

# More Than a Cyclist Rationale

## The Issue

Cyclists are often viewed as objects or hazards on the road rather than people, and research shows that this perception gap has a very real and dangerous impact on attitudes that lead to negative consequences for safety.

- **Dehumanisation** is typically studied in relation to attitudes towards racial or ethnic groups. A **dehumanisation scale is a psychological measurement tool** where participants rate a target group (in this case, cyclists) on a continuum or sequence of “more human” to “less human” (for example, an “ape-to-human” pictorial scale).
- In a large Australian study (Delbosc et al., 2019, Transportation Research Part F), **55% of non-cyclists and 30% of cyclists rated cyclists as less than fully human** on standard dehumanisation scales.
- Respondents who saw cyclists as “less human” were significantly **more likely to report aggressive behaviours**, such as deliberately blocking, cutting off, or driving too close to them. A more concerning incident was when **a driver deliberately ploughed into a bunch of riders from behind** (in Sydney in 2015). Seven cyclists were left with serious injuries, with one facing years of rehabilitation (SBS Sports Article by Al Hinds).
- Parallel research (Bonham, Johnson & Haworth, 2020) shows that **drivers are taught to perceive cyclists as hazards rather than as legitimate participants in the shared road environment**. When we label people as hazards or strip them of **human identity, aggression and indifference become easier to justify**. The study states that from over 200 articles published on “hazard perception” since the 1960s, about one third (approx. 33%) categorised cyclists as “hazards”.

## The Opportunity

The “**More Than a Cyclist**” campaign reframes people who ride bikes as neighbours, friends, co-workers, and family members—real people with lives beyond the bike.

By shifting language, imagery, and emotional framing, the campaign aims to reduce dehumanisation, build empathy and respect for riders, and make roads safer for everyone.



## Evidence-Based Rationale

- **Humanising reduces hostility** - When drivers are reminded that cyclists are people and not an “out-group”—a group of people perceived as different from or outside one’s own group – they show greater empathy and are less likely to express or justify aggression. (Monash University Human-Factors Research, 2019).
- **Language matters** - Referring to “people riding bikes” instead of “cyclists” helps avoid labels that trigger stereotypes. It focuses on the person before the mode of transport.
- **Representation matters** - Visual portrayals of riders as diverse, everyday individuals (not only athletes in lycra) can disrupt “othering” (fundamentally different, or less relatable than oneself) and normalise cycling as a part of daily life.
- **Reframing risk** - Safety campaigns that depict cyclists as “hazards” can reinforce fear and defensiveness. Reframing them as —**sharing space and responsibility**—creates mutual respect.



## Intended Campaign Outcomes

- Reduce driver aggression by increasing empathy and social connection.
- Improve public perception of cycling as normal, human, and community-building.
- Encourage participation by making cycling feel safer and more socially supported.
- Contribute to broader safety gains, as “safety in numbers” improves with higher ridership.
- Improved Physical Activity for individuals and reduced pollution and congestion in the environment with less cars on the road.

## Key Messages

*“I’m more than a cyclist. I’m your neighbour, your teacher, your friend.*

*I just happen to be riding a bike.”*

*“Be careful – the cyclist you are sharing the road with could be someone you know.”*



*“If we can put a human face to cyclists, we may improve attitudes and reduce aggression directed at on-road cyclists. This could result in an increase in public acceptance of cyclists as legitimate road users.”*

## Supporting Evidence

- Delbosc, A., Naznin, F., Haslam, N., & Haworth, N. (2019). Dehumanization of cyclists predicts self-reported aggressive behaviour toward them. Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour.
- SBS Sports Article: <https://www.sbs.com.au/sport/article/humanising-the-inhuman/bhr74wj0n>
- Bonham, J., Johnson, M., & Haworth, N. (2020). On constituting cyclists as hazards: The implications for safety. Transportation Research Record, 2364(1), 8-15.
- Monash University Accident Research Centre (2019). Face Off: Cyclists not human enough for driver's study.