# Still I Ride Part 2

*Transcript*

[Intro]

**Eden:** That’s a hard question. That’s a hard question. And I think it’s hard because in my mind, especially as someone who’s like a Woman of Colour, cyclist conjures up different images than it does for me. And so strictly speaking, I’m probably a cyclist.

**Dulce:** Yeah, you ride a bike.

**Eden:** There you go. And, but would I use that as like one of the terms to describe myself if I was writing an autobiography? Probably not. But there’s no reason why that couldn’t change. And I think it would be nice to imagine sort of a community where being a cyclist does, in fact, mean lots of different things, or actually even just seeing more people on the road who looked like me would make cycling feel more sort of open, more accessible, and actually think you can be a cyclist and have box braids. Or you can be a cyclist and struggle on hills, you know what I mean [laughs] that would just be really, really cool. But I think I try not to get too down about the fact that not many Women of Colour cycle. Instead, I think, well, I’m one who does. And hopefully somebody’s driving that car to work will see me and think "Gosh, I could try that as well."

[Transition]

**Dulce:** Cycling has always been about more than its health, economic and environmental benefits. The rise of women cyclists coincided with the age of the new, educated and independent woman. The early moral outcry over women’s cycling outfits and alleged damage to their feminine physical features may seem ridiculous today yet cycling continues to be linked to discourses about who can be visible, who can take space, and how.

Over the past decades, cycling has been represented as a self-indulgent leisure activity. The media loves portraying cycling as an unsafe annoyance to other road users; something that only middle aged men in lycra engage in and benefit from. To some extent, the cycling culture has done little to change that perception and only very recently has started becoming a little less exclusive.

My name is Dulce Pedroso and this project seeks to move beyond the discussion on barriers to cycling to understanding how those who are often not part of the cycling discourses experience and challenge dominant representations of cycling. Thanks to a grant through the Active Travel Academy Justice in and for Active Travel initiative, I was able to get m my bike and myself on the train to travel to different parts of the country to ride with and talk with nine women who all identify as a Woman of Colour and, for whom cycling is a big part of their lives.

In the previous episode we heard how the women I interviewed got into cycling and the role cycling now plays in their lives. In this second part, Zoe, Vera, Susan, Eden, Mildred and Sidrah reflect on how discourses around cycling interact with what it means to be a woman and a Person of Colour in our society especially when cycling and being visible in public space.

We recorded these conversations while riding our bikes in late spring 2021, when the UK was just starting to emerge out of lockdowns. You will hear some traffic noise in the background and the sound quality isn’t always great. Most annoyingly, the technology failed during a couple of rides, so you will not hear everyone I spoke to, but if you are interested in the research and want to find out more, you do so via the Active Travel Academy, or find me on Instagram.

I feel privileged to have been able to talk to the women who took part. They are challenging the status quo whether that is as ride leaders, social media influencers, cycling advocates, cycling industry insiders or just as individuals who are encouraging their friends and families to ride more. I hope you enjoy listening to these stories as much I enjoyed recording them!

[Transition]

**Zoe:** I really enjoy cycling. But I also really enjoy running. And I’ve also become like a running instructor in the last five or six years, and I think, like, as far as community goes, or communities go, I feel like the running community is so welcoming. And it doesn’t matter as much like how fast you are or, like, which trainers you’re wearing. Whereas with cycling, I feel like it’s still very, like, dominated and dominated by a certain demographic of male... And they have very expensive bicycles and very expensive kit. And they kind of size you up, and is whether or not you’re worth speaking to, based on what kind of bicycle you have. And that’s not really, that’s not really that welcoming.

**Vera:** And I think it takes me back to my... *careful down here, a bit blind...* takes me back to my first day cycling with a club, where I found it really annoying, and I really didn’t enjoy it when I went on club ride. And they’d all be looking at my bike. And it was this entry level bike. Like, you know, probably the only one with an aluminium frame, and everyone’s got carbon. I had no idea what a groupset was. I just, I was like, this thing has got pedals and it’s got a chain. That’s good enough. I didn’t even, like, I was still learning how to use which gear went up and which gear went down. But they were like, "Oh, you know, you should get this upgrade" or like, "you should do this" or like, "if you do this", you know, all these like tech things and talking about their carbon bikes and asking me questions. I think it put me off. First of all, it was like, I think cycling is quite an expensive sport. And I wasn’t in it to start spending my little pennies. You know what I mean, I wasn’t in it to... I wasn’t looking for something to waste money on. And so I think, certainly, that’s been like, one of the big barriers, I think. And it still is to this day for me, like every money I spend on this. Like, I know I spend a lot of time cycling and it’s money worthwhile, but it’s hard to know where to draw the line. I think it’s easy to get drawn into getting the latest upgrades. And I certainly found that in that non diverse space that I was in where it was a lot of white middle aged men. Obviously, you know, they’ve been middle aged, they’ve worked a long time, and they’ve got a lot of money....So this is a hike a bike section. We’re just going to carry our bikes over to the other side.”

Vera: Yeah, so I suppose the first one would be gender...was always like, has always been in the forefront of like cycling, even when I learned to cycle as a little child. You know what I mean? That’s like, yeah, there was always a distinct difference in way, in the ways that boys and girls were treated, especially I guess maybe in the teenage years or – because I learned how to cycle as a child, but then stopped cycling. But there’s always an attachment of gender and like, you’re a girl, you shouldn’t be having your legs across the bike or things like that. So, that’s always been like attached to it. Yeah, and even as an adult, like, you know, joining the club, you have women’s rides. So, it’s a big part of like of that, and then I think, yeah, and then more recently since joining the club, race has become part of it as well. Where you do notice, you know, the differences in like representation or lack of representation, and then it becomes a thing. Even if you don’t like, you didn’t, it’s not something I went into it thinking “Oh, yeah” but you sort of, yeah, the more like, the more time I’ve been spent cycling, the more that becomes, comes to the forefront of like, because you notice it more, and you start to question certain things.

**Vera:** … But at the same time, I’m sort of tired of being the only one in certain spaces. So it’s like, why am I going to another thing where I’m like… but sometimes I’m like, you know what I mean? Like, you know, always sticking out like a sore thumb. And now I’ve just gone to another activity where it’s more of the same. To be fair, it’s way better than engineering in that sense. But yeah, sometimes there are questions of like, you know, I’m just putting myself in another situation where I’m not as represented or, yeah.

[Transition]

**Susan:** …no, because I find it really quite, I suppose I’ve always found it quite frustrating and annoying that say, the outdoor industry, cycling itself and so many other things, is just so white and... but maybe that’s just the way that they’re representing it. I don’t... I think part of it is the way that it’s represented. So, let me see. So, for me, and the clubs that I cycle with, I am the only Black woman. So, Leicester Women’s Velo, which is the cycling club that myself and some of the Breeze champions started up. That’s one of the most diverse clubs in Leicester. So, we do have other Women of Colour, women who are East Asian and South Asian in the in the group also. I know, let me see, Leicester has tried to put more rides like cycle training to try and get more Women of Colour... So, targeting certain areas. So, like certain areas of Leicester where there’s a higher number of people who are Black and Asian to try teach cycling there as well. But then some of it, I wonder whether it is whether if you don’t see it, you don’t know that you can be it. But also, I don’t know, I’ve had... cuz, speaking to the Breeze people and trying to work it out. I think also sometimes... What, why? Why sometimes put yourself in a situation where you know that you’re going to have to contend with microaggressions or, or blatant racism and trying to explain things to end, it’s the whole trying to explain things to people as well...

**Susan:** I suppose initially, for me, the major I suppose the microaggressions, for me, are more racial, I would see it as because I think especially being the only one. I’m very, very self conscious of that. And it’s, yeah, so why, sometimes I wonder, yeah, maybe for some people it may seem... because I think when I first got into cycling, I think my family saw me as a little bit eccentric, because why am I doing something that nobody else who looks like me is doing? And it’s true. A lot of times when you put yourselves in that situation, you are going to have to put up with stuff as well. Like I remember going to, and I was thinking about this, like going through it, I remember going to a talk once where this guy was a cyclist. And I think he was a writer as well, for a magazine. And every month we would have meetings, and people would come and give presentations about their books and stuff like that, even like Leicester Women’s Velo, we took over it and did a talk about it, etc, and stuff like that. And one of the things, is the whole thing, like, I was really shocked and stunned when he actually said, you know, "the treatment that we get as cyclists, it’s like racism". And obviously, I’m the only person of colour in the whole room. And my mouth just drops. But then it’s also knowing, if you say anything, people might just think that you’re the angry Black woman in the room. And you’re just kicking off a fuss. And they’re not... and obviously it’s… and to some people, they think that racism is just, it’s just, well, it’s hate. And that’s it. I’ve had that where somebody says, "well, it’s hate, isn’t it? They hate us as cyclists. They hate Black people. That’s it, isn’t?" And so sometimes I wonder whether it is because it doesn’t make sense why there aren’t more People of Colour in the outdoors, but obviously, there are the barriers as well [rings bell] *Cheers, thanks.*

[Transition]

**Zoe**: Yeah, I mean, when I started the Kiddical Mass project that I mentioned, I realised, you know, there are women like me, who used to cycle but then stopped when they had kids. And definitely was able to get some of those mums back on bikes. But I also realised, at that point, there were loads of women who didn’t grow up in the kind of like family or culture that I grew up in, who never had learned to cycle. And I did the cycle instructor training around that time as well. And at that time, there were some regular courses that were held at the community centre in Easton. And they were free for local women to learn how to cycle. So, I started to teach on those because it was like, well, it just seemed like a lot of these women even if they wanted to go out on bike rides with their kids, they couldn’t have done it because they didn’t have the skills. So, that was actually something that I did, intermittently for about five years to teach women cycling. And it was really incredible. I would probably say, that’s one of the best jobs I’ve ever had. Because, you know, being I guess, on that journey with someone from not being able to, yeah, get on a bike and pedal to seeing them like, you know, literally like letting go and it’s so amazing! And so many women said things like, oh, after I learned how to ride a bike, I realised I could learn how to swim or do other things like it gave them the confidence in other parts of their life too. But we also saw like some women came back, pretty much every, you know, we have courses every six months and a lot of women would come and get those basic skills and then lose them, whether it was they lost them over the wintertime or other things, and then they come back again, because they didn’t have anywhere to maintain them. They didn’t have a bicycle; they didn’t have a place to store a bicycle. And I mean, some women were actually coming kind of secretly, as well, like, that their partners didn’t know that they were coming. So, yeah, I think that there’s still a bit of a gap, to build that confidence. And I mean, we’re still on the railway path. And we did use this, too, as a space once the women had those basic skills, to flex them, if you will, but a couple of women in the groups I taught, came out on their own to practice on the railway path. And then they were subjected to harassment, which again, completely put them off being on the bikes, or to some extent, even just, you know, walking and spending time in this kind of space. Which, again, is really sad, and just like highlights, but there’s so much need really, to make the public realm open, inviting for everyone. And that people, you know, regardless of their backgrounds, should feel safe and comfortable...

…I think it was, it’s because of gender, and, and ethnicity sometimes. And whether they were on a bicycle, or otherwise, I think they were just that much more visible, I think being on a bike makes you more visible than if you’re walking or... And it just puts you in a position. Yeah, but some people then feel more comfortable harassing you, unfortunately, and I mean, I’ve had sort of gender based harassment on my bike. And I guess, because I’m fairly confident, and also just a mouthy person [laughs] I always have a comeback [laughs]. It’s not very nice. And it’s annoying, but I think I could just let it kind of wash off me. Whereas other people who, you know, just learn this new skill, and still feeling, you know, quite new at it, and maybe not very confident, it’s just the last thing that you need is to have that kind of experience. And then maybe associated with being on the bicycle.

[Transition]

**Susan:** Because it’s also it’s interesting because one of the things, because I’ve talked to a friend, one of my friends, Maryam, who wears a hijab, and we were talking about cycling during lockdown. And part of it is also for me, like this countryside, because this is all area that is just on my doorstep, like my mum’s house isn’t too far from here. But obviously, it’s a real contrast. So, it is very White. And, like during the lockdown, especially when Leicester had its own lockdown, because this is Leicestershire, myself and Maryam were like saying how you feel a little bit self conscious coming out here, because you’re wondering whether people are gonna like, because people like to think, “but what are they doing here?” Because obviously, they’re not from round here. And whether that’s also sometimes a barrier to people just going places where nobody looks like you, cuz I don’t... I mean, like, I’ve had the instances where I’ve been standing, maybe waiting for somebody. And I’m in a predominantly White area, and a White person will come up to me and like say, "Can I help you?" or so, and you know [laughs], why they’re really asking, they’re not really asking to help you. They’re just sort of like...

**Dulce:** Like, “why are you here?”

**Susan:** Yes. And so there’s also the whole thing of maybe coming out to areas where, I don’t know, you don’t feel that you necessarily belong, or would feel welcome, which I would say most of the time you are, it’s just that one occasion. Yeah, and especially... not so much... Yeah, no, sometimes especially where it’s seeing Union Jacks or British flags up, especially noticing that a lot more after Brexit, also, that in the whole thing that gets... It’s nice that people are proud, but then it’s also the whole, for me what it actually really... my whole feeling towards it. And whether they actually... *Morning!*... and what actually made them think "I’ll put that flag up".

[Transition]

**Eden:** I think often it’s like this, this not only fear of discrimination, but likelihood of discrimination. That is really intimidating. And I think I mean, otherwise, perhaps not face anything so direct as that, I think, I carry that likelihood with me. When I cycle, I know that actually I stand out. I know that I appear unique. And I know that actually people are probably thinking and wanting to say and have in fact said things that are really hurtful. And I guess the idea of starting a family it’s quite scary to, you know, think about your kids experiencing something like that. But I guess the way that I imagine conquering this is to continue doing what I’m doing, to say "Actually, I’m going to keep getting out there" and even keep getting on the road. Not letting the likelihood of discrimination stop me. Because, after all, that’s how they win. That’s how they win. And we don’t, we don’t want that. We don’t want that. And I think it would be a huge loss. For me personally if something like that were to lead me to not cycle. I’ve been lucky to not have anything quite to that degree. But hopefully the more people that are there, that the less likely these scenarios will become, the more educated other communities will be that actually, this is happening, Black women ride, you know! And I think if we could send that message and send that loud and clear, it would be a better experience overall. And for the next generation, which I don’t know, it sounds weird talking about that in my 20s, but yeah, there will be another generation! [laughs]

[Transition]

While the cycling culture can be quite exclusive and this can manifest in very concrete ways, in terms of having access to a certain type of bike or in how fast or far we can ride, for example, it is also clear that the absence of People of Colour from the cycling culture runs deeper than just what and how we ride. The lack of representation can manifest in a feeling of not belonging, sticking out like a sore thumb or in actual experiences where we may feel unwelcome in a certain space. These experiences don’t necessarily originate from the cycling culture per se, but cycling exists within broader societal discourses, which is why race and ethnicity are relevant to the cycling experience of Women of Colour. The lack of representations can have real consequences, as the heightened visibility of Women of Colour who do cycle, for example, can make one more vulnerable to harassment whether that is motivated by gender or racial bias or just general negative attitudes towards cyclists.

But no one I spoke to saw these as barriers that should stop them from cycling. If anything it made them more determined to challenge stereotypes, and you are shortly about to hear a few examples of how. Mildred, for example, as one of the few women in the cycling media, uses her position to shift the focus from performance to everyday cycling and to challenge tokenism in the cycling industry. Vera talks about the role of women only cycling clubs and Sidrah describes how the WCCC, the Women of Colour Cycling Collective, opened up new cycling experiences. But just as important is to be able to ride with people from different backgrounds. Those who may have more privilege on the road or in public space more broadly, have a role in creating an environment where those who are not as represented don’t feel they have to apologise for being there as well.

[Transition]

**Mildred:** I recently wrote a piece about saddle sores. And it was aimed at everyone. I deliberately made it kind of a unisex article, but I had a full on section just related to labial discomfort because a lot of saddle sores articles don’t talk about that. *Getting out of breath…* Yeah, like I spent a lot of time on that article. I interviewed a gynaecologist, an endocrinologist and various sports coaches and bike fitters, physios. I spoke to all the people who know these things, all women. And every comment on the article is a guy saying, “the best thing to do for saddle sores is this”. And it’s just like, did you read it?! I think you’ll find I already said that in the article, if you bothered to read it. Yeah, it’s just that whole kind of assumption of like, I know better. I know more than you. Again, I just wonder if it would happen quite as much if I weren’t a woman. But it’s all speculation, you know, know.

…Yeah, I mean, I definitely feel that there have been changes. And you know, there are definitely people out there making waves and certain publications are moving in the right direction, and brands. But I do see a lot of… I see a lot of tokenism, which I think that’s very widespread and I even sort of amongst my networks have had to actually explained to certain people in the industry what tokenism means. And I’m still seeing a lot of wanting particular bodies for a photoshoot. Whereas like, it has nothing, no bearing on the actual story or, you know, the people that they want pictures don’t actually have any input to give, you know, that they’re literally just there to look a certain way. So, I think like, it’s good that we’re having conversations, and there’s definitely a thirst for it. I’ve been seeing, you know, whenever, unless you’re talking about me and my publication, but like, you know, just generally across the media and when I do see people posting about representation and diversity, and how important it is and the majority of people seem to respond really well. There are obviously a minority that are very loud that don’t think it’s needed. But that’s the internet for you.

**Vera:** So, my cycling club is mixed. When I first started, I went on a few ladies only rides. But generally, I tend to go on just mixed rides. And the reason for initially going on ladies only ride, which would be I guess, a similar thing if you have like, a Women of Colour ride, cuz at first, I was not very comfortable going on these club rides with these macho men like, you know, push it super hard. And I wasn’t… I didn’t feel like up for that. And I felt that, not that the women are slower, but that they were more inclusive and accommodating. If I did fall behind, I didn’t feel so guilty. We’re going left. And I think so that’s what I had at my disposal at the time. You know, this women’s group, and that made me feel like, my gateway into this club and feeling comfortable. And, I guess, because I never really had that option of, you know, a Woman of Colour or that other thing, but, yeah, who’s to say like, if that was available again? Yeah, I think I’d have had even more of that, like, being at ease with certain things. You know, cuz I’m, like, I don’t know, say, how I do my hair in a helmet or like...Yeah, so certain practical things like that might be just slightly different in the way we deal with things, you know. And being able to ask those questions.

…So, I mean, for me, like, not having that representation, would never stop me from doing things. That’s fine. But, and it’s sort of, but it impacts people differently and I feel like a certain level of responsibility of like, doing my part to introduce other people to it. So, I think that’s where that comes in. So that said, in my engineering career, I spent a lot of time doing STEM outreach, getting girls into science and engineering. And that sort of has always been a part of me. It’s like, if I love something, and I enjoy something, I just want to like, share it with everyone else. And so when I see people not enjoying it, maybe because they’re not, you know, they’re reluctant or they’re not aware of certain things. It’s like, ‘Oh, my gosh’, like, people are missing out. So, yeah, it’s sort of a driver to just try and get more people to discover and enjoy those same things that I enjoy. And yeah, getting more representation, again, encourages more people. You know if you see someone that... What was that saying? You can’t be what you can’t see, or be the change you want to see, sort of thing?

[Transition]

**Sidrah:** And in cycling I haven’t really seen many People, women of colour, I see men of colour even you know, I was thinking this when I was cycling yesterday in the park, I think I saw two other women of colour, loads of men of colour but it’s still predominantly middle aged white man on very expensive bikes. So, yeah, it’s…

**Dulce:** So, how did you come across WCCC?

**Sidrah:** Through Yewande. She would post about it every now and again. And I was like, oh, that would be good for me and then I was away on holiday and I was like, actually I should actually sign up for it. And I did, and it’s been really it’s been really good for me to see that there are so many other women of colour you know, out there and you know what they’re doing and you know, like I’ve never tried gravel riding but seeing other people or even you know like the endurance cycling. I didn’t know very much about it we done a bit of cycle packing but not a lot. I didn’t realise how much there was and how I actually would love to try and be involved with. Yeah, it’s definitely opened that’s probably increase you know seeing through WCCC see the different types of cycling and seeing other women and Women of Colour doing it has been like “Yeah, why have I not thought to do this before?”

…Just before… I can see the arrow now. *Sorry. All right let’s…Oh, thank you…* Yeah, cuz he gets quite aggressive with cars. And I might shout, but he chases them down and gives them a good old shouting to, or… But he as the white male he gets away with it, doesn’t he? [laughs]

**Dulce:** Do you think people would react differently if it was you?

Sidrah: 100% Absolutely. You’re already seen as an aggressive when you’re, you know, “oh, she’s so aggressive”… Because he doesn’t get that. …*Hiya. No problem at all. Thank you. No, thank you…* Definitely, I’m like, I always thank anyone who stops for me. I’m definitely a lot more thankful for everything that I get. Whereas he thinks maybe he. …*Oh, oh, thank you…* is entitled to a lot more than I do. *… thank you…* We, you know, it’s also shared experience, we’ve experienced a lot of the same rubbish situations on the bike, and it’s almost that someone else agreeing. Yeah, that was shitty, or they shouldn’t have done that makes you feel like okay, yeah, I’m entitled to that emotion, feeling whatever it is. Whereas if you’re on your own, you’re like, oh, maybe I did something wrong. And that’s a lot of when I’m on my own, I’ll maybe I did something, whereas when I’m with other people, they’re like, no. Ah, that shouldn’t have happened. Etc.

We’ve done an hour and a half. Is that okay?

**Dulce:** That’s perfect.

[transition]

**Zoe:** …but I do feel like, bicycles are, like, tools of socialism and liberation, and need to be used in that way. And I think, I mean, I have to say, I have a car, but I do feel like that is much more of a tool of capitalism, and consumerism. And, yes, bicycles can be expensive. But I think, you know, having something that allows you to get that physical activity, to get the fresh air to be outside, do something for yourself, is so important. And also taking up that space and being visible. I think if you get behind the wheel of a car, that’s kind of subscribing to, you know, all of those consumerist capitalist, sort of belief systems… you have to have, you know, all this stuff and money and materialism. But if you can be on a bike and be in that space and take it up. But that’s also a statement, and I feel like it’s something, especially women from minority ethnic backgrounds should be making, because we shouldn’t feel like we have to be on the margin of road or hidden in some SUV or something, we should be able to, you know, be in that space and belong in that space. And doing that will also facilitate us taking up space in other arenas as well.

[Transition]

Thank you for listening to this recording. And thank you again to the Active Travel Academy as well as Beryl Bikes, who also sponsored this research. And thank you everyone who took part, who took the time to ride with and talk with me and let me use these recordings.

Something I was thinking about a lot when I was doing this research was perhaps the personal toll on individuals when we are the only one in a certain space, when people may see us representing our gender or race of whatever it may be and when sometimes we put that pressure on ourselves to act as a role model. To the extent that any of it is within my power, and as far as this project is concerned, I want to absolve you from having to speak for all Women of Colour or underrepresented cyclists and invite everyone who loves cycling and cares about the problems to which cycling can offer a solution to think about how we can challenge dominant discourses in and through cycling!