



## Short communication

## Cyclists as a minority group?

Gabriele Prati<sup>\*</sup>, Víctor Marín Puchades, Luca Pietrantoni*Department of Psychology, University of Bologna, Italy*

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 8 August 2016

Received in revised form 8 February 2017

Accepted 12 April 2017

Available online 28 April 2017

## Keywords:

Cyclist

Minority

Vulnerable road user

Traffic

Safety

Identity

## ABSTRACT

In the social sciences, several definitions of minority group can be found. The definitions include different aspects such as power/status, number, distinctiveness, social category, group context, dispositions, and discrimination. Compared to motorized road users, cyclists are considered vulnerable road users because they lack physical protection. We argue that such definition does not capture the social and cultural aspects that characterize the membership within the group of cyclists. We offer arguments and reflections based on recent literature advocating that cyclists may share some features of the experience of minority groups. Although cyclists differ from other minorities in important respects, they manifest many of the characteristics by which minority groups are defined.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Bicycle use as a mode of transport is associated with population-level health benefits (Garrard, Rissel, & Bauman, 2012; Götschi, Garrard, & Giles-Corti, 2016; Kelly et al., 2014) as well as with reduced traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions through reduced fossil fuel consumption (de Nazelle et al., 2011; Macmillan et al., 2014; Xia, Zhang, Crabb, & Shah, 2013). However, safety considerations contribute as barriers to bicycle use and promotion (Jacobsen & Rutter, 2012). Cyclists are defined as vulnerable road users because they are unprotected by an outside shield from other motorised traffic (OCDE/OECD, 1998). Furthermore, motorized vehicles have greater mass and speed compared to bicycles (Wegman, Zhang, & Dijkstra, 2012). For these reasons, motorized vehicles, with heavier machines and higher speeds, may present a danger to cyclists. Indeed, risks for cyclists are generally higher than those for motorists (Mindell, Leslie, & Wardlaw, 2012). Haworth and Debnath (2013) have defined cyclists as minority road users because they are physically smaller, less visible, without physical protection, less stable, and more affected by road surface irregularities in comparison with dual track vehicles.

The burden of road traffic fatalities and injuries on cyclists may be not only the results of physical factors (e.g., lack of outside shield). Historical, social, and cultural factors may also play a role. The central thesis of this article is that cyclists as a group of road users have been relegated to a secondary place. In short, cyclists may share aspects of the experience of minority groups. There is evidence of discriminatory treatment (e.g., yielding behaviour at crosswalks) and disproportionate safety outcomes (e.g., overrepresentation in pedestrian-vehicle collisions) for individuals belonging to ethnic minorities (Goddard, Kahn, & Adkins, 2015; Mather & DeLucia, 2007). Although the notion that cyclists comprise a minority group

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author at: Dipartimento di Psicologia, Università di Bologna, Viale Europa 115, 47521 Cesena, FC, Italy. Tel.: +39 0547338507; fax: +39 0547338503.

E-mail address: [gabriele.prati@unibo.it](mailto:gabriele.prati@unibo.it) (G. Prati).

comparable to more obvious minorities (racial, ethnic, and religious minorities) was never articulated, [Granville, Rait, Barber, and Laird \(2001\)](#) investigated the extent to which cyclists were seen as being equal or unequal to other road users.

The present article draws on social science theory and empirical research to describe and explain the status of cyclists compared to other motorized road users. The current article is not a systematic review of the existing literature on topics such as cyclists' perceptions, cycling take-up, perceptions of cycling. Rather, the identified literature was examined and used to document our conceptualization of cyclists as minority road users, as opposed to only vulnerable road users. In other words, the aim of this article is to promote scientific discourse that challenges the current viewpoint on the status of cyclists compared to other motorized road users by applying definitions of minority group based on recent transport literature. First of all, the definition of minority group in the social sciences are briefly reviewed. Next, a discussion of whether cyclists may share some features of the experience of minority groups is offered.

## 2. How do we define minority groups?

The definition of minority would initially seem obvious. Numerically small groups are defined as minorities, whereas groups with the greatest number of members are majorities. This numeric conception of minority status is very common in the bulk of experimental research on minority–majority relations ([Kerr, 2002](#); [Simon, Aufderheide, & Kampmeier, 2008](#)). However, numerical asymmetries do not invariably signify status or power asymmetries ([Moscovici, 1994](#)). This concept can be illustrated by taking some examples of groups often identified as minorities. First, in several societies, women would be considered a (social) minority despite the fact that they compose more than half of the population. Similarly, large, yet powerless groups (e.g. Blacks during apartheid in South Africa) would have been considered a minority ([Tajfel, 1978](#)). Indeed, the term majority–minority population has been used to indicate a population in which more than half of its people belong to a minority group. In this regard, we could also mention the distinction between powerless populace – a minority group that is numerically large but powerless – and subjugated – a minority group that is numerically small and powerless ([Seyranian, Atuel, & Crano, 2008](#)). Thus, it is difficult to argue that numeric size is the only or the main feature that characterizes minority groups.

In the sociological literature, minorities are thought to be held in low esteem by the majority and to experience discrimination and unequal distribution of power and resources ([Simpson & Yinger, 1985](#)). The experience of prejudice and discrimination are central in some conceptualizations of minority such that it has been proposed its replacement by the term oppressed group ([Meyers, 1984](#)).

Such conceptualizations resemble those reported in the law literature:

“[Minorities are] groups of individuals that, without being necessarily less in number than others (think of women), are for historical, economic, political or other reasons in a position of disadvantage (of subordination, inferiority in power, etc.) compared to other groups of the same society”.

[[Torbisco Casals, 2006, p. 23](#)]

Some scholars highlighted the complexity associated with defining minority groups and proposed several criteria. For instance, according to [Wagley and Harris \(1958, p. 10\)](#) minorities have the following five characteristics:

- (1) “minorities are subordinate segments of complex state societies;
- (2) minorities have special physical or cultural traits which are held in low esteem by the dominant segments of the society;
- (3) minorities are self-conscious units bound together by the special disabilities which their members share and by the special disabilities which these bring;
- (4) membership in a minority is transmitted by a rule of descent which is capable of affiliating succeeding generations even in the absence of readily apparent physical or cultural traits;
- (5) minority peoples by choice or necessity, tend to marry within the group”.

The first three of the five characteristics may apply to most of the minority groups (e.g., ethnic, sexual, or religious minorities), while the fourth and the fifth characteristics can only be applied to a specific subset of minority groups. According to [Tajfel \(1981\)](#), there are both internal (e.g., stereotypes, self-consciousness, social movements) and external (e.g., power, social status, unequal distribution of resources) criteria of minority membership. More recently, [Seyranian et al. \(2008\)](#) proposed a multifaceted conceptualization of majority and minority groups along eight dimensions: power (i.e., group dominance, superiority, status, and influence over others), number (i.e., size of the group), distinctiveness (i.e., similarities or differences with other groups), social category (i.e., group types in society, usually nouns), group context (i.e., social, political, or economic circumstances of a group), dispositions (i.e., traits associated with minority groups), and being the source (i.e., how the group perceived or treated other groups) or target (i.e., how a group was treated or perceived by other groups) of behaviour. Although there are no consensual definitions of minority in social science, in our brief review we have indicated the most important dimensions that are relevant to minority groups. Next, we consider the question as to whether each of these dimensions can be used to describe the condition of cyclists.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5037297>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5037297>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)