**Safety-oriented On-road Practices of Adult Bicycle Riders in Brooklyn, New York USA**

**Interview Questions**

**#24, from Midwood/Marine Park, recruited and interviewed November 18, 2018.**

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*Background Questions:*

1. What is your age? (Were you born prior to this month and day in the year 2000?)

**64**

1. What is your race or ethnicity?

**Hmmm… I’m never quite sure how to answer that one. I’m Jewish, I’m – I don’t know – European Middle Eastern Northwest Asian – I guess – somewhere along that continuum.**

1. What is your gender?

**Female**

1. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

**I have two Master’s degrees. Masters of Science.**

1. How long (in months or years) have you been riding bicycles?

**I guess 60.**

1. How long (in months or years) have you been riding bicycles in Brooklyn?

**Oh gosh, do the math – 1978. What’s that? 40 years.**

1. Compared to most other bicycle riders you have observed, are you more careful, less careful, or about the same?

**I would say more careful.**

1. Have you been in any bicycle crashes that involved other vehicles or pedestrians?

**Yes.**

[Do you care to share the details…..?]

**I got doored in March of 2014 and was seriously injured. Several operations, 2 ½ years of physical therapy, and permanent stuff that will probably result in needing another surgery at some point. Not fun. And I set off metal detectors.**

[more details about her condition]

During the past 12 months…..

1. What have been the main reasons or purposes for going bicycle riding? (Commute? Errands? Transportation to other locations? Exercise? Recreation? Part of your job? Other?)

**Oh wow, I mean, I commute by bike, errands – just hauled home a 10-pound frozen roasting chicken and 12 pounds -- 10 pounds of environmentally-safe rock salt stuff plus sundry other stuff.** [Was this all on one-trip?]  **One trip. But also I do a lot of bicycle fund-raisers. So I would say, kind of all of the above.**

1. On average, how frequently have you ridden your bicycle?

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**I would say, let’s see – probably 5 times a week. Average.**

1. On average, how long (in minutes) did you ride each day you go bicycling?

**I would say it averages out to about 2 hours.**

[f/u Q: Typically then in a week, about 10 hours of riding?]

**Yeah, I guess so.**

1. How much of your bicycle riding took place when there was a lot of motor vehicle traffic?

**I would say probably 90% of it.**

1. How much of your bicycle riding took place in darkness or low light conditions such as dusk?

**A good 40%.**

*Primary study questions:*

1. From the perspective of safety, what is it like to go bicycle riding in the streets of Brooklyn?

**Um, dicey. Stressful.**

[f/u Q: Do you care to elaborate on that?]

**Even if you’re on a street that has bike lanes, there’s a lot of, you know, cars using the bike lanes as – drivers use it as their personal parking space, which forces me and any other person on a bicycle – forces us into traffic. There are a lot of cars who take, you know – drivers take red lights as a suggestion and not a law. I bicycle, because of where I work, I have to traverse Grand Army Plaza on a regular basis, and it is astounding how many vehicles will stop, look, and go at the red light, even when there are bicycle riders and pedestrians in the walking – you know, in the walk – you know, crosswalk. It’s – you know – and cars that will, like, come right up on your back and zoom to make that yellow light or that just-turning red light -- you know, ca-- drivers that are, like, zipping to make turns – things like that – and it’s (*unintelligible 2-3 words*) of always have to just be watching. And that’s not even getting into the pedestrians that step out into the street without looking, or walk in bicycle lanes, jog in bicycle lanes – things of that sort. So, I think that bike riders really are kind of at the bottom of the pecking order in terms of -- in terms of street use and safety, and have to just be incredibly vigilant.**

1. [You may feel that you’ve already answered this next question, but I’ll try it anyway.] For a bicycle rider in Brooklyn, what are the most common dangers or hazards that confront a bicycle rider?

**Well, car doors – people open car doors – it can be a passenger side door, it can be a driver side door. Oddly enough, I actually got doored by somebody who was standing outside of his vehicle, and opened it right into my path, and I couldn’t stop that fast, and I couldn’t get out into traffic that fast, and -- you know, so that’s a big hazard. And then, of course, the drivers who run lights, you know, and, you know, speed through turns.**

And with regard to those particular hazards, are there particular things you do while you’re riding to avoid them?

**Well, I try to keep my distance from cars – not always easy to do, just because, on some streets you then have drivers who, even though they actually do have plenty of room to move over and give – give you – give the adequate space to get by cars, seem to think that they need a lot more room and will blare their horns. But I try to, you know, keep any eye out, as well as watching for cars, being aware of cars coming behind me. I also -- most of the time when I ride -- (*unintelligible*) I don’t know why I didn’t today, but I usually have a blinking red light in the rear of my bike, even in the daytime. I don’t always use a headlight so much in the daytime, but I do use my rear blinking red light.**

1. Are there dangers or hazards that are difficult or impossible for a bicycle rider to see and react to?

**Well, car doors are unpredictable. I’ve heard people say: Oh, look for, you know, red lights in the cars – but that’s not always true. And I see plenty of car doors that are opened where the light isn’t even -- there’s no light inside of the vehicle that’s on, and so you don’t get that kind of clue. You know, drivers that decide to just go through lights are unpredictable. I try to – try to watch, but I had a very close call about, maybe, two weeks ago, and I hit the brakes and actually just kind of did a slide and, boom, went down, tr-- you know, because the guy made an illegal left-hand turn and cut me off. I had the green, you know, for the crosswalk, he had a red arrow and -- So, you know, it was just one of those things, you’re just constantly reacting and, you know, but – pedestrians just strolling out into the street, looking at their phones – hard to avoid, sometimes they do it intentionally, it’s almost like a dare, I dare you to hit me, you know, and I don’t want to hit a pedestrian. The la-- the one time I did was when I first came to New York and didn’t know about New Yorkers’ bad habits, and I actually had the green light, and this was – this was way before cell phones – this woman just kind of wandered out in my path, and I hit the brakes and I went down, and I was all bloodied and scraped, and she was fine – you know – but – but it’s a hazard and can – you know, I -- somebody else I know, actually he’s a lawyer, separated his shoulder trying to avoid a pedestrian. You know, it’s the same – same stuff – you know, just trying to keep one’s eyes open and be ready to stop and, you know, maneuver and kind of keep an eye for what, you know, what’s going on behind in terms of cars that are coming so that if you have to make an evasive move, you know, knowing whether you can do that safely or whether you need to hit the brakes.**

[You kind of anticipated my follow-up question] What particular things you do while riding to avoid these difficult dangers and hazards? [Is there anything else you want to add?]

**Not really – I just, you know, make sure – I mean, I’m not plugged in, I’m not – you know, no earbuds, no -- you know – nothing that would decrease my ability to hear what’s going on around me. Because I fi-- I think that that’s – to me – hearing what’s going on behind me. You know, does it sound like a truck or a school bus? I know I’d better try to, you know, make as much room as possible. Does it sound like some jackass with his, you know, foot on the accelerator, gunning it? You know, those are all really important clues, so -**

1. Please describe things you have seen other bicycle riders do that you consider to be dangerous.

**Well, I see bike riders just going out when they don’t have the light, weaving in and out of traffic. I think those are – and riding at night with no lights! Oh my gosh! You know – 20 bucks, you can get two frog lights, you put one on the front and one on the back, you know, and people will see you and – it just blows me away that -- that, that, you know – that they don’t do that. But those are biggies. And then the – and usu-- well, sometimes it’s bike riders but also guys on the electric bikes and that kind of thing and the scooters that shouldn’t be in bike lanes at all, going the wrong way. I – yeah.**

[So you’re saying, generally there are riders, including the electric and the scooters, that go the wrong way…. ] **Yeah. [**and you consider that to be dangerous.]

**Yeah, and it’s -- if you’re in a bike lane and you’re going the right way and this person’s coming at you, then it’s, like, okay now where do I go? And I usually try – I try to hold me ground. . They -- If they’re going to -- If they’re going to do something, let them move out of the lane, you know? Why should I put myself at risk? So I try to kind of position myself so that they have to make that move.**

1. If it were your job to teach other adult bicyclists how to stay safe while riding in the streets of Brooklyn, what particular instructions would you give them?

**Well, I guess my instructions would be: one, that even though a lot of the red lights and things don’t make sense and sometimes it’s even better to go – unfortunately, if something does happen, you haven’t got a leg to stand on. Maybe even literally. So that’s something to consider, that -- Make yourself visible – lights, a blinking red light, even in the daytime, can be a real plus in terms of visibility. Don’t feel like you have to race to get where you’re going – it’s not a race, you know, it’s a form of transportation. And, try to be a good ambassador, because a lot of drivers justify their bad behavior – I mean, it’s stupid and it sort of smacks of victim blame, but nonetheless, a lot of drivers use bike riders’ bad behavior as an excuse for hitting us, for doing stupid things, and for not respecting our presence on the road. So the more – I feel very strongly that the more riders who are out there that do ride their bikes responsibly and follow traffic laws, the better we can get support for our be– for our presence. And hopefully also, stay out of trouble.**

1. Imagine for a moment that, right now, you are riding on a Brooklyn street along with other traffic. Tell me all the different things you are doing to keep yourself safe and avoid a crash or collision as you ride.

**Well – So, I’ve got a helmet which has a little blinky light on top, as well as some reflective stuff. And, particularly at night, I’ll use that, because it may put me more in the line of vision than the lower-down blinky lights. I try not to get myself wedged in, like against curbs, but to hold my position, not weave or do anything unpredictable. If I can safely signal, you know, then I do. If I can signal without, say, losing my balance or something, I try to signal and act in a way that can be anticipated by the other vehicles. I guess those -- I guess those are the main things.**

1. Now I would like to throw out a few words or phrases and ask you if they trigger any additional thoughts about how to ride safely:

* Intersections

**Ha ha ha – Choke. Try to go when pedestrians are also going, or other bicycle riders, because I think that there’s a certain safety in numbers, and the more likely to get the drivers’ attention. And, don’t dash out into them, because you don’t know what’s coming. Yeah.**

* Traffic signs and signals

**They’re there for a reason, and they keep things under control -- if everybody does their part, then they usually work.**

* Right-of-way

**Well – I yield to pedestrians. I would hope that drivers would yield to me and respect my right-of-way – particularly, you know, if I’ve got a walk – there’s a walk sign and I’m at a green light and I’m trying to go across an intersection.**

* Pedestrians

**Unfortunately, unpredictable. But, I try to keep an eye out and expect the unexpected.**

* Speed

**My – you know – I feel like I’m taking a Rorschach test, but my ind—my reaction – even today, I was, like, when I was waiting to cross Ocean Parkway was: what’s the rush? If everybody just, you know, settles down, takes a deep breath, goes according to the speed limit, then -- I think studies have shown that you don’t get there that much faster. And there’s a good chance that everyone will get there, and that’s – I guess that’s the one thing that really strikes me is that – if everyone just took a deep breath and slowed down, more people would get where they’re going safely. And everybody has that right.**

* Respect

**We all need to respect each other – we’re all trying to get places, we all have the right to use sidewalks, the roads, streets, crosswalks. And drivers need to respect pedestrians’ and bicycle riders’ rights to use the -- you know, to use the streets. They’re not just there for them.**

* Trucks, buses

**Scary. I think – wow – I think bus drivers are getting the word more and more to – at least, the MTA buses are – the private buses are a whole other ballgame – you know, like, Megabuses and whatnot – but I think the City buses are really getting the message to watch out for bike riders. Often we’re kind of sharing the same space, trying to maneuver through the same areas –**

[f/u Q: Are there particular things you do, to avoid problems with trucks and buses?]

**Some-- Well, sometimes I’ll just hang back and wait until they are sufficiently ahead, if I can. And – I think that’s probably the biggest thing that I do.**

* Parked cars

**Well, again, the issue of getting doored is always there – and -- and then the ones that are parked, you know, in the bike lanes. And seem to think that they’re somehow entitled.**

[f/u Q: Since your incident with being doored, are there particular things you do to avoid that kind of thing happening again?]

**Well, I try to keep my distance. I try -- I try to, you know, estimate a kind of a safe space. I mean, there have been times when I’ve had to yell, you know, and I’ve yelled out, “Hold the door.” And sometimes, you know, I’ll see somebody, like, they’re walking to their car and they’ll start, you know, and he’s got – and I’ll yell out, “Hold it.” And they’ll look up and they’ll wait, and then I always tell them, “Thank you.” Because I think that that, you know, it’s pretty – if it’s not a conversation per se, but I think that they – you know, people remember that, and it clues them in that this was an important thing that they – you know, the fact that they took that moment and did look and did wait.**

* “Taking the lane”

**I try not to be in that situation, but there are times when it is the best tactic. It takes a certain amount of boldness but -- it’s – you know, if I can, you know, like I said, you know, use bike lanes or have that space on the side to ride safely I prefer it, but --**

* Pet peeves

**Oh boy – just, you know – the disregard for other people’s safety that I see among so many drivers. I don’t even know that there’s one – one thing. Probably running the red li-- running red lights is probably the biggest single thing that I just, you know –**

[f/u Q: You may have already answered this, but what would be your strategy to avoid a problem from that?]

**I guess I just try to look and make sure that there isn’t somebody that looks like they’re going to barrel through the intersection. I would just kind of like make that – that, you know, brief, you know, kind of assessment before, you know, shooting through an intersection myself. Yeah.**

**I actually have another pet peeve, which is actually nuts – well, sometimes, like, I’ve had to deal with it bicycling but I usually try to do a different route, but this is – where I live, actually there’s one section and then at the end it goes, it kind of goes back to the taking the lane – both streets that border – I live on a one-way street that can only be accessed one way, but there’s just an insane amount of double-parking that goes on, so that, if I’m driving, for instance, I would have to make a right-hand turn from the left-hand lane, often into other -- only to find that there are now double-parked cars on both sides of a two-lane street, forcing everybody to straddle the yellow line, and it’s like, you know – and there are pedestrians – so it’s a really really dicey situation, and I take it very slowly. I’ve had kids run across the street – and they have the green light! But you can’t see them, because everything’s, you know, they – you know, they talk about daylighting? There isn’t that, it’s -- so there’s no visual, you know – no -- you just can’t see what’s going on, and it’s really really scary. When I bicycle, I go on a route when I – I actually go the wrong way up my street. It’s the one consistent illegal thing that I do – because going the other way is so dangerous that it’s actually safer for me – but, again, so many double-parked cars on both sides of the street, and sometimes drivers that are trying to get through get very very aggressive – but I figure, you know, I – you know, I keep my eyes out for what’s coming at me on the street, and if I have to, I just pop up onto the sidewalk and get out of the way. But it’s still safer than going around and contending with all the other craziness.** [That sounds very hairy.] **And that’s just the half a block to my house, you know – that one little -- that one little couple of streets just to get to my house, you know – it’s crazy. We used to – actually at one time it used to be kind of routine - we would hear “Bump” “(screech)” -- and we had a building full of families, like, probably from Bangladesh you know, Bangladesh, Pakistan, something -- that part of the world, but kids all played in the street – they lived in these tiny little apartments and they were all playing on the street and I suspect many of them were unregistered, had no insurance whatever – the moms would come down and scoop this kid who had just been hit by a car – scoop ‘em up off the street and run them into the apartment, and we’d be sitting there going “Oh God, no.” You know, but it was like, it was like, practically a routine thing that we would hear these – this bump -- it’s a little six-year-old would go flying and, amazingly, none of them ever got killed – I don’t know what extent and kind of injuries they had, but it was crazy, and this was, like, right outside my door. My house was actually one of the wickets for their cricket game. I had to ask them what it was called, because they had to move the garbage cans to let me in and out. “What do you call those?”**

[f/u Q: You used the term daylighting a minute or two ago and I’m actually not familiar with that term.]

**Daylighting is where they make sure that the car – you know, cars, trucks – whatever -- vehicles are parked – that there’s this gap, so that vehicles and pedestrians can see around. There’s actually, somebody – there’s this guy – this is really funny -- he writes – he writes a blog, it’s called Streetsblog. And he took white, like, duct tape or something, some kind of industrial strength white tape, and he created a “daylight” on his own – he just -- he said he wanted to see what would happen, and he went out and he made it so it looks – it looked like the real deal, but it’s tape, it’s not paint, and he said it’s amazing – that cars have actually made sure to park outside of that zone. But -- And what it does is that it creates a more open visual area both for pedestrians, bike riders, drivers, because you don’t have a vehicle right there blocking off the view of the intersection.**

1. Please feel free to offer any other thoughts about the topics we have discussed today.

**No, I think you – it’s pretty good. And I hope it goes somewhere. I hope it, you know, is useful.**

[Are there any questions that you think I should have asked that I didn’t?]

**Off the top of my head -- The only, you know, the only other thing – and I haven’t really had bad experiences, but I’ve heard other women tell me that they’ve had bad experiences with other bike riders. You know, harassment, you know, aggressive behavior. I’ve had it from pedestrians, I haven’t had it from other riders, but those are things that I know have gone on.**

[comment about it not coming up in other interviews, but might be because I’m a male interviewer.]

**It might be, you know, something that, if asked about specifically, that they’ll then address it. Maybe younger women get it more than I do. I’m an old lady, you know – they just kind of look at me and go, like, really?**

Thank you very much for participating in this research study and especially for taking the time and effort to complete this interview with me.