

The Social and Emotional Aspects of Transportation Cycling

Road rage, traffic fatalities and injuries, rude behaviour, traffic congestion, smog and other health concerns. How are people coping with riding their bikes to work, school and other facilities?

As a nationally certified cycling instructor I have met a lot of people who have incorporated transportation cycling into their lives. I have witnessed a broad scale of ability and discussed a myriad of motivations about why to cycle. Overall I am impressed by people's reasons to ride and their willingness to sign up for skills courses. However, I have found that many transportation cyclists are unaware of the social and emotional aspects of cycling.

Introduction

The social aspects of transportation cycling include personal and societal responsibilities. The personal responsibilities are the physical requirements needed to ensure the safety of self and society. The societal responsibilities include communication, courtesy and contribution.

The emotional aspects of transportation cycling include the context or presumptions under which cyclists engage with traffic and development of emotions and concern for self and society, to cope with traffic.

Together, the development of a cyclist's social and emotional understanding of traffic leads to an eloquent cycling style that clearly communicates with other road users and is, by itself, a persuasive argument for the need and benefits of integrating cycling into societal norms of acceptable transportation.

Part 1: The social aspects of transportation cycling – the personal and social responsibilities.

The personal responsibilities of transportation cycling are the physical requirements needed to ensure personal safety. Being able to brake, turn and manoeuvre in traffic is of utmost importance to cyclists. Though this may seem obvious, most cyclists do not review courses or books designed to develop their traffic or bicycle handling skills. Neither do they practice the two most important safety measures in a cyclist's repertoire, emergency braking and obstacle avoidance.

Personal responsibilities become a social issue when a cyclist demonstrates poor skills or little regard for their own safety. Inept displays of cycling confuse and irritate other road users and it is reasonable to assume that a person who puts their own life in danger will likely put other lives in danger. Cyclists who acknowledge they have social responsibilities work on the physical skills needed to share the road.

The societal responsibilities of transportation cyclists include communication, courtesy and contribution. Cyclists need to develop their communication skills beyond the hand signal. Often cyclists cannot take their hands off the handlebars because they need to steer or brake. Another method of communication is needed to augment or replace the hand signal when the situation warrants. The eloquent cyclist works with time and space, road position, body position and the environment to move predictably with traffic.

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Cyclists constantly balance their own safety and courtesy for others. Courtesy is the medium through which road users share facilities. Courtesy is the ability to pay attention to the needs of others, allowing yielding and merges, while following traffic laws and conventions. Although both Communication and Courtesy assist in the societal acceptance of cycling, cyclists can do more to accelerate mass understanding of cyclists needs.

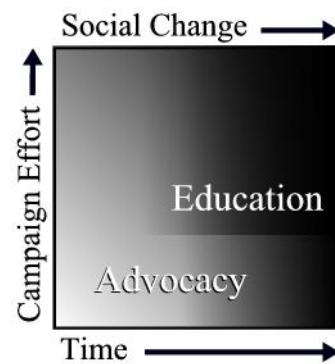
Third and last of the social aspects of transportation cycling is Contribution. Contributing to the development of society is the least realised responsibility because of the perception that great amounts of time and dedication are required. But if a cyclist does not have time for the more overt forms of societal development, they can demonstrate support for cycling by modelling behaviour that other road users can understand and appreciate. Cycling well is cycling advocacy.

More overt forms of demonstrating support for cycling are important because cycling advocates do not own, or have access to, the mass media. Cyclists are perceived as they are portrayed in the media and the mass media only picks up on controversial events. Participating in a wide range of advocacy events broadens the public perception of cyclists and cycling.

Contributing to the development of society may mean, at its most vociferous, belonging to a cycling advocacy group that organises mass demonstrations. Individual conversations are also important to cycling advocacy and education. Creating forums for dialogue, whether formally at meetings or

informally over meals benefits all of society. Cycling newsletters and magazines, as well as their wide distribution, are another important part of advocacy. Well-written print media allows people to inform and educate themselves and it also allows the public to debate the truth-value of cycling advocacy. Finally, producing and attending courses, workshops and symposia form the subset of advocacy called education that creates accelerated understanding and change in society

EDUCATION AS A SUBSET OF ADVOCACY Promoting Social Change

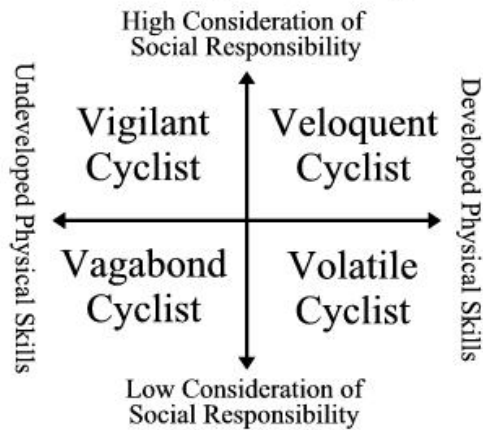


The diagram illustrates that education is subset of advocacy. Social change occurs over time with advocacy campaign efforts.

Education programs can promote social change but advocacy can exist without education. The task of education and educators is to intentionally address the concerns of advocacy and produce programs that speed social change. Many transportation cyclists seek out and benefit from educational programs and information. However, because cyclists vary in skill level and in degree of consideration of their social responsibility, existing cycling education programs do not suit all bicycle users.

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Cyclist Types by Skills and Responsibility



The diagram illustrates the relationship between the development of cycling skills and the consideration of social responsibilities that result in four types of transportation cyclists. Skills are the physical acts of controlling a bicycle such as braking and turning but also manoeuvring in traffic. Responsibilities are the consideration of social responsibility when cycling in traffic. The responsibilities include the physical requirements needed to ensure the safety of self and society as well as the societal responsibilities of communication, courtesy and contribution.

Four Types of Transportation Cyclists and how they respond to training:

1. Vigilant cyclists have undeveloped physical skills and an appreciation for the social responsibilities of cycling. They are motivated to develop their skills and social responsibilities by taking courses, reading and riding with others.
2. Veloquent cyclists have both the physical skills and a high regard for the social responsibilities of cycling in traffic. They are motivated to develop their own skills and social responsibilities as well as help develop other cyclists, and society at large, through cycling advocacy, courses, reading and riding with others.

3. Vagabond cyclists have neither the skills nor understanding of social responsibilities when on a bicycle. Most are reluctant users of bicycles. Where mental illness is not a problem, vagabond cyclists may develop the physical skills and a social conscience to ride appropriately in traffic but their ability to obtain regular food, clothing, shelter as well as meaningful employment must first be addressed.

4. The least predictable of the four types of transportation cyclist is the volatile cyclists. Volatile cyclists are physically skilled individuals who are either unaware or uncaring of the social responsibilities of cycling. Unaware volatile cyclists do not participate in cycling courses because they feel there is nothing more to learn about cycling. Training programs should expose the unaware volatile cyclists to personal and social development rather than skill development. The self-development of this cyclist will, most likely, come with time (age) and experience (trial and error).

Uncaring volatile cyclists are both skilled and anti-social. Their careless application of social responsibilities may be due to sub-cultural affiliations that repudiate the social norms of cycling. Development of the uncaring volatile cyclists would be challenging and is not within the realm of current cycling education programs.

The social aspects of transportation cycling can be achieved with patience and practice. When cyclists develop themselves and take the time to communicate with other road users, when they are courteous and safety minded, and when they contribute to the

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development of society, their cycling becomes an eloquent model for all road users to follow.

Part 2: The emotional aspects of transportation cycling

Transportation cyclists realise that the difference between a good day cycling and a bad day is their emotional reaction to traffic. Along with the physical skill development, cyclists need to develop attitudes that safeguard their emotions and help them cope with traffic.

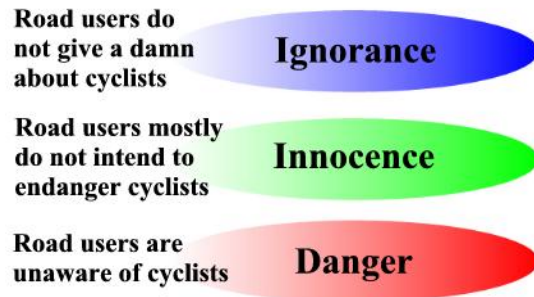
The emotional experiences of a cyclist are wrought on the many close encounters in a season of cycling. Cyclists who can use their experiences to develop a comprehensive emotional context for cycling become better cyclists, cycle more often and cycle throughout their life. Cyclists who cannot safeguard their emotions become bitter with the riding experience, frustrated with other road users and stop riding their bike when they can no longer justify the emotional effort required for transportation cycling.

The ability to safeguard emotions and learn to cope with traffic is based on a variety of presumptions or emotional contexts for transportation cycling. In fact, the inability to develop coping skills is often due to inflexible emotional contexts for cycling. Becoming an emotionally proficient cyclist requires flexibility of thought and the ability to reflect on changes within oneself, society and where those two entities meet, traffic.

Vigilant and Veloquent cyclists reflect on their emotions and develop methods to cope with the stressors of interacting with motorists. Though every transportation cyclist has his or

her own personal-emotional context for cycling, contexts generally follow one of three re-occurring themes.

CONTEXT & PRESUMPTIONS about motorist behaviour



This diagram illustrates three emotional contexts and presumptions about motorist behaviours. Presumption of Ignorance: Other road users do not give a damn about cyclists. Presumption of Innocence: Other road users mostly do not intend to endanger cyclists. Presumption of Danger: Other road users are unaware of cyclists.

When cyclists adopt any one of these presumptions as true, they modify their behaviour in traffic to fit the context. For the cyclist who believes other road users do not give a damn about cyclists, riding predictably isn't always necessary because motorists don't recognise or expect good road behaviour. Cyclists who believe that other road users mostly do not intend to endanger cyclists ride predictably and expect the same of other road users. Cyclists who believe other road users are unaware of cyclists remain vigilant at all times and ride as if motorists can't see them. There are two variants of this context: 1) cars are dangerous and 2) traffic is a war where riding is the battle.

There are deficiencies with all three themes. The presumption that motorists are ignorant, and therefore wouldn't recognise good cycling behaviour, is nothing but an excuse to

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ride poorly and it does nothing to improve all road behaviour. As a coping technique it is simple and effective because motorists are always to blame. This context does not allow for emotional growth because the cyclist does not reflect on the truth-value of their presumption. This context is closely associated with Vagabond and Volatile cyclists and often with Vigilant cyclists until they further develop their awareness of social responsibility.

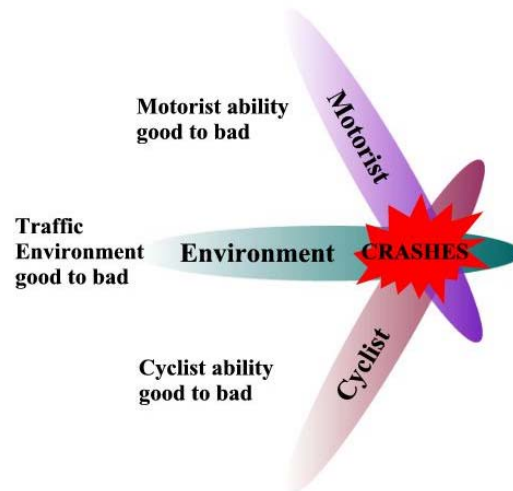
The presumption that other road users mostly do not intend to endanger cyclists is sociable and generous but not entirely dependable for accident avoidance. As a coping technique it is difficult to constantly rationalize but, if the cyclist reflects openly on his or her experience, this presumption will lead to emotional development and a better understanding of traffic. This presumption of riding is associated with Vigilant and Veloquent cyclists before they learn to reflect on changes within them self, society and traffic.

Lastly, the presumption that motorists are unaware of cyclists leads to constant stress. These hyper-vigilant cyclists are all alone with the rest of traffic instead of being a part of it. As a coping technique this presumption rates very poorly because of the cognition required and anxiety produced by manoeuvring through traffic as if anything could happen. This presumption of riding is associated with Volatile and Vigilant cyclists until they develop a sense that they must interact with traffic to understand and survive it.

Cyclists, who adhere to emotional contexts presuming ignorance, innocence and danger, become emotionally overwrought because they are constantly reacting to their

perception of motorists motivation or traffic itself. To diffuse emotions, a more comprehensive emotional context is required to make sense of traffic and concerns for self and society.

INTER-ACTIONIST CONTEXT FOR TRANSPORTATION CYCLING



This diagram illustrates the inter-actionist context for transportation cyclists. This model shows three variables that Veloquent cyclists consider during each ride and try to improve upon whenever possible. Motorist ability ranges from good to bad. The Traffic Environment ranges from good to bad. Cyclist ability ranges from good to bad. Crashes occur at the far end of each range where two or all three of these ranges meet.

Cyclists safeguard their emotions and cope better with traffic when they accept that both lack of ability and poor environmental conditions lead to crashes. Poor motorist behaviours are countered with excellent cyclist behaviours. Presuming motorists' behaviours are motivated by Ignorance and Innocence, or presuming all traffic is dangerous all the time, is stressful and creates emotional reactions of hate and disappointment. Accepting that behaviours need development, not motivations, gives transportation cyclists, advocates and educators a

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place to make a difference. The Inter-actionist context suggests there is room for personal and social development and prevents uncalled for emotional reactions.

Transportation cycling requires mental and physical skills that can compensate for other road users and the environment. Because these skills take time to develop and some road users never do develop them, it is important that other facilities co-exist, with major traffic routes, where cyclists can hone their skills in an environment that favours cyclists and reduces interaction with motorists.

Cyclists choose their route to accommodate their emotions and presumptions, not their physical skill level alone. Vigilant cyclists, those with undeveloped skills but with a moderate degree of social responsibility, prefer bike routes even when it means longer travel

times. Veloquent cyclists, those with a moderate degree of skills and social responsibility, have developed a comprehensive context to deal with traffic. They have the ability to ride any route and choose their route by the amount of time available and how they feel that day.

Cyclists need to develop attitudes that safeguard their emotions and they need to develop physical skills to help them remain emotionally and physically intact for another day of riding. Accepting there are personal and societal responsibilities, transportation cyclists become better communicators, understand the need for courtesy and contribute to their own and societal development by participating in advocacy any way they can.

Cycling well IS Cycling Advocacy