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“I’m a completely different person now”: Extraordinary experiences and personal transformations in sport

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ABSTRACT

Many sport programs aim to positively impact participants' lives, but there is little understanding of how sport leads to those changes. The purpose of this study was to examine an extraordinary experience and the participants' interpretations of that experience as well as their feelings of personal transformation through the experience. In doing so, the authors developed an understanding of how sport can be used to create meaningful life changes at the individual level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 past participants of a long distance cycling ride that raised money and awareness for cancer research. Data analysis included three rounds of coding. Participants reported that the unusualness and sense of newness of the ride, the high levels of emotional intensity experienced, and the deep interpersonal connections developed led to a sense of empowerment and new meaning and purpose in life. Results indicate that extraordinary experiences contribute to lasting personal transformations, beyond intended behavior changes, within sport and out of sport. The characteristics of extraordinary experiences that contribute to personal transformation are discussed, as are suggestions for sport managers to leverage extraordinary experiences to create positive personal transformations.

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1. Introduction

Biking 4500 miles across a continent may seem an impossible task for many, but for those who complete the journey, their lives are changed forever. Life change may seem a large claim for a task that on the surface involves riding a bicycle every day for seventy days. However, the factors involved in creating personal transformation go well beyond the physical challenges of the bicycle ride and have largely remained unexplored in the literature. In short, it is unclear how effective sport experiences can be toward changing people's lives. According to [Hartmann and Kwauk \(2011\)](#), most beliefs on the impact that sport can have on one's life are grounded in anecdotal evidence and driven by heartfelt narratives. There is very little understanding of how sport can be used appropriately to positively change people's lives ([Walker, Hills, & Heere, 2017](#)). Therefore, this study is an exploration of personal transformation through an extraordinary sport experience that begins to develop our understanding of how sport can be used to create meaningful life changes at the individual level.

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Personal transformation is the process of creating a new self-definition through critical self-reflection and analysis of old and new self-views that changes the way an individual sees their relationships and themselves as well as the way they behave (Mezirow, 1978; Wade, 1998). One mechanism by which this transformation occurs is taking others' perspectives, and the need or desire to take others' perspectives is preceded by a dilemma that cannot be resolved through one's current understanding. These dilemmas will vary from individual to individual but can include conversations with others, stressful life experiences, a new environment, or even reading a book that presents information that conflicts with one's previous understanding of a subject or experience (Ferguson, 1980; Wildemeersch & Leirman, 1988).

One of these dilemmas is known as an extraordinary experience, or an experience characterized by a sense of newness, high levels of emotional intensity, and interpersonal interaction (Arnould & Price, 1993). Examples of extraordinary experiences can include a river rafting trip, skydiving, mountain climbing, attending events like the Burning Man Festival or Mountain Man fantasy reenactments, and biking across a continent (e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Dodson, 1996; Kozinets, 2002; Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2013). These extraordinary experiences result in a sense of personal transformation and connection to others making it difficult to return to one's previous, everyday world (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Because extraordinary experiences are unusual and not every day experiences, not every sport experience can be considered extraordinary. However, the power of these experiences to change lives warrants further attention as organizations could leverage them to benefit participants, particularly as sport organizations tout these benefits. Chalip (2006a) argued that sport and recreation can help participants in a variety of ways, but only if designed and implemented properly. As sport and recreation organizations often claim positive benefits like physical and mental health, socialization and cultural sensitivity, they become a legitimation for providing sport—but these same organizations often do not implement policies or programs that actually provide these benefits (Chalip, 2006a; Coakley, 2011). Understanding extraordinary experiences, and the elements that facilitate the resulting personal transformation, would be one step toward helping organizations provide positive change in participant's lives.

The purpose of this study is to examine an extraordinary experience and the participants' interpretation of that experience as well as their feelings of personal transformation through the experience. The findings will help to develop an understanding of how sport can be used to create meaningful life changes at the individual level. Sport must be implemented intentionally and appropriately to help participants reap the potential benefits. This study, grounded in participant experiences, will help further sport management research and practice by developing an understanding of how an extraordinary experience in sport can result in personal transformations, and how sport could be designed and implemented to achieve such results on a broader scale.

2. Literature review

Chalip (2006b) argued that the social impacts of events are valuable to communities, and do not just happen, but must be fostered through creating a sense of celebration and social camaraderie (liminality). By enabling and amplifying the sense of celebration and camaraderie, event organizers, including those associated with charitable sport organizations, can address social issues, build networks, and empower community action (Chalip, 2006b; Welty Peachey, Borland, Lobpries, & Cohen, 2015).

Chalip (2006b) also called for a need to identify the means to capitalize upon the social effects that sport events can create, something that must begin with understanding the individual process of transformation through experiences. Utilizing Chalip's (2006b) framework, we examine the literature on consumer behavior to understand more about the impact of experiences on human behaviors and attitudes. First, we define experience and examine the characteristics and outcomes of one type of a consumer experience—the extraordinary experience. We then focus on describing the characteristics of personal transformations, which is one outcome of participating in an extraordinary experience. Finally, we describe the known impacts of charity sport organizations and events and how this study extends theory in this literature base.

2.1. Extraordinary experiences

Experience has been studied in many different disciplines, from science to philosophy to sociology and psychology to anthropology to management (Carú & Cova, 2003). In consumer behavior, Carú and Cova (2003) stated that experiences are personal occurrences, "often with important emotional significance founded on the interaction with stimuli which are the products or services consumed" (p. 270). When these interactions lead to a personal transformation, they can be defined as extraordinary.

Because of their potential for personal transformation and impact on organizations, extraordinary experiences have garnered more and more attention. These experiences are memorable, intense, and unusual—they do not occur in everyday life, unlike ordinary experiences (Abrahams, 1986). Thus, these experiences can have a profound impact on participants due to the attention, focus, and awareness that individuals give extraordinary experiences.

Characteristics of extraordinary experiences include being triggered by unusual events, experiencing high levels of emotional intensity and experience, interpersonal interaction, and a sense of newness of perception and process (Arnould & Price, 1993). Leisure and sporting activities, such as river rafting, mountain biking, and skydiving can be characterized by the

same elements (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Dodson, 1996). Participants in the above activities reported having vague expectations due to the limited knowledge of what to expect or the desire to preserve the spontaneity of the experience (Arnould & Price, 1993). They also felt that the experience allowed them to connect with others and feel a sense of belonging with others and group dedication to a larger goal (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Dodson, 1996). This sense of camaraderie is a hallmark of liminality and an important component of experiences, extraordinary or otherwise, in creating social impact (Chalip, 2006b). Additionally, individuals who participated in leisure sporting activities, such as those described above, reported personal growth displayed through acquisition of new skills, jargon, and feelings of place and purpose (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Dodson, 1996). Upon reflecting on the experience, participants described difficulties reentering into the everyday world because of their transformation (Arnould & Price, 1993). Ultimately, the extraordinary experiences provided through these activities demonstrated the ability to facilitate personal transformations and participants' relationships with other individuals (even forming temporary communities), their service providers, specific places, and more broadly, nature (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Dodson, 1996).

One type of extraordinary experiences, transcendent customer experiences, take place in a consumption context characterized by feelings of self-transformation, separation from the ordinary, feelings of connection to a larger phenomena, "emotional intensity, epiphany, singularity and newness of experience, extreme enjoyment, oneness, ineffability, extreme focus of attention, and the testing of personal limits" (Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007, p. 358). Companies attempt to create extraordinary experiences for the consumers as a way to alter customer attitudes and behaviors towards the brand or organization. These experiences have the ability to create positive brand associations, build lasting relationships with the brand, as well as impact consumers' relationships with other individuals, objects, activities, values, and symbols (Pullman & Gross, 2003; Schouten et al., 2007). For sport or cause-related organizations looking to create positive brand associations, extraordinary experiences and transcendent customer experiences could be one option to develop participants' personal transformations and attitudes toward the brand or organization. If events can be viewed as interventions that should modify one's attitude towards our organization, it could be argued that any singular event suffers from only having a temporary effect, and that people's attitudes towards the organization would likely to return to their baseline attitudes and behaviors that were present prior to the event (Kazdin, 1998). Extraordinary experiences seemingly offer the opportunity to break through that pattern and prevent a return to the baseline. A 4,500 mile cross-country bicycle ride could be one such experience.

Despite the certainty of personal transformations and behavioral effects that occur through extraordinary experience, there is a need to explore the effects of these experiences on future participants' behaviors within and outside of a brand specific-context (Arnould & Price, 1993; Schouten et al., 2007). In particular, understanding the characteristics and effects of personal transformations experienced during extraordinary experiences can help managers facilitate these experiences to create desired results.

2.2. Personal transformations

Feelings of self-transformation and personal growth are characteristics of extraordinary experiences that impact the attitudes and behaviors of the individual, which can in turn affect others and the organization. Transformation, generally, refers to a restructuring or forming over; for personal transformation, this restructuring or forming over comes in the form of one's self view. Specifically, personal transformation can be defined as a "dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness by which one becomes critically aware of old and new self-views and chooses to integrate them into a new self-definition" (Wade, 1998, p. 716). It is non-linear and requires time and the ability for self-reflection.

Before individuals experience personal transformation, they have a perspective that shapes how they view themselves and their relationships. The original self-views are influenced by structural cultural assumptions from economic, political, social, religious, occupational, or educational systems and historical and social contexts (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Mezirow, 1978). The personal transformation process is initiated or preceded by a disrupting life event that disorients the individual (Wade, 1998). This can include events such as interpersonal relationships, exposure to a new environment, stressful life experiences, or even reading a book. The event challenges or threatens one's self-view by presenting a different viewpoint that creates a dilemma the individual has to address or ignore (Wade, 1998). A deliberate decision to address the dilemma and shift from old self-views to new, more inclusive, differentiated, and integrated self-views signifies that a transformation has occurred (Mezirow, 1991).

The disrupting life event causes individuals to recognize these assumptions and shift their perspective that then has consequences on personal and social priorities (Mezirow, 1978). The individual might also experience feelings of excitement and satisfaction with the new perspective, as well as sadness at the loss of the old self-views after personal transformation (Wade, 1998).

Extraordinary experiences are one type of life-disrupting events that trigger transformation because the experiences include social interaction and are out of the ordinary, thus introducing individuals to other and new perspectives. Sport and leisure have been shown to be components of coping and self-transformation processes for the same reasons (Chalip, 2006b; Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002; Lundberg et al., 2011; Shehu & Moruysi, 2010). The elements of sport that facilitate personal transformation are found in extraordinary experiences as well, meaning that sport experiences have the potential to be extraordinary. Given that sport can be a tool for personal and social change, but is not always, it is important to understand the role of extraordinary sport experiences within personal transformation.

While sport has the capacity to impact personal and social change (e.g., Chalip, 2006b; Frisby & Crawford, 1994; Inoue, Funk, & Jordan, 2013; Shehu & Moruisi, 2010), sport can also cause social and personal harm—through corruption, abuse, environmental destruction, exclusion and discrimination, performance enhancing drug use, fan and athlete violence and more (Frisby, 2005). Negative sport experiences (e.g., those experiences characterized by personal conflicts, lack of enjoyment, sitting on the sideline, and more) have been cited as reasons for sport dropout or burnout; but appropriately designed programs can help reduce these experiences and negative effects (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). Beyond sport outcomes, negative sport experiences can have effects on other personal outcomes and personal development such as stress, physical and emotional exhaustion, social exclusion, and other-referenced competency (MacDonald, Côté, Eys, & Deakin, 2011). There are positive outcomes associated with sport, but again, appropriately designed programs must be provided. While there has been a call to research the processes that lead to personal change, and those processes that do not, this call has not led to much research on the subject (Coakley, 2011). This project examines extraordinary experiences in sport, as one process that leads to personal transformation, in order to better understand how to leverage the social effects that sport events can produce and to create long lasting changes for the participants that, unlike regular events, are unlikely to return to the pre-event baseline.

2.3. Cause-related sport impacts

Participating in charitable or cause-related sport events, events that raise money and awareness for a charity or cause, can impact the lives of athletes, volunteers, and community members. For example, many charity sport athletes have found inspiration and meaning through making a difference in the world, by supporting the cause or charity (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009). Importantly, though sport may be used as a hook to encourage engagement with the charity, the sport and cause can be mutually reinforcing in building long-term associations with both (Bunds, Brandon-Lai, & Armstrong, 2016). Additionally, athletes can build an empathetic connection with those the cause is trying to help (e.g., those suffering from cancer) through participation which can further motivate prosocial behavior (Bunds et al., 2016). Participants also have found a sense of belonging and solidarity through being with like-minded people and a part of something bigger than themselves (Filo et al., 2009; Filo, Spence, & Sparvero, 2013). These social impacts are not limited to just athletes, but also local community members through increased ability to develop social capital and enhanced pride and collective identity, as well as promotion of sport and health (Inoue, Heffernan, Yamaguchi, & Filo, 2018). The meaning that athletes find through the charity and social community influence the sense of importance of the event and cause (Filo et al., 2009).

2.4. Contribution and research questions

In combination, the current literature surrounding extraordinary experiences, personal transformation, and cause-related sport events suggests that individuals can experience life change through participation in sport events, particularly those that are meaningful, and that sport managers can likely implement intentional design elements to enhance this transformation (Hills, Gomez Velasquez, & Walker, 2018). However, broad empirical evidence surrounding many interventions, not excluding cause-related sport events, suggests that the personal change experienced is fleeting or short-lived rather than actually transformational over the course of a person's life (Hartmann, 2003; Kazdin, 1998). Chalip (2006b) suggested that much in his discussion of liminality which while being framed as positive, is ultimately a temporary phenomenon that evaporates after the event.

It seems that the cause-related events previously examined in the sport management literature, in spite of the liminality and sense-of-community created in the moment, do not have the disruptive capabilities of truly extraordinary experiences to actually create lasting shifts in attitude and/or behavior. The event in this study, however, holds that capability; as such, it provides a distinct opportunity to investigate the impact of an extraordinary event on the lives of the participants, and to help illumine the components of that event that lead toward lasting transformation. From a practical perspective, these findings will build understanding of how sport organizations can leverage extraordinary experiences to create positive personal transformations. From a theoretical perspective, these findings will help scholars determine boundary conditions on existing theoretical frameworks, indicating if current theoretical understandings are adequate or if current thinking about what sport-related personal transformation looks like and how, when, and why sport participation leads to enduring positive transformation needs to be reconsidered.

Toward this end, the following research questions guide the inquiry:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How did the extraordinary experience contribute to the participants' personal transformations?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the outcomes of participants' personal transformations?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What elements of the extraordinary experience are relevant toward personal transformation?

3. Method

To understand the transformations and experiences of participants in an extraordinary event, we utilized an interpretive case-study approach with the Texas 4000 as the central case. The interpretive approach centers on the way that human

beings make sense of their reality and attach meaning to it. It acknowledges that human behavior and understandings thereof must be interpreted within the context of their lives and interpretations of their lives in short and long-term (Fraser, 1995; Sandelowski, 2000; Stake, 2005). Specifically, this study is framed from a social constructivist approach, where the researcher seeks understanding of the world in which they live and work. These meanings are varied and multiple, which lead the researcher to look for the complexity within the perspectives, and then draw meaning. As Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 18) stated, “The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation.” This social constructivist approach allowed us to understand these experiences from the participants themselves, in order to then address and perhaps build theory that is grounded in their lived experience.

3.1. Participants

University students who participate in Texas 4000 join a “community of cancer fighters,” who “train, fundraise, educate, and bring hope to those with cancer” (Texas 4000, n.d.). University students apply, interview, and are selected to participate in the organization. Once selected these students spend a year fundraising for cancer research, volunteering at community events, conducting community programs to raise awareness for cancer research, and both designing and training for the culminating event of participation, a more than 4,000-mile bike ride from Austin to Anchorage. The design elements include developing a financial plan, mapping the tour route, securing host homes, as well as planning meals, additional transportation, and method for return to Austin. At the time of data collection, 471 had participated in the organization since its creation in 2004. These Texas 4000 alumni were recruited for participation in this study. Of the 471 riders, 32 actually participated in the interviews. Interview participants self-selected into the study by responding to an e-mail invitation to participate and agreeing to share their experiences through interviews.

Participants in the study ranged from 21 to 37 years old and were three months to ten years removed from their experience (see Table 1). They represented undergraduate and graduate students, and one staff member, from many majors

Table 1
Participant Demographics.

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number</u>
Male	15
Female	17
<u>Ride Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
2004	1
2005	0
2006	2
2007	2
2008	4
2009	8
2010	4
2011	3
2012	5
2013	3
<u>Route</u>	<u>Number</u>
Rockies	17
Sierra	14
Ozarks	1
<u>School Year during Year Leading Up to Ride</u>	<u>Number</u>
Freshman	2
Sophomore	4
Junior	8
Senior	14
Graduate Student	3
Staff Member	1
<u>Leadership Positions Represented</u>	
Business Development Committee	Media Director
Equipment Committee	Travel Committee
Finance Chair x2	Program Coordinator
Saturday Ride Coordinator	Media and Public Relations Chair
Atlas Ride Director	PR Leader for Route
Equipment Chair x2	Program, Legal, and Media chair
Program Chair	Business Development Co-Chair
Travel Chair	Recruitment Chair
Assistant Ride Director x2	Fitness Chair
Ride Director	12 participants had no Leadership Role

across the university. Participants also represented a wide range of organizational leadership positions, year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore), ride years (i.e., the year they rode to Alaska), and routes they rode to Alaska.

3.2. Procedures

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews which were conducted with individuals who have participated in Texas 4000. Each individual was asked to reflect on their expectations, the pre-experience, the extraordinary experience, and the personal transformations they feel occurred, if any. Participants were recruited via e-mail, and upon agreement to participate, in-person interviews were conducted when possible. Interviews were also conducted via Skype or phone if alumni lived farther than 30 miles from the research institution. While there have been doubts about the use of telephone interviews, this method of interviewing has been shown to achieve “successful social interactions” and generate “useful data” (Irvine, 2011; Sweet, 2002). Additionally, Skype interviews can also achieve rapport and sensitivity with participants and allow for the visual friendliness and feedback of face-to-face interviews (Hamilton, 2014; Hanna, 2012). Prior to the interviews, participants completed a background information form to collect data about gender, age, education, ride year, and leadership positions within the organization.

Interviews lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. A semi-structured format was used to allow for follow up questions that asked for clarification or expansion on responses. Questions were included to examine the participant’s experience in the program, and how it impacted their life, especially regarding characteristics of extraordinary experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Upon transcription, coding and analysis of the data was conducted by the researchers, who have not participated in this organization, nor are associated with any of the participants.

3.3. Instrumentation

To ensure that relevant questions about the experience, relationships, previous experiences, transformations, and impacts were asked, a semi-structured interview guide was created. The questions were derived from work on transcendent customer experiences, extraordinary experiences and personal transformation (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lundberg, McCormick, Tanguichi, & Tibbs, 2011; Schouten et al., 2007; Wade, 1998). All questions were reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of sport management and qualitative research experts. Feedback from this panel resulted in questions being revised to be less guiding and allow for participants to describe the experience in their own words. In all, seven questions were asked of all participants, asking participants to describe their motivations to join the organization and expectations (Arnould & Price, 1993; Wade, 1998); to describe their experiences, emotions, and relationships; to describe the impacts of participating in the experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lundberg et al., 2011; Wade, 1998); to describe their current relationship with the organization (Schouten et al., 2007); and if there was anything else they would like to share about their experience. The semi-structured interview format allowed for follow-up questions that encouraged participants to provide thick descriptions and expand upon their answers (Fraser, 1995; Munhall, 2010). Follow-up questions were asked as necessary about the organization, processes, interpersonal interactions, the cause, the sport, emotions, expectations, and impacts, especially as relevant to the characteristics of extraordinary experiences and personal transformations (Arnould & Price, 1993; Wade, 1998).

3.4. Analysis

Interviews were transcribed using a denaturalized approach, allowing for a focus on what was said during the conversation and its meanings with little attention on speakers’ involuntary vocalizations and utterances (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Upon completion of transcription, the interviews were coded first line by line using codes generated from participant’s words in order to best represent the data in its own terms (Sandelowski, 2000). In the first round of coding, codes were organized by stages of the overall experience, such as joining the organization, preparing for the ride, the actual ride (which is the extraordinary experience), transitioning out of the organization, and impacts. In particular, this round of coding examined the participants’ characteristics and experiences as they related to extraordinary experiences and personal transformations. After these codes were organized, a second round of coding was conducted in order to examine the relationships between the first round codes (Sandelowski, 2000; Stake, 2005), with a focus on understanding how the transformations occurred and how they were related to their experiences and characteristics.

Categories were organized by pre-determined steps in the process of participating (e.g., joining, training, fundraising, ride details, and impacts). Within these categories, the first-round codes were assessed for commonalities and emergent concepts, such as “T4K depression,” “I can do anything,” and “gratefulness.” Meanings for these concepts were derived directly from the participants’ words using the *in vivo* coding. For example, T4K depression was a code assigned to the concept of the struggle to return from the ride to Alaska and re-enter the “everyday” world.

Finally, a third round of coding was conducted using axial coding to connect the codes generated during the second round of pattern coding (Sandelowski, 2000). Specifically, relationships between themes and subthemes were identified in reference to how one’s motivations related to one’s experiences, how these experiences related to the transformations that occurred, and how the transformations that related to the initial motives. For example, one *in vivo* code “I feel like I’m capable of anything,” was categorized as an impact of participating and coded in the second round as “I can do anything.” This

second round code was connected to other second round codes, such as “physical challenge” (referring to the physical challenge of bicycling across the country) and “learning about cancer experiences” (referring to others’ cancer experiences, such as other riders, hosts, donors, and others). These connections resulted in the theme of empowerment and subthemes of continued support of organization, increased sport participation, and change in life path, among others. The themes and sub-themes found were: Motivations and Personal Characteristics of the Transformation including sub-themes of cause-related motivations, adventure/sport-related motivations, cause-related experience, and adventure/sport related experience; Extraordinary Experience Elements Leading to Transformations, including sub-themes of escape from daily life, building deep connections with others, developing empathy for the cancer struggle, feelings of support and generosity, challenging the old self view; and Outcomes of the Transformation including sub-themes of sense of empowerment, sense of duty, and sense of meaning. Each of the themes and sub-themes identified in the pattern coding and the relationships identified through axial coding are further defined and explained within the results.

4. Results

The data analysis showed that extraordinary experience elements, including the unusualness and sense of newness of the ride from Texas to Alaska, the high levels of emotional intensity, and the interpersonal interactions on the ride, all contributed to feelings of personal transformation. In the lead up to the ride, many experiences (e.g., fundraising, volunteering, and training) had some of these elements, but not all, and were not significant contributors to the personal transformations that occurred, thus these elements are not discussed here. Ultimately, riders described the actual ride across North America as leaving them with a sense of empowerment and a new sense of meaning and purpose in life—although the ways these transformations were enacted varied based on the motivations and history of the riders. The process is illustrated in Fig. 1.

4.1. Motivations and personal characteristics of the transformation

Participants came in to the organization and ride with different backgrounds, experiences, and motivations. To understand how the experience transformed the participants, we deemed it important to examine the differences between the participants, in particular their motivations, so we could identify what the different focal points for transformation were. Overwhelmingly, these differences influenced the impact of the experience on the transformation. Most prevalent were differences in history and motivations to join—either cause-related or adventure/sport-related—which meant that how new an experience was, differed, and thus the meaning and impact differed. Without a clear description of the riders’ motivations, it would be impossible to accurately assess whether the experience transformed them.

Riders’ previous cycling experience varied widely, but none reported having gone on a bicycle ride across the country and only one reported having done extensive advocacy work. It was not uncommon for riders to make statements like “I was not a cyclist, I had never been on a road bike before” (Rachel, 2012 rider) or “I thought biking was so boring and my experience with my bike back home let me know that it was really uncomfortable to be biking for more than an hour” (Anna, 2013 rider). Similarly, riders expressed that they were “never involved in the cancer community” prior to joining Texas 4000 (Robin, 2009 rider) and they had “never really fundraised to that magnitude before” (Jack, 2012 rider).

Riders’ experiences influenced their reasons for joining Texas 4000. Robert, for example, thought Texas 4000 “seemed fun, an exciting adventure” to be had, but also had seen cancer’s impacts on friends and family members and wanted to join to “make a difference” in the cancer fight. Marcus (2012) similarly “thought it would be a good opportunity to help the cancer community by fundraising and by honoring all members and friends who’ve had cancer.” Cancer is “something that makes you feel helpless” said Renee (2007) rider, and Texas 4000 “felt like that was the biggest thing that I could do.” Joseph (2010),

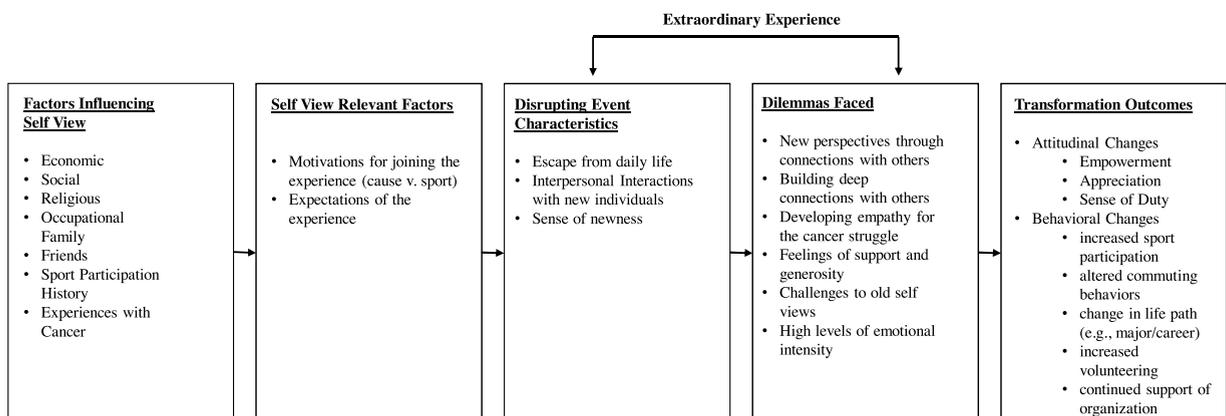


Fig. 1. Process of Personal Transformation through an Extraordinary Experience.

on the other hand, was a cyclist and “really just wanted to do the bike ride” because it would be fun and “a great way to get back in shape.” Despite the diversity in history and motivations, riders all had similar experiences leading up to “Atlas Day,” that is, the day they left for Alaska.

4.2. Extraordinary experience elements leading to transformations

Riders overwhelmingly described the experience as unusual, in that it was quite different than their everyday life as they spent twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week disconnected from their usual lives. They were disconnected from their daily responsibilities and relationships, and felt they had far less to worry about than in their normal routines. This disconnectedness also led to an increased importance of relationships with teammates. Because these experiences were so different than the ordinary and because the interpersonal relationships were vital, they are triggers for extraordinary experiences as described by [Arnould and Price \(1993\)](#).

4.2.1. Escape from daily life

Preparation for the ride, ranging from six months to a year and a half, included training, fundraising, and volunteering (some or all of which was a new experience for most participants). Outside of preparation for the ride, participants balanced some combination of school, work, family, and social obligations. However, when they got to the summer ride, no matter their previous history or preparation experiences, riders were disconnected from their normal lives. The daily routine on the ride started by waking up, packing, eating, ride dedication circles, riding to the next destination, arriving at the next destination and interacting with the hosts (if any), presenting programs, and sleeping. For seventy days, this routine was followed with little variation, and it was freeing for many. Will (2006 rider) stated, “It was a very freeing and exciting moment to be able to just ride a bike, and the simplicity and the beauty of riding your bike to Alaska can’t be overstated.” Arthur (2008 rider) expressed that

This is what you do . . . [and] one really cool thing about doing that was that was your only responsibility for the day. And I think that was really relieving, or it felt good knowing that the only thing you had to do was ride your bike. You didn’t have to worry about homework, or tests, or obligations outside of just riding your bike.

It was almost as though riders got to “be a kid again all summer” (Carrie, 2009). Before beginning, riders only had vague ideas about what to expect over the summer, and described the summer as unusual, as is characteristic of extraordinary experiences.

4.2.2. Building deep connections with others

With this freedom from other responsibilities, and a repetitive routine that included anywhere from three to twelve hours on a bicycle, riders were able to develop close relationships with teammates and support each other on difficult, challenging days. Anna (2013 rider) pointed out that “when you’re biking, you’re talking to so many of your teammates in a way that you can’t really talk to anybody else because you can only make small talk for so long.” These conversations were described in the following way:

Very deep conversations that you never would’ve gotten into before with anybody, and you start talking about your faith, and you start talking about what you think about life, start talking about the difficulties that you’ve been through. Or you talk about who you’re riding for that day. (Eric, 2013)

Riding together day after day, riders reached a “point in the ride . . . you’re starting to become a lot more uninhibited about what you’re sharing with your teammates” (Thomas, 2009 rider). Robin (2009 rider), for example, became very close to Diane, who also lost a parent to cancer, and when he described their conversations, he still became emotional about it:

Diane and I would ride together a lot, just the two of us, and we would just have these insanely powerful conversations. Being able to ask each other things that, nobody had ever asked us because they would feel uncomfortable about it . . . telling each other about what our parents’ funerals were like . . . and I think being able to talk about that in such a loving environment where there was no judgment—that was just incredible. And so, we would just have these powerful conversations, and then we would be able to tell our teammates about them. And it was also really powerful to see how recapping these conversations to our teammates really affected them too. And so, I think through the process of us both working through a lot of these emotions, our team felt like they had a huge part in that also.

By having these types of conversations, and “the actual physicality of the ride” made it “feel like we were changing the world” (Robin, 2009 rider). Carrie (2009 rider), also described how learning about her teammates’ experiences with cancer was meaningful and that one day “we just kind of all got together and rode for her mom, and rode for her, and then the whole day—it was one of my favorite days of the ride—where I rode alongside of her and she told us the stupidest stories, but just these stupid silly fun little memories of her mom and she had a blast. And she was crying at one point and all of us are like crying alongside her, but she’s laughing too.”

These conversations on the bike, which would not have happened in everyday life, were especially important to and characteristic of both the emotional intensity and the interpersonal interactions necessary for extraordinary experiences.

4.2.3. Developing empathy for the cancer struggle

Bonding on the bike brought about high levels of emotional intensity and experience (such as the incidents Carrie and Robin described). But these weren't the only places that these powerful situations occurred. During the ride, participants described how they internalized the stories of others' cancer experiences. These stories of suffering, battles, challenges, triumphs, and losses elicited strong feelings, such as sympathy and empathy. This internalization and the emotions elicited from the experiences led directly to personal transformations.

Through programs to raise awareness for cancer prevention, conversations with host families, and chance encounters on the road, many riders learned more about what it is like to go through a cancer diagnosis and fight. "One host told me her story about fighting cancer . . . that was just such a weird eye-opening experience to hear that come out of someone: 'Oh, that's the best thing that ever happened to me.' But I think it's a life altering experience that makes you appreciate every day so much more" (Abigail, 2008). Another host, described by many riders as a world-class weightlifter who battled cancer, shared a powerful moment when he was at chemo. While there, this host saw a woman missing a jaw "and when [the host] looked at her, [he] looked right into her eyes. [He] didn't look around. What [he] saw was something that was just terrible, but [he] looked right into their eyes because the worst thing that you could do was take away someone's pride" (Rick, 2009 rider).

In addition to these less structured opportunities during the ride or interactions with hosts, every morning, just before leaving for the next destination, the team would circle up and share ride dedications for the day. Individual members would volunteer to share a name, a story, and their thoughts and feelings about who they wanted to dedicate that day's ride to. Hosts were invited to participate as well. Robin (2009) described these ride dedication circles as an opportunity to "every day . . . refocus us as to why we were on the ride. And it was great to be able to learn new stories of hope and inspiration every day from these ride dedications." As everyone shared who they were riding for each day, it "remind[ed] you of what you were doing and why you were doing it and who you were doing it for" (Judy, 2009).

These stories also gave inspiration and purpose to most riders. For example, Rachel (2012) said, "There were days that I only literally finished a ride because I was riding for someone that day, and I couldn't give up . . . it was important for me because I told [my friend] I was riding for his uncle." Jack (2012) described the ride dedication circle he learned about his host's wife, who had passed away from cancer, as "very emotional," but felt "it was a good release . . . everybody was in tears that morning in the ride circle. It's very powerful and a really good reminder [of] why we're here, why we're doing this, why people care about what we're doing." For some, though, these reminders were "kind of unfortunate" because "the whole cancer backdrop . . . kind of plays a backseat to just having fun for the summer" (Arthur, 2008), emphasizing that while transformation was a universal theme for our respondents, this transformation was not always tied to the cause behind the ride, and each respondent sought their own meaning within the overall experience.

Finally, riders were able to learn about others' stories through these circles. Carrie (2009) described how Charlie, "who has this big old cowboy hat and white beard," was fighting esophageal cancer, but "you could just tell from the prognosis it was not going to turn out well. So, we rode for him," she said, "and that's just one of the stories that I have . . . I just feel so lucky to have so many stories like that because when you think about [it] a lot of people our age and students are, for better or for worse, self-centered. And to have that type of experience at such a young age, it prepares you to be a better human being in the long run." Robin (2009) and Diane (2009) both lost parents to cancer. One day, after hearing their teammates say they didn't feel worthy to ride because they didn't lose anybody to cancer, they dedicated their ride to "the friends on the team that joined the ride because they had this passion to raise money for cancer research without having that direct connection to it."

These ride dedication circles gave focus to the ride, allowed teammates to learn about and be inspired by others, and for some, offered the opportunity to share something they had never talked about before. Combined with the informal opportunities, riders reported that the intense emotions experienced on the ride influenced their transformations. And, without the interpersonal interactions they had on the ride, these experiences would not have happened. Interpersonal interactions, such as connecting to teammates, hosts, strangers, and others throughout the ride, also led to personal transformations through inspiration.

4.2.4. Feelings of support and generosity

Interactions with hosts and other individuals led to personal transformation, partially through hearing their stories and learning about others as described above, and partially through the generosity experienced. "It's really just incredible the outpouring of support you get," Jack (2012) said. "We're meeting people, and hearing their stories, and learning and sharing with them." Through programs about cancer prevention and awareness, riders were able to share information and feel like they were making an impact "because that's when we connect to people" (Michael, 2006). The programs were presented to hosts and to hospitals, and "some people were really shocked at what they saw . . . a lot of people [were] not really mentally prepared to see what a treatment center looks like" (Carrie, 2009). And these visits allowed riders to meet individuals who had cancer or had family members and friends with cancer and learn about things they otherwise wouldn't have. "You don't think about how much gas it takes to go back and forth to a doctor's appointment or treatment. You don't think about how expensive it is and time consuming it is to worry about getting groceries for your family" (Carrie, 2009).

Other interactions with passersby and hosts left people with an appreciation for their generosity. Hosts did a lot for riders and would get their whole community together "for a night and a morning and made you feel welcome . . . it was pretty

amazing what people do for people they don't know, who had no clue who we were before that" (Emily, 2004). This outpouring of support was something that impacted riders in profound ways.

4.2.5. Challenging the old self view

Finally, a sense of newness of perception and process characterizes extraordinary experiences. Unlike unusual events that take one outside of one's everyday life and trigger the extraordinary experience, the sense of newness of perception refers to the idea that the extraordinary experience is different or novel and not repetitious, thus exposing participants to new processes and ways of thinking. Throughout Texas 4000, the riders described new experiences and perspectives, such as learning about other's cancer experiences (see above), learning about bicycling, and learning about the kindness of others (see above). These new perspectives contributed to their personal transformation.

Experience with cancer was not a prerequisite to join the team, so some people had no experience and were shocked at what they saw at cancer treatment centers. For many this was "a very transformational experience" (Carrie, 2009). Eric (2013) explained this sentiment by explaining, "You find out that everyone has a personal connection to cancer, along the way . . . it just opens your eyes to how much more cancer affects everyone than you realized before." Combined with the stories of hosts' cancer experiences described earlier, these stories contributed to the impact of the experience. When Arthur (2008) found out that a host had passed away, for example, he said "Stuff like that really impacts you and makes you know you're doing something good for others." Rick expressed "I didn't really pick up on . . . how integral the fight against cancer is to the Texas 4000 mission" when he first joined, so these stories and experiences were new to them. Even those with previous history of learning about cancer were able to learn new things about patients', friends', and family experiences with cancer.

Participants also described the newness of cycling; throughout training for the ride, there were a lot of new experiences related to cycling itself. Learning how to ride with clipless pedals (i.e., pedals that require a rider to clip in to the bike with special shoes and cleats) was very frustrating, for example. And the training rides were frustrating for some who struggled with the time commitment or injuries, while others really enjoyed the chance to train and get to know their teammates. Riders like Anna (2013) did very little cycling before joining Texas 4000. She expressed that "cycling to Alaska seemed like the most unappealing thing I could think of doing because I thought biking was so boring and . . . uncomfortable." Robin (2009) said, "I had never cycled before, so that was something completely new that I had to learn," and Arthur (2008) said "I wasn't really an athlete by any means." These statements were prevalent.

For these Texas 4000 alumni, and even those who had some cycling experience, the joys and challenges of completing a cross-country trip were new and unusual. Calvin (2007 rider), said, "I just saw the world in this way that didn't know was possible." And Eric described it as "beyond anything you can imagine, just seeing it every day and seeing how it changes . . . there's nothing like seeing the country by bike . . . because every day it's a new scene. You're never going to see the same thing twice." Arthur said he "had never seen many of" the cities across the US, and the ride allowed him and others to see new things and learn more about the country.

Rides also presented challenges—whether purposeful or simply a part of daily life on a bicycle. These challenges, such as riding 200-plus miles in one day or climbing 6000 vertical feet in 28 miles, were difficult and inspiring. Lauren (2011 rider) said her challenge ride allowed her "to remind [herself] . . . 'no, this is why I'm doing this.'" Jack (2012) described a particularly blustery day in which riders dropped one by one until "it got down to me and this guy . . . [who] was riding for his brother that day . . . so he really wanted to finish the ride," so Jack kept riding with him. On these challenging days, riders often described riding for someone else as a way to inspire them to complete the ride. This inspiration is best described by Steven (2008) who said that on one of these days "those last twenty miles [I] was just thinking about why I rode and the people that I've met along the way, and the people that I will meet in the future, that will benefit from the cause that I'm riding for . . . keep riding because there is so much more out here that you're going to do." Learning to cycle and learning to tie it to a cause brought about a sense of newness and perception of the sport experience.

Finally, riders also described the generosity and kindness from others they met on the ride was something they hadn't previously experienced. For example, Rick (2009) stated,

One thing you don't appreciate is just people's generosity . . . [they] waited and gave us popsicles . . . entire families just took us in . . . and many different people did this and many different communities did this or churches did this or schools did this. That was something that I always take with me is just generosity is something that I didn't really consider to be a virtue until I really joined the ride . . . People are very selfless and I think that's a really beautiful way to live.

Abigail (2008 rider) similarly expressed that she had "just never viewed how generous people can be. People who didn't really have a whole lot, but gave so much. And they felt so honored to host us that we didn't feel like a chore to them, which amazed me."

Although the personal transformations varied from rider to rider, the unusual, new, and emotionally intense experiences on the ride, along with the interpersonal interactions, all contributed to personal transformation among the riders.

4.3. Outcomes of the transformation

Overall, riders left the experience with a sense of empowerment, best described by Michael (2006) and Arthur (2008) who stated, "I can do anything" or Anna (2013) who stated she felt like she was "capable of anything," and the many others

who expressed similar feelings. Ultimately, the hardships and triumphs of the ride allowed riders to “realize it’s ok to take chances, it’s okay to fail, it’s okay to think that you can achieve crazy things of an astounding scale” (Diane, 2009). This empowerment led people to “think that [they] can help other people through incredible, imaginative projects” (Anna, 2013), that they “could work with anybody . . . any kind of personality” (Jenny, 2010), and that they had “this huge capacity, if [they] want[ed] to reach for it” (Marshall, 2008). Riders often described the feelings of not being able to go anymore on a bike “and still being able to do it” and translating that “to other areas of life, like even when things are not going the way you want them to . . . you can actually make that happen for yourself and for others” (Judy, 2009). Anthony (2009) said that the ride, for him “wasn’t about being really good, it was basically about enduring everything which was a parallel to enduring cancer treatment . . . it’s ‘can you keep going when you don’t want to keep going.’” More narrowly, riders applied the success of the physical challenge of riding a bike to Alaska to physical empowerment. Riders went on to run marathons and ultra-marathons (Emily, 2004; Michael, 2006; Rachel, 2012), triathlons (Arthur, 2008), and self-supported rides (Arthur, 2008; Michael, 2006); often these were new physical challenges that participants had not done or considered before their ride to Alaska. Many also integrated biking into their daily lives through commuting (Jenny, 2010; Sydney, 2010). Others felt empowered to change majors, career paths and embrace other life changes, which, when combined with the sense of meaning and purpose in life that was developed through the ride, was profound.

Overwhelmingly, riders also felt that this sense of empowerment came with a sense of duty to the team and their teammates to “not let this be your greatest adventure,” a phrase that gets passed down from team to team. Riders interpret this phrase to mean “you’re going to do lots of other amazing things—it doesn’t have to end here” (Carrie, 2009). Texas 4000 “instilled in me that passion, drive for adventure, that I didn’t have before, so that I can continue to think ‘How can I better myself? How can I better society? What can I do for others? What can I do to empower myself to help others?’” explained Rachel (2012). Ultimately, the ride led participants to be more “appreciative of the world and everybody and everything that’s good in it” (Francie, 2010).

The interactions with others ultimately allowed riders to take a new or different “perspective on things and a sense of gratefulness” (Sydney, 2013). The kindness and generosity showed to them, even in the face of daunting or dismaying cancer experiences, contributed to this transformation because hearing about “people who have lost their parents or their spouse or somebody else who is truly close them, every single day” (Sydney, 2013) made it difficult to walk away without being grateful and needing to carry that kindness forward. Through their interactions with others and their new and unusual experiences and perspectives, they felt a duty to take this appreciation out into the world.

This sense of meaning, purpose, duty and empowerment led to life changes. Carrie (2009), for example, said, “Texas 4000 really changed my career trajectory in a way, but also just my gauge for what’s personally meaningful,” as she changed her master’s thesis topic and became more involved in non-profits through volunteering and development. Jenny (2010) had worked in theater before going on her ride, but upon returning and “realizing the things that were really important and how you could help people in a really meaningful and impactful way” ended up joining AmeriCorps afterwards, working with a literacy organization. Diane (2009) finished up her degree in Corporate Communications, and then decided to get a Master’s degree in Public Affairs and interned with a cancer-advocacy organization because she “thought this (corporate communication) is too vain, I need something more after this Texas 4000 experience.”

For others, the impact was profound because it helped narrow their focus. Abigail (2008) said she was interested in social work prior to Texas 4000, but the ride helped her decide to pursue art therapy specifically, after volunteering with Texas 4000 doing art therapy at a hospital for a children’s unit. She said, “I’m not sure I would be where I am right now if it wouldn’t have been for Texas 4000 in all honesty. I always thought I would do something like social work, but I probably would have gone a totally different route.” Lauren (2011) pointed out that through the interactions with others during Texas 4000 she “realized that being a doctor is cool, but I was really about getting to know people and hearing their stories and so that was ultimately why I decided to go into counseling.” In all, riders were able to have new, emotionally intense experiences and meet people with different perspectives that allowed them to change their own perspective and transform on a personal level.

5. Discussion

Overall, the results of this study indicate that unlike results from studies of other cause-related sport events, extraordinary experiences can lead to sport-related and non-sport-related personal transformations that for some participants lasted for years beyond participation. Participants of this event largely and in masse, escaped a ‘return to the baseline’. Research question one asked how the extraordinary experience contributed to the participants’ personal transformations. The results show that this transformation happens by disconnecting participants from their regular life and relationships and allowing them to be exposed to new perspectives, experiences, and generosity that challenged their old self view.

Research question two addressed the outcomes of participants’ personal transformations. Results indicate that outcomes include a sense of empowerment, duty, and purpose that led to continued sport and cause participation, as well as significant life changes (such as a change in career paths). Significantly, these transformations are neither planned nor temporary changes, but emerge organically and endure, in some cases, for many years after the experience.

Research questions three asked what elements of the transformational experience were most relevant to personal transformation. Results indicate these were the physical challenge, the disconnectedness from everyday life, the opportunity

to meet and learn new perspectives, and the community-building associated with the experience. By identifying characteristics of extraordinary experiences that contributed to individuals' personal transformations, the outcomes of those transformations, and how sport organizations can leverage this information, this research contributes to our knowledge of sport participant experiences. Each of these is discussed below.

5.1. Theoretical implications

In response to how the extraordinary experience contributed to the participants' personal transformations and the subsequent outcomes of those transformations (RQ1 and RQ2), participants reported that the experience had impacted their lives in numerous, lasting ways; these transformations were characterized by a sense of empowerment, meaning and purpose in life. Previous research has described feelings of purpose as a result of the extraordinary experience and subsequent personal transformation (Arnould & Price, 1993; Wade, 1998). The findings of this study add to this research by demonstrating that these feelings of purpose, when combined with the sense of empowerment, translate into lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes. One way that this took place was actually accomplishing the task of the ride itself. But, another important way was the high level of involvement from the very beginning—the riders planned, raised funds, secured host homes, secured transportation, etc. Thus, the actual immersion in the total experience gave them a great sense of purpose and empowerment above and beyond the grueling nature of the training and the ride itself. Previous research on sport and sense of community suggests that involvement and leadership opportunities can create a powerful sense of community (see Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012). Even mundane tasks that contribute to the realization of the event can provide a strong sense of empowerment, as Katz and Heere (2015) demonstrated in their study on how tailgating affected one's identity with a sport team. This study supports this contention, and takes it a step further by suggesting that the involvement may also be a contributor toward life transformation. This is certainly an area within community-building theory that deserves further attention.

Participants were able to take the feelings of purpose and empowerment to find directions in life that enabled them to pursue a life that continued to give them a sense of purpose, often turning them into “cause champions,” or individuals who support, fight, and argue for causes (Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2015). While not always tied to the specific organization or cause, the personal transformations left participants empowered to find their own cause and purpose in life, ranging from pursuit of other physical challenges to changing majors and career paths to continue serving others. While participating in a sport program is not guaranteed to create positive change (e.g., Chalip, 2006a; Coakley, 2011), the results of this study indicate that extraordinary sport experiences seem to go beyond current conceptualizations of sport and cause, to create not temporal, but lasting personal transformations with regards to attitudes and behaviors. The evidence also supports previous findings that sport experiences have social value that can be leveraged (Chalip, 2006b). This builds upon existing theory not only by showing the enduring nature of personal transformations, but also by showing potential mechanisms for this change, which are described below.

These changes appear to be brought about by a sense of disconnectedness from one's daily life and exposure to new people and perspectives, highlighting how the extraordinary experience contributed to personal transformations (RQ1). Arnould and Price (1993) explained that characteristics of extraordinary experiences included experiencing high levels of emotional intensity, interpersonal interaction, and sense of newness. When the cyclists in this study removed from their usual support systems and daily activities, they were able to experience all of the described characteristics, which allowed them experience personal transformations. They learned to rely on their teammates and described having conversations that they didn't have in their normal lives, suggesting that one way to encourage liminality and create lasting change through sport experiences is through this disconnectedness because it enables sociability among people with different perspectives (Chalip, 2006b). Previous research has identified inclusive play and common areas for food, merchandise, and play as methods of enabling sociability (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). The results of this study indicate that disconnectedness and interactions with people who have different perspectives (through host interactions, for example) are additional methods for enabling sociability.

Additionally, while leisure activities have been shown to be vehicles for personal transformation (e.g., Kleiber et al., 2002), the results of this study indicate that characteristics of these extraordinary leisure experiences, such as disconnectedness, are instrumental in bringing about these changes, which helps answer Research Question 3. Importantly, the riders met individuals they would not have met otherwise and were exposed to perspectives they had not previously been exposed to. Previous research into personal transformations has recognized the impact that interpersonal relationships can have on individuals through the exposure to new viewpoints (e.g., Mezirow, 1978; Wade, 1998). The exposure to these other perspectives and disconnectedness resulted in intense emotional experiences that resulted in lasting personal transformations. The personal transformation may not have occurred or have resulted in a different outcome if the participants did not meet other riders or hosts, learn about their experiences, and have the ability to process them through the sense of disconnectedness. This is an important contribution to the literature because it provides evidence of actual change, rather than intended change, as participants who give their thoughts immediately after an experience may not have the resources (such as disconnectedness or emotional experiences) to fully integrate the new perspectives and subsequently change their attitudes and behaviors.

Participants in this study had different motivations for joining the organization, consistent with other behavioral research (e.g., Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Crompton, 1979; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008; Snelgrove & Wood, 2010).

The two central motives were cancer-related and adventure-related— Influenced predominantly by participant backgrounds. For example, someone who had lost a family member or close friend joined the organization had a cancer-related motivation to join, while someone without these ties was more motivated by the sense of adventure a 4500-mile bike ride offered. Importantly, these differences affected the individual's experience and transformation. Contextual factors such as previous experience and motivations are important to consider when designing programs to create specific participant outcomes, and have been shown to shape participant experiences and transformation into cause champions in sport-for-development organizations (Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2015). For organizations looking to develop cause champions and community around their organization, this is especially important to consider. Hassay and Pelozo (2009) argue that there are two methods of developing community that a non-profit (and other organizations) should be concerned with. An individual can identify with a charity, become involved, and develop a sense of community or an individual can become involved with the charity, develop a sense of community within the non-profit, and then become identified with the organization. While this study did not examine identity, the motivations to join did affect participant experiences and thus outcomes in a similar sense. Many of those who joined for cancer-related reasons became involved and developed a sense of community with the team, while some of those who joined for adventure-related reasons became involved with the cause and developed a sense of community with the team and a sense of duty to the team to carry on their lives with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Similar to Wood, Snelgrove, and Danylichuk (2010) findings, riders who were primarily looking to fulfill cause-related motivations had an experience centered around meeting those needs. For example, they came to see the physical act of cycling as a metaphor for the fight against cancer—each pedal stroke represented a contribution to the overall battle. Their relationships with others developed through sharing their cancer experiences with teammates and hosts. Riders who were primarily seeking adventure did attempt to fulfill those needs, thus these riders enjoyed learning to bike and the physical challenges on the ride more. They also continued seeking these physical challenges for many after their participation in the program. These differences in experiences due to different motivations supports previous findings that acknowledged differences in expectations, but extends this work by exploring how the different motivations affect the impacts and transformations of the individuals (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Dodson, 1996; Schouten et al., 2007).

5.2. Managerial implications

The elements of the extraordinary experience that led to participants' personal transformation are important for sport managers to understand and potentially implement within their own organizations to build empowerment, new perspectives, and a sense of meaning. As organizations face more competition, sport managers must think intentionally about the outcomes they hope to achieve through the experiences they provide (Duerden et al., 2018), especially if they hope to create a lasting impact.

Charity sport events have attracted individuals with perceived similarities which can be limiting in helping organizations reach a wider audience (Filo et al., 2013), and the results of this study demonstrate that attracting participants with a variety of motivations and backgrounds can also impact the participants (in addition to reaching a larger audience). Sport managers should take efforts to ensure diversity of participants through their marketing efforts, as well as selection processes (such as applications or interviews). Marketing efforts to attract individuals from different geographic areas or areas outside of sport—by tying in a cause, music, or art—could encourage diversity, and the selection processes could reduce likelihood of perceived similarities among participants.

Additionally, managers should encourage interaction with other participants and individuals outside the organization. For example, in this study participants spoke about their interactions with hosts and learning from their perspectives. Other opportunities to interact with individuals outside the organization might include guest speakers or volunteer projects for sport participants. These opportunities could expose participants to new perspectives that they may need to consider how to integrate with their current perspective.

In addition to interacting with people with different experiences, opportunities for a sense of newness and opportunity to disconnect from everyday life are important for personal transformations. Creating liminality in sport is important for creating lasting change and social value (Chalip, 2006b; Welty Peachey et al., 2015), and allowing opportunities to disconnect from daily life and try new things can contribute to that liminality. To that end, sport managers should encourage travel and opportunities to try new foods, see new things, do new activities. These activities should create a sense of newness, which when combined with a disconnection from daily life (such as through escape from technology), could contribute to a sense of liminality.

Finally, after each of the above activities, opportunities for reflection should be provided. Individuals can choose to ignore the new perspectives or experiences, thus providing structured time for reflection and reconciliation would give participants a chance to address how the new information aligns with their previous perspective (Mezirow, 1991; Wade, 1998). Giving time for individual reflection, leading a group discussion about interactions with others or the new experiences, or encouraging journaling or some form of documentation and reflection of the experience would allow individuals the time needed to reconcile the new experience or perspective with previous perspectives, thus creating lasting change.

5.3. Limitations and future directions

By examining only the experiences of participants in one organization, only after their experience, there remains much potential for future work examining personal transformation and extraordinary experiences in sport. Future research should examine extraordinary experiences provided by other organizations to compare and contrast the experiences and elements provided and how those elements relate to personal transformations. Additionally, this research only examined the perspectives of participants, limiting the understanding of the experience and transformation. The effect of motivational differences on the experience and transformation should be further explored in future research. Also, identifying the perspectives of sport organization employees would help provide a more complete understanding of how sport organizations provide these experiences and their goals. Additionally, the participants' networks could give researchers a more complete understanding of the participants' personal transformations. Finally, future research should also measure attitudes and behaviors of participants before their participation. One limitation of this research was interviewing athletes after their participation, thus relying on individuals' recollections of their attitudes and behaviors and their own transformations. Measuring individuals' attitudes and behaviors before, during, and after their participation in an extraordinary experience will address this issue.

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