ACTIVE TRAVEL ACADEMY

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

Cycling and Heteronormativity: Queer and Trans Perspectives on Cycling

Rachel Aldred (University of Westminster), Dulce Pedroso, Matt C. Smith, Jerònia Cubells

Based on/reflections on three papers…

- Walking and biking as queer: deviations, care and resistance negotiating Barcelona's streets, 2025. J Cubells, R Aldred, E Verlinghieri, O Marquet Gender, Place & Culture, 1-24
- Conceptualising active transmobilities as infrastructure: a research agenda, 2025 (under review). MC Smith, R Aldred
- Breaking the Cycle: Representation and diversity in photographs of cyclists. 2024 (2025 article under review), R Aldred, D Pedroso.



What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #1

- Exclusion of groups from images, discourses of cycling
- Normative images of cycling and ‘the cyclist’
- In analysis of 100 Google UK images of ‘family cycling’, Dulce Pedroso and I found that 58/58 images showing two adults, showed (by our judgement) one man and one woman.
- Most other images (26) showed a single adult accompanied by one or more children – these adults were 11 men, 15 women (by our judgement)



Photo by Team Evelo on Unsplash

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #1

- Photo analysis found a raft of similar exclusions – especially around around race & ethnicity, disability, & body size.
- Similar text-based analyses have found related types of exclusions (e.g. Andrews et al 2018), recent equity analyses
- Implication that we can potentially incorporate such exclusions into images/ discourses of cycling and 'the cyclist' (maybe not quite like this!)…?

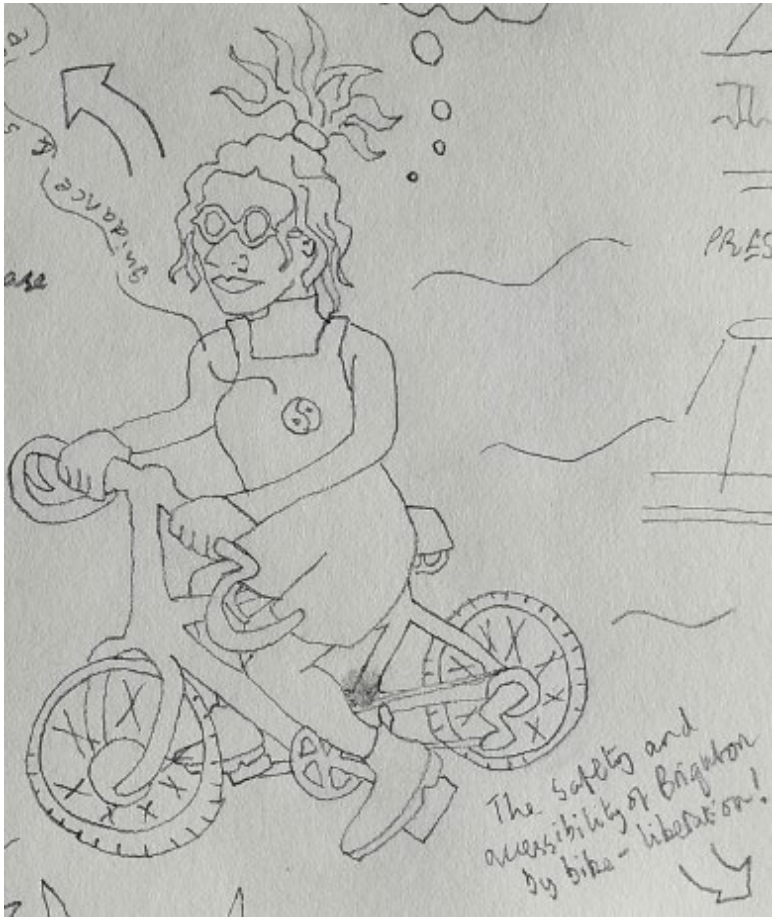


Don't worry, it's AI! - https://deepai.org/machine-learning-model/text2img

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #2

- Experiences of cycling (Smith & Aldred forthcoming)

- “I cycle everywhere and always have […] And also just for me it feels quite liberating to be able to travel in that way […] it's also enabled me to side-step some of the awkwardness some trans or LGBT people experience using public transport out.” (Lily, white trans woman, 30s)



Extract from Lily’s body map (Smith 2024, Smith & Aldred forthcoming)

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #2

- Experiences of cycling (Smith & Aldred forthcoming)

- “[Cycling] I feel not at all vulnerable to people but vulnerable to traffic, but good gender feels because I feel powerful on my bike and… happy and good, but then like walking I feel more vulnerable depending on where I am”. (Rudolph, non-binary, white, 20s)



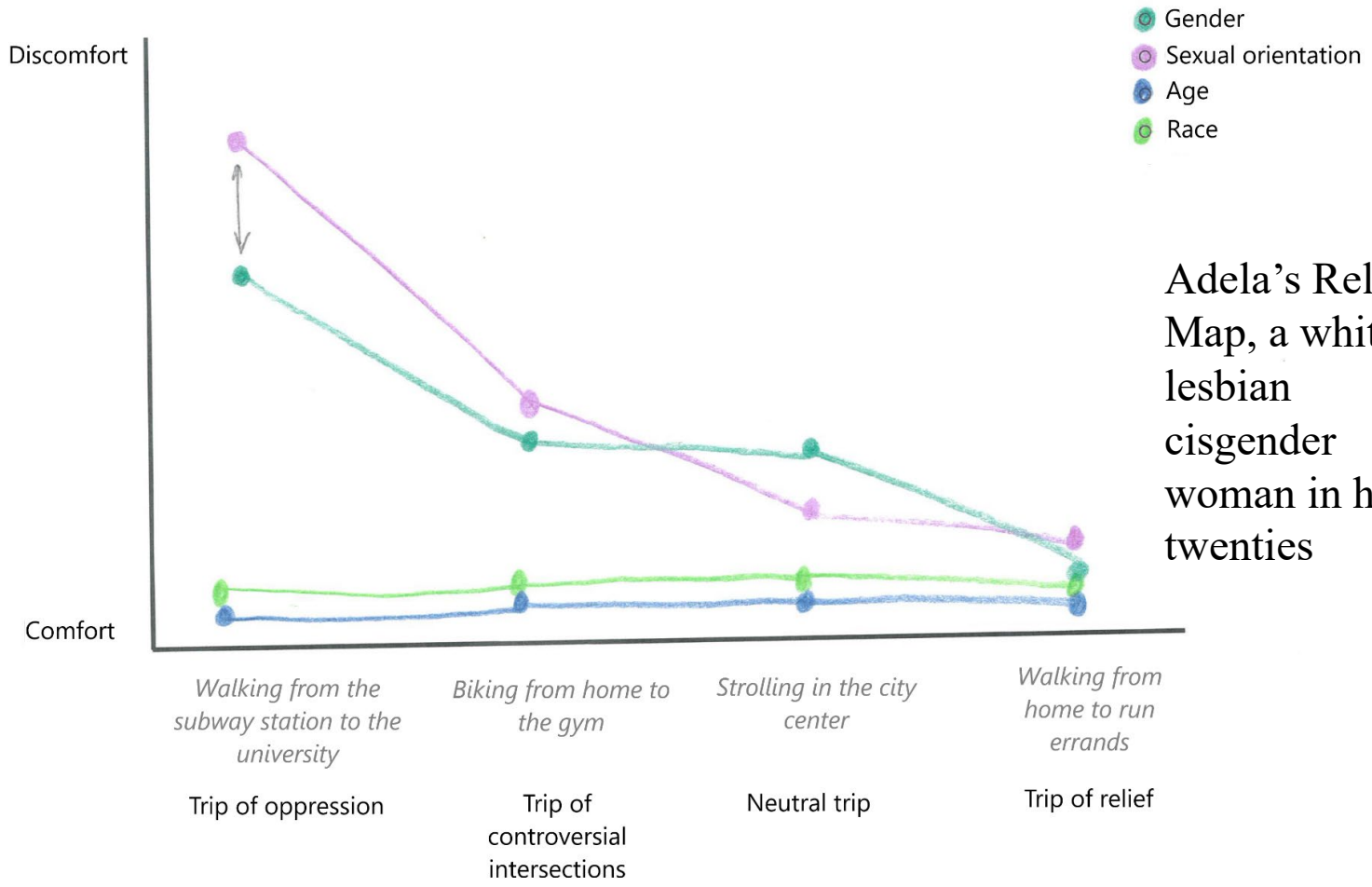
Zephyr, via AI
https://deepai.org/machine-learning-model/text2img

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #2

- Cycling as infrastructure of care

"Their quote highlights trade-offs made where both cycling and being visibly queer or trans are more accepted and widespread than in much of the UK, but still require constant vigilance, as indeed does being a cyclist in traffic. For Rudoph and Lily cycling offers increased motility and embodied safety in relation to their gender. Cycling acts as an infrastructure of trans care by enabling participation in community activities that facilitate a sense of belonging in the city and by affording the embodiment of positive gender affects. This begins to shed light on how cycling can constitute mobility and motility (potential for movement) in relation to other infrastructures; while being constantly shaped by cissexism, racism, ableism and other systemic formations." (Smith & Aldred forthcoming)

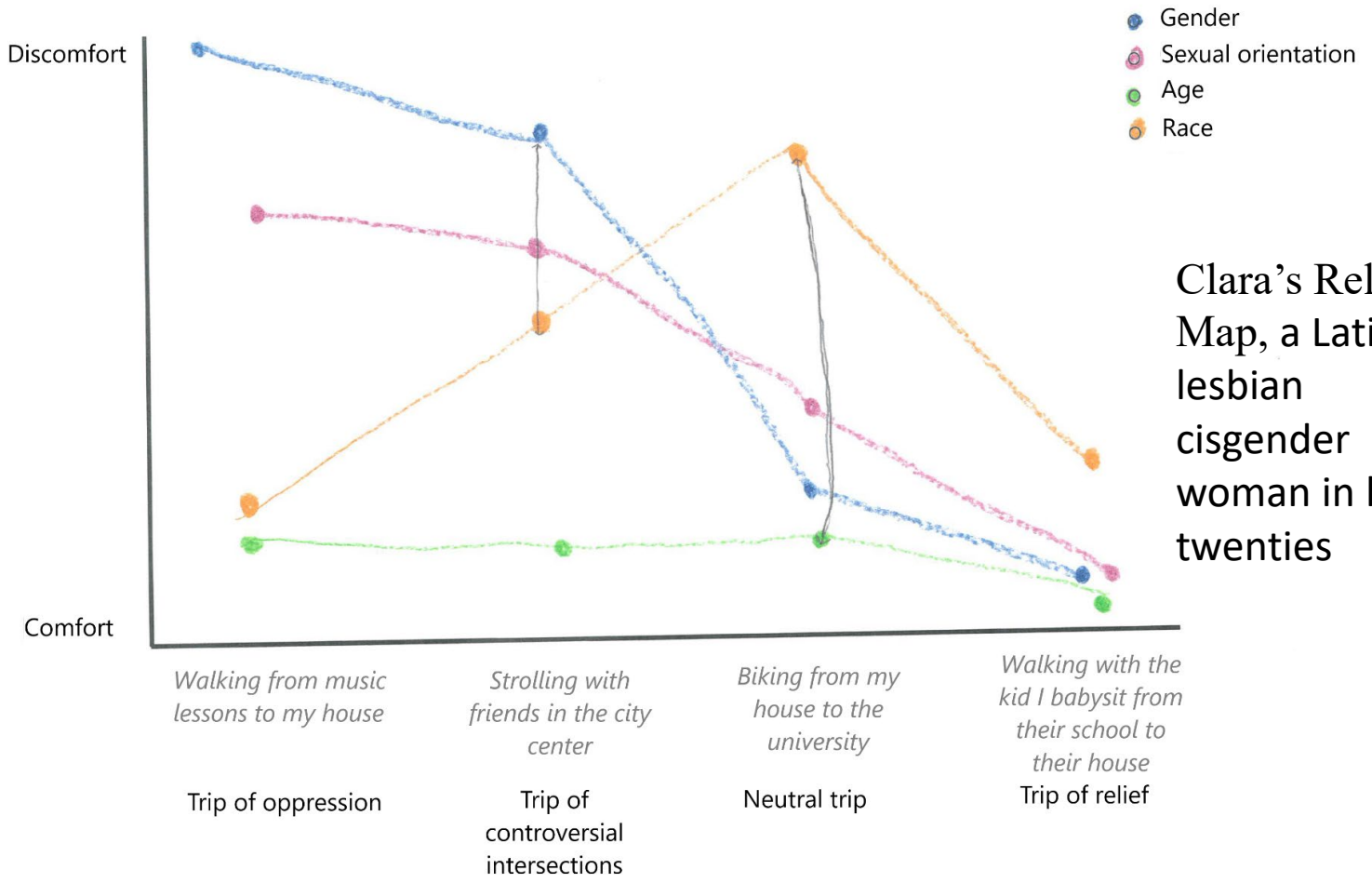
What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3



Adela's Relief Map, a white lesbian cisgender woman in her twenties

Using relief maps (Rodó-de-Zárate 2014) to explore dis/comfort: Cubells et al 2025

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3



Clara's Relief Map, a Latinx lesbian cisgender woman in her twenties

Using relief maps (Rodó-de-Zárate 2014) to explore dis/comfort: Cubells et al 2025

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3

Pedalling away from oppression?

- *“Cycling is really safe because I go full speed on my bike, and people don’t have much time to react and say, ‘Oh, a trans woman on a bike’.” (Elisabet)*

(Cubells et al 2025)

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3

Pedalling away from oppression?

- *“Cycling is really safe because I go full speed on my bike, and people don’t have much time to react and say, ‘Oh, a trans woman on a bike’.” (Elisabet)*

- *I’m aware that I’m very careful when biking. She [my white partner] dares to ring the bell. It’s different how they give you permission or look at you favourably as you pass by. Suddenly, it’s not as serious if I, being white, cross in front of a car. I have a couple of friends who told me, “the police has never stopped me, I would run red lights and they are like ‘be careful’”. I’ve already been ticketed, lectured, and it’s like they enjoy asking me for my documents. (Clara)*

(Cubells et al 2025)

What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3

Parodying gender norms

- *I overtake guys cycling just to annoy them. They get competitive, make passes that put you at risk, invading the opposite lane… unfortunately, cycling is a display of masculinity that really annoys me. (Berta)*
- *I know that femininity in bike spaces is always associated with not having a clue and being a joke. And I believe I play with it by wearing pink, for example. I want people to tell me nonsense because it annoys me that there's only respect for masculinity. (Dani)*

(Cubells et al 2025)



What might queer and trans perspectives on cycling look like? #3



Photo by Cymo Tome on Unsplash

Queering mobilities/the city

To me, queer mobilities have to do with transfeminism, with breaking ableism. I believe that it's how we share, how we move... it's about the perspective: the way I pedal, the rhythm, and that doesn't mean that there should be only one [rhythm]. To me, all that is to be queer, right? To consider the diversity of people who are going to use the space. (Núria, in Cubells et al, 2025)

Thank you ☺

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