

**PRE-PUBLICATION WORKING DRAFT CIRCULATED FOR COMMENTS**

**CYCLING CULTURES: SOME INITIAL FINDINGS FROM A NARRATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Abstract**

This paper reports on emerging findings from a research programme that I have recently started, entitled “Cycling Cultures”. The programme will include in-depth narrative interviews with people who cycle, seeking to understand and analyse diverse and changing meanings and experiences associated with cycling. How, for instance, does cycling fit in with other identities throughout the life course, in a country where cycling levels are low? What kinds of emotional attachment to cycling do people develop? What kinds of things do they perceive as encouraging and discouraging them from cycling?

Findings are relevant to the sociologies of transport, identity, and social movements, but also to broader debates in policy and cycling circles about encouraging cycle use. For example, some attempts to encourage cycling are based around a “health promotion” model, but it is possible that in-depth interviews with people who currently cycle might suggest that other perceived benefits, such as convenience or freedom, are more important to them.

Initial research is focusing upon Cambridge, UK, which has the highest modal share for cycling in the UK. Thus cycling is “normalised” in Cambridge to an extent generally not found elsewhere in this country, and this is embodied in (for example) styles of dress that can be observed among Cambridge commuter cyclists. Participants have been recruited through leafleting cyclists and parked cycles in the town, and at a cycling conference held in May.

The paper will discuss the Cambridge research, and any comments and suggestions on the future direction of the research are very welcome.

**Cycling cultures: some initial findings from a narrative research project**

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This is a **very** rough draft being circulated to Cycling and Society conference attendees. Please do not quote without permission. This material will later be written up into one or more academic papers, so comments and suggestions are very welcome – email [R.E.Aldred@uel.ac.uk](mailto:R.E.Aldred@uel.ac.uk)

**Introduction**

I became interested in the idea of “cycling cultures” because I increasingly saw the term used in policy discourse. Transport sections of local authority websites frequently include a statement along the lines of “We aim to encourage a cycling culture”, before informing readers about the availability of local cycling maps and so on. Cycling activists also use the phrase. After having decided on “cycling cultures” as a working title for my new research project, I discovered that 2008’s Cycle Campaign Network/Cyclists Touring Club conference was entitled “Creating a Cycling Culture”.

Still not entirely clear about what I meant by a “cycling culture”, I wondered whether the conference would help me clarify my thoughts. As it turned out, the conference didn’t seem to focus on culture. It rather seemed to be about increasing cycling levels; definitely a laudable aim and I enjoyed the conference, but I was still

confused about what I – and others – meant when we spoke of a “cycling culture”. Could we even speak about a singular cycling culture? Or, perhaps particularly given the frequent disagreements between cycling activists, would we be better off talking about cycling cultures?

The term “cycling culture” may itself be off-putting. Does it imply that cycling is all about culture, and not – for example – about infrastructure? Culture carries contradictory associations in popular (and academic) discourse, and these can be problematic. On one hand, it can be assumed that culture is fixed and unchanging, witness the way in which “ethnicity” now operates in place of “race”. On the other hand, “culture” can be seen in individualistic and consumerist terms; we choose our own cultures in the same way as we might choose a brand of washing powder. Culture in this light would be equated to the products that we purchase, which do not just symbolise but become our selves.

However, “culture” is more than these two sketched positions. In my use of the term, culture is embodied in the everyday habits of our lives. When talking about cycling, talk frequently turns to questions of the body and to relationships between the natural and the technological. As I am beginning my interview analysis, I have started to wonder whether it might be more useful to talk about a cycling “habitus” (Bourdieu 1977). A habitus is a way of being in the world, linked to practices and dispositions, operating at a different level from the political or ideological (but connected to them). As cycling is an embodied practice, habitus may be a particularly useful way of theorising the effects of cycling upon individuals and groups, within particular social and geographic locations.

### **Car cultures and cycling cultures**

A key question for me is whether the use of particular transport modes encourages particular kinds of subjectivity. Is there a distinctive “view from the handlebars”? Reading the introduction to Matthew Paterson’s (2007) book on car cultures, I was struck by his description of how cycling made him aware of the way that car cultures oppressed cyclists. So as a comparison, I want to discuss car culture/car cultures a little bit. In the academic literature there is a split between those who see car use within mass motorised societies as encouraging a particular (usually negative) form of subjectivity (e.g. Paterson 2007), and those who stress “car cultures”, or the diversity of cultures based around car use (e.g. Miller 2001).

I tend to fall into the former camp, and see violence, and the threat of violence, as inherent to the car. Elsewhere (Woodcock and Aldred 2008) I argue that violence can actually be seen as part of the car’s “use value”, hence the trend to larger and larger vehicles. “Car cultures” often glorify this violence, seen in the outbursts of pundits like Jeremy Clarkson who threaten violence against cyclists and/or pedestrians. Car advertisements appeal to violence and to its gendered and racialised aspects, as in Nissan’s “Urban Proof” campaign (“urban” being a euphemism for “black”). However, often this violence is repressed and hidden, as critiqued by Godard in *Le Weekend*. While some advertisements do show or suggest violence, car advertisers’ default image is the car on the open road – i.e. there is no need to threaten or use violence, because no one else is present (vehicle or pedestrian).

I am not arguing that all drivers are violent. I am arguing that driving offers entry into a system that runs on violence (creating what the World Health Organisation has famously called the “forgotten epidemic”). So it is not surprising that the Transport Research Laboratory (Basford et al 2002) found that drivers exhibited extremely negative attitudes towards cyclists, with some viewing all cyclists as illicit road users and even relatively tolerant drivers feeling that only some categories of cyclist really deserve road space. “When the moderator...entered cyclists into the discussion, they were the subjects of rather negative imagery, which may suggest an underlying conflict

between drivers and cyclists. Respondents placed cyclists, perhaps not surprisingly, at the bottom of the road user hierarchy.” (Basford et al 2002:7).

Violence is only one aspect of car culture(s). Böhm et al (2006) describe an automobile ideology rooted in the infrastructural demands of mass motorisation. Like underground rail networks, motorisation demands massive public investment. But unlike tube passengers, individual drivers are *automobile*, competing with fellow drivers to reach destinations independently. Tube passengers are not necessarily co-operative and struggle over seats, but they are all dependent on the tube reaching its ultimate destination. This is not the case for drivers, who are not “all in it together” in the same way.

Inside a glass and metal box capable of travelling at high speeds, car drivers are sensory deprived and enhanced in a range of ways. Communication with others outside the car is difficult. I am sure that others have had the experience of being ignored by car drivers, while a pedestrian, cyclist, or public transport passenger will find it much harder to ignore someone trying to communicate with them. But frequently car drivers genuinely cannot interact with their environment except where the environment is specially tailored for them, as with large road signs for example.

Obviously, in mass motorised societies such as the UK, driving is also a totally “normal” part of life. Driving is identified with life changes (the legal driving age) and with caring (the school run). The car encloses the family unit and access to the car still embodies traditional “family values”; under-17s cannot drive and among adults, while over 80% of men have a driving licence under two-thirds of women do (National Statistics 2006). Even where both partners drive, family outings may frequently involve the man in the driver’s seat, the woman in the front passenger seat map reading, and children in the back. However cars also symbolise independence and leaving the family unit, as seventeen-year-olds take their driving tests and prepare for their future as independent drivers.

So how do the characteristics of cycling compare with driving? As the editors of *Against Automobility* point out, cycling can also be seen as a form of automobility (a device for independent motion), albeit not the dominant one. Indeed, the editors suggest that bicycles can potentially fulfil automobility’s promise. Cycling, like driving, is a form of “private transport”. However, unlike driving but like walking, it makes relatively little demand on public infrastructure. We could compare this to the early days of cycling in which it was cycling that strained the available infrastructure; cycling groups were the first campaigners for increased spending on roads.

In towns and cities within motorised societies, cyclists are in a sense more automobile than drivers; the driver cannot pick up her car to circumnavigate a queue of parked cars. In congested situations and/or where cycle permeability is good, the cyclist’s mobility advantage is particularly pronounced. By contrast where roads are designed to favour cars over cyclists, as with gyratory systems, the threat of violence can severely impede cyclists’ mobility. The extent of mobility experienced by cyclists varies and may encourage different kinds of cycling cultures.

Cycling allows for different types of relationships to the environment (or, perhaps, habituses) that are distinct from those encouraged by other forms of public and private transport. Walking and cycling, for example, are both “active transport”, yet the type of exercise provided by each is quite different. Cycling may be more accessible for some people than walking, due to the weight being taken off the legs; cycles can be adapted to suit people with a range of abilities (Aldred and Woodcock 2008).

## **Cycling and Cambridge**

The research discussed here is a series of 25 interviews recently conducted in Cambridge, about experiences of cycling throughout people's lives. Cambridge is frequently spoken of as being one of the few places in the UK to actually have a "cycling culture". Around one in four residents cycle to work (ten times the England and Wales average). Cambridge has a relatively active cycling lobby and the council has a cycling officer post (job-shared between two people). While I have spoken to a few people that I would call "cycling activists", most of my interviewees were not activists.

There are various push factors encouraging cycling in Cambridge. It has a compact and accessible city centre, which unlike many towns has not been re-designed in favour of the automobile. There are increasing restrictions on car use in the city and growing congestion in its narrow streets. There is also a lack of car parking in the centre. Cambridge is flat and sunny with a large student population, and students at Cambridge University are not allowed to bring cars down with them. The City Council has relatively pro-cycling policies as have some local employers.

As a Londoner visiting Cambridge, it did seem to me that Cambridge cyclists looked different to London cyclists. I was immediately struck by the lack of lycra, and by people cycling into work in what were obviously their work clothes. There seemed to be relatively few helmets, and people used front baskets more than rear panniers. There was a high level of age and gender diversity, and I particularly noticed young people, women, and people over the age of 65 cycling, groups with a lower propensity to cycle in the UK. This last is interesting given the age and gender make-up of the Cambridge CTC/CCN conference, predominantly middle-aged and older, and male. Clearly people who cycled in Cambridge were diverse age- and gender-wise, but perhaps women and younger people are less likely to see themselves as cycling activists? Finally, I noticed that many cyclists seemed to jump red lights, at least at the junction where I was attempting to hand out leaflets!

Six of my interviewees were recruited at the CTC/CCN conference, while nineteen responded to my leafleting them or their bicycles during a May weekend. I had fifteen men, and ten women (all white, mostly English). Out of my leaflet recruits, the gender split was virtually equal – 10/9, but five out of my six conference recruits were male (this roughly reflects the gender balance of attendees). Around a quarter of my interviewees were in their twenties or early to mid thirties, and another quarter were over 60; the remaining half were in between these age groups. In socio-economic terms, I would estimate around ten were working-class and the rest middle- or upper-class – but this is very rough! Around two-thirds owned at least one car, which initially seemed high to me, but Cambridge is an affluent city with high car ownership and – I was told at the CTC/CCN conference – over 90% of Cycling Campaign activists are car owners.

## **Cyclists – or people who cycle?**

In my leaflets, I'd asked for "people who cycle" rather than "cyclists", on the grounds that there might be a difference. Even though I'd referenced behaviour not identity, I got several people who didn't actually currently cycle that much but identified with cycling. One was an ex-manual worker and ex-bicycle courier, who now needed a car to travel to see clients. Another worked unsociable shifts ten miles from his workplace, so unlike his wife was unable to cycle to work. Still another now lived very near her work, too close to cycle. The division between recreational and utility cycling seemed less clear-cut than I expected. People saw cycling they carried with them and enacted in different ways at different times of their lives. The cycling life stories that I gathered suggest that if 25% commute to work by bicycle in Cambridge, there may be

a substantially higher proportion that have previously commuted by bicycle, who would do so again if circumstances changed.

Yet while I found a strong wish to identify with cycling and bicycles, there was also a concern among many interviews that – in the words of several – they were not “proper cyclists”. Clearly a cycling identity is something that has to be worked at. One interviewee contested the very use of the word “cyclist” – although she used it throughout her interview. She said:

- I rather resist the use of the word “cyclist” because when you have cyclist campaigns and cyclists interests, it labels people. It sounds pedantic but if you actually talk in terms of people on bicycles, people on cycles the tenor of the sentence changes... if you just label people they become two dimensional and sometimes you get almost a sort of warfare between “The Motorist” and “The Cyclist” whereas usually it’s the same person, just a difference in the number of wheels.

Clearly, this discourse conceals the variously classed nature of cycling and driving in Cambridgeshire. As another interviewee pointed out, many people are priced out of Cambridge and into the surrounding villages, from where it is more difficult (although not impossible) to cycle. Others mentioned facilities that were needed for people in this situation – including showers at work, better park and cycle/bus and cycle infrastructure, and improved cycle routes outside the city boundaries. Conversely, it’s also important to note that many interviewees cited the low cost of cycling as a reason for cycling.

### **The bicycle: a benign technology**

Respondents argued that cycling promoted a particular type of relationship to natural and social environments.

- “[On a bike] you can travel, you can cover quite a distance but take it in at the same time whereas in a car, you’ve got to concentrate, whereas you can just sort of amble along on a bike.”

The bicycle was characterized as a benign technology, allowing for harmonious relationships between the body and nature. Interviewees talked about the positive changes that cycling induced in the body, after an initial effort was made. By contrast time without cycling was associated with physical and mental flabbiness.

- “I seem to remember when I first started cycling it would take six, we used to call it six weeks to get your cycling legs. You know the muscles in your legs change.”
- “If I go through a stretch where I don’t cycle for whatever reason... you do notice the extra pounds start adding up, and the belt starts getting out on the outer reaches and then when you hop back on the bike and get back into the daily routine of getting that little bit of extra exercise.”
- “Up until till the last couple of years I had a 32 inch waist since I got my car I’ve gone straight up to 36 you know, within of a year.”

Cycling was even seen as addictive for those who had “got the habit”:

- “It gets in your blood a bit you know. When you’re not on the bike, you haven’t had your fix.”

Cycling was seen as a morally good activity. The person cycling deserves the pleasure derived from the expenditure of energy, and also that cycling allows further indulgence in bodily pleasures without guilt.

- “[It’s] a much richer experience than driving. So just as you’re getting tired and you’re coming to the top of a hill, there’s a pub waiting for you. And you are ready for that pub in a way that you wouldn’t be if you whizzed by it in a car.”

The mental and the physical were linked in that many interviewees talked about how cycling made them happier.

- “You feel better in two different ways – you feel better in that yes you’re healthier and you feel better in that you can sit down and say, “I’ve done something I should feel proud of myself. I went to see such and such and I made it under my own steam”. That makes you feel good, that you are capable of something. So it’s good for self esteem really.”

Most (but not all) interviewees claimed to feel more comfortable cycling than walking, and one even talked of people who didn’t cycle “wasting their lives” walking. Cycling was seen as a natural activity, and several referred to bicycles being “part of one’s body”. In Cambridge City, this is supported by infrastructure and restrictions making competing forms of transport more inconvenient (from parking charges to the poor bus service).

Some interviewees pointed out that cycling could be compatible with style and even glamour, and most felt no need for specialist clothes for day to day cycling. They felt that this would interfere with the ease and convenience of cycling. My sense from the interviews is that most felt they should wear helmets, but that nevertheless, most were not totally consistent helmet wearers. For example, one woman said that she always wore a helmet early on in the interview, but later on talked about the joy of not wearing a helmet when she “accidentally” forgot to put it on.

Most interviewees, while not taking part in organised group rides, saw cycling as a sociable way for both adults and children to travel with friends. They could both experience new places (because of the range of the bicycle) and to see places in a different way.

- “We went out and we didn’t really know what to do with ourselves, that was on a summer’s day so I made a suggestion that we just do a left, and a right and see where we ended up (laughs). So we cycled off and went left, then we went right, then we went left, then right and we ended up right over in Chingford reservoirs from Leyton and no-one knew that this place existed. We ended up on the hill with this great big view of these reservoirs and it was really funny how we ended up somehow going via Walthamstow and (laughs) ended up on the hills.”

By contrast cars were seen as enclosed objects standing between the individual and the environment. Even interviewees who enjoyed or did not dislike driving tended to agree with this characterisation.

- “In Cambridge going up to traffic lights and things you very often bump into someone you know from like a meeting or somewhere. And so you can have a quick little chat. So it doesn’t shut you off in the same way as the car does, when you’re on your own little bubble.”

Everyday cycling was characterised as a pleasurable activity for most, especially car-free routes such as the river and the commons. Cycling was seen as allowing for a flexible relationship to one’s surroundings, between walking and motorised travel. “You can cover a distance but it’s unlike a car, you smell things you can interact with people much better around you. You just appreciate, it’s the right speed.” Pleasure could derive from mastering difficult situations – “Not going to be beaten by this hill, however painful it was.” People also spoke of experiencing pain without pleasure when cycling; this was not seen as due to difficult terrain or weather, but to motorised traffic danger. But overall cycling was characterised as naturally pleasurable.

- “Why sit in a box all day? I quite enjoy my commute and I always have done coz, you know, some of it can be bad, some roads can be bad but on the whole going to and from work has been a positive experience for me and I don’t think many of these people would say that (indicates people in car queue alongside park).”
- “I certainly know I’m a lot fitter largely because I leave home too late and have to cycle faster than I would have done otherwise. And you’re bowling along and you’re more in touch with things. I suppose that’s one of my feelings, feeling that you can see more from a bike. Every now and then you get road rage because on a bike - somebody’s perhaps not acting terribly helpfully (laughs) so it’s a fairly strong feeling the other way as well.”

Cycling is seen as allowing an in-depth exploration of place not possible by motor transport, yet providing more reach than walking. People could talk vividly about their favourite routes and how the bicycle enabled them to experience places differently, and to access histories, sights, and sounds that otherwise they might not have found. People described Cambridge but also other places that they had explored by bike.

- “It’s a really good way of seeing things that are happening and your surroundings but you actually get to places really quickly.”
- “It’s almost the whole history of London as you cycle along that canal.”
- “I went and did loads of mountain biking in Marin County where it all originated apparently. And that was great, really, really enjoyed it. It was the first time I’d done that in ages. Proper steep down hills, thinking you’re going to ping yourself over the handlebars. Lovely. I really loved that.”
- “You get on the bike and you stumble on these little Olde Worlde bits. Little bits of real old Cambridge, little alleys or gateways.”
- “In the early morning there would always be robins singing in the park and you would be sort of sailing past. And I think also the fact that because bikes are so quiet that you have a sense of being some kind of unseen observer just coming and going through.”

## Independence and freedom

Independence and freedom was a major theme and a number of interviewees argued that cycling allows children to progress healthily towards independence. All vividly remembered moments when they experienced cycling as a practice of freedom, whether as children or as adults. Cycling was seen as particularly providing independence for those culturally constructed as dependent or not fully competent, for example for children, ill people, older people, and pregnant women.

- “We went to the next town, we didn’t even have to get a bus, we did it on our own steam and that was fantastic.”
- “I don’t remember getting [my first bike]. I do remember the first time I cycled to school on my own. That’s if you like the moment that I remember cycling.”
- “A lot of people have [cycling] as their, sort of freedom, freedom of being out and about whereas they don’t drive and maybe they’re elderly.”
- “I used to go [to college] by myself through the streets, it was quite far at night and it was so exciting to be there and to feel so grown up you know, find your own way.”
- “I’m glad that cycling has been part of my life since I was young and I think it always will be. And I like it when I see old people who are still pootling along on that bike and can probably get quite a distance and I think that probably that when I get older and I’m a bit less mobile a bike will probably represent the freedom to me again that it did as a kid.”
- “Even though I’m sixty and I’ve now got a free bus pass I actually prefer to cycle because it gives me so much freedom.”

People gave lively accounts of experiences where they experienced joy in cycling and sometimes mildly irresponsible adventures as children:

- “We would go out, Saturday morning and we’d just head off down the river and cycle and cycle and have these little adventures and stuff and I remember we’d stop absolutely shattered and think, “God, we must be in London or somewhere by now”. And like ask a passer-by, it’d be like you’re just on the outskirts of Cambridge (laughs) or something. It’s going out, freedom. Adventures.”
- “And then we used to pedal down the hill like the clappers and you had the church at the bottom and I think it was my brother’s brakes went and he landed in the graveyard (laughs).”

While interviewees acknowledged that there were situations where motorised transport was more convenient than cycling, some commented that cycling allowed them to practice freedom in other areas of their life. For example, one young woman said that she hoped to use cycling as a way to cut down unnecessary purchases, which she saw as otherwise being pushed onto her by the supermarkets at which she shopped. Others talked of being allowed more choice about where to purchase, subject of course to an accessible and affordable range of shops.

- “You don’t have to do these massive shops which I never do. Like some people do but you can shop on the way back from things and, and that’s where the bike gives you that freedom which the bus doesn’t do. You can stop off at somewhere on the way home and get a bit of shopping in and it’s nice and easy.”

Cycling was seen as providing life lessons, allowing young (and older!) people to become aware of limits and dangers, and to learn about their local environment.



- “About 16 I did my first really long ride, it was about 70 miles, and I started to find out about the importance of eating and drinking when going on a long bike ride. Coming back was desperate for the last 15 miles. Luckily part of it was along a railway line I was following. I didn’t have much energy, then I had to do a huge climb, long hill and down the other side to come back home. I remember sitting on the road side for half an hour, halfway up this hill, just wondering what I was going to do. Because there were no shops around, I didn’t have any money anyway. I was just fantasising about gooseberry crumble in the pantry that I was going to eat when I got back. But I eventually got back and I was very pleased with myself.”

Many interviewees talked about cycling as freedom in terms of “letting go”, allowing children to take some responsibility for themselves. This was firstly in a literal sense, where parents acted as stabilisers for their children cycling, but also in a metaphorical sense. There was a strong view expressed by many that children needed to learn independence and cycling was a good way in which they could be allowed to do so in stages as they grew up. This formed part of a wider critique, where participants felt that children are now not being prepared properly for adult life.

- “[Apparently my Dad] was basically running behind me sort of stabilising me. We didn’t go for those children’s stabilisers. It was just dad behind me, holding me, with his hand on my back keeping me properly balanced. And at some point apparently I said, “You can let go now”, and he said, “I already have”, he was back there somewhere. And that’s how he tells me it happened.”
- “I also really clearly remember learning to cycle. I don’t whether that’s similar to other people but I remember how it went coz I was sitting on somebody’s bicycle and she was pushing me and, and at one point she said, “You know, do you realise that I’ve let go and you’re actually cycling?” and that was how it was.”
- “We had three girls who all cycled and we were probably in some people’s eyes quite foolhardy. Insofar as we let the children cycle. I made sure they were shown how to do it safely. But it gave them independence. No doubt they would have quite liked to have been picked up and taken to and fro in a nice warm car but on the whole they were expected to cycle. And they were doing that in and out of town quite late. Probably more than their contemporaries. I might be just justifying my own laziness but we actually think it’s better for kids to be a bit more independent and not then to suddenly be stranded when they’re eighteen, responsible for themselves and not used to it.”

People talked about how they enjoyed cycling differently at different ages; for example, several older cyclists talked about how they cycled in a different way to when they were younger. Transitions in childhood were also mentioned:

- “When I started growing up I didn’t see my cycle for enjoyment but I started cycling to go to places where there would be some enjoyment. So you cycled to the cinema, you cycled to the parties, that sort of thing. You know, you stopped the racing when we left primary school.”

However, people also spoke of the potential for transitions *out* of cycling. This could happen at particular points in people’s lives, for example when they “fell in love with the internal combustion engine” in one case, or when they had children.

I: Do most of the people you know cycle as well?

P1: Not really no. Most people drive. No I think everyone else drives don't they now. The last few friends of mine started driving.

P: But isn't that because they've got families.

P1: Yeah. It's because they've got kids, that's why, definitely.

"First you walk, then you have a tricycle and then you have a bike, and then eventually you have a car and then you've reached the pinnacle of civilisation and I think that's maybe how people feel about it."

Cycling could be used to escape unhappy home lives, as in this case:

- "I went to university and the first couple of months at university I didn't cycle at all. I was in London and I was very scared. I wasn't used to riding in traffic – I'd been riding on quiet country roads most of the time – so cycling in London gave me the screaming heebie jeebies. But eventually I realised it worked okay and it would make life cheaper and easier, getting around by bike. So my parents sent it down on the train, I went down to Euston to collect it. And I didn't look back really after that."

One participant talked of getting back some of her independence after experiencing an illness that had left her weakened and unable initially to walk far or use public transport:

"[My doctor said anything that gets me moving in different ways other than just walking, sitting and standing would be really good for me. And I find cycling moves your legs in a different way than just like walking and I think it got me back on my feet quicker. I found it hard to walk for long distances without stopping, but when you're cycling you're sitting down and it takes the pressure off. So you can actually stop and just freewheel a bit if you get tired."

While people sometimes felt unsafe on roads because of motor traffic, women in particular stressed that they felt safer cycling rather than walking, and that the high levels of cycling also made them feel safer outside. This, interviewees argued, increased their mobility.

- "[As] a cyclist you feel like you're part of a very big club that's very open and includes everyone potentially ...it creates a really nice atmosphere and on the street I think it makes everything safer because people are around a lot of the time. So if you're cycling around at night, everyone's leaving the pub on their bikes, I think it contributes to a feeling of safety."
- "As a woman and this is probably not such a bright plan but I kind of think I'm less vulnerable on a bicycle so I would cycle places where I wouldn't walk."
- "[I go across the park] and I do go at quite high speed. But yeah you do feel a lot safer. I'd never walk across the park at night ever. Never walk across the park at night. Whereas I would cycle through one. And sometimes I try and go on the roads a bit more at that, because at those times of night the traffic's lighter anyway. As long as I've got lights. It kind of opens up stuff, routes for me."

Mobility was also seen as providing safety for children, who could escape more easily from bullies or predatory adults on a bicycle: "You immediately have this great sense of freedom because children are safer on the bike than walking coz they can get

away.” While people were concerned for the safety of children and families, and spoke of the need to make journeys to school easier and safer, there was also a sense of pride in handling risky situations well. One mother spoke of how she would stop the traffic for her children so they could cross the road. People agreed that Cambridge City was generally safer for cycling than other places.

While speaking of the need for individual safety behaviour (see later) interviewees’ definitions of this differed dramatically. One instance of this is cycling “after the pub” – initially I was slightly surprised when interviewees saw this as acceptable. By the end of the interviews I concluded that nearly everyone I spoke to saw drinking and cycling as safe, even those people who most castigated others for lack of safety behaviour (e.g. no lights, no helmets). For example, people would speak of their friends or themselves avoiding drink-driving by taking the bike. In a city where the bus service is described as unreliable (and probably sparse at night), having the confidence that it is safe to cycle home after the pub represents an increase in mobility.

### **Communication and rootedness**

Participants described how the independence or freedom embodied in cycling could also nourish communication and rootedness. It was seen as embedding and deepening links to family and friends.

- “I think it’s really companionable to go out on the bikes in a way that going in a car isn’t really. You’re more actively engaged with getting there. It’s not one person’s driving everybody else sitting there. You’re all making the same kind of effort. It’s a companionable thing somehow to work together. To get somewhere.”

People have different capacities to cycle fast, so slowing down and waiting for others was as an important part of relationships and friendships. Bicycles were ever-present in memories as a normal part of life, whether the exact nature of the bicycle itself (for example, one belonging to a grandmother) or not was important.

- “I was cycling behind [my husband] down Pembroke Street or something, that image of him on his old bike which he continued to use for many, many years. We only got rid of it recently. That was part of the excitement of young life and young love and all that. And we got lovely pictures which we just happened to have taken of him on his bike with the kids on the front and the back. I’m so glad we’ve got them, they’re all part of our memories.”
- “My gap year was really such good fun and so cycling is sort of always a link coz it’s the same bike. The movement is exactly the same as it was then. A photograph almost back to that time. It’s really good.”

Cultural transmission was mentioned in particular by a Dutch woman living in Cambridge and her daughter – ownership of Dutch bicycles in particular kept both in touch with their Dutch-ness. In addition, people felt that cycling improved local environments and allowed for more public communication and ad hoc meetings. They thought it encouraged openness to others (by comparison with driving) while also helping people to connect to their local environments and local communities.

Many participants recall being given birthday bikes, lending bikes, sharing bikes, and so on, as being happy occasions cementing family bonds:

- “When I was 9 my parents bought me a proper new bike, three speed bike, Sturmey Archer gears and my memory is it cost £19 and ten shillings but I

wouldn't swear to that. I got very excited by that. So I'd been to choose it in the shop in town and then my parents hid it and it came up to my birthday and they said, "Go down to the village shop and you'll find something interesting down there", and they hidden it down there. So I walked in the shop and there it was. I was ever so proud."

The bicycle itself could be a means of communication:

- "I cycled with my sister, and with friends to and from school. And stopping off en route to get ice cream and you build up a really strong relationship with your route and we used to cycle through the meadows to school. And go past the little cows and we named them all. Sort of landmarks of your route. And I remember many times falling off and that tends to mark your route as well. And yeah, your skin (laughs). I remember when my sister, she always used to make a point of cycling home with me so I'd get to my bike and I'd find a little note from her saying, 'Can you wait for me, I'll be about five seconds? I'll be there!'"

Although most people were not actively involved in cycle campaigning, there was a strong feeling among most of being part of a community (even if their membership of it might be at times tenuous, or – as discussed later – some people were excluded from this community). Work, friends, virtual communities were all referenced as being related to a broader cycle community.

- "There's this sort of like a fraternity of cyclists about. They're not in clubs or anything but they'll do people favours."

In particular, passing on bikes to those outside the immediate family and receiving bikes was mentioned as a way in which this community was held together. One interviewee went as far as to claim that cyclists never bought new bikes; others talked of buying cheap "guest bikes" for visitors to use and handing on their used bikes to others for free or a small fee.

- "I've just bought a second bike off someone's housemate who's leaving Cambridge to have as a bike when friends come, because that's the time as well when I find it quite tricky, when people come to visit and then I want to go to the allotment or go somewhere a bit far. It's not easy to go by bus and you can't do it or it takes you ages just to get into the centre of town, you just want to nip in, get few things or do something, go for a coffee and then come back."
- "I remember more of the process of cycling than actually getting [a bike]. Because I think there was quite a lot of sharing of bikes around the families that had small children."

Websites are a way of sharing information and supporting each other:

- "I was going to move to a place called Abingdon at one stage and I just went to this website and said, "Does anybody commute from Abingdon?". Before I knew within ten minutes somebody came back and said I'll commute with you."

Shared information and support can also be described as peer pressure. Interviewees described how others encouraged them to cycle, or how they encouraged others. In Cambridge, the relatively supportive environment (at least for those living and working in the city boundaries) means that people who do not see themselves as cycling activists are happy to "nag" others to cycle, because it is easy and convenient rather than a moralistic sacrifice. One interviewee described how soon after moving to

Cambridge she had been told to buy a bike by her glamorous, made-up housemate ("She didn't strike me at all as a cyclist!"). Of course, many of the interviewees mentioned health and environmental reasons for cycling, but when asked how they would convince others to cycle, they foregrounded ease, convenience, and pleasure. (And in stories they told, this indeed seemed to be how they had presented cycling to others).

People reported the importance of other people's attitudes – not in a vague, abstract sense so much as in practical terms, such as a boss or client reacting to arrival by bike. "I think that's what makes it easier, you can come to a meeting and be stripping off your waterproof trousers, your waterproofs, and nobody looks askance at you, and that helps I think." A supportive work community was seen as important, so that "you got the odd grotty jacket hanging up whatever, everybody's doing it, it's not a problem is it? You don't feel like you're out of sync."

Some interviewees spoke of the negative impact of *discouraging* attitudes:

- "And there's the being stigmatised... It was my boss really. I mean it was one of many things, but he disapproved of a professional engineer coming to work on a bicycle and going visit sites on a bicycle. It was straight prejudice."

This employee ultimately left that job, but others with less choice over their work might have remained and taken the company car. Discrimination against cyclists at work is an under-explored area, but of course is enshrined in many employers' compensation scales for work travel, even in Cambridge, and in the differential provision of financial support for those travelling to work by different modes.

Cambridge City Council is seen as relatively pro-cycling, although the split between City and County Council is problematic (the County is the transport authority, and has responsibility for the roads. One interviewee, a councillor, spoke of the importance of developers seeing that councillors themselves cycled to meetings. "I think that it quite surprised some of the applicants, you know, the developers and the men in suits, they were quite sort of amazed to have us talking about cycling and how does this work. And threatening refusal if they didn't get it right. But then an awful lot of the councillors were appearing with bike clips on."

### **Adding it up: the calculus of cycling**

Most said public transport offered limited alternatives for "normal" journeys. So often, they were comparing cycling with driving (and walking), and driving was seen as having a variety of costs not applicable to cycling. Such costs of driving included financial costs, time and inconvenience, difficulty and danger to others, psychological costs, and environmental costs.

- "When I first started working I made a conscious decision that I was saving up for a deposit for a house. So not running a car, that was a hundred and fifty pounds a month, that's money that can go in the pot for a deposit."
- "I always try to figure out the cost of things over a say a year, buying a bike and then maintaining it is probably averaging something like a hundred pounds a year... That's only a tank and a half of petrol."
- "I tend to be less grumpy (laughs) when I come into work after a cycle ride. It's emotionally better for you for starting work."

Cycling as a way of life involves learning a new calculus as well as a new way of being. This means weighting different aspects of life differently, and making complex decisions. A number of interviewees spoke of the importance of buying a child's bike that the child would grow into, making the purchase cheaper in the long run assuming

that the child would cycle regularly and continue cycling. Decisions about where to live were also viewed differently by interviewees who wanted to be able to carry out everyday tasks on a bicycle.

- “Generally speaking I’ve always regarded the bike as the means of getting from A to B. And I’ve always made a conscious determination to live within a distance from work that I could cycle you see. And not more than a mile and half if I could help it (laughs).”
- “We were able to sit down with a map of Cambridge and work out where we could live and my husband could cycle to work.”
- “I would never go live somewhere more suburban where I was forced to have a car or dependent on a bus.”

Of course, choices are constrained and people’s views on what is a cyclable difference can change. Changing one’s mind to encompass cycling as a normal and/or preferred mode of transport allows different perspectives on distance and convenience.

- “In London once we went to Hyde Park and we were swimming in the Serpentine and my boyfriend cycled back to Hampstead. To me it’s the other side of London from Hyde Park. Was it Hampstead or was it Highgate? But anyway we took the tube and he took the bike and he got there ten minutes before us (laughs). And the tube was working fine and we got one straight away. So it totally changed my idea of distances. And actually something that I would have thought, “Oh that would take hours. I’d be knackered by the time I get back.” And actually I was like, “Whooah. That’s just really strange that it’s quicker.”

One interviewee lived in Newmarket (13 miles away from Cambridge) but had made a conscious decision to cycle, whereas in London he had used a moped for similar distances. This participant said that if his workplace did not offer showers, he would not have been able to make that choice. For others, thirteen miles might be seen as too far to cycle but potentially coverable by a combination of bus or car, and bicycle, given appropriate facilities. Interviewees, when asked about distance, frequently replied by talking about time and convenience. It was clear that many people did not necessarily know how far distances were, but categorised them primarily by mode and time.

- P: If my daughter drives to work, she’s got to leave something like three quarters of an hour earlier than if she cycles to work. So she does tend to cycle.
- I: How far is her journey?
- P: It’s not so much the distance. It’s more if you want free parking, there’s very limited free parking and it’s probably about three quarters of a mile from the town centre so you’ve have to get in about quarter to eight at the latest to get free parking and then walk in.

People talked about the mental shift involved in becoming someone who “does cycling”, and the tricks and shortcuts that people learn or are taught:

- “The thing with cycling is you’ve got to mentally feel like it’s quite a small distance.”
- “For the sake of five minutes I’d be bumping into all the mums dropping off kids, at least three schools. I don’t, I miss them. They’re all gone by the time I get

past. So it's little things like that makes the journey. And on the way home I do the same. So that's what you got to do."

- "I didn't know how to go about it finding out about cycle routes, or picking a good cycle route and just seeing [my boyfriend] do it – he'll literally just look at a map, "Ooh that looks interesting, ooh let's go round here", pick a route, know roughly that thirty miles is quite nice, makes you feel like you've done something but not too much."

Interviewees also commented on how a "driving" mindset could take over from a cycling one. While around two-thirds owned a car, they spoke of the need to prioritise the bicycle over the car. For one interviewee who now found he needed to drive to work, this was a difficult struggle. Now that he was not cycling every day, cycling distances seemed longer and more onerous:

- "Since I've been driving sometimes I look at a journey and think, uh, it's just too far to cycle, I'll get in the car or if I haven't the car available I might forego it and just not do it. Whereas just always before I would just get on the bike and cycle. I don't know if that's part of getting old or if that's probably just a bit of laziness really because I've got access to a motor, so I'm trying to restrict the amount I use it at the moment and get out on foot or bike a lot more (laughs)."

### **Barriers and enablers**

Interviewees talked of work being a particular barrier to cycling at different points of their lives. This could be due to employers' expectations, a lack of infrastructure at work, long distances or long hours. (Of course, it is perfectly legal for a job advertisement to insist that possession of a driving licence or even a car is an essential requirement – there is no need to apply any reasonable adjustments for applicants who do not drive and/or do not have a car.)

- "I do work shifts so I do six till two, and two to ten and when you do crazy hours like that you don't really feel like cycling home late at night."

Interviewees also spoke of how flexible hours, good facilities and supportive work environments can make it easier to cycle. Some had tried to improve facilities; for example, campaigning for bicycle parking at stations and at the workplace. Most identified rising car use as both a disincentive (danger, unpleasantness) and an incentive (congestion, delays for motorists) to cycle. A majority of interviewees were reasonably satisfied with the physical infrastructure, although a minority were vocally dissatisfied and gave vivid examples of problems.

- "Some of the routes around Cambridge they have all these signs where you have to give way supposedly or dismount at a farm, field gates which are padlocked and haven't been used in twenty years and there's still a sign saying "Cyclists dismount".
- "But it has it's contradictions all the time, Cambridge. Wants to keep clean but its just opened, just opened a Grand Arcade and there's a car park there. A car park!"
- "The cycle lanes are a well known joke round here...Basically where it doesn't inconvenience the motorist and regardless of whether or not it will help the cyclist, put a cycle lane down."

The overwhelming majority of interviewees were united in praise of Cambridge's bike shops. These local shops were seen as providing an important local service and ensuring that cycling continued to be easy and convenient. One interviewee did comment that in decades past there used to be more bicycle shops, but most were impressed by the sheer amount of shops and the support that they provided. This was particularly important for those interviewees who did not want to carry out basic repairs such as mending punctures. Being able to get a bicycle fixed on the spot without pre-booking seemed especially valued by female interviewees, who perhaps had more other commitments than the male interviewees and may have felt less confident to carry out repairs themselves.

- "In Cambridge to get your bike fixed virtually every corner has a shop that does it. So again in London you'd look it up and you'd go to one but it's just not as available."
- "I know I can always drop my bike off wherever I want. And usually even if it has something quite major to do it will be ready by the next day. And if not, the same day. Drop it off and they do it and I quite like that. I want to learn to do bike maintenance but to be honest I'm just lazy and it's just really nice to turn up and pay a fiver... if I had to go further afield and if you've got a puncture and you've got to take it over to the other side of town, and you don't have a car, with a rack, it's like how on earth would you get it sorted? And you wouldn't, you'd end up leaving just leaving it and thinking, "Oh I'll get it done at some point" and you'd reach a stage where you wouldn't have cycled, you got into some other travel habit."

The cycle to work scheme can help to support these local businesses and it would be interesting to see how it has affected bicycle sales in such shops. (One interviewee commented he wanted to buy his bike locally, but could not afford to as his employer didn't offer the scheme.)

Finally, theft was seen as a major problem discouraging cycling, and discouraging people from making cycling a habit. Not only could people not get attached to particular bikes, they could end up buying bikes that would actually put them off cycling in the future.

- "A lot of the students in Cambridge have really cheap nasty bikes, Halfords sixty quid specials and one reason they don't get good bikes is that bikes get stolen. But you see these kids riding around on these bikes and it's such hard work (laughs). You know, the saddle is too low. You'd think that if they could actually have a decent bike properly set up then there's a much higher chance that they'll stay with cycling even after they've got a job and a car and all that kind of stuff."

### **Good and proper cyclists**

Cyclists feel pressure to define "good" or "deserving" cyclist; this fits with media discourse (traditionally critical of "Lycra Louts") and drivers' views. Interestingly, I found that the only people entirely avoiding such "good cyclist" talk were a Dutch woman and her daughter. Of course, "good cyclists" imply "bad cyclists", and people spoke critically of, for example "fanatical cyclists... extremely arrogant and very dangerous cyclists with the high speed bikes, Lycra, helmets, often listening to something". Another commented that "the London cyclists are extremely aggressive." Most people commented negatively on dangerous cycling by "language school students" which is seen as a particular problem in Cambridge.



People blamed themselves as well as others, frequently saying “I know I should...”

- “I feel I should wear illuminated clothing but I don’t (laughs).”
- “I am very bad. I don’t wear a helmet.”
- “And when my son is on the cycle I always think, “Oh I hope he wears a helmet”. I’m not actually wearing one myself. Which is a bit bad really and so I suppose I’ve been a bit lazy about it or I don’t know. Just don’t bother.”

As well as “good cyclists” and “bad cyclists”, people spoke of “proper cyclists”. They felt that “proper cyclists” were an exclusive, sporty club, that excluded them. Even interviewees whom I felt were likely to have a high level of fitness tended to say “I wouldn’t be fit enough” to accompany “proper” cyclists on a group ride.

- “I carried on wearing jeans for cycling for a long time, into the 1980s. I just felt very shy about wearing Lycra and proper cycling shorts. Partly I felt embarrassed by my body and partly because I didn’t think I was a proper cyclist and therefore I wasn’t entitled to wear things like that.”
- “Every now and again when I’m cycling home I’ll go past this big sort of cycling meet and see all of these guys, you know, fully Lycra’d up with the pointy helmets and erm, and I don’t know it just doesn’t appeal to me to do. I think I’m not fit enough to do that.”

It seemed to me – although this is quite impressionistic and of course may not be the case for other people or people in other cities – that my interviewees felt more ambivalent about cycling as sport than about the campaigning side of cycling. A number of interviewees spoke positively of the Cambridge Cycling Campaign’s campaigning activities, although they themselves were not involved in the Campaign beyond using the website or occasionally signing a petition. A small minority of interviewees did take part in group rides and this group found them enjoyable.

### **The view from the steering wheel**

While most interviewees expressed critical views about “bad cyclists”, there was less “bad driver” talk. Even non- or infrequent drivers tended to empathise with the driver’s point of view, and worried about their (or others’) cycling upsetting drivers:

- “You do get the odd bit of road rage because it’s so frustrating for a driver, because cyclists can just get anywhere and you’re sat in traffic in the car.”
- “I feel terrible if I make a mistake and I do cause a car to screech to a halt (laughs). It happens occasionally. Just occasionally I do something really stupid.”

People mentioned the importance of motorists understanding cyclists and vice versa. A small minority did criticise Bad Motorists – “I’m starting to get seriously worried by motorists and I’ve had so many near misses now compared to what used to go on. Because there’s no respect from motorists to cyclists most of the time.”

A popular narrative spoke of how the view from the wheel transformed the Bad Cyclist into the Good Cyclist – “Now I’m a driver, I can see...”

- “I realise now that things that I do on a bike are dangerous, like cycling without lights is a real issue. If I’m driving at night now and I see a guy without his lights that sort of infuriates me. But I did that so many times, I just wouldn’t bother with lights. So I think if you’ve never driven a car, as a bike rider you don’t realise, I can see why people get infuriated sometimes with cyclists.”

One interesting exception was a half-Dutch woman, who drives but who argued that her cycling actually made her a *worse* driver, because cyclists and drivers have opposing interests on the road:

- “I think I’m a bad driver because of the fact that I cycle. So I’ll not overtake people even though there’s probably enough space because I know it’s really horrible when someone goes too close to you. And then, and just always checking my mirror and kind of waiting for people to come past even though they’re miles away. I sort of have the mind of a cyclist really even when I’m driving.”

Two other women felt car danger intensely, but attributed the danger to themselves – “I hated driving. It just made me feel sick. I used to think I would eventually just kill somebody or myself.” For them, cycling was much preferable because it posed less risk to others; it was connected to a gendered perspective that prioritises others’ safety over one’s own.

### Politics and policy

While my interviewees did seem to appeal to a particular cycling habitus, very few talked about national policy and most did not have a clear idea of what the government might do to encourage cycling. Many found it hard to imagine improvements that could be made to support cycling either locally or nationally, although they could more easily relate to the local than the national cycling infrastructure. While growing car use was acknowledged as a problem, there was little sense of how it could be challenged. People who owned cars mentioned trying to reduce their car use, but there was little mention of or support for policies that might encourage this, such as congestion charging (which was being debated in Cambridge at the time of the interviews). For many, cycling was just seen as something that people do (or don’t do) – for example one interviewee commented: “We’re a lazy nation.”

It was interesting that people found it difficult to think about policy, because many commented that locally, people cycle because driving has become increasingly difficult. This is due both to increasing car use and to restrictions on driving and parking in the central area.

- “I used to drive into town in a car ten, fifteen years ago and I’d park up anywhere I wanted and you didn’t give it a thought.”

Those who had thought about policy were worried of appearing “anti-car” or supporting compulsion, even when they then went on to talk about discouraging car use and even car ownership. Conversely the interviewee below began talking about policies that could shift behaviour but then went on to claim that behaviour is unlikely to change.

- “I’m in favour of [a congestion charge] because it would stop people hopping in their cars for silly small journeys. Once you make up your mind to cycle in Cambridge, it’s not, it’s not such a such a big job, it’s not a hard job really. It’s quite easy. I think anything that can force people a little bit more to use their

bikes the better. Yeah it's a tough question really how to get more people on their bikes, because I would say probably most people who want to are probably already doing it, and the people who aren't willing have a reason not to most of the time.

Many acknowledged that car ownership encouraged them to be "lazy" and see distances differently, in a way that was likely to make them use the car more and cycle less.

The interviews have interesting implications for current debates around congestion; in London it now appears that the congestion charge has reduced car use but not congestion. However, the interviews supported a view that congestion is not necessarily a problem. With supportive infrastructure, congestion can encourage cycling as a means to avoid getting stuck in traffic.

- "In Cambridge, you have a certain amount of creative congestion and it's the congestion that just helps you make that decision to get on the bike rather than in the car. Because at a certain time of day it is so much quicker, so if you tend to leave home at the last minute you can do that as a cyclist if you've got a meeting to get to and you could never do it as a car driver."
- "[T]here's an enormous rush hour in Cambridge both in the morning and in the evening. So driving at those times is all stopping and starting and the cyclists just whiz past leaving people stuck in cars."
- "Well, [I cycle] in order to get from A to B in a time that I know I'm going to do it. And to be able to leave my bike somewhere and get off it. Whereas if I drive I don't know when I'm going to arrive and I don't know if I'll be able to park it. Or how much I'm going to pay to park it. And it's just simple."

### Concluding thoughts

Even if interviewees themselves did not say this, a key lesson that I took from the research was the need to plan infrastructure to make car use more difficult and less convenient. The importance of bike shops is also an important point; most people described bike shops both as plentiful and willing to do repairs on the spot. They spoke about how without this it would be easy to get "out of the habit of cycling". The experiences of interviewees raised need to consider a diverse range of cyclists; for example, older people with difficulty walking, families with trailers. (For both groups, chicanes necessitating dismounting may be a particular problem). And the safety issue was particularly interesting in that cycling was seen as potentially improving safety for groups such as women and children. The potential role of life transitions and memory in supporting and encouraging cycling was also raised by much of the interview material.

While many felt attached to bikes or had done so, there was a recognition that relationships with individual bikes were transient because of theft and vandalism. This was compared with cars; people were seen as identifying with cars at a deeper level, partly due to the enclosure offered.

- "People see their cars as like another room in their house except it's one that kind of detaches from the house and goes off round the place. I think they're really funny about it, they're really defensive, but when you're in a bicycle you haven't got that, you're not enclosed, you're on the outside."

While cycling was seen as allowing people to be more integrated into their local environments, it was also described as providing mental space and the ability to compartmentalise. In particular, cycling was seen as enabling the creation of a stronger barrier between work and home than driving or other means of passive transport. The physicality of cycling counteracted the way in which work tends to spill over into other parts of our lives.

- “You can’t blur being at work with being at home there’s a definitely, you actually have to do some work to get home. Right now you’ve done that you’re rewarded by being at home. It’s more of an active differentiator between being at work and being at home as well. Because physical activity does that. You can’t day dream about work on a bicycle the way you can in a car.”
- “You have to think about your physical safety on the road...it just gets you out in the world between work and home.”

Interestingly, my findings differed slightly to those from Skinner and Rosen’s (2007) series of focus groups, also conducted in Cambridge. The key difference is over the question of gender. While I also found that women generally said they carried out little bicycle maintenance, my findings differed for men, where I found a three-way split (around a third described themselves as expert, another third said they dealt with reasonably basic repairs, and a final third said they avoided even puncture repair if they could). One could perhaps hypothesise that there is a gender-related interviewer effect or that male engineers (many of Skinner and Rosen’s interviewees were engineers) are more likely to be “into maintenance” than other men. The men that I interviewed also seemed more willing to raise safety concerns on their own behalf, and did not tend to raise safety concerns that applied to their female partner but not for them. This was in contrast to women, a number of whom said that they felt safer on a bicycle “as a woman” than walking.

I found that my interviews produced a particular sort of discourse around both independence and rootedness (“The Cycling Citizen”, perhaps?). The bicycle was characterised as representing both, as people can cycle together sociably, but independently. In an individualistic society, interviewees saw cycling as warding off atomisation while respecting individual autonomy. The bicycle was seen as a continuing rite of passage, encouraging people to learn how to be self-reliant and independent, but still offering space for community and care for others. Passages from youth to adulthood, bringing up children, and learning to age comfortably seemed particularly salient. Sharing, giving, lending and mending helped to maintain a sense of a cycling community and culture, as did peer pressure and encouragement to cycle. The final word goes to one of my interviewees, who characterised a cycling habitus as difficult to enter but easy to maintain:

- “You need to sort of break in to that world and once you do you, it’s the set up and it’s the fact that other people doing it that it’s so easy. Which just make me think about other places and how on earth you get that critical mass going before it gets enough people on board. So that the hardcore people and then so you get everybody else on board. People who would like to but can’t be bothered or don’t know enough about it. Do you know what I mean?”

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