

# Cyclists with more safety attire seen as 'less than fully human,' finds Australian study

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Credit: Pixabay

A national study has found cyclists who wear safety vests or helmets look 'less human' compared to cyclists who do not.

Lead researcher Dr. Mark Limb, from QUT, with Dr. Sarah Collyer, now at Flinders University, ran the [national survey](#) of 560 people as part of his work to encourage more cycling around cities by uncovering some of the potential obstacles to riding a bike.

The results have been published in the latest edition of *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour*.

Dr. Limb and Dr. Collyer, a psychology researcher from Flinders University's Caring Futures Institute, hypothesized that people wearing bicycle helmets would be perceived as less human compared to people without helmets, due to reduced visibility of eyes and hair.

But their survey found high-visibility safety vests topped the dehumanization list, followed by helmets.

"We also asked people their overall view of [cyclists](#) and found that 30 percent of respondents considered cyclists less than fully human," says Dr. Limb.

Some survey respondents who identified as cyclists themselves also used the survey to share some of their own experiences with safety and appearance.

"Some noted that they felt they are treated differently by road users depending on the attire they wear, with full Lycra cycling gear attracting more abuse than casual wear."

"One female respondent also said she deliberately left her long hair out when she cycled as she thought it helped her avoid some of the abuse her [male counterparts](#) received."

The new study was inspired by a 2019 Australian study that found more

than half of car drivers thought cyclists were not completely human and suggested that this dehumanization could be one of the triggers of deliberate acts of aggression towards them on the road.

The new study found photos of cyclists with helmets were 2.5 times more likely to be selected as 'less human' than the cyclists with no helmets, and vested cyclists were 3.7 times more likely to be selected.

"More research is needed in this area, as it raises more questions. For example, is overt safety gear like vests and Lycra seen as particularly dehumanizing because some people associate that sort of attire with cyclists who ride in groups—and those formations can sometimes be unpopular with other [road users](#)?"

"Also, many risk-taking studies have found that men are more likely to take risks than women, and more likely to look down on risk avoidance strategies. We found that men were more likely than women to think that some type of safety gear made cyclists look less than human ... so is this partly because men are more dismissive in general of risk avoidance?"

Dr. Collyer said the findings also raised questions about how we view other people in our society who wear 'high-vis' gear.

"Our study found that both males and females wearing 'high-vis' safety wear were consistently rated 'less human'," she says.

"Does this mean people see road work crews, for example, as 'less human' and, if so, what does that mean for their [safety](#)?"

"If the findings from our study cause people to think about how we view cyclists and other vulnerable road users, that will be a good outcome. What goes through our mind when we see a cyclist when we are driving? Do we think of them as someone just like us who is just trying to get to

work or home, or do we view them differently?"

**More information:** Mark Limb et al, The effect of safety attire on perceptions of cyclist dehumanisation, *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.trf.2023.05.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trf.2023.05.008)

Provided by Flinders University

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