

Adolescent Attitudes to Bicycling:

A Retrospective Look from Adulthood

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ISSUE

Cycling has the potential to be a significant means of short distance mobility, yet mounting international evidence shows that cycling behavior wanes during the adolescent years. Children that live in bike-friendly societies, where levels of cycling increase rather than decrease over the course of childhood, are more likely to become cycling adults. The adolescent years thus seem to play a critical role in the formation of attitudes towards bicycling that carry forward into adulthood. The objective of this project was to explore the effect of bicycling experiences throughout the life-course, including the adolescent years, on the nature and formation of bicycling preferences and attitudes for adults.

KEY FINDINGS

The results showed that all types of biking, especially recreational, decreased over adolescent years. In addition, both positive attitudes and positive associations with bikes and biking decreased. Bikes were often abandoned during the teen years for other modes of transportation, and were associated with negative image and stigma, especially during high school.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To increase rates of bicycling in adolescence communities must minimize the stigma and improve the image associated with bikes and bicycling. Social marketing campaigns and bicycling programs developed by and for teens could help to change attitudes towards bicycling among adolescents. In order to achieve a more bike-friendly society, communities must encourage bicycling throughout the life-course, especially during the teen years.

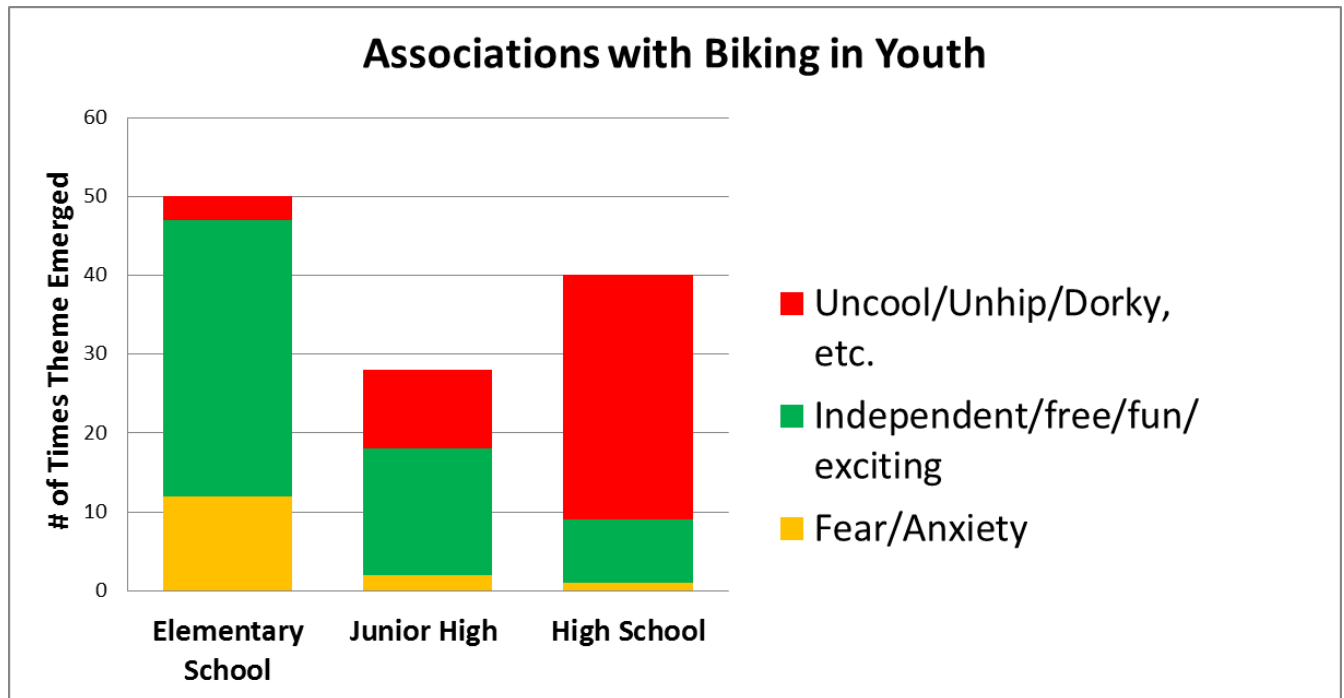
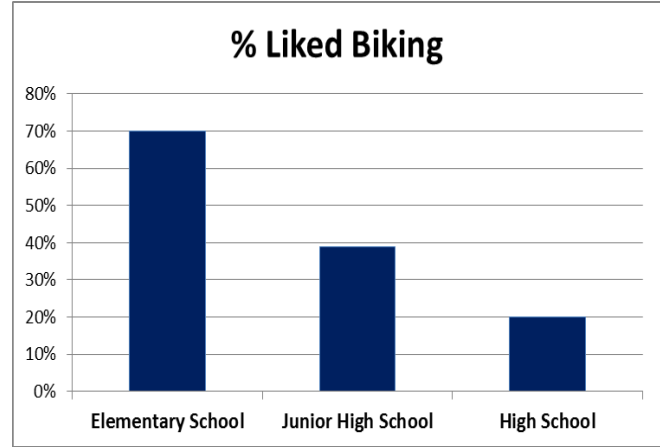
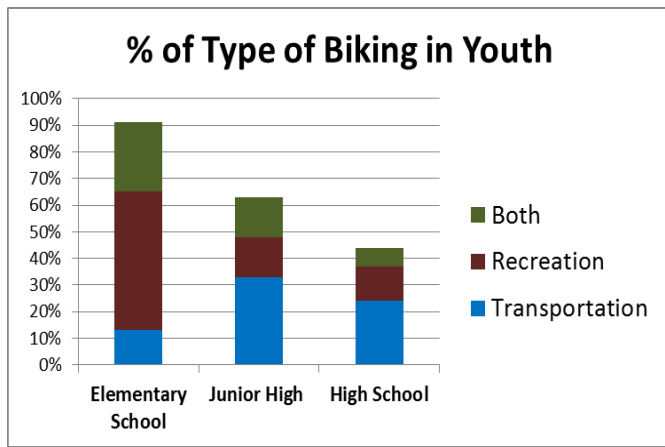
METHODOLOGY

Fifty-four adult residents of Davis, California between the ages of 25 and 65 years responded to a recruitment notice in the summer of 2010. Bicycling was deliberately not mentioned on any of the recruitment notices in order to ensure that our sample wasn't biased towards people with strong opinions about bicycling. Participants filled out a short self-administered survey and participated in a 60-minute audiotaped face-to-face interview regarding their bicycling experience throughout life. Interview transcripts were open-coded for emerging themes using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Three coders maintained a 92% inter-rater reliability rate.

A significant number of codes emerged for the **youth period** (elementary school, junior high and high school). The majority of codes could be categorized as either **negative or positive associations** towards bicycling during the youth period.

RESULTS

Several patterns were evident across participants' stories about bicycling during different points in their youth. In elementary school, bikes were seen as recreational "toys" and providing independence for kids. In junior high school, bikes continued to provide independence; however, negative associations with biking and a preference for walking emerged. In high school, driving was the preferred option for transport. Bikes were "off the radar", and abandoned for other modes. In addition, negative associations with biking increased, including negative image and stigma.



NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

These results point to a need for further research to understand what factors shape adolescent attitudes towards bicycling. This research should be conducted on adolescents from varying socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, subsets of adolescents that hold positive attitudes towards bicycling should be studied.

Find out more about the UC Davis Sustainable Transportation Center at <http://stc.ucdavis.edu>

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