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Author(s): Rachel Aldred
Article Title: "On the outside": constructing cycling citizenship
Year of publication: 2010
Citation: Aldred, R (2009). 'On the outside: constructing cycling citizenship.' Social and Cultural Geography, 11(1), pp.35-52.

Link to published version: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649360903414593

Publisher statement:
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"On the outside": constructing cycling citizenship.

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Abstract

This paper uses in-depth interview data from Cambridge, England, to discuss the concept of the "cycling citizen", exploring how, within heavily-motorised countries, the practice of cycling might affect perceptions of the self in relation to natural and social environments. Participants portrayed cycling as a practice traversing independence and interdependence, its mix of benefits for the individual and the collective making it an appropriate response to contemporary social problems. In this paper I describe how this can be interpreted as based on a specific notion of cycling citizenship rooted in the embodied practice of cycling in Cambridge (a relatively-high cycling enclave within the low-cycling UK). This notion of cycling citizenship does not dictate political persuasion, but carries a distinctive perspective on the proper relation of the individual to their environment, privileging views "from outside" the motor-car.

Key words:

Mobility, citizenship, cycling, transport, identity, consumption

Introduction

Transport comprises "practices of identity and meaning construction" (Jensen 2009: 154); and cycle use in the UK, as in much of the urban West, occurs within a context of mass motorisation and increasing travel distances. In such societies transport, and primarily the private car, is fundamental to people's everyday lives and hence their

identities, although this often goes unrecognised thanks to the motorcar's very ubiquity (Urry 2007). Developing such arguments, and moving beyond the preoccupation with car-based mobility, this paper argues that transport and citizenship are linked. It uses interview research conducted in Cambridge, England to develop a concept of "cycling citizenship" based on the links people make between cycling and worlds outside the bicycle.

This vision of "cycling citizenship" challenges the image of the individual as neo-liberal consumer and the citizen as conceived primarily in national, formal political terms. In this paper it will be shown that participants linked the practice of cycling to social and natural relationships on a local level, and the creation of safer, less polluted, friendlier localities. The cycling citizen is hence embodied and sees their well-being in holistic and relational terms, with the practice of cycling enabling diverse connections to others. Participants construct the benefits of cycling and its implications for citizenship in implicit or explicit contrast to perceived attributes and implications of private car use. For example, the freedom that the bicycle offers to users is perceived as justified because the bicycle, unlike the car, is seen as helping to promote a safe and pleasant local environment.

Rethinking consumption and citizenship

There is a rebirth of interest in citizenship and its connections to consumption and to environmental issues (Soper and Trentmann 2008). The study of citizenship has been enriched by such debates, recovering a diversity of models of citizenship. Work incorporating environmental dimensions into constructions of citizenship (e.g. Dobson and Bell 2003) fundamentally challenges post-war models of the citizen, connecting the

formerly national citizen to additional responsibilities (to people in other countries, to non-human animals, to future generations). Arguably some such connections have been made visible through a politics based around consumption or anti-consumption (Slocum 2004).

Shove and Warde (2002) argue for constructing consumption in terms of local, everyday practices rather than one-off purchases, undermining the traditional dichotomy between the consumer as atomised individual and the citizen as active community member. Consumption is politicised, and while this can mean the display of individual distinction, it can lead to the collective pursuit of alternative visions of the "good life" (Soper 2008). Cycling is intriguing in relation to this as it involves the acquisition (purchase or otherwise) of a bicycle, but then the use of a bicycle involves a more or less conscious non-consumption (in terms of petrol, although cyclists may consume maintenance services and accessories).

Slocum (2004) highlights the ambiguous nature of (anti-)consumer citizenship. On one side, writers such as Rose (1994) have spoken of the process of "responsibilisation" through which people are urged as good citizens to take on individual responsibility for maintaining their lives – including, crucially, one's physical appearance. Regimes of bio-power construct the responsible citizen-subject who maintains his or her body, with stigmatised signs of failure including obesity. Cycling as a body practice could thus be seen as a means of displaying one's identity as a healthy, low-carbon subject. This could enact exclusions based on class, gender, and physical ability (although such exclusions would be culturally variable; for example, old age is seen as a barrier to cycling in the UK but not in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany) and represent a privatised subjectivity offering no challenge to power structures. Slocum (2004) acknowledges this negative side to consumer citizenship, but

argues that it represents more than a ruse of neo-liberal governmentality. Consumer citizenship also stems from a loss of trust in government and big business, and can be an attempt by individuals to participate in decisions about how society is organised. Consumption-related identities should not be seen as necessarily threatening to democratic citizenship, but potentially even an extension of it. Shove and Warde (2002) point out that consumption covers a vast array of practices, some of which do not fit our traditional model of consumption. Water is generally consumed privately, not an object of display; the politicisation of water consumption can move water from the private to the public sphere.

Thus consumption is not necessarily individualising, nor necessarily depoliticised and separate from a politics of production. Transport has a potentially important contribution to make here. Consumption is often constructed as pleasurable, even frivolous - the zone of play - while production remains the zone of work (Shove and Warde 2002), yet transport can confuse such categorisation. In this research, participants' descriptions of diverse cycling practices challenged the easy split of cycling into "utility" and "leisure". Studying transport practices thus may shed additional light on limits of the production/consumption binary, and on how consumption practices might give rise to distinctive forms of citizenship. However, currently there is little work on transport and citizenship (and even less on cycling and citizenship), though see Wickham, 2006.

Citizens at the wheel?

The two major global transport trends are firstly, an increase in distances travelled, and secondly, the growing dominance of the automobile (Urry 2007). While the former trend has sparked an interest in global and cosmopolitan citizenships (e.g. Carter 2001), the latter trend has received much less social scientific attention. Authors disagree over

whether one can ever generalise about the socio-cultural implications of the motor-car, given the cultural diversity in the use of automobiles (e.g. Miller 2001). Miller's view is summarised in a quotation reproduced by Koshar (2004: 122): "we cannot presume as to what a car might be… the automobile is 'as much a product of its particular cultural context as a force'." However, this is ambiguous – has the car **no** essential properties; or specific properties articulated through interaction with particular socio-cultural contexts? In the context of citizenship and consumption, one response is to shift the focus from how drivers and passengers feel about driving or how they use their cars to the types of local environment that mass motorisation might create. Many authors argue that high levels of automobile ownership and use produce particular types of cities, which in turn act to further encourage automobile ownership and use (Woodcock and Aldred 2008). In particular, attention is directed towards public space and street life, with the car sometimes seen as representing a privatisation of public space.

Sennett's (1974) description of "dead space" suggests that places without street life (as for example in areas dominated by busy roads) have profound implications for public life, and hence for citizenship. This has been a key theme in urban scholarship for many decades and an explicit objective of the New Urbanism school of design is to avoid such "dead space". Recent work on automobility including Urry (2007), Dennis and Urry (2009) and Paterson (2007) suggests ways in which processes of motorisation might affect patterns of local social interaction. This is due to the changing geography of motorised public space and the effects of motorised space upon existing power relations (for example, with reference to adult-child relationships, see Barker 2009). These effects will be culturally variable and will have varying effects, but some generalisations may still be made.

Firstly, cars are resource-hungry, and this shapes the local environments that we live in (for example, in terms of noise and air pollution, which may affect people's willingness to spend time in their local streets: Woodcock and Aldred 2008). High and rising numbers of cars on the streets[1] creates major demands upon infrastructure and tends to lead to the development of "auto-space" as planners foreground the needs of people as motorists over the needs of people as pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users (Freund and Martin 2007). While the injury burden of motorisation is highly variable, it is everywhere significant with an estimated fifty million injuries and 1.2 million road deaths globally per annum (Woodcock et al 2007). Road danger particularly affects children and has contributed to the withdrawal of children from street life (Hillman et al 1990). Where vulnerable citizens remain at home, this is likely to affect possibilities for social interactions and hence citizenship.

While the twentieth century saw driving shift from an elite to a mass pursuit (Sachs 1992), this processes has created its own distinctive patterns of inequality, with associated effects on social cohesion, social inclusion, and well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). As motorisation increases, cars are increasingly necessary for social participation; non-ownership is no longer "normal" but a sign of social exclusion. And inequality remains: even when the majority of households own at least one car, ownership and access to cars remain unequal (see e.g. Department of Transport 2008). Socially-excluded groups (including women, the poor, disabled people, older people, and children) are less likely to have primary car access or to be able to drive. Among UK adults, less than 20% of men do not have a driving licence, but over a third of women still lack one and so are legally prohibited from driving (National Statistics 2006). Working-class families have fewer cars than middle class families. Where a car

is needed to access essential resources and facilities, such inequalities do not merely mean loss of status but also affect the ability to participate in everyday life.

Finally and more contentiously, Böhm et al (2006) claim that the infrastructural demands of mass motorisation lead to a contradictory individualisation at an ideological level. Like underground rail networks, large-scale motorisation demands massive public investment. But unlike tube passengers, individual drivers are *auto*mobile, competing to reach destinations independently (Sachs 1992). Car-automobility is associated with freedom and independence in many cultures and may even be experienced as the "articulation of liberal society's promise to its citizens that they can freely exercise certain everyday choices" (Rajan 2006: 114). Yet driving is simultaneously an experience of constraint: other drivers and the regulatory infrastructure necessary to keep high volumes of traffic moving appear as obstacles (Paterson 2007). If these authors are correct, mass motorisation could have truly profound implications upon citizenship; if not, the discussion above suggests other such links can be made.

Transport modes and citizenship

Wickham (2006) is one of the few to investigate such links, discussing transport and citizenship with reference to public and private motorised transport. He divides urban citizenship into two distinctive components – social cohesion and social inclusion[2], indicating pathways through which transport mode might be connected to citizenship. Firstly, both public transport and the motor-car encourage the greater spatial separation of different domains of life, potentially leading to a lack of social cohesion through reducing shared public space. Secondly, car transport physically destroys public space (perhaps seen at its most extreme now in Dubai: Hari 2009). Thirdly, public transport "can itself be seen as public space" enabling social interactions with strangers

(Wickham 2006:9), although the literature tends not to discuss this. Finally, public transport may be publically-owned and seen as part of a broader "civilised" public infrastructure.

Wickham focuses on motorised transport; however, his discussion is relevant to cycling. In Cambridge, for example, restrictions on motor traffic increase the prominence of cycling, creating a distinctive type of public space within which cycling is relatively normalised. High cycling levels may counteract the tendency to spatial segregation, due to the shorter range of cycling trips compared to driving or public transport trips. People choosing to shop by bicycle are relatively unlikely to visit out-of-town shopping centres; these are generally designed for car-borne shoppers, who benefit from the abundance of free parking that they will not find in Cambridge city centre. Cycling infrastructure may have a variable effect on public space; cycling through parks, for example, is contested and in some cases may prove problematic to pedestrian interactions, closing rather than opening up space.

Wickham's third point, that public transport itself creates a public space, links citizenship with the ability to interact and communicate with unfamiliar others. High levels of car use affects communication within public space, because car travel structures the forms of communication possible with those outside the motor vehicle (Aldred and Woodcock 2008). Some forms of such communication may be relatively subtle (such as warning others about police vehicles ahead); however, direct interpersonal communication is relatively limited. For example, it is often very difficult to stop one's car and ask the way, whereas this may be easier for pedestrians and cyclists. Different transport modes enable different types of public spaces and social interactions, which may encourage different articulations of citizenship.

Thinking about transport as a public space is also intriguing with respect to bicycles. Bicycles are a private form of transport, yet potentially allowing users to interact with others to a greater extent than does the 'carcoon' (Wickham 2006). That said, pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users can set up social barriers between themselves and others, so while public space may exist in physical terms it cannot be assumed to do so in social terms. Finally, while bicycles are privately owned, there may be degrees of commodification involved: inexpensive bicycles may be borrowed or given away to a greater extent than cars. There are also bicycle hire schemes in a number of cities[3] which provide bicycles not privately owned by the individual user, although these are not generally publicly-owned.

The consumption patterns involved in cycle use are distinctive by comparison with other transport modes, and if citizenship and consumption are connected as argued above, this too will have effects upon the relation of cycling to citizenship. While individuals may well not refer to "citizenship", they may describe facets of identity that analysts would see as connected to citizenship. In the analysis that follows I identify four dimensions of cycling citizenship: being responsive to environmental issues, taking care of oneself, being rooted in one's locality, and responding with openness to the social environment.

Cycling identities in mass motorised societies

We necessarily experience cycling in the context of other travel possibilities open to us, and with reference to the cultural meaning of those other travel options, including the dominance of car-automobility. Differences and similarities may be more or less salient in different contexts. There are constant debates among cycling activists over whether "we are traffic" (a Critical Mass[4] slogan) or whether the bicycle is more akin to

walking. As cycling, unlike public transport, is a form of automobility (i.e. individually-controlled movement - see Böhm et al 2006), this raises intriguing questions about its possible roles in societies where automobility is highly-valued, such as the UK (Aldred and Woodcock 2009).

However, in most of the UK, cycling is "extremely unusual" (Jones 2005: 816), with the 2001 Census recording cycle to work rates of under 3%. Cyclists are "routinely rendered as deviant" (Böhm et al 2006: 8) and often as threatening to car-automobility. The dual image of the adult[5] cyclist is heroic/dangerous deviant versus earnest, absolutist environmental warrior, these images having displaced former Prime Minister John Major's more traditional fantasies of "old maids cycling to communion". Culley (2001) speaks of bicycle messengers as postmodern city heroes, supporting a popular romantic myth of messengering (Fincham 2006), while Cupples and Ridley (2008) describe campus bicycle user forum members as fundamentalists.

The UK Transport Research Laboratory found cyclists "were the subjects of rather negative imagery [*by drivers*], 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) Unsurprisingly, in mass motorised societies cycling is perceived as existentially and practically frightening (Horton 2007). In this context the opinions expressed by Cupples and Ridley's (2008) informants[6] could be characterised more generously. Rather than using the stigmatising term "fundamentalism" to characterise such views, we might see participants as reacting to stigma, marginalisation, and danger with group defensiveness and group pride. Despite their claim to deconstruct binaries, I believe that Cupples and Ridley contribute to a persistent binary discourse that constructs the "good cyclist" against the "bad cyclist".

This discourse forces the "good cyclist" to display credentials (whether by swearing off the "anti-car" ideology, signing the "Stop at Red" pledge[7], or wearing a helmet).

Contrasting experiences and views about cycling may be accessed through studying high-cycling enclaves within the UK. In such areas, cyclists may be regular users of other transport modes including the private car, providing useful data on how people using multiple modes perceive these different modes in relation to each other. While the car is still the hegemonic form of mobility (Horton 2006), cycling in such areas is relatively normalised, so the bicycle may carry a broader range of social meanings. As with the car, its cultural meanings will be an emergent mix of properties relating to the object and local/national/global contexts. Cycling, like driving, is "private transport" (although *bicycles* can be public, as in the Parisian Vélib hire system[8]). But cycling, like walking, makes relatively few demands on public funds, compared to motor vehicle-related costs such as motorway construction and maintenance. This has changed since the early days of cycling, when cycling groups campaigned for, and were major beneficiaries of, road spending (Hamer 1987).

In highly-motorised towns, cyclists are in a sense more automobile than drivers. The driver cannot pick up her car to circumnavigate a queue of parked cars, while the cyclist can do so, or skirt between the cars. In congested situations and/or where cycle permeability[9] is good, the cyclist's mobility advantage is pronounced. Where roads are designed to favour cars over cyclists, danger can severely impede cyclists' mobility. The varying extent and nature of cyclists' mobility may encourage different local cycling cultures: for example, within Inner London Hackney Council aims to keep cyclists on-road with traffic, while nearby Camden Council has built a network of segregated cycle paths[10]; so the findings here may relate specifically to local environmental factors. However, Cambridge cycle infrastructure varies in type and

quality; more infrastructural patchwork than paradise. Therefore the city may be seen as representing a kind of UK cycling culture that we might find elsewhere if cycling levels increase dramatically.[11]

Cycling in Cambridge

With one in four journeys to work by bicycle (ten times the average for England and Wales, and significantly higher than any other city) Cambridge is unusual within the UK. The Cambridge cyclist thus may forego some of the "chills", if not "thrills", of travelling in urban environments in which cycling is more marginal (Jones 2005: 813). A historic city that avoided wartime bombardment and post-war redevelopment, Cambridge is full of narrow streets and alley-ways that restrict motor vehicle journeys, and parking is very limited. Some of the centre is closed to motor traffic, except for access, and much of the rest has a confusing one-way system (without cycle contraflow). The natural environment is favourable to cycling: the city is flat (although the surrounding countryside is hillier) and the climate generally predictably temperate.

Cambridge has a distinctive history of retarding motorisation; like Oxford, its prestigious University has a tradition of forbidding students to bring cars with them unless there are exceptional circumstances, related to long-standing "town and gown" conflicts in both cities. Cambridge also has a relatively active cycling lobby and the council has a dedicated cycling officer post. Cycling activism is a part of the Cambridge context and while the local press was widely perceived as unsympathetic to cyclists, cycling activism like cycling is unusually prominent

Finally, Cambridge has relatively high levels of white-collar and professional work, in particular jobs in science and technology including environmental science (Skinner and Rosen 2007). This may help perpetuate a wider range of potential cycling

identities than in other localities where, for example, cycling might be predominantly associated with the inability to afford a car or with being an environmental activist. In another Cambridge cycling study, Skinner and Rosen found some interviewees linked cycling to their work identity (as engineers or scientists). My participants seemed less inclined to do so, perhaps partly due to the different interview context (Skinner and Rosen's study being based around workplaces) although cycle-friendly employment situations (or the lack of the same) were mentioned.

The research discussed here is based upon 25 narrative interviews conducted in Cambridge (UK) with cyclists about their experiences. Interviews began with the question "Can you tell me about your life as a cyclist" and continued by probing different aspects of participants' responses, with some more structured questions introduced towards the end (for example, the question "What do you think the council or the government could do to encourage more people to cycle?"). The research aimed to access stories about participants' lives in their own words, but also to see whether people had distinctive views – or indeed any views – on cycle-related policies.

Twenty interviewees responded to leaflets given to them or placed on parked bicycles in central Cambridge during a weekend in May 2008. This was an attempt to access "everyday cyclists" rather than only activists or enthusiasts. However, wishing also to access activists, I recruited five interviewees at the annual Cyclists' Touring Club/Cycle Campaign Network conference held in Cambridge in May 2008. Two of these were involved in cycling policy-making, while the other three were campaigners. I interviewed fifteen men and ten women (all white, most English). For leaflet recruits the gender split was almost equal, 10/9, but four out of five conference recruits were male (roughly reflecting the gender balance of attendees). Around a quarter of interviewees were in their twenties or early thirties, another quarter were over 60, and the remaining

half were in between these age groups. A range of occupations (manual and non-manual) were represented and around two-thirds owned at least one car[12].

In terms of motivation and cycling history (as opposed to, for example, opinions on cycling infrastructure), I did not find clear differences between cycling activists and other participants. Two out of five cycling activists talked about "the environment" as important to them (as opposed to local environments), while seven out of twenty other interviewees did so. The main clear difference between the two groups was that the cycling activists seemed more able to suggest policies that might encourage other people to cycle, although with disagreements about what policies these might be. When I asked other interviewees whether they could think of things that might encourage other people to cycle, most could not think of anything, even though I often felt such ideas were implicit in their narratives. However, people from the two groups responded similarity in other ways; for example, when describing links between cycling and local environments or communities. This suggests that the "cycling citizenship" described here is not the prerogative of cycling activists, whereas the ability to formulate pro-cycling policies may be more clearly linked to involvement in an activist milieu.

Good citizens, good cyclists?

Within highly-motorised societies a cycling identity must be worked at, and even in Cambridge cyclists can feel ambivalent about this identity (Skinner and Rosen 2007). However great the diversity among cyclists, they are popularly defined as a minority group. As discussed above, they feel under pressure to define themselves as a "good" or "deserving" cyclist, within the context of often hostile media coverage. Of course, "good cyclists" imply the existence of "bad cyclists", and thus interviewees spoke critically of, for example "fanatical cyclists… extremely arrogant and very dangerous

cyclists with the high speed bikes, Lycra, helmets[13], often listening to something”. Another said “London cyclists are extremely aggressive”, and most commented negatively on dangerous cycling by “language school students” in Cambridge. Where “bad cyclists” exist, another option is to reject the struggle for “goodness” and defiantly claim a deviant identity (Fincham 2006). One interviewee described his attitude to unlocked bicycles (not one which would have gained him many friends among other interviewees):

> “You had so many bikes nicked, you see an unlocked bike you generally jump on it if you need one (laughs)” (male, 20s)

The “good cyclist” identity was not an easy one to claim, even if one wanted to do so. People castigated themselves, frequently saying “I know I should…” In the UK cyclists are frequently encouraged to wear safety clothing (unlike, for example, the Netherlands). However, in Cambridge cycling has become a ‘natural’ part of many people’s lives, so it can feel odd to dress up in fluorescent gear and cycle helmet before every errand. The resulting conflict provokes guilt but sometimes fatalism (as with the 80-year old who told me that if he was run over, he would die, so there was no point in wearing a helmet):

> “I feel I should wear illuminated clothing but I don’t (laughs).” (male, 30s)
>
> “I am very bad. I don’t wear a helmet.” (female, 50s)
>
> “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.” (female, 60s)

As well as "good cyclists" and "bad cyclists", people spoke of "proper cyclists". Most interviewees felt that "proper cyclists" belonged to an exclusive, sporty club, which excluded them. Interviewees tended to say "I wouldn't be fit enough" to accompany "proper" cyclists on a group ride. They were ambivalent about whether they would want to do so:

> "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." (male, 50s)
>
> "Every now and again I'll go past this big sort of cycling meet and see all of these guys fully Lycra'd up with the pointy helmets, and I don't know, it just doesn't appeal to me. I think I'm not fit enough to do that." (male, 30s)

Being a "cyclist" (good, proper, or otherwise) seemed difficult to obtain for some, even though – as I later describe – most cyclists did feel part of an imagined community. The coexistence of these apparently opposed positions may not be surprising. Being part of a stigmatised group may simultaneously create a sense of group loyalty and encourage members to police the group's boundaries, creating a perpetual even if suppressed insecurity about one's own membership status (c.f. for example Gilroy 2000).

The environmental citizen

While people found the identity of a "cyclist" difficult to assume, *cycling* was described as a positive activity denoting care for one's environment, natural or social (of which see later). While interviewees were generally happy to describe cycling's effects on their local environment, they were less likely to explicitly reference "environmental

issues" such as climate change. Only around half spoke in these terms, such as this comment from a male in his early thirties: "I'd rather stay with the bike for environmental reasons". There seemed to be a gap between people's ability to describe their local environment and talk about it as an "environment", and their ability to do the same at a larger scale. This reflects the difficulty that many people have in localising major environmental issues (Slocum 2004a) and the fact that most interviewees had not taken up cycling primarily because of a "green" mindset. Thus discussion of "environmental issues" forms only a small proportion of the overall dataset.

However, for a minority of interviewees (including several who worked in sustainable transport-related jobs), cycling formed part of an attempt to lead a "green" lifestyle. These people described "tweaking" different parts of their lifestyle to get closer to their ideal. These participants put emotional and practical effort into being "green", and success was rewarded with "feeling right":

> "It really felt wrong to be driving to the allotment especially when you're kind of doing all this green stuff and getting your car sort of defeats that, so that now we can cycle it's brilliant." (female, 20s)

Others described how a "normal" practice had come to take on a new significance as environmental issues had gained in prominence. This could cause people to change other aspects of their lifestyle, as for one interviewee who described how he had not originally taken up cycling to be "green", but had now cut down on flying:

> "I was cycling before climate change and the environment became so urgent but obviously it fits in, fits in now very much." (male, 40s).

Conversely, some interviewees commented that regular cycling allowed them to exercise environmentally-informed choices in other areas of life, qualified by the caveat that cars were sometimes more convenient or appropriate. Women in particular referred to the possibility of exercising more freedom over everyday shopping decisions, and so being more able to avoid unnecessary purchases:

"You don't have to do these massive shops …[You] can stop off at somewhere on the way home and get a bit of shopping in and it's nice and easy." (female, 60s).

Some participants argued that the environmental goods conferred by cycling should lead to a social contract whereby other road users treated cyclists with a higher degree of priority. One interviewee described having to put her body in the way of traffic so that she and her children could turn right to get to school:

"I would just go out and stop the cars because there was no traffic light, like there is now. There is no way that they would stop for us. It was really horrible. And I thought, 'This is just so unfair', you know, we're helping the environment and that sort of thing." (female, 50s).

Several participants commented on the vulnerability of cyclists to local environmental pollution:

"I hate getting behind a bus when it's at traffic lights. I'd rather get off and just walk past it or hold back. When it starts up and you see all that - I just hold my breath. It's always horrible. (laughs)" (female, 60s)

However, the interviews were done at the time of an oil price spike, and several interviewees did comment on how this might rebalance incentives and rewards:

"And of course now things are getting more greener and it's more expensive to drive, it's payback time for the cyclists, you know!" (male, 50s)

The self-caring citizen

Interviewees cast the bicycle as providing its user with independence and freedom. The car has long been associated with these themes (not least through advertising); however, the bicycle was seen as superior in providing independence for those culturally constructed as dependent or not fully competent. Cycling may be more accessible for some people than walking (Aldred and Woodcock 2008). One participant talked about the relative ease of cycling while pregnant, while another spoke of how cycling helped her regain independence after an illness that left her unable initially to walk far or use public transport:

"I think [cycling] 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." (female, 20s).

People stressed how in different ways throughout the life course, cycling could provide the freedom to both look after oneself and participate in society. All vividly remembered moments when they experienced cycling as a practice of freedom, and looked forward to cycling continuing to provide them with independence:

"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." (male, 50s).

"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." (female, 20s).

"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." (male, 20s).

"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." (female, 60s).

Interviewees argued that cycling allows children to progress healthily towards independence, a key concern in a society that demonises yet over-protects its children (Hillman et al 1990). Thus cycling was seen as good training for being a good, self-reliant citizen. Interviewees talked about cycling as freedom in terms of a "letting go", 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'." (male, 30s).

"We had three girls who all cycled … 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." (female, 50s).

Interviewees talked about how cycling made them happier, provided them with a sense of achievement, and allowed them to feel more independent. On a psychological level, cycling can provide self-esteem and a sense of control, compared with the likely experience of using other forms of transport in a congested city. This suggests that psychological benefits of car use (Ellaway et al 2006) may apply to cycling. Additionally, taking exercise was seen as a morally and physically beneficial activity, linking the exercise of autonomy to other benefits not gained through car use:

"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'." (male, 30s).

Interviewees talked about the positive changes that cycling induced in the body, after an initial effort was made:

"We used to call it six weeks to get your cycling legs. You know the muscles in your legs change." (male, 50s).

This aspect of cycling citizenship could be seen as most easily allied to neo-liberal governmentality, through its evocation of a duty to self-care. However, this is only part of "cycling citizenship", and is itself ambiguous. Like Crossley's gym-goers (2006) participants related their engagement in "body work" to past and present bodily experiences. Their talk of practices of freedom was articulated in relation to specific social exclusions, particularly but not solely that based on age. So while neo-liberal themes were certainly there, so were other themes, including challenging inequality.

The locally-rooted citizen

A third aspect of cycling citizenship was found in participants' portrayals of cycling as a pleasurable activity promoting rootedness in the local environment through which they travel. When describing this they frequently used "you" interchangeably with "I", implying they believed that the relationships described were not specific to them but represented a broader experience:

> "[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." (male, 50s).

Cycling was seen as allowing people to enjoy a sense of 'balance'; moving neither too quickly nor too slowly, they could feel part of their local environments while still retaining the ability to leave. It was described as a natural activity, and several referred to bicycles being part of one's body. In Cambridge City, this is supported by factors making competing forms of transport more inconvenient, from parking charges to the poor bus service.

Cycling was characterised as allowing an in-depth exploration of place not possible by motor transport, yet providing more reach than walking (cf. Spinney 2007).

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:

> "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 yeah I remember sort of many times falling off and sort of yeah. That sort of tends to mark your route as well. And yeah, your skin (laughs)" (female, 20s).

Bicycle speed was characterised as an appropriate pace at which to travel through localities, between car speed and walking speed: "You just appreciate, it's the right speed" (female, 50s). People described Cambridge and other places that they had explored, and how "you can see more on a bike". This enhanced vision included gaining access to historical pasts:

> "You get on the bike and you stumble on these little Olde Worlde bits. Little bits of real old Cambridge, little alleys or gateways." (male, 40s)

While there was a sense that cycling allowed a deeper relationship to one's surroundings, this was characterised as being flexible; people described different cycling practices allowing different ways of connecting to the local environment. Sometimes, for example, one might be late for work and then utility took precedence over pleasure. People might participate in social life (see below) but they might also be flâneurs (see Oddy 2007) in certain contexts:

> "In the early morning there would always be robins singing in the park and you would be sort of sailing past… you have a sense of being some kind of unseen observer just coming and going through." (female, 20s)

Cycling allowed one to switch between different cycling practices, and to transcend the characterisation of transport as merely "dead time" getting from A to B:

> "It's a really good way of seeing things that are happening and your surroundings but you actually get to places really quickly." (female, 50s)

Thus this aspect of cycling citizenship referred to relationships with places being different to that encouraged by other travel modes (primarily, comparisons were here made to driving or to walking). Such relationships were seen as being locally rooted, yet still allowing flexibility and autonomy for the traveller.

The citizen in the community

Finally, cycling was characterised as a shared and sociable practice capable of embedding and deepening links to family, friends, and others. This could happen through cycling together or sharing stories, suggestions, and equipment:

> "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." (female, 60s)

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 made them feel safer outside. This was seen as more socially inclusive and egalitarian, linked to the discussion above about how cycling could provide mobility and freedom for those culturally constructed as dependent.

> "[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." (female, 20s).

> "As a woman I kind of think I'm less vulnerable on a bicycle so I would cycle places where I wouldn't walk." (female, 50s)

> "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." (female, 40s).

People have different capacities to cycle fast, so slowing down and waiting for others rather than competing with them was as an important component 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 previously to a grandmother) or not was important:

> "[My husband] 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." (female, 50s).

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

"When I was 9 my parents bought me a proper new bike, three speed bike, Sturmey Archer gears …I was ever so proud." (male, 50s)

"My sister 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?'" (female, 20s)

Although most participants were not actively involved in cycle campaigning, there was a strong feeling among most of being part of a community, even if people also felt ambivalent about being a "cyclist". Work, friends, virtual communities, and bicycle shops were all referenced as being related to a broader 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." (male, 40s)

Passing on bikes to those outside the immediate family, and receiving bikes, was mentioned as a way in which this community was held together. Because bicycles are relatively cheap, second-hand cycles could easily be passed around wide social circles, unlike cars. Expertise and advice could be shared, and colleagues could commiserate over bumps or crashes. Interviewees talked of buying cheap "guest bikes" for visitors to use and handing on 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." (female, 20s)

"There was quite a lot of sharing of bikes around the families that had small children." (female, 50s)

Cambridge is famous for its information industries, and websites are used to share information and provide mutual support. Interviewees who were not members spontaneously mentioned the Cambridge Cycling Campaign's website, which includes interactive mapping and photographs of cycle facilities and obstacles. As many people have digital cameras or cameraphones, taking pictures to share is an increasingly important method of community participation:

"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." (male, 40s)

Cars were seen as enclosed objects that necessarily stood between the individual and her natural and social environment, while bicycles were seen as enabling physical and virtual connectedness. Even interviewees who enjoyed 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." (female, 50s).

The cycling citizen

These four dimensions (the environmental citizen, the self-caring citizen, the locally-rooted citizen, and the citizen in the community) combine to create a model of "cycling citizenship", in which the independence or freedom embodied in cycling was seen as also nourishing communication and rootedness. Interviewees presented cycling as allowing the maintenance of relationships to natural and social environments distinct from those associated with other forms of public and private transport. This citizenship was articulated at a variety of scales; in terms of the impact on the individual body, impact on local natural and social environments, and impact upon a broader, even global scale. The point is not primarily whether participants' perceptions were wholly accurate (for example, among drivers cars may enable conversations over water coolers as much as bicycles do among cyclists) but rather that cycling can indeed be linked to distinctive articulations of citizenship.

Most participants saw relationships with individual bikes as necessarily transient because of theft and vandalism. By contrast one interviewee described deeper psychological attachments to cars, partly due to physical and psychic enclosure:

"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… when you're in a bicycle you haven't got that, you're not enclosed." (male, 30s)

This openness – being "on the outside" – could be seen as a way of holding onto citizenship in a mass motorised society, by breaking down the compartmentalisation of modern life. Within bike-permeable, compact environments, the cyclist can stop, chat,

and divert from her planned course with relative ease. This allows for an alternative mode of being to that characterised by spatially distinct zoning of life into Work, Leisure (including exercise), Shopping, and Holiday (Lefebvre 1991).

Time spent travelling by bicycle was characterised as pleasurable and useful beyond the simple attraction of getting somewhere fast (also referenced by respondents). As Watts and Urry (2008) describe, travelling time is not strict clock time; it encompasses a diversity of feelings and experiences. Cambridge cyclists, in the main and most of the time, are "everyday cyclists", not heads-down racers. Interviewees characterised cycling time as enabling pleasurable work beyond the physical activity itself; while cycling they also worked at constructing independence alongside interdependence; a rootedness that did not exclude the possibility of speed. The pleasures of cycling were characterised as deserved pleasures: the person cycling earns the pleasure derived from the expenditure of energy, and cycling then 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." (male, 50s).

Interviewees presented cycling as a flexible practice that could ward off atomisation while respecting individual autonomy; in an individualistic society, this represents an attempt to accommodate individualism within a framework that simultaneously limits it. The individual was seen as deserving his or her freedom, by contrast with the also auto-mobile driver, because of the public benefits offered by cycling (specifically seen by

interviewees in terms of contributing to a local civic or urban environment). This "cycling citizen", while not the only possible such construction, represents a response to contemporary social problems and strains (including climate change), rather than a nostalgic throwback to pre-motorised times or a purely oppositional stance.

This paper has provided a distinctive contribution to debates on citizenship and on transport, and additional empirical work in distinctive localities could develop this contribution further. Other possible articulations of cycling citizenship might be quite different; for example, they might be more anti-car. The Cambridge interviewees were mostly also car owners and/or users, and while they did contrast driving to cycling this was not linked to a more overt political critique of motorisation. Indeed little support was expressed for road charging, a hot political issue when the interviews were taking place. Rather different results might be obtained by interviewing "everyday cyclists" somewhere like the London Borough of Hackney, another area with relatively high levels of cycling but much lower levels of car ownership. However, the paper indicates ways in which mode of transportation might be linked to wider issues of citizenship, which may be a fruitful way of developing and extending current debates over citizenship and consumption (e.g. Soper and Trentmann 2008).

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Acknowledgements

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[1] In the US, there are nearly as many cars as there are citizens.

[2] His study finds only weak empirical evidence for the role of reducing car usage in the former, but stronger evidence for the role of reducing car dependency in the latter.

[3] http://www.stationcycles.co.uk/Hire/Index.htm in Cambridge, for example.

[4] Critical Mass is a monthly ride carried out by cyclists in cities across the world including London. See http://www.criticalmasslondon.org.uk/main.html .

[5] For younger children cycling is seen as relatively acceptable; however, older children ("gangs on bikes" in local press) may also be seen as threatening.

[6] Their research was carried out in New Zealand, which has with comparable levels of car dependency to the UK.

[7] A campaign launched in the UK to encourage cyclists to publicly commit to stopping at red lights to "improve the status of cycling". See http://stopatred.org/index.php.

[8] See http://www.velib.paris.fr/

[9] Where street networks allow direct journeys by bicycle e.g. through modal filters blocking car traffic but allowing cycles through, cycle contraflows on one-way streets, etc.

[10] The two Cycling Campaign groups have campaigned for these two very different outcomes.

[11] Similar research is planned that will include more diverse localities to enable this comparison: for example, in Hackney, with a very different socio-economic profile to Cambridge, where cycling is estimated to have doubled to around 10%.

[12] Cambridge is an affluent city with high car ownership and – I was told at the CTC/CCN conference – over 90% of Cycling Campaign activists own cars.

[13] It is interesting that in Cambridge – where helmet wearing is low – some interviewees characterised helmet wearing as a sign of a *bad* cyclist! (someone likely to be going too fast).