Change and continuity in walking and cycling through life course events and transitions; insights from life history interviews

Heather Jones
Dr Kiron Chatterjee, Prof. Selena Gray

heather6.jones@uwe.ac.uk
BACKGROUND
Physical activity:

• (life-long) physical activity beneficial
• Potential of routine walking and cycling
Knowledge limitations

Predominantly cross-sectional study
  – Associations with contemporaneous factors
  – Overlooks influence of previous experience
    • locations, attitudes and inter-personal relations

Change over time
  – Population level time series data
  – Longitudinal studies short term time frames
    • Life events trigger behaviour change
Research Aim

• To understand change and continuity in individual behaviour over the life course
Life course perspective

“any point in the life span dynamically as the consequence of past experience and future expectation as well as the integration of individual motivation with external constraint”

(Giele and Elder, 1998)
Principles and themes

- Trajectories, turning points, transitions
- Linked lives
- Historical context
Research objectives

• To understand change and continuity in individual behaviour over the life course

  – the development of behaviour through events and transitions
  – how outcomes relates to cumulative, earlier experiences
  – Impact of events within parent-child dyads
  – differences in trajectories between cohorts
RESEARCH DESIGN
Methodological challenges

• No existing longitudinal data

Retrospective, biographical approach
• reconstruct through recollection and reasoning
• behaviour contextualised in relation to life events and transitions
• lagged changes, spurious linkage of event and behaviour change

Bonham and Wilson (2012) women’s start stop cycling biographies

Biographical interviews

• Two stage interview
  – 1st: life history calendar
  – 2nd: review personal timeline

• visual and interpretive biographies
Participants

Two ten-year birth cohorts
   C1 1945-1955
   C2 1975 -1985

Distinct historical locations

Parent-offspring dyads

Community groups

33 biographies
Analysis

• Flexible data-led exercise, iterative, comparative

• Timing and circumstances of change
  – Focused on key periods

• Holistic form
  – Typology construction

• Individual cases
• Dyad
  – Intergenerational impact of events
• Gender-Cohort groupings
BIOGRAPHIES
FINDINGS
Behaviour change and life events

Ascribed to changes in **location, mobility resources, inter-personal roles and health**

- often multiple and interrelated events,

*but, also,*

- behaviour frequently stable through events
Holistic form

• much behavioural stability with a few changes

Transition to adulthood:
New behavioural patterns established in the course of location, role and resource changes

Mid-adulthood:
Trajectories often stable, walking and cycling often precluded by roles and activity spaces
some changes ascribed to events

Later adulthood:
potential in the context of evolving family and employment commitments
Holistic form - typologies

Cycling
- No cycling beyond childhood
- One-off experiences in adulthood
- Twenties dabblers
- Leisure purists
- Revolving returners
- Committed commuters
- Cycling in early adulthood
- Unsuccessful return as adult

Walking
- High and stable
- Mixed
- Low and changeable
- Low and stable

Level of current activity
Changeability

Diminished – restorative – resilient
Comparative insights: Boomers vs Echoes
## Early experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boomers:</th>
<th>Echoes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>independent walking</td>
<td>escorted walking, greater car access within family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesser bike access but greater spatial freedom</td>
<td>Greater access, more restricted spatial boundaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cycling extension to mobility in youth</td>
<td>Gender differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males - specialist cycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females - interest waned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Transition to adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boomers:</th>
<th>Echoes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earlier role transitions</td>
<td>prolonged transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car access</td>
<td>Car access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some recreational and transport cycling</td>
<td>higher education, graduate employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>some males recreational and transport cycling,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>females occasional recreational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mid and late adulthood

**Diminishing changes:** locational changes, injury
Mostly men

**Restorative changes:** locational changes, health events, role changes
Mostly women

**Adaptive changes:** Electric-bikes, commute to recreational cycling
Events in linked lives

• mothers’ employment and children’s educational changes
• Care needs and location changes for ageing (grand)parents
Longer term influence of trajectories

restorative cycling trajectories - engagement in youth and early adulthood
Failed returns

Walking trajectories - car access
Life course framework

Changes in macro context
- economic factors & spatial planning
- transportation factors & spatial planning
- cultural values & norms
- health /environment/risk
- family structures

relative stability

Transition to adulthood
- gendered life course

Work – retirement transition
- latest walking/cycling

Changes in micro context
- mobility resources
- locational decisions
- interpersonal relationships & roles
- health

Time
Longer term mechanisms

Role socialisation, Stress adaptation, Capital accumulation


Earlier experiences: generative and enabling of restorative change?

Boomer women better positioned?

- Later automobility
- Employment shaped by motherhood
  - disruption and limitations to mobility

Changes in these factors for females in younger cohort

Contribution of a life course perspective

- Life-long opportunity structure
- Timing
- Historical context
- Inter-generational aspects
Implications for policy

• Value of early experiences, even if brief

• Later life potential for restorative, adaptive and diminishing change

• sensitive periods
  – Emerging adulthood: promote multi-modality
  – Later life occasions for intervention e.g. Downsizing moves

• gender/cohort dimensions in readiness for restorative change
Next steps…

How does the built environment shape the experience, ability and willingness to cycle through middle and later life?