Abstract: Understanding the Bicycle as a Vehicle of Quality of Life

Quality of life is a broad concept referring to the holistic wellbeing of an individual. Transportation and mobility are considered key components of quality of life because they mediate and shape the ways individuals interact with their bodies and the world around them, although the application of the concept to transportation research is relatively new and underdeveloped. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that bicycle use has numerous economic, environmental and social benefits for riders by enhancing mobility through healthy and inexpensive transportation. These factors are major components that shape the quality of life for individuals worldwide. Bicycle use has clear and measurable impacts on health and the environment, yet the specific effects of everyday bicycle use on subjective perceptions and objective measures of quality of life are largely unknown. In this project, we examine the relationship between quality of life, transportation sustainability, and bicycle transportation. In particular, we ask: What explanatory and analytical possibilities does the concept “quality of life” have for understanding and promoting transportation cycling? How do everyday cyclists and transportation professionals think about the relationship between quality of life and bicycling? Does cycling transportation and culture impact aspects of quality of life beyond transportation and mobility, and what are these extensions? By exploring these questions, we aim to develop a better understanding of personal transportation choice in future bicycle transportation planning, as well as the relevance of the “quality of life” concept to understanding and developing policies related to bicycle transportation. In-depth interviews were conducted among everyday transportation cyclists and bicycle transportation professionals in Burlington, Vermont to identify perspectives on the experience of bicycling expressed through a universal discourse on bicycling as well as the vernacular specific to these cyclists' context.