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## *Chapter 8*

### **Gendered Cultures of Slow Travel: Women's Cycle Touring as an Alternative Hedonism**

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I think it's addictive. I say to my kids, I don't do drugs, I don't do alcohol, I don't gamble: I ride a bike... The only holidays I have now are cycling holidays. (Sally, 57 years)

In this opening quotation Sally evokes the compelling pleasures of slow travel and the desire for cycling that motivates many women to begin a different kind of journey. With the rise of the slow movement there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the gendered cultures that inform and are informed by discourses of fast or slow living. In contrast, the mobilities literature has begun to map out some discursive parameters that give shape to gendered cultures of movement (and stasis), embodied and reflexive performances of identity and different perceptions of risky and pleasurable practices (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Uteng & Cresswell, 2008).

In this chapter I bring together work on gendered mobilities and cultural studies of consumption to offer a feminist perspective on slow travel through an analysis of my own and other women's experiences of cycle touring. I draw upon ethnographic research and interviews with 17 women cyclists (aged 25-75 years) who

I accompanied on a nine day ride over 600km with over 1000 riders on an organised tour with Bicycle Queensland in Australia, 2010. Being careful not to essentialise women (or men's) experiences as homogenous I explore how women, as gendered subjects, articulate their desire for cycling as a form of slow travel. As with all domains of life, slow tourism is not free of gender and this chapter offers to shed light on the multiplicity of slow ways of moving and engaging with the world through the specificity of the body, and through the relations between bodies that are also circumscribed by power differences (Bonham & Koth, 2010; Furness, 2010; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000).

While sustainable tourism continues to be a highly contested area in theory and industry practice, the emergence of a slow travel ethos brings with it possibilities for moving, knowing and relating differently (Hall, 2009). Taking inspiration from the slow food movement, the parameters of slow travel and tourism have been defined in relation to the meaningful experience of the journey that embraces a slower temporality, concern about environmental impact and local diversity (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Yet, most literature has focussed more attention on environmental concerns and temporality, than the convivial or social experience of the journey (Dickinson *et al.*, 2010; Germann Molz, 2009). Mass cycle tourism events constitute a particular form of slow travel, although most events do not self-consciously identify with the slow movement in their promotion and not all participants in this research made an overt connection with the slow ethos. However, as I shall argue in this chapter, the meanings the women articulated about the cycling journey in many ways reflected key dimensions that define the slow movement (Germov *et al.*, 2011; Parkins & Craig, 2006; Tam, 2008). For example, cycling figures as an embodied journey that creates a different temporal relationship with local places and cultures,

the collective context of a mass tour offers a sense of conviviality and participants negotiate their desire for mobility and greener travel experiences.

As a form of sustainable travel, cycling can be low impact, however, there are many ways of undertaking cycling journeys across the spectrum from light to dark green (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) . Mass cycling as slow tourism is, in one way, a low carbon form of mobility that contributes to greater sustainability through its influence on everyday lifestyle practices and directly in terms of tourism choice. Yet, there is the perennial issue of the mode of transport chosen to begin the cycling journey. My focus on the Cycle Queensland tour event also raises questions about the carbon footprint created by the many large trucks that are required to move the camp, luggage and staff to a new location each day. This is offset to some degree by 1000+ individual riders choosing not to use cars for their week long holiday, although a number may have driven or flown to the start of the ride. Bicycle Queensland actively promotes the use of coaches and trains as more sustainable alternatives for riders and there are identified social and economic benefits created for the many (disadvantaged) rural communities (see Bicycle Queensland, 2009). More analysis is needed of the impact of the tour event and the benefits arising from the uptake of cycling in everyday lifestyles as well as holiday choices. However, what this chapter offers is an exploration of the slow meaning of mass cycling touring which can in turn inform debates and tourism practices that are focussed on the issue of sustainable provision and consumption.

Debates about green lifestyles and sustainable travel can tend to be infused with a kind of environmental moralism that is often defined against (or ignores) the

desire for pleasurable experiences of places, mobility and connection with others. For example, a recent article by Jackman (2009: 20) in *The Weekend Australian Magazine* stated that ‘your average green activist still seems like a humourless and hectoring pedant who will not quit their campaign to save the planet until they have destroyed any scrap of enjoyment we gain from living here in the first place’. Slow tourism and travel potentially offer a way to think through the relationship that connects environmental concern and pleasurable experiences that can sustain lifestyle change and transform highly consumerist practices. It is from this perspective that I draw upon Kate Soper’s (2008) notion of ‘alternative hedonism’ as she evokes the ethical relations between pleasure in different consumption practices and the rising disenchantment with consumerism. Soper (2008: 5) argues that Euro-American notions of the ‘good life’ rest on a privileged ideal of the affluent consumerism and are only likely to be countered with appealing ideas about what it means to enjoy a high standard of living. Rather than simply offer an environmental critique of hyper-consumption that simply dismisses consumer desires, Soper suggests that the emergence of more sustainable practices will be dependent upon new ways of thinking about enjoyment and pleasure in everyday life. In this sense, the accusation that the slow movement is simply a middle class indulgence is an argument that misses an important point; sustainable leisure and travel options need to become desirable options as part of the rise of the ethical consumer. Rather than dismiss the tourist’s desire for slow experiences, products and services, how can we think about slow travel as part of the emergence of a ‘new hedonist imaginary’ (Soper, 2008) that embraces an anti-consumerist ethic and the politics of consuming differently? Slow travel can also be thought about as a gendered experience of mobility that is produced

within the sphere of 'life politics' that shapes women's leisure consumption and identity formation in advanced economies (Rojek, 2010; Rose, 1999).

### **Researching Gender and Cycling**

...even if it is the same road, [it is] a different experience. Kim (60 years)

Like other traditionally male sporting cultures, much of the research on cycling as a recreation, competitive sport or touring experience has assumed the masculine subject as the norm (see Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson & Robbins, 2009; Hodgson, 2007; Lamont & Causley, 2010; O'Connor & Brown, 2007; Ritchie *et al.*, 2010; Spinney, 2009). A number of historical (Simpson, 2001) and contemporary studies (Hanson, 2010; Womack & Suyemoto, 2010) have identified the freedom and empowerment that cycling creates for women via increased independent mobility (away from the gendered constraints of home). There has also been a focus on understanding the gendered barriers to cycling and how women's participation can be increased to address inequities, target women as cycling consumers, encourage green transport and promote healthy lifestyles (Emond *et al.*, 2009; Garrard, 2003; Garrard *et al.*, 2008).

Although Australia is far behind most European countries in terms of participation, infrastructure and cycling inclusive culture, cycling has grown in popularity. As the fourth most popular physical activity, 6.5% of Australians over 15 years cycled for recreation or sport at some time in 2009-10. Yet, if we look more

closely at the gender differences we see that there are still far fewer women cycling in their leisure time (men 8.2% and women 4.9%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Commuting by bike is on the increase in many cities and cycle tourism has begun to take off with rail trail development and a range of small and mass cycle tour events that are held in many States (Ritchie *et al.*, 2010). There are many forms of cycling and ways of moving, not all of them embrace a slow ethos. Indeed the fast pace, expensive bikes and competition are often implicit in the comment that cycling is on the rise as the ‘new golf’ for businessmen. A number of women enjoy this kind of cycling, too, and I do not wish to imply that this is morally questionable; rather my interest is more specific to cultures of slow mobility and slow tourism.

At a time when a number of traditional sport clubs are experiencing declining membership, State based not-for-profit bicycle associations have had rapid growth. For example, Bicycle Queensland, who organise the Cycle Queensland tour that is the focus of this research, doubled its membership over the last five years to reach over 10, 000 members (Bicycle Queensland, 2009). Yet, women do not constitute 50% of members nor 50% of riders on the 1000 plus Cycle Queensland tour and hence the aim of this research was to understand more about the gendered context of cycling as a sustainable form of everyday travel and tourism. Given the lack of research into women’s experiences of large organised cycle tourism events, like Cycle Queensland, I wanted to consider both conceptual and practical issues relating to the gendered culture of cycling to encourage different ways of thinking about what might encourage more women to participate. With the support of Bicycle Queensland and some university funding I was able to interview 17 riders (from 40 women who responded to my email invitation) aged 25-75 years. The majority of women were from an Anglo-celtic background and eleven were experienced cycle tourists while

six were first time riders on this kind of event. They came from mixed social backgrounds with seven women residing in regional or rural areas in different States of Australia (one New Zealander) and ten residing in cities or large urban areas. Four women attended by themselves (often meeting up with friends or an organised group), another four came with their own self-organised group (often a bicycle user group or fund raising group of friends), five came with their partners, three came with a female friend and one woman was riding with her partner and 3 children for the ninth year in a row. I completed interviews at the camp site on the rest day or once riders arrived at camp for the afternoon. Being part of the ride was important in terms of the ethnographic journey, the collective context of the event and to be able to share something of that experience with the participants.

Using a reflexive approach to analysis I identified several key themes across all the responses and interpreted these in relation to feminist post-structuralist work on mobilities, consumption and tourism (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). The key themes that I will focus on in this chapter include women's narratives of the 'slow journey' (often defined in relation to a masculine culture of speed), the sense of becoming part of a 'convivial community' and the relationship between 'hedonic identity and sustainable mobility'. I argue that these dimensions of cycle touring embody an alternative hedonism that Soper (2008) associates with the rise of non-consumerist practices and environmental critique. Next I want to offer an ethnographic glimpse into the liminal journey of the ride by bringing slow mobilities into the meaning making process of tourism and event research (see also Holloway *et al.*, 2010; Watts & Urry, 2008). As Spinney (2009) argues, cycling has conventionally been 'known' through rational and linear assumptions about movement rather than through methods that value the ephemeral, the fleeting and the sensual.

## **An Ethnography of a Cycle Tour Event**

As a cycle tourist I joined over 1000 riders on several annual journeys through rural Queensland to enjoy the pleasures of slow travel and safety in numbers on the (often life threatening) road. On day one of Cycle Queensland we move out en masse from the town centre as a swarm of bikes and bodies streaming for miles, up and down, country roads for about eighty kilometres each day. ‘Cycle away from the everyday’ is the event strap line on the marketing material that accompanies waving images of male and female cyclists of all shapes and sizes. We are urged to escape our sedentary existence and embrace the embodied challenge of finding our own pace along with the sociability of moving together. For nine days we become a nomadic community, of which two thirds are men and one third women, bound by affective relations that connect and separate us; alternately we love and loath the rolling terrain, heat or rain and the rhythm of organised ride-camp life. The embodied mass is also fractured into differences marked by corporate jerseys, a competitive or leisurely ethos, bike brand and type, family or friendship group, staff, volunteer or rider, different ages, sexualities, cultures and genders. Women of all ages and abilities come on the ride in couples with male or female partners, sometimes alone or with groups of friends, cycling clubs or family. Every day cycling is a search for the slow rhythm with its alternate states of immersion in the immediacy of places and the focussed intensity of physical challenge. It is awakening movement that counters the tendency to forget how to live in the present with our car centred, work oriented lifestyles. At times I overtake labouring, or leisurely, riders ploughing the headwind, we chat briefly about the day and offer encouragement. In turn I am overtaken by those, often years older than I, seeking the momentary thrill of the downhill.



Each evening the community of cyclists comes together in the middle of our tent city to dine under the stars, listen to the ride briefing about weather, road conditions and local knowledge. To test our tired bodies further we are offered a tempting array of choices with live music, an outdoor café and movies as well as local towns to explore. The culture of the ride is convivial, inviting social exchange between strangers, from fixing flats to yarns about previous rides or future journeys. Daily adventures on the ride are shared in shower queues or breakfast line ups, ideas about bike assembly or riding tips are swapped with new friends. Some relearn the lost art of relaxation after physically demanding effort and retrace the connection with people met on previous rides. The cycling tour community is a fleeting formation in time and space, offering a collective escape from the work-consume treadmill and a chance to remember the shared pleasures of slowing down, living simply.

*Slow journeys: It is not a race*

I like the idea of the journey, rather than an event - I don't mind events, but the idea of travelling as part of cycling was really good for me... it's the pleasure of applying yourself to something to improve without having to then put yourself against some kind of stopwatch that takes the pleasure out of it. Kim (60 years)

Standing in the registration queue the day before the ride begins I strike up a conversation with the older woman behind me who is keen to get her number and

reassemble her bike that is boxed in multiple pieces. 'Molly' (56 years) happens to be one of the respondents that I am going to interview during the ride. Having established this fact within several minutes we discuss our delight in the journey ahead; no cooking or cleaning, long days pedalling through the countryside and some daunting steep hills to test our fortitude. We catch up for an interview after several days of riding when the rain starts and doesn't stop for several days just to test our tolerance for mud. Molly is not phased at all by the rain and talks about how she has planned well ahead to do the ride with her friend because her husband doesn't come anymore (his snoring woke the campsite and he has a different cycling 'attitude'). Like many of the women I interviewed, Molly enjoyed the embodied challenge, health and environmental benefits of a cycling holiday (she is very fit), that is also safe and well organised, 'I really like the feeling of working out big time during the day while seeing beautiful places and coming home tired, exhausted and hungry...I enjoy the fact that it doesn't take up any petrol to ride a bike'. She was given a bike at age 45 and along with her regular rides, alone and with friends during the week, she has been on several small and large cycle tours in the last ten years. The cycle tour keeps her motivated and she looks forward to being,

away from the everyday. I find that immediately you are out on your own, or with friends, I notice the birds, I notice the spider webs with the dew on them...I never wear anything in my ears...I just really enjoy having a lung full of air and the freedom...seeing the countryside, different places that you go to slowly...the trouble people go to when we all arrive (in small towns), people waving and morning teas.

Molly invokes a slow ethos in responding to my question about what is it is she enjoys about the cycle tour journey. In a similar way experienced cycle tourist Dale (45 years) talks about mobility as simplicity, 'travelling by bike is really my ideal way of feeling like you're actually travelling through an area not just going from A and then arriving at B and hopping out. You actually experience the whole journey. I just love the freedom and the simplicity'. The journey is described through the language of the body and sensory engagement. Jean (68 years) talked about the immediacy of moving through the time-space of cycling as something that characterises the slow journey,

Well it's probably the only time I actually can get in the moment. Like you really have to be in the moment when you're cycling. You have to be aware, you're listening for magpies and noises. You're watching, you're scanning for brake lights going on thinking somebody's stopping or going to turn at you. You're concentrating. So I can get out of my head I guess. I'm a thinker. So I get out of my head when I'm cycling. I just cycle along and I compose songs and think great thoughts... You get on your bike and your legs have got muscles and it just feels so good...The pleasure in the body being stronger is really exciting yes. So that's probably it I suppose and the wind in your face. The fact that you're travelling. I go to sleep in cars; I really don't like driving in cars much. So you feel very alive on a bike because you're using all your senses.

Other women spoke about slow mobility in spiritual terms, as Joan (60 years) said: 'I do a lot of communing with God when I'm out on my bike. I love...seeing all the animals, you saw those cattle lined up at the fence... I love seeing the countryside and looking at the houses and I wonder what those people do and it's "me" time'.

Women's experiences of the slow journey was often articulated in relation to gender differences and contrasted against a masculine culture of speed. Molly (56 years) defined her enjoyment of the slow journey against her husband's focus on speed, distance and the point of arrival,

He has a totally different attitude to cycling. He gets on his bike and he gets a big sweat and he wants to get there, whereas I'm happy to have morning tea and to chat, to take it easy and to look at the view. Not just to see what time I leave and how fast I go and what's my average speed, all that kind of stuff!

Kim (60 years) also reflected on the masculine desire for speed as a display of strength to others 'that goes to power - it goes to strength and power which is more important to them than health'. The counter discourse of slow was evident in many women's comments about how important it was that the cycle tour enabled a leisurely journey rather than normalising a competitive ethos. Sally (57 years) spoke about this when she said, 'I wouldn't even call it a sport, [perhaps] a recreational activity, because a sport has that inference that you're racing or you're competing... it's more the enjoyment of morning tea, (riding) chatting with people and lunch, (riding) chatting with people'.

Many women identified the value on riding at one's own pace, the lack of competitiveness that might show women up as less able than men and the feeling of safety that the event organisers created. Joan talked about the importance of riding at her pace, 'the tour is very, very good for that sort of thing. Nobody knows when you leave or when you get in. Because I mean a lot of the blokes have been in town for hours at the pub so then they straggle in the afternoon at the same time you're coming in. So there's no competitiveness about it at all. You don't feel pushed'. For many women the slow journey was defined against masculine notions of speed and competition, as well as less sustainable transport such as cars.

### *Convivial communities*

It's a lovely community. I mean look at them. We've been in the rain for all this time and they're still happy. They're still laughing and joking...It is unique yes. We've got away from the materialistic side of the world and they're just concentrating on each other and what's important...Yes in nine days. It's almost like a retreat isn't it? A retreat from life. Jean (68 years)

In addition to the slow pleasures of cycling the next major theme was the sense of a convivial community that was created during the tour. The pleasure of sociability, of meeting new and familiar people, and sharing the journey with others was a strong focus of the nine day tour. In Soper's (2008) terms these social relationships provide the basis for an alternative hedonism as Jean implies in her

comment about 'getting away from the materialistic side of the world'. Sally (57 years) as a solo rider and volunteer spoke about the feeling of community that was created by 'the camaraderie of the cyclists. I enjoy the bike riding, I enjoy being out in the countryside but the main thing is the camaraderie of the cyclists that you can sit down to anyone at lunchtime, breakfast, in the queue to the loo and chat away. To me, that's how society should be and I really appreciate that.' As a source of affinity that generated the mobile community, cycling was identified by many women as an alternative marker of identity that enabled more egalitarian interactions. Kim (60 years) spoke about this by saying that:

What I find is really interesting is that you have no idea about people apart from that they're cyclists when you meet them here. You don't have the trappings of normal life, so somebody could be a corporate executive I guess, or I don't know, clear drains or something. You've no idea when they're on their bike in Lycra, so it's a leveller really and it takes away those immediate judgements that you can make about people, or you make different ones about their athleticism, but that's very interesting and you discover people are not always what you expected, or you don't know, so that's nice. It's a discovery process, meeting people.

For some of the younger participants the social aspect of the ride provided an opportunity to meet potential partners who had similar interests (several long distance romances occurred after the tour) and to also meet other cyclists from their home towns. For Pam (43 years) who had been on all eight annual rides with her three boys

(the eldest is now 14) and husband the tour was a significant site of family leisure connections: 'there're a lot of people that we only know from the ride, that we only meet every year and they watch our kids grow up and each year come and go, wow look where they are now'. Describing herself as shy, Pam undertook the first ride to meet other people and many years later finds herself organising many social rides during the year and providing advice to encourage other mothers to take their families.

All participants spoke about the importance of the inclusive culture of the tour for their enjoyment and how the organisers facilitated this convivial atmosphere through their communication about respect, helping each other out and being patient on the road. The liminal nature of the tour community created a context where social norms relaxed and interaction with a diversity of people was expected as part of the slow experience. For women this sense of convivial community was significant in enabling social relationships (especially for solo riders) that were based on their identity as cyclists (rather than as mothers, partners or workers). The issue of gender identity was also central to how women created meaning about the pleasurable challenge of the slow journey and responded to concerns about environmental sustainability.

### *Hedonic identities and sustainable mobility*

For a number of women, cycling also embodied a slow travel ethos about sustainability that was defined against speed and car based mobility. Jean (68 years) talked about the Australian 'love affair with the car. All our cars drive much too fast for their own good and the good of everybody else. Most of the accidents that happen

these days aren't accidents. I can't understand why we've got such angst against cyclists. Why haven't we got angst against cars? I mean cars kill people... cycling puts you back in the community. A car takes you out of the community'. Most participants talked about a strong interrelationship between their cycle tourism choices and cycling at home for recreation and/or commuting. Some were inspired by their tourism experiences to cycle more often as part of a greener, healthier lifestyle, while others found that their everyday riding generated a desire to try cycling holidays instead of motorised travel. Yet, there was also an awareness of the contradictions of travelling by plane or car to participate in the cycle tour, as Kim stated about her trip from New Zealand, 'I think environmentally obviously it's really good, except that I was thinking last night I've just punched holes in the stratosphere to get here so I can ride a bike; be a model of carbon neutral or something'. Only a couple of participants did not consider the environment impacts of cycling to be important in their decision making, rather they viewed any benefit as a by product. Lorna talked about this 'doesn't rate that highly for me. Because, I mean at home I would not be a person that would choose a bike over a car because of environmental issues. I'm just way too busy'. Frequently women talked about the effect of have to juggle multiple gender responsibilities (caring for others, work) on their time. In this sense cycling as slow travel is not always motivated by environmental concern, but it can generate pro-environmental behaviour through tourism choices that are not necessarily intentional (nor does it necessitate a 'green' identity).

In contrast, many women identified themselves as strong advocates of cycling as an empowering experience where pleasure could be derived from challenging oneself and engaging with the world differently. Kim (60 years) spoke about this, 'I feel very powerful on the bike; I feel very good on the bike'. What is interesting about



the desire to engage in sustainable travel was the connection to what I have termed an 'hedonic identity' where women fuse the meaning of pleasurable challenge in their lives with either an implicit or explicit environmental awareness as 'cyclists'. For example, Joan initially talked about how the enjoyment of cycling had become part of her identity as an independent older woman after buying a bike post-divorce when she was 57. She said 'you feel so good. Your whole body feels (good), you move better'. The Cycle QLD trip was her first tour and she decided to go to 'give myself a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday present and this is it. So here I am sitting in the rain at Mount Morgan, loving it'. Joan valued the environmental benefits but like many other women in the research she talked about first having to overcome gender constraints that affected her motivation and capacity to cycle. Jean talked about doing the ride after her husband passed away and how her confidence had been restored after this loss, 'I actually questioned whether I could do things. I've never, ever questioned that I couldn't do anything. This has sort of made me see that I can, I can do anything again...it does give you a bit of an identity especially at 68'.

Amongst participants there was a strong gender discourse about cycling as a new source of slow pleasure and identity for women as they desired an alternative to the gendered responsibilities of home (often tied to consumerism). Cycle touring offered the freedom of mobility, social connection and overcoming the gendered limits of self. Lucy (56 years) responded to the question about what she enjoyed most about the tour with 'I've got nine days without having to think of cooking'. As a mother of nine children in a regional town Jean (68 years) reflected on her life prior to taking up cycle touring, 'my life was very directed for 31 years and I've been a mother and a wife for such a long time I thought well it's probably about time I found out where I was again, so the 2002 ride was a ride back to "me"'. This notion of cycling

as a source of independent identity for women was evident throughout the interviews and illustrates the gendered meaning that women attribute to slow travel experiences in relation to the recognition afforded by others. As Kate (46 years) said it gave her a sense of 'self worth, I think that helps a lot, because you achieve something on these rides. You go back home and you tell people where you've ridden, they go what? You did what? I'm a teacher and the kids say... and they go "wow"'.

A number of women identified how the embodied pleasure and challenge of riding was interconnected with the slow experience of place during the ride and in their communities at home. For Jean (68 years) the pleasure of cycling in her regional area was key to promoting sustainable transport, healthy communities and safer roads, 'I'm very passionate about sustainable transport, obesity, and all that sort of thing. Because my children all rode bikes but I've seen the car parks at school just get fuller [with] cars and less [with] bikes. So I'm very passionate about that area'. Pam (43 years) also talked about the effects of the cycle tour on her family's identity and how cycling has been incorporated into their commuting and recreation. She said that is has 'been a change of lifestyle I suppose in a lot of ways. I ride to work every day now and things like that, so I have that level of fitness all the time. People say to me when they hear that we're doing the ride, they go, oh you must be so fit - oh that's amazing. But I don't feel any different because that's what I do all the time'. For some women cycle tourism was clearly a form of alternative hedonism, in Soper's (2008) sense, of being motivated by an anti-consumerist intent and desiring other forms of sustainable mobility in everyday life and when travelling. In this way the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge that articulates a gendered understanding of adventurous forms of travel and leisure where the masculine is not presumed as the norm (Hanson, 2010, Little & Wilson, 2005).

## **Concluding Remarks**

Thinking about the pleasurable experience of slow mobility is important for considering how sustainable forms of travel can be promoted to women given the gender disparity in cycling participation rates. While the environmental benefits were mentioned by nearly all participants as part of their cycling motivation, more often women spoke about their desire to be fit, active and healthy, connect with like minded cyclists as part of a convivial community and experience the immediacy of new places and people. It was the hedonic dimension of slow mobility that motivated most participants through their identity as ‘cyclists’ to undertake a tour and to cycle for recreation or transport. The findings in this study illustrate how slow travel and the meaning of cycling mobility are gendered in particular ways for women (Uteng & Cresswell, 2008). Without essentialising gender differences I argue that there are significant implications for tourism operators (cycling and beyond) in considering how they develop, promote and support gender inclusive journeys that respond to the multiplicity of motivations (and constraints) that women identify.

The implications of this study for theorising slow travel and tourism are many. First, we need to move beyond the notion that slow travel experiences are premised on an implicitly masculine subject and examine how gender plays out through different experiences of mobility. Second, the understanding of social and identity aspects of the slow experience needs further exploration alongside the environmental concerns (as well as the relationship between them). These issues call for a greater engagement in diverse methodologies through which experiences of slow mobility

can be better understood (Büscher & Urry, 2009). Within the context of the slow movement, the practices of travel and tourism are a growing dimension of our contemporary 'life politics' through which alternative cultural and political forms of hedonism are played out. Slow mobilities may well move from being considered niche or alternative to becoming mainstream as the world grapples with issues of peak oil, increasing international demand for travel and problems of food security (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

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