are both self-oriented (benefiting the individual) and community-oriented (benefiting society) (Janoski & Wilson, 1995). Scholars have also considered the role of human, cultural, and social resources in explaining the race-based (Musick, Wilson & Bynum, 2000), gender-based (Schlozman, Burns & Verba, 1994), and religion-based (Cnaan, Kasternakis & Wineburg, 1993) differences which underlie philanthropic and voluntary actions.

In addition to these internalized and personal factors, philanthropic behaviour is also influenced by the norms and obligations of an individual's social networks (Berger, Cunningham & Drumright, 2006; Berger & Gainer, 2002). Findings in the latter studies indicate that the decision where, when, and how to give depends on the socialized meanings associated with the gift and the extent to which the gift supports and is supported by an individual's chosen social network. In other words, charitable donations of time or money may be related not just to the worthiness of the cause, but also to the psychosocial meaning that accrues to the donor (Gainer, 1995; Woocher, 1986). Philanthropy not only rewards the donor with a generalized positive feeling, but also provides important building blocks for his or her construction of identity (Berger & Gainer, 2002). The decision to donate and to what cause, then, is a function of the individual's current personal identity and goals.

Jewish Identity and Philanthropic Behaviour

Jewish identity is widely understood to be a complex identification with religious beliefs and practices, with a historic people and culture, and with a socio-political ideology of social justice

(Cohen, 1998; Legge, 1999; Liebman & Cohen, 1999; Sharot, 1997). This multidimensional identity can be manifested in different ways depending on the particular aspects of Jewish identity highlighted by individuals and communities. Identification with the religious aspects of Jewishness might be expressed through religious rituals such as fasting on Yom Kippur or attending religious ceremonies (Amyot & Sigelman, 1996; Himmelfarb & Loar, 1984). Identification with the ethnic aspects of Jewishness might be expressed through participation in communal activities such as friendships, communication networks, endogamy, or organization memberships (Kivisto & Nefzger, 1993). Identification with the socio-political, social justice aspects of Jewishness might be expressed through political action, advocacy work, or philanthropic activities such as donating time or money to worthy causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish (Sklare & Greenblum, 1979).

A review of literature on the sociology of Jews supports this conceptualization. The notion of tzedakah—mutual help and the active involvement of individuals in assisting the needy—is a strong Jewish tradition and a highly valued form of behaviour (Jaffe, 1992; Marx, 1979; Yishai, 1986). Giving to Jewish causes, supporting communal activities, and taking collective responsibility for the Jewish community around the world is a highly ritualized act for many Jews. The annual cycle of raising funds, making contributions, and celebrating those who raise and give funds is an integral part of diaspora Jewish communal life (Cohen, 1998). Indeed, some have argued that this activity forms the core of what Jonathan Woocher (1986) calls “civil Judaism.” To the extent, moreover, that individuals identify with the community, become involved in its activities, and develop close ties to its members and leaders, they are likely to give more to the causes it supports. They are likely to do so as a form of self-expression, as a way of securing a position in the community, and/or in order to construct a personal or public identity.

Supporting and connecting with the state of Israel can be linked to any one of the three dimensions of Jewish identity.

Support for Israel can be seen as a religious obligation by those who consider Israel an aspect of a redemptive religious process “the first flowering of our redemption,” as the prayer for the state of Israel (Scherman, 1984, p. 451) recited in synagogues puts it. Alternatively, support can be based on what Sheffer (2002, p. 343) calls “symbolic-cultural factors,” such as a strong sense of common history and perceptions of Israel as the historical place of origin of the Jewish people. Finally, attachment to Israel can be based on liberal values and the perception of Israel as a small, beleaguered, democratic nation worthy of Western support (Liebman, 1999).

Philanthropic activities by diaspora Jews that support the Jewish community in Israel are not a new phenomenon. For many centuries, diaspora Jews have provided financial and other forms of support to the Jewish communities in the Holy Land through various non-profit organizations (Gidron, 1997). Several studies stress the importance of Jewish philanthropy in the development of the Israeli non-profit sector (Gidron, 1997; Gidron et al, 2003; Jaffe, 1992). A study by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (State of Israel, 1996) found that 6.7 percent of the revenues of the Israeli non-profit sector derive from diaspora contributions. Gidron and colleagues (2003, p. 43) identify diaspora Jewish philanthropy as one of four major forces influencing the size, structure, and nature of the Israeli non-profit sector. (The others are the state, organized Jewish religion, and labour unions.) Referring to diaspora philanthropy, Jaffe, pointedly states: “It is obvious that many Israeli nonprofit organizations would wither without these funds” (Jaffe, 1992, p. 171).

In the early years of the state, philanthropic giving by diaspora Jews to Israel was channelled through a federated and centralized system of fund raising abroad and a centralized system of fund distribution in Israel (Gidron, 1997). The system did not allow designated giving, and all funds were channelled through a general purse managed by the Jewish Agency, a quasi-governmental organization with close links to the central government. Since the mid-1970s, this philanthropic structure

has changed in two important ways. First, a range of new non-profit organizations, many of them advocating government policy changes, has been established. Second, a generation of younger Jewish donors, who are less inclined to support the “state of Israel,” in general, and prefer to focus on specific projects or organizations has emerged. These donors seek greater accountability, greater knowledge of where their money is going, and a more direct, personal connection to the recipient (Wertheimer, 1997). Israeli organizations aware of this trend have established fundraising offices (the “Friends of...” model) and campaigns abroad to tap this emerging donor market, competing directly with the federated institutions. As a result, federated, centralized coffers have declined in relative size and importance compared to the more participatory forms of philanthropy (Wertheimer, 1997). The philanthropy associated with the Alyn Bike Ride falls into this participatory category.

As this very brief review suggests, philanthropic giving, in particular, to Israeli institutions is an integral part of diaspora Jewish identities. These gifts provide donors with inputs in the form of highly valued religious, social, and communal characteristics.

Sports and Identity

Recreational sport is a ubiquitous aspect of the Canadian landscape. Individuals are engaged as active participants, volunteers, or spectators at a range of levels in team games (basketball, hockey, football) and individual games (golf, running, cycling), in amateur pick-up games at the park and professional and Olympic games. In the broadest sense, sport provides economic, health, social, and cultural benefits to individuals and society (Bloom, Grant, & Wyatt, 2005; Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2002). While the general benefits associated with regular participation in sports and physical activities are well recognized, there are significant gender and age variations in physical activity which is largely dominated by young males.

The demographic composition of sports participants in North America may be changing dramatically, however, as the

baby-boomer cohort renegotiates what were formerly gender-specific and age-specific constraints (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997). For example, Curves International, a fitness club chain for middle-aged women, is the “fastest growing franchise of any kind in history” (Gibbs, 2005). The growing popularity of “learn to” run, walk, or cycle clinics, some targeted at and restricted to women, also points to these changes. Popular descriptions of newly active, middle-aged, “weekend warriors” attest to the recreative potential of active sports. For example, in 2005 the Toronto *Star* quoted one middle-aged female marathoner, who claimed: “Everything that I’ve learned about life I’ve learned from running marathons” (Carey, 2005, p. D.1). She went on to elaborate in terms of “setting goals, tenacity, resolve, courage, consistency, [and] adapting to changes you have nothing to do with” (p. D.1). Adult participation in recreational sport is clearly a growing phenomenon and appears to be a highly valued component of middle-aged Canadian identity.

Tourism and Identity

Sports tourism is an emerging sub-field of tourism (Hinch & Higham, 2001). Researchers are beginning to consider the motivations and behaviour of the “ego-tourist,” who searches “for a style of travel which is reflective of an ‘alternative’ lifestyle and which is capable of maintaining and enhancing cultural capital” (Munt, 1994, p. 108). These “ego-tourists” appear to enter into the travel marketplace in order to develop their own “individuality, integration and authenticity” (p. 108), and to acquire qualities such as “strength of character, adaptability, sensitivity or even ‘worldliness’” (p. 109). This identity re-creation behaviour is enacted, according to this view, through processes of intellectualization, professionalization, discourse, and spatial hegemonic struggles (Munt 1994). *Intellectualization* refers to experiences that offer and/or demand study and learning. *Professionalization* refers to the prominence of tour/group leaders who are professionals with credentials, degrees, experiences, and cvs that legitimize their leadership role. *Discourse and practice*

refer to the adventurous, broad-minded, independent nature of these experiences. *Hegemonic spatial struggles* refer to the exclusiveness, uniqueness, and romanticism that are central elements of this form of tourism. Munt suggests that through these processes of learning, credentialing, adventure, and classification post-modern ego-tourists create self-identity.

Motivationally, an “ego-tourist” appears to be very similar to what might be called an “ego-athlete” or “ego-philanthropist” who seeks identity inputs from his/her recreational activity. Furthermore, minus the spatial element, the key processes of identity re-creation--intellectualization and professionalization--are clearly present and perhaps even dominant in the other recreational sectors. Academic programs, scholarly and popular literature, clinics, instructors, trainers, “schools,” centres, and institutes focused on each of these spheres are growing in leaps and bounds. The purpose of these developments is to legitimize, accredit, and professionalize their respective sectors in order to support (among other things) the identity re-creation of their constituents. Using qualitative methods, we explore how an international charity cycling event can serve to support the identity re-creation of a group of philanthropic sports tourists.

Method

Information on motivations and identities of bike ride participants was gathered through a set of pre-ride and post-ride interviews with a group of Toronto riders in the 2005 Alyn “Wheels of Love” bike ride. We conducted twelve pre-ride interviews and ten post-ride interviews with fourteen individuals (see Figure 1 below). After obtaining permission from the event organizers, all Toronto-based riders were identified from the Wheels of Love website and contacted with no predetermined requirements or conditions. As compensation for their participation, a \$10.00 pre-ride and \$15.00 post-ride donation to Alyn was made in the name of each interviewee. All interviewees were Canadian Jews who ranged in age from the mid-40s to the

mid-60s. Six interviewees were female, and eight were male. Interviews were conducted in coffee shops or in riders' homes, depending on circumstances and interviewee preferences. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each and, following informed consent, were recorded on audio tape and then transcribed. It is important to mention that all interviewees had been to Israel at least once before this ride, and all had at least minimal involvement in sports activities prior to registering for the Alyn ride. For at least a third of the group, however, the ride was their first cycling experience.

In our analysis, we made supplementary use of standard qualitative research techniques including participant observation, content analysis of newspaper items describing the event, diaries, web log entries, and email correspondence made available to us by the interviewees. Importantly, the first author (Ida Berger) participated in the ride, training, raising the required donation, and riding the entire route. (Her day-by-day log of the event is available at <http://idasride.blogspot.com/>)

The interview transcripts and supplementary information sources were analyzed for content and coded for emerging themes. Observations and findings were shared during strategy meetings. Lists of themes (e.g., Israel, sports challenge, philanthropy justification, motivation, learning processes, gear, consumption, nostalgia, *communitas*, etc.) were developed, supported, and refined until consensus was reached. Concurrently, scholarly literature was collected to provide an intellectual context for the emerging themes. We turn now to a discussion of the findings.

Findings

Our goal in this paper is to use a consumer culture theory perspective to develop an understanding of the core motivations and realized personal outcomes of Wheels of Love participants. As highlighted in the literature reviewed above, and as revealed in the interviews, there are numerous potential and actual motivations underlying a decision to participate in such an event.

FIGURE 1: RIDER PROFILES

	Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Pre-ride Interview	Post-ride Interview	Last Visit to Israel	Biking Experience
1.	Barbara	F	X	X	< 1 year	Novice*
2.	Dana	F	X	X	1 year	Intermediate*
3.	Daniel	M	X	-	1 year	Intermediate
4.	Eva	F	X	X	> 20 years	Novice
5.	Eli	M	X	-	< 1 year	Advanced*
6.	Gabriel	M	X	-	5-6 years	Novice
7.	Jennie	F	-	X	1 year	Advanced
8.	Jacob	M	X	X	4-5 years	Novice
9.	Joseph	M	-	X	< 1 year	Advanced
10.	Julie	F	X	X	2 years	Novice
11.	Moses	M	X	X	> 20 years	Novice
12.	Nathan	M	X	X	8-9 years	Advanced
13.	Samuel	M	X	-	< 1 year	Intermediate
14.	Susan	F	X	X	1 year	Novice

* novice=no organized biking experience; intermediate=some organized biking experience; advanced=competitive and organized biking experience

The list includes: having fun; raising money for a worthy cause; achieving or maintaining a fitness goal; accomplishing a particular challenge; taking up or continuing cycling; traveling as a tourist, in general, or to Israel, in particular. The analysis below will illustrate that all of these motivations are paradoxically both authentically true yet not sufficient. They are authentic and true in that they were mentioned and contributed to participants' considerations. But authenticity notwithstanding, none of these motivations, in isolation, can sufficiently explain participation.

Based on classic consumer theory, such as multi-attribute attitude models (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), such decisions could be deconstructed into a set of salient beliefs or expectations, each of which could be separately weighted and then totaled to arrive at an explanation of behaviour. In this case, however, informants found such analyses almost impossible. When asked to rank their motivations, they were stumped. They

responded that all these factors together had motivated their decision to participate. Interviewees adamantly characterized the motivating factors as a “perfect package” (Barbara), a “confluence” or “convergence” (Jacob), “unique chemistry” (Nathan), that “in every aspect was so close to [the] heart” (Daniel) that “a light bulb was turned on” (Nathan).

In the sections below, we explore this “unique chemistry” by deconstructing the package into its three key elements, while trying to identify the themes that bind them together. By so doing, we hope to understand the process and meaning of identity re-creation through charitable recreation from the riders’ perspective. The three inter-locking, negotiated, consumed, and re-created identities that we explore are those of the diaspora Jewish pilgrim, the middle-aged athlete, and the participant philanthropist.

The Diaspora Jewish Pilgrim Coming Home

All informants had been to Israel before, some as recently as a few months prior to the ride, and many had been to the very places traveled during the ride (see figure 1 above). Nevertheless, they all talked about and rationalized their motivation for participation in the ride in terms of a visit to Israel. For some, this was a renewal or re-acquaintance after a long absence. For others, it was a continuation or extension of regular and frequent visits. The act of deeply connecting with and symbolically acquiring or possessing the land of Israel was a consistent, animated, passionate, almost obsessive motivation articulated by all the riders. They spoke of Israel “calling,” “drawing,” and “urging” them to come. In his pre-ride interview Moses stated:

I certainly have had an urge to go to Israel. That was sort of in the background before I knew about the ride...I have a draw [sic] to go to Israel because, as I said, I’ve been building my Judaism and my observance and my spirituality. It’s been building more into my life. The last

time I was in Israel I wasn't of the same mind.
It's very meaningful for me to be in Israel now.

There was a very spiritual and sacred tone to the way the interviewees discussed this motivation, although the connotation was not always "religious." Sometimes support for the country was expressed in terms of cultural or Zionist attitudes. In his post-ride interview, Joseph asserted:

There's something very special and very exhilarating about being in Israel and being able to bike ride there and breathing the air. You know, it's part of my culture and my background and certainly being able to see Israel in this way was a very unique and interesting experience.

Barbara said something similar in her post-ride interview:

I think it's really just my upbringing. My parents are very, very avid Zionists. I think I told you, my parents were actually in Israel at the same time. They bought an apartment in Jerusalem maybe 17 or 18 years ago and for years and years and years, I was brought up with talking . . . about Israel all the time. It was a major thing in their life, and I was first brought to Israel when I was 12 years old. So I was brought up on this love of Israel, and I guess it just sort of . . . stayed with me.... Obviously the country just has a special place in my heart. It's not a religious thing; I don't know what it is. It's just something; it's just part of me.

Whatever its source, the undercurrent was always laden with emotion, tradition, and depth of meaning. This meaning was captured and amplified through the ride's relationship to the biblical portion read that week in synagogues, the *Lech Lecha* (Go Forth!) section of Genesis. In this passage, Abraham is commanded: "Arise! Walk the length and breadth of the land, for unto thee will I give it" (Genesis 13:17). Some biblical exegetes interpret Abraham's travels as both a symbolic (Scherman, 1993) and a legal act "denoting acquisition" (Hertz,

1960, p.49). Throughout the ride, including the starting announcements and the closing banquet, the ride was connected to this verse and thereby both implicitly and explicitly to the “acquisition—consumption” process. Thus the organizers as well as the riders evoked the idea of travel through the land (here in the form of cycling) as a method of connecting to and gaining “possession” of the land. As Dana put it in her pre ride interview:

You really become attached to the land like [this]. You can bike anywhere in the world but in Israel it was very special.

Susan went further in her post-ride interview:

Being in Israel and seeing it...that way was so incredible. It's similar [to riding elsewhere], but this is the land of Israel. So it has all that much more significance. I've been there many times but never on a bike. So riding up to Jerusalem on a bike, I remember the bike chugging its way up there. To have done it with your own leg power and to see it so intimately was quite overwhelming.

These comments indicate that two aspects of travel were necessary in order for the experience to be “overwhelming” and carry an “attachment” meaning: cycling as opposed to some other form of tourist travel, and being in Israel as opposed to some other locale. Embedded in these and many other comments is the actual process by which such travel produces attachment and acquisition. The interviews called to mind an older tourist metaphor, one that is pre-modern and rooted in ancient Jewish behaviour—namely, pilgrimage. Sociologist Eric Cohen (1988) outlines a pilgrimage model of tourism based on the work of Turner (1973; and also, Turner & Turner, 1978), which proposes a sequence of three processes. First, the traveler separates from his/her spatial and social context. Second, the traveler crosses a threshold into a space and time quite different from his/her “ordinary, profane life” (Cohen, 1988, p. 37). Turner calls this “the Center out There” implying a psycho-socially

important but geographically distant, sought-after place. In this new liminal state, the traveler is free to experience the sacred, connect or bond with others in the same state, and behave in a highly playful, permissive, and not necessarily characteristic manner. In the third stage of the pilgrimage process at the completion of the liminal experience, the traveler re-enters his/her prior life with a newly acquired, re-created identity and social status.

The notion of pilgrimage helps to explain how travelers acquire or develop their new identity characteristics. It resonates clearly in the rider interviews. The riders' comments depict a process by which they traveled through the land and "acquired" it, extending their identities along the lines of Cohen's pilgrimage model.

Consistent with the process of "separation," the riders spoke about the preparations and negotiations involved in leaving family, work, and their Toronto lives. In his post-ride interview, Jacob put it this way:

I travel a lot on business and getting on a plane and going somewhere is not usually an issue for me.... I do it weekly. Getting on that plane with my family driving me to the airport, which they never do; I usually take my car or cab.... We were all excited...my bags were packed, and my bike was packed. It was a big deal. My six-year old daughter kept saying I should be careful, because the ride to Israel is very long, and I kept trying to explain to her that it was a ride "in Israel" not "to Israel." I tried to explain to her that I first go there, and then I ride. She said there was lots of water in between, and I should be careful. My son, because I was training so vigorously before the ride...must have heard me saying I was training so hard, because I didn't want to die on the Golan. So it's this imagery of me having a heart attack climbing the Golan sticking with him.... He got very nervous about it, and he hugged me very, very hard in the days

up to the ride and said: “Be careful dad! We want you to come back! Please don’t have a heart attack.” So it was very touching. So getting on that plane and leaving them on the curb at the airport was much more difficult than I anticipated, and I felt bad leaving them behind.

Consistent with Turner’s notional liminal state, riders spoke very passionately about their experiences riding in Israel, seeing and feeling the land, and especially ascending to Jerusalem. Some described their connection to the historical sacred meaning of the route being traveled. In his post-ride interview, Nathan waxed almost poetic:

[Perhaps] the most...[uplifting] moment was when, on the second day, we came out of Ramot...we were very, very high up over the Kinneret [the Sea of Galilee],...the highest point I...imagine you can get to. We overlooked the Kinneret. People were talking about what happened in biblical times, and other people were talking about current...politics.... So it was as if in one panorama you...[could] see the history and politics of the land...[over] thousands of years. It was really an awe-inspiring moment, even though we were soaking wet and freezing cold.....

In his post-ride interview, Jacob describes being transported into history:

There was one section when we got to Mt. Gilboa; there was a guy who took out the Tanach [Bible] and started reading about King Saul on Gilboa [who] was afraid to be killed by the Plishtim [Philistines] and couldn’t sleep because he was afraid. Just like how I couldn’t sleep that night, because I was afraid of the Gilboa to some extent. He was afraid for his life and his destiny and his place in history.

The interviews also revealed both the *communitas* (social bonding) and the playful behavior characteristic of the

voluntary liminal situation—what Cohen calls, “ludic.” Dana expressed it this way in her pre-ride interview:

It becomes like a big family; ...everyone watches each other, so it's a very bonding experience, because it's so many days. It's not just one day, like a walk here. You sleep with each other; you eat with each other; you cry with each other; you laugh with each other; you sweat with each other.

Their sentiments are echoed in Susan's post-ride interview:

When I reminisce, what makes me smile is thinking about what happened with the people. There were lots of funny things that happened along the way, but it was also with the people. It wasn't about your bike that turned the corner.

It is consistent with Turner's third pilgrimage stage, that on returning and re-integrating into their everyday lives, the riders went through a process of “catching up” and getting back to normal, while still savouring the ride experience. In his post-ride interview, Nathan put it this way:

Well, because my family is of a higher importance than work, it was more difficult being away from them. With work, you can catch up, but in the life of a child, ten days are gone, they've disappeared. So yeah, I'm back to normal now with work and with my relationships with my children and wife, back to normal. But nevertheless, those ten days are precious ten days.

There was also evidence that, through the experience, the participants were in fact “changed.” For some, the experience “bonded [them] more to the land” (Dana, post-ride interview) and strengthened and enhanced their connections to Israel. As Joseph said in his post-ride interview:

I had been there before but being able to do the bike ride and the fact that it was so challenging

at times and that I was able to see Israel in a different way...just enhances my connection with Israel itself. Given my overall background...my...connection [to Israel] has certainly been enhanced having done this bike ride for sure.

More commonly, especially for those who did not consider themselves "cyclists" prior to the ride, the event changed how they saw themselves, their on-going behaviour, and their future plans in terms of their cycling identity. For example, Jacob, who did not consider himself a cyclist before the ride, stated:

I came back on a Sunday night, and by Wednesday morning I was back in my spin class. True, I have not yet unpacked my bike because it's cold. But I'm back to four times a week spinning class; I'm back to my training. I have new goals. (post-ride interview)

As will be discussed in the next section, the experience made committed cyclists of all the participants. Just a few weeks after returning home, another participant new to cycling, Susan, was already planning a five day bike trip in Ontario this summer "similar to what we did in Israel." (post-ride interview)

These processes of separation, liminality and re-integration could, as Cohen suggested, capture many or perhaps any tourist experience, to some extent. The fact, however, that these riders were all diaspora Jews making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from a place of "exile," gave special meaning to the pilgrimage frame. The pilgrimage, moreover, had a special, paradoxical quality for several of the riders. Several spoke quite explicitly about coming "home" to Israel, even though, as Canadians, they were coming "home" to a place where few had been born, or lived, or had a passport or any identity other than that of foreign tourist. Nathan put it this way:

So in a way, it's kind of a home of sorts and ... there's a feeling of going home to Israel despite

the fact, that I'm a stranger there and I have to use a passport to [enter].

Daniel agreed:

That's right, it's my other home. My wife considers it less home than I do, but I consider it my other home." (pre-ride interview)

Joseph was even more definite:

I feel at home there. Everyone is very friendly...we have friends there, and...given my background, I feel very much at home...and very much...[connected].... (post-ride interview)

These feelings of going home or being home extend Turner's "Center Out There" to a "centre" the traveler seeks not only to visit but also to incorporate into his/her new "profane" existence. The implication is that this "pilgrimage" was as much about reducing the "space" between the "everyday" and the distant "centre," as it was about visiting the centre. This understanding of the ride is supported by the ambition or intention of some riders eventually to "*make aliyah*" (immigrate to Israel). Dana spelled this out in her pre-ride interview:

I've been to Israel a couple of times, and my husband and I are very committed to Israel. You know, we're thinking one day we might make aliyah, and maybe we'll go there for a sabbatical year. We're very committed to being there, and our kids have been there many times. So we're very committed to Israel.

This not only raises the interesting question of where "home" is for these riders but also problematizes the more general notion of home for middle-aged, highly mobile post-moderns living as members of a diaspora (Sheffer, 2002). For this group, the issue of home is one that is being negotiated, contested, and, for the most part, constructed. Their parental family homes, as they once were, no longer exist because of parental age, death, or family dispersion. Their own nuclear

home, the one that they themselves built, cannot stand as the place to go back to or draw values or inspiration from. There needs to be something bigger than what they themselves are or have built. And, identifying with the ancestral identity or heritage of their adopted country, for instance, an identity as “people of the North,” as Adrienne Clarkson (2003), the former governor general of Canada, once described Canadians, rings rather hollow to most urban Jews with east-European ancestry. It is in this context that a pilgrimage to Israel, the ancestral home of the Jewish people, becomes so powerful. The experience deepened the participants’ connection to the land of Israel and amplified their sense of Jewishness. The riders saw themselves as members of a diaspora in permanent or temporary exile, who went to Israel not just on a pilgrimage to some meaningful place “Out There,” but on a personal quest to find home, to go home, and to be home.

The Middle-Aged Athlete Bringing the Medal Home

Although, as noted, a few of the riders were devoted cyclists, most would not have described themselves as such prior to the ride. For many, cycling at this level of commitment and intensity was a new activity. Barbara put it clearly:

On a personal level, being able to go to Israel and challenge myself physically...like this was a very big personal challenge, because I’ve never done anything like this in my life.... I actually was not even a biker before I heard about this...ride. (pre-ride interview)

Jacob was more reflective:

Well actually, I’m not a bike rider, and I haven’t been. I’m a pretend cyclist. ...I mean, I see now that I’m training, and I take it very seriously.... I ride in the morning, and I see other cyclists on the road.... We wave, and I go my way, and they go theirs, and everyone is on their own track. Those are cyclists; I’m not a real cyclist. Maybe

they are the same as me, maybe they dress better and...[just] look the part. (pre-ride interview)

Many of the riders gave fitness as a goal, their personal challenge and one of their main reasons for participating. They discussed either ongoing or a new desire to achieve or maintain fitness. Many spoke about things that they had been doing to keep fit, such as running, spinning, snowboarding, skiing, or swimming and how cycling represented a continuation of that commitment. Cycling was an addition to their sporting regime. For Moses,

It's kind of complicated, because in the last year to year and a half I've been on a program to get fit. I decided I was going to go down to my BMI [body mass index], and I've maintained that weight.... I'm exercising regularly and happen to do spin classes...on a [stationary] bike. So the idea of doing a long bike ride was quite attractive although, a bit scary and challenging. (pre-ride interview)

Several riders admitted to wanting to get fit or regain their fitness after a long period of good intentions. For Gabriel, the ride provided the impetus to make good on these intentions:

I started to notice that over the past few years I hadn't done much fitness or physical activity. It's been primarily work and the kids, and I think I needed some motivation to get back into shape. I used to be a swimmer, and I used to be very active. So it came back to me that it was time to do something, and what better motivation than a crazy ride for 5 days? (pre-ride interview)

The fitness goal sparked a renewal and/or continuity of the riders' sense of health and youthful strength. As Daniel noted, it provided a challenge and a goal to strive for. The event was one they chose, negotiated, and actualized as a personal physical challenge and as a source of inspiration in their lives. He said:

I see it as one of those challenges to prove that I'm still alive and ... still capable of doing something and...not something...trivial...at all.
(pre-ride interview)

In the post-ride interviews virtually all of the participants described the same three particularly challenging incidents: riding through a blinding rain storm; riding through very heavy traffic; and climbing the hills to Jerusalem on the last day. Many verbalized their surprise as to why they had ridden through such obstacles, when bus transportation to the next rest stop was available, and money for the cause had already been raised. The riders recognized that neither the cause nor fitness per se could explain their actions. Rather, the desire to achieve a personal goal, to rise to a challenge and finish what they started came closer to the core rationale. Moses articulated this motivation in his pre-ride interview and then told us how he rose to the challenge when interviewed after the ride:

We all have to come up with goals in our life on a regular basis to inspire us. Otherwise we'll sink into some level where you're just sort of functioning on auto pilot. So I think it's good to find something that inspires you and challenges you on different levels. That's what this ride does; it challenges me on different levels. (pre-ride interview)

I'm so happy I [rode off-road the last day] for a few reasons. One...[is] I met the challenge of my fear; ...I went off road, and I only had one bad fall. I did reasonably well for the off-road riding. In a way, I regretted I didn't do it before. (post-ride interview)

Not only did the riders achieve personal goals, but all agreed they would continue riding, and that "now" they were prepared to call themselves "cyclists." Through the experience, they add cycling to their identity. Barbara, "who actually was not even a rider" before the ride, told us in the post-ride interview:

I love the sport, and I can't wait to get back on my bike.... I have people I know who are looking forward to biking as soon as the weather gets nice again. I mean, I'll just train in the gym, and then I'll start biking again in April, and I'll continue biking.

Jacob, who had considered himself a "pretend cyclist" pre-ride, also told us after the ride that, "this is a sport I want to continue with. Now you can ask if I see myself as a cyclist and I'll say, 'Yes.'"

While the ride was never positioned as a "race," several of the riders spoke with pride about being near the front of the group or, at least, not at the back. There was unquestionably a sense of race and of competition underlying the riders' behaviour, if only against one's own personal best. As Julie put it:

I said to myself, "Thank God that I made this...." I couldn't believe I actually did five days of bike riding. It was a very good feeling to do this.
(post-ride interview)

Susan seconded her sentiments:

I felt thrilled with my ability....I never got off my bike, and I never stopped. (post-ride interview)

"I know it's not a race," Jacob said in his post-ride interview,

but it's always a race, and everyone challenges themselves [sic] to a certain extent. The challenge I set for myself was I didn't want to get off my bike. I didn't want to walk, and I didn't want to rest. I wanted to just go. If I had to be in the back that would be fine but that was the thing. I'd prefer to be at the top of the pack, in the top ten percent of the riders, which is top 30 or 35. There are people who have been riding for 20 years, two hours a day for 20 years. There are very serious riders, and I had my little bike there with no clips and no...fat tires..... Everything

wrong. But I was surprised! We came out of the chute; ...we rode a little bit, and my cadence and my pace were faster than a lot of people. ...I was very fast, so I accepted that.... Riding into Tel-Aviv...they blocked off the street. It was like the Tour de France, going full speed down...the beach and [through] traffic, through the tunnel, past the hotels.

Supporting this implicit notion of competition were many of the post-ride comments that indicated disappointment with the finish. In the pre-ride interviews, riders' expectations regarding how they would feel at the finish included feelings of triumph, achievement, and satisfaction with having reached a goal. In the post-ride interviews, however, many riders spoke of how "anti-climactic" the finish was, and how disappointed they were that they could not ride into the hospital over a marked finish line. Jacob put it this way:

Well, the finish line for me was anticlimactic. It was like, okay, the biggest part of the difficulty was already accomplished. So the finish line was okay, whatever, it was okay, it's done.

Eva expressed similar sentiments:

It was a little bit [anti-climactic]. It would have been nice to have everybody come in staggered and when you got there people cheered, and then you could go and do whatever you needed to do with your bike. This way they made everybody stand there at this junction in a parking lot for at least an hour doing nothing. And then you couldn't even ride into the hospital; it was so crowded, ...you just ended up getting off your bike.

Nathan's deflation was tempered, however, by satisfaction at achieving the goal.

When I actually finished, I had the feeling, "Oh! Is that all there is?" It was anti-climactic in one way. But in another way, it was a great achievement, and we finished at the hospital. So it was

very meaningful, because we ended up where the kids were, and those were the people we were riding for. ...After all that pain and suffering you could see the kids, and that...put everything in perspective. (post-ride interview)

These feelings of disappointment speak to a disconnect between the riders' expectations and what actually transpired. Framed in a sports competition context, feelings of deflation are understandable. In any competitive sport there is a marked finish line with a clear identification of winners, rank order, and some symbolic recognition such as a medal or certificate. The fact that the participants missed this recognition suggests that indeed the riding was a race of sorts. Their identities had incorporated the athletic frame with its implicit goal of bringing home the medal, even if the medal merely represented finishing or accomplishing a personally meaningful goal. The finish embodied the sport-based identity benefits listed earlier, such as goal setting, tenacity, resolve, courage, etc. Fully acquiring these characteristics or fully extending the riders' self perception along these lines may have been hindered by the organizers' lack of appreciation for such identity inputs. As moving as the closing ceremony was from the perspective of the money raised for the cause, several riders commented on what was missing from their perspective. Some recognition of the physical achievements of the riders would have solidified the identity re-creation process and helped the participants "bring the medals home."

The Participant Philanthropist Not Arriving Empty Handed

The philanthropy aspect of the event provided the third source of identity inputs. Raising money for and otherwise supporting a charity represents a mindset of goodness, being good, and doing good, in other words, altruism. Various motivations could account for such behaviour. In this case, we found that the most revealing explanations were grounded in the religious and social context of the participants. The riders were diaspora Jews

engaging in a physically challenging pilgrimage to Israel. As mentioned earlier, philanthropy is a highly valued religious and communal activity for North-American Jews (Cohen, 1998; Woocher, 1986). Indeed, several interviewees linked their motivations concerning the cause to the Jewish social norms and religious obligations of *tzedakah* [giving charity] and *tikkun olam* [making the world a better place]. Eli is a good example:

I go to an Orthodox synagogue, where we learn doing *tzedakah* and charity work and helping others and trying to do *tikkun olam*. So, I feel I'm obligated in a way to do this type of thing if the opportunity arises. ... That's why I chose to do it. (pre-ride interview)

The same biblical commandment that required the ancient Israelites to ascend to Jerusalem three times a year for the pilgrimage festivals also stipulated that "they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed, everyone according to what he can give, according to the blessing that the Lord, your God, gives you." (Deuteronomy 16:16–17;). The notion of not coming "empty-handed" was expressed by Dana in describing her relationship to philanthropy. She had participated in the Alyn ride with her husband the previous year and spoke about the meaning of the fund raising:

We raised \$10,000 (Canadian) last year, the two of us. So, we feel like we're contributing, and we are. That money went to Alyn, so I don't feel like I'm taking from Israel but ... giving, not just my tourist dollars but myself. (pre-ride interview)

The altruism of fund raising for the hospital notwithstanding, the cause was not the prime motivation for any of the participants. In fact, when rank-ordered, it was usually listed third, after travel to Israel and cycling. If the cause were the only or even prime motivator, then the riders could have just written a check and stayed home, saving money and time and actually giving more to the cause. As Julie suggested:

My husband said to me: “You’re going to Israel spending \$400 for the privilege; you’re spending \$1,500 for your ticket; you’re going to spend at least \$2000-\$3000 in Israel, and you’re going to do this and this. Why don’t you just give the hospital \$5,000 and stay home and work?” (pre-ride interview)

That is the question. How important was the hospital charity? What role did this third dimension of the “package” play in motivating, inspiring, or otherwise contributing to riders’ experiences? The question of Julie’s husband highlights the fact that the cause was not the main driver of participation. The interviews indicated that the riders expended more resources and experienced more pleasure and satisfaction from the physical and travel aspects than from the philanthropic aspects of the ride. In fact, Dana said explicitly that the fundraising was “probably the least favourite part of the whole thing.” (pre-ride interview)

Most riders hardly knew the hospital, what services it provides, or why the money was needed before deciding to register and participate. Their connection with the hospital was almost completely based on this single event. Once they heard about the event, they judiciously, but by no means thoroughly, conducted research to convince themselves and those they solicited that the cause was worthy of support. This worth stemmed from two of the hospital’s characteristics: the fact that it served a vulnerable population (“kids”) and that it provided services to all without discriminating. As Moses put it:

This hospital seems to be equal if not more innovative in some of the programs, and it services the whole population of Israel. So I just thought it sounded like a very good charity. (pre-ride interview)

This is not to say the riders were not personally moved by the hospital charity once they learned about it. Some knew children with conditions comparable to those treated at the

hospital, and many found the hospital's work inspiring and "easy" to sell (Jacob, pre-ride interview). Still, personal attachment and meaning typically came only during or as a consequence of the ride, not before. Some riders, like Dana, spoke emotionally of how thinking of the "kids" helped them rise to the physically challenging aspects of the ride:

When you're *shvitzing* [sweating] up this road and thinking you can't do it, and you're looking at this picture of this kid and you're thinking, "I'm doing this for this kid," you want to cry. And you're...thinking, "I can do this for this kid." You just find that extra bit of *koyach* [strength]...because you're not doing it for you, you're doing it for this kid. (pre-ride interview)

Although not the most important of riders' motivations, the hospital charity was, in fact, critically important. Many riders said that, without such a cause, they would not have participated. It was the cause that gave the riders "permission" or "justification" to spend the money and take the time away from family, work, or other obligations. It was the "goodness" of the cause that facilitated participants' ability to negotiate their participation in their own minds, with their families, and when approaching their sponsor-donors. As Moses put it,

Alyn just helped me actualize something that I wanted to do anyways. You know, get into biking.... If it wasn't for the ride and for the kids in the hospital, it would [have been]...hard to justify going away for two weeks just for myself...." (post-ride interview)

Jacob and Dana expressed similar sentiments:

I needed a reason to go to Israel, and, as opposed to going on a UJA mission or some other type of event, just to go [to Israel] by myself is maybe in my mind a little selfish. So I decided to choose a cause to force me to go, and that would be a focus for me. (Jacob, pre-ride interview)

You know, when I'm busy as a mother [and] with all the other things, sometimes I need an excuse to go out, like exercise. But...if I say to my husband, "I really have to go now, sorry you have to do the dishes," because I have to go to this [spinning] class, it's not just for me. He cuts me some slack, because he knows I'm not just doing it for me, but I'm doing it for some cause. (Dana, pre-ride interview)

In effect, the cause served as the leverage point, negotiating tool, and mechanism that facilitated the participants' ability to commit to their very personal goals. It enabled them to achieve their goals of physical fitness, biking, and travel to Israel. In other words, the cause was not an end in itself, nor was it a chief driver of the activity, but it was a critical and necessary means to the achievement of highly valued personal outcomes.

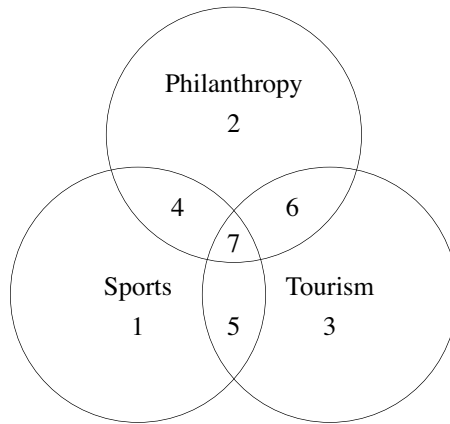
Seeing philanthropy as a mediating factor in the achievement of some other valued outcomes brings to mind more general models of gift-giving behaviour. In the consumer literature, gifts are considered not only acts of altruism but also symbolic means of constructing, extending, and expressing an ideal self (Belk & Coon, 1991). The act of giving to the cause can be seen as a way of actualizing and signifying such valued ("good") characteristics as concern for others, willingness to share, goodness, being good, doing good, using resources (health, material blessings, strength, etc.) to achieve positive goals. Because giving is consistent with the riders' religious and communal norms, they could leverage the philanthropy in order to train for and complete the ride. The event thus extended and thereby re-created their identity as good altruistic people who would not come home empty-handed.

Conclusions

The interviews and texts reveal a rich, nuanced, complex set of motivations and equally complex and transforming experiential outcomes. The results bring to light how recreational behaviour is connected to broader cultural processes situated in place and

time; they show how participants actively modify, transform, and appropriate symbolic meanings encoded in experiences in order to manifest and fit their particular personal and social circumstances, identities, and life goals. Through participation in the Wheels of Love bike ride, the Toronto-based riders re-created three inter-locking identities. First, they became diaspora pilgrims by ascending to and experiencing a sacred and spiritual centre. Second, they became accomplished athletes by finishing a physically challenging course. And third, they became participant philanthropists by giving of their physical and financial resources to a personally meaningful cause. These three identities represent three overlapping circles of recreational activity as depicted in figure 2 below:

FIGURE 2: THREE DOMAINS OF RECREATION



Each circle represents an independent domain, but together they create four overlapping domains. All seven resulting positions offer loci of identity re-creation. Each of the domains has its own set of motivations and identity inputs. The sporting activity was motivated by a desire for fitness and resulted in feelings of health, youth and strength. The philanthropy activity was motivated by the desire to do good and resulted in feelings of having helped to make the world a better place. The tourism activity was motivated by a desire to connect

with a place and resulted in experiencing a different culture.

Even more interesting is a consideration of the intersections of the domains. As we saw in the interviews, the biking, giving, and travel did not occur independently, but rather, interactively. For instance, in the sports-philanthropy domain, the good of the cause justified the time and effort devoted to the sport, while the challenge of riding helped riders identify with and commit to the cause. In the sports-tourism domain, traversing the land of Israel through the challenge of riding formed the basis of its symbolic consumption, while the special meaning of the land amplified the value of riding. Finally, in the tourism-philanthropy domain, the philanthropy transformed the tourists into contributors to the land, while the special value of the land motivated the riders to put in the hard effort to raise the funds. In each case, the overlapping domains enhanced and amplified the embedded values creating a synergy wherein the whole was greater than the sum of the parts.

The Wheels of Love event represents the central overlap of all three domains. The identities of the riders were re-created at this junction through the mutual reinforcement of sport, philanthropy, and tourism. All three spheres provided important elements, and all three paired intersections enhanced the experience. It was, however, at the centre that the real convergence occurred. In the Wheels of Love event, the three domains came together and were bound by one central theme: that of home. By traversing the land through the challenge of riding and the gift of philanthropy, these diaspora Jews came home, brought the medals home, and did not arrive empty handed. The interaction created an environment in which “each and every one of the 325 riders...but certainly and especially this one...[had] an experience of a lifetime.” (Ida Berger’s blog, day 5)

Through the consumption of international charity sporting events such as this bike ride, “consumers,” in effect, become producers of new identities. Event organizers and sponsors thus become not simply event providers or fund raisers, but, rather, co-producers with participants of both the event and the participant

identities. Recognizing and understanding this co-production process suggests a new way of looking at the structure and management of such events. This perspective conceives of the recreational marketplace as a clearinghouse for identity characteristics, wherein various organizations, institutions, and other entities supply identity benefits in exchange for the psychological, physical, and financial resources of a heterogeneous community of participants. This suggests several interesting theoretical and managerial implications.

First, conceiving tourist travel as a consumption/production act in which the traveler “acquires” the land through which s/he travels extends our understanding of what we mean by both travel and acquisition. It is clear from this research that this kind of post-modern “ownership” requires an exchange of significant resources—physical, psycho-social, and financial. Through this exchange the traveler or ego-tourist is able to connect, identify, understand, own, and thereby extend his or her identity to include the location of travel. Whether acquisition of this kind occurs for other populations than diaspora Jews, in other geographic locales, or through other forms of tourist travel remains an open research question.

Second, appreciating the personal growth and accomplishment aspects of activities such as this bike ride should be useful to scholars in the non-profit and social marketing domains. In particular, the interaction between participants’ personal, physical, psychological, and social goals and their philanthropic accomplishments suggests the need for mediated and/or moderated models of behaviour. A full understanding of just how these many overlapping motivations interact requires further study across different domains using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

For social marketers interested in promoting participatory behaviours such as those displayed by these riders, the managerial task is to identify, develop, promote, and deliver a competitively sustainable portfolio of sought-after benefits. The growth, financial success, and, most particularly, the comments

herein analyzed indicate that the Alyn Charity Bike Ride organizers were able to do that. Further research should compare these findings with an examination of other events both similar (such as AIDS rides) and different (Breast Cancer Walks or fun-runs). Both the benefits sought and delivered and the manner in which the events are promoted and delivered should be examined. In this way, social marketers could develop a rich body of theory and evidence for this growing field.

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