Chapter 7

Fear of Cycling

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Cycling has formed part of UK society for over a century. For much of that time, the bicycle was the most numerous vehicle on the roads, a major means of everyday mobility (Alderson, 1972; McGurn, 1999). But the amount of cycling in the UK has fallen dramatically and more or less continuously over the last half century; it accounted for 37 per cent of all journeys in 1949, but accounts for only around 1 per cent today (Department for Transport, 2002). The number of cycles bought has never been higher, yet the number of cycling trips made on UK roads has never been lower.

Across government, cycling is now seen as 'a good thing'. But despite growing pro-cycling rhetoric and policy in the UK, many people appear remarkably reluctant to 'get on their bikes'. Why? Discussion about impediments to cycling tends to concentrate on lack of good cycling infrastructure, such as cycling routes and cycle parking. Seemingly insurmountable barriers, such as hilly topography, high levels of rainfall and cold winters, are also considered influential (see Parkin, Ryley and Jones, this volume). But what about emotional barriers to cycling?

Numerous studies have shown fear to be a significant barrier to cycling (British Medical Association, 1992; Davies et al., 1997; Gardner, Ryley and TRL, 1997; Gardner and TRL, 1998; Pearce et al., 1998; Ryley, 2004). One study based on quantitative and qualitative research, *Barriers to Cycling* (CTC et al. 1997, 7), concludes 'the most prominent practical barriers perceived to be deterring potential cyclists were danger and safety'. The UK Department for Transport (2007, 2) reports that 47 per cent of adults 'strongly agree that "the idea of cycling on busy roads frightens me"'. Nor is fear of cycling confined to the UK. Gary Gardner (2002, 76) reports how, in 'surveys in three U.S. cities in the early 1990s, more than half of respondents cited lack of safety as an influential factor in their decisions not to cycle'. This fear of cycling impinges on cycling promotion; for example, one person who tried to encourage colleagues to cycle to work during National Bike Week notes that: 'Several people have criticised my efforts as irresponsible as cycling is "Dangerous" and by encouraging it we are putting employees at risk' (email to cycle-planning discussion group, June 2004).

So fear is an important *emotional* barrier to cycling. Yet this fear of cycling has been insufficiently analysed; many efforts have been made to challenge it, but few to understand it. This chapter aims to explore and better understand contemporary fear of cycling. I begin by setting fear of cycling in a wider context; we live in fearful societies and it is possible to fear cycling for many reasons beyond the fear of having an accident on which I concentrate, at least to begin with. I move on to critically examine some measures which are apparently designed to improve cycling's safety; road safety education, cycle helmet promotion, and the separation of cyclists from motorised traffic.

Later in the chapter I broaden my interest in fear, and attempt to make connections between the constantly produced fear of cycling and common media representations of 'the cyclist' as a figure to be feared. If the first half of the chapter tends to prioritise people's fears of the accident and physical injury via cycling, I here switch to consideration of people's existential fears, of having to negotiate with (their representations of) cyclists and with the possibility of themselves becoming a cyclist. I contend that fear of the accident and fear of being pushed towards cycling (and thus towards adopting a cycling identity, becoming 'a cyclist') are related, and together constitute contemporary fear of cycling. Cycling promotion needs to recognise and develop more effective strategies to overcome both these fears, of cycling as a practice to be feared and of the cyclist as a figure to be feared. I should perhaps make it clear, for what is to follow, that I write not only as a sociologist but also as a cycle campaigner.

The Complexities of Fear of Cycling

Before I concentrate my analysis on people's stated fears of traffic and accidents whenever they engage with the idea of being or becoming a cyclist, I want briefly to note how these are not the only fears of cycling. We know far too little about people's fears of cycling, but such fears certainly extend beyond fear of the accident. Fears of cycling may also include fear of being on view, of working one's (perhaps 'unsightly', perhaps 'sightly', certainly gendered) body in public, fear of harassment and violence from strangers (on safety fears of using cycle paths, see McClintock, 1992, 28; Harrison, 2001, 23, 35; Ravenscroft, Uzzell and Leach, 2002; Ravenscroft, 2004). The city is full of fear, which is partly why and partly because people move in cars. Increasing car use can be seen as a retreat from the 'public' world of the city, a means of cocooning oneself and one's family from 'the outside', from fear of traffic but also from dangerous places and people. Cycling puts the person back into this fearscape in a much less mediated way.

The car is experienced as an extension of the home for people (mainly women) who are fearful of public space (Davidson, 2003, 71, 102). In contrast, the bicycle affords no shield from the (masculine) gaze.[1] There is surely an existential vulnerability attached to performing physical activity in public space. Especially for novice and returning cyclists, the potential psychological barriers are massive; people are afraid of appearing inept, and (although this situation is thankfully changing) most people do not currently receive formal training in either how to ride or how to repair a bike. It is easy to trivialise someone's fear of feeling embarrassed and humiliated by falling off a bike in public, but it is significant (although if you do want light-hearted examples, see Moore, 2002). Importantly, maintaining composure is harder for people perceiving themselves as 'under the watchful eyes of others' (Davidson 2003, 78). For many people, a fear of cycling in public no doubt forms a major barrier to cycling (and partly explains people's preference for pedalling static machines in gyms and at home).

Then there is fear of using one's body, of sensing one's body, of getting sweaty, of experiencing 'hard work', of hills. Other fears are more connected to issues of identity and include the fear of ridicule, of losing status, of riding a gendered, classed, raced and stigmatised vehicle, of undermining one's existing sense of identity; fear, in other words and as we will see later, of becoming 'strange'.

All these fears of cycling are socially, geographically and historically variable. Unequally socially distributed, they will tend currently in the UK to be greater among women than men, among those people riding with children than those without, and among ethnic groups with little history and experience of cycling. Unequally spaced, they will tend to be lesser in places with higher levels of cycling and where cycling is correspondingly closer to 'ordinary practice', such as Cambridge in the UK, or the Netherlands and Denmark. Fears of cycling also shift over time. High-wheeling cyclists feared 'coming a cropper'; in the late nineteenth century, many women undoubtedly feared the damage cycling might do to their respectability (Simpson, 2001; this volume); and today, we have this omnipresent fear of traffic.

Finally, before returning to specific focus on that fear of traffic, I want to note how fears of cycling in general ~~are~~ culturally embedded, and therefore hard to change. Fear is never a solitary emotion; it is not only constructed by wider social forces but also crucially mediated by key social relations. In such social relations, care and commitment are performed and demonstrated through advising someone against engaging in 'risky' behaviours. So that, increasingly rooted in a landscape of fear, exercising the agency required to choose cycling is undermined by other people's fears. The anxieties of family, friends and colleagues can all work against a desire to cycle, just as they can encourage currently more socially-acceptable demonstrations of care through car-dependent practices, such as the chauffeuring of children (Maxwell, 2001).

Existing Accounts of Fear of Cycling

Although below I explore how fear of cycling – and more specifically a fear of traffic – is constructed, I am not suggesting that fear of cycling is somehow wrong, or not real. To the contrary, we must recognise the realities of the situation currently confronting cyclists. The UK is a massively automobilised society (Sheller and Urry, 2003; Urry, 2004), its roads dominated by cars. Year on year, more vehicles take to the roads, and these vehicles keep getting bigger, and – certainly for those on the outside – more dangerous (on the SUV [Sport Utility Vehicle], see Vanderheiden, 2006).

Different studies demonstrate the increasing dangers faced by cyclists and pedestrians on our roads (Dean, 1947; Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg, 1990; Davis,

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[1] There is an important tension here between apparent visibility and apparent invisibility. The 'I didn't see the cyclist' argument following a collision shows that even though people cycling feel very visible, in fact many car drivers simply fail to notice them. This inability of people in cars to see people on bikes is I think connected to cycling being 'out of place' on today's roads, something I discuss later in this chapter.

1992/93; Adams, 1995). A key insight of these studies is that advances in road safety tend to be unequally distributed. For instance, John Adams (1995, 125) argues that making the use of seat-belts compulsory 'had no effect on total fatalities, but was associated with a redistribution of danger from car occupants to pedestrians and cyclists'. Motorists wearing seat-belts are told they are safer and they start to feel safer. This increased sense of safety promotes an overall decline in standards of driving. Those on the outside of cars become objectively less safe, and therefore sensibly more afraid. Thus, 'cyclists and pedestrians have responded, and are likely to continue to respond, to the increasing threat of motorized traffic by withdrawing from that threat' (ibid., 125).

Fear has driven huge numbers of cyclists off UK roads (Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg, 1990). This downward trend in levels of cycling results in the remaining cyclists feeling less safe because those in a minority generally perceive themselves to be less safe than those in the majority. But these remaining cyclists are also objectively less safe, because other road users become less considerate of cyclists as cyclists become less common (and more strange) and as these road users themselves become less likely to also sometimes cycle. The more people who cycle, the safer cycling becomes; the fewer people who cycle, the more dangerous cycling becomes (Jacobsen, 2003).

In the context of a car-centred culture with low levels of cycling, then, fear of cycling might be seen as wholly appropriate. But despite its worsening context, cycling's advocates remain understandably keen to present a more favourable view. Typically, those promoting cycling attempt to counter perceptions of cycling as unsafe with 'objective' risk assessments. Thus, the risk of being killed while cycling on UK roads remains 'very low', or 'negligible'. Roads may not always be pleasant places to cycle, but they are still relatively 'safe'. This kind of claim is often accompanied by statistical analyses, which either demonstrate how unlikely it is for someone to die or be seriously injured whilst cycling, or favourably compare the risks of cycling with the risks of using other modes of mobility, particularly car travel, or even other leisure pursuits. Field (1994), for example, asserts that cycling is less risky than either cricket or horse riding. That such comparisons are not new demonstrates fear of cycling to be long-standing: a Cyclists' Touring Club leaflet of 1959, for example, states 'Your chances of being involved in an accident are 1 in 19 if you drive or ride on a motor-cycle; 1 in 32 if you drive or travel in a car; but only 1 in 155 if you ride on a bicycle' (Cyclists' Touring Club, 1959). On his cycle advocacy website, Ken Kifer states bluntly: 'The belief that cycling in traffic is dangerous is widespread but cannot be supported through accident and fatality statistics' (www.kenkifer.com/bikepages/traffic/fear.htm, last accessed 4/2/07).

Another response to the perception of cycling as dangerous is to point out that *not cycling* is more dangerous; the health benefits of cycling easily exceed the small risk of death or injury, and non-cyclists forgo an important means of health and fitness (Seifert n.d.). The British Medical Association (1992) estimates the health benefits of cycling to outweigh the hazards by a factor of 20–1. In an article titled 'Is Cycling Dangerous?', Ken Kifer argues that 'cycling is much less dangerous … [than] the fearmongers insist and … has compensating benefits which are more important than the risks involved' (www.kenkifer.com/bikepages/health/risks.htm, last accessed 4/2/07).[2]

So on the one hand, we have understandable fear of cycling based on people's perceptions of the risks of accident and injury. On the other hand, we have well meaning attempts to challenge these perceptions and the fear they generate. My concern here is that denial of cycling's danger tends too quickly to dismiss people's genuinely held fear of cycling, and effectively blocks consideration of other factors which may be involved in the construction of that fear. Therefore, this chapter does not take sides in the debate over whether cycling ought to be perceived as dangerous and thus as a practice to be feared. It instead follows another path, one which explores some of the mechanisms which might contribute to perceptions of cycling as dangerous, and thus to be feared. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell note how 'factuality can be understood as a situated product of a range of social practices', and we must attend to 'the procedures through which some part of reality is made to seem stable, neutral and objectively there' (1994, 50). We might therefore do better to try to understand the procedures which produce a fear of cycling.

Constructing Fear of Cycling

Fear of cycling belongs to a fearful culture (Massumi, 1993; Glassner, 2000). UK sociologist Frank Furedi (2002) argues that western societies have become dominated by a 'culture of fear'. We have never been so safe, yet never have we been so fearful. '"Be careful" dominates our cultural imagination' (ibid., viii). We belong to 'a culture that continually inflates the danger and risks facing people' (ibid., xii). 'Activities that were hitherto seen as healthy and fun … are now declared to be major health risks' (ibid., 4). What is more, 'to ignore safety advice is to transgress the new moral consensus' (ibid., 4).[3]

Our fears are produced (Sandercock, 2002), which is why they are subject to such variation. Obviously, some fears take more work to produce than others. Most people fear a lunging shadow down a dark alleyway. Fewer people fear waste incinerators, nanotechnologies or the policies of the World Trade Organization (Goodwin et al 2001, 13) because those fears are more difficult to produce. Fear of cycling is neither inevitable nor 'natural' and needs similarly to be produced. It also always exists relative to other fears. For instance, cycling in London became substantially less fearful, relative to travel by bus and underground train, in the wake of the bomb attacks on public transport in July 2005; consequently the level of cycling increased significantly immediately after the bombings, but then dropped back down again (though remaining above its previous level) once people's fears of travelling by underground and bus had subsided (Milmo, 2006). Fear of cycling is most effectively produced through constructions of cycling as a dangerous practice. By saying that cycling is constructed as a dangerous practice, I am not denying that cyclists are really injured and killed on the roads; rather I am noting how people's fears of these (im)probabilities of injury and death are culturally constructed.

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[2] The tragic irony of these statements is that Ken Kifer was killed by a speeding drunk driver whilst out cycling in September 2003.

[3] I have the increasingly common advice to 'always wear a cycle helmet' in mind here, and that is an issue which I will consider in some detail later in this chapter.

The rest of this section explores three ways in which cycling is constructed as dangerous, and thus a contemporary fear of cycling is produced; road safety education, helmet promotion campaigns, and the increasing separation of cycling from motorised traffic. The irony, of course, is that these interventions are responses to a fear of cycling, clearly aimed at increasing cycling's safety. But I will demonstrate how, contrary to intentions, each intervention actually tends to exacerbate fear of cycling, and sometimes literally invokes it in order to promote the 'solution'. Fear is also used for financial profit in the sale of safety equipment; for example, adverts for high visibility clothing cite the numbers of cyclists killed and injured on UK roads, and claim starkly, 'you must be seen' (www.vissiwear.com; last accessed 4/2/07).

Constructing Fear of Cycling, 1: Road Safety Education

With accelerating automobility, the tension between the street as a space for communal sociality and as a space for cars had, by the 1930s, become acute. The unruly social worlds of the street and the car's increasingly voracious appetite for space could not peaceably co-exist, and one or other needed to be tamed.[4] Motoring organisations such as the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club argued that children should be taught to keep out of the car's way, and road safety education was born, as an alternative to preserving streets for people (some local attempts were made to institute the latter, an early – but not widely followed – example being the Salford play streets scheme of the 1930s).

The transformation of streets for people into roads for cars, perhaps inevitably, produced death and injury. By 1936 concerns about the alarming rise in cyclist casualties had led to the idea of a cycling proficiency scheme, eventually adopted nationally in 1948 (CTC, 2005). To stem the carnage, cyclists must be trained to deal with the new, dangerous conditions. But things could have been otherwise. A 1947 book by J.S. Dean, former Chairman of the Pedestrians' Association, is instructive here. In his 'study of the road deaths problem', *Murder Most Foul*, Dean's basic tenet is that, 'as roads are only "dangerous" by virtue of being filled with heavy fast moving motor vehicles, by far the greatest burden of responsibility for avoiding crashes, deaths and injury on the roads should lie with the motorist' (Peel n.d., 3). Yet road safety education concentrates not on the drivers of vehicles, but on those who they have the capacity to kill. Dean saw how placing responsibility for road danger on those outside of motorised vehicles might lead, by stealth, to placing of culpability on those groups, and *Murder Most Foul* is a tirade against the placing of responsibility for road accidents on children.

The dominant assumptions on which UK road safety was originally based have remained in place. Today, rather than producing strategies to tame the sources of danger on the road, road safety education tries instead to instil in 'the vulnerable', primarily school children, a fear of motorised traffic, and then to teach them tactics to escape from road dangers as best they can. The title of the UK Government's highway code for young road users is *Arrive Alive* (Department for Transport, 2000a). The message such a title sends to children is not how much fun and freedom can be derived from sustainable modes of mobility such as cycling and walking; rather, it tells children that the world outside is a dangerous place, full of potential accidents, and they had better ensure they 'arrive alive'.

The introductory paragraph to Lancashire County Council's child cyclist training scheme, *Passport to Safer Cycling*, likewise seems deliberately designed to instil fear. It states how in Lancashire 'the number of cycle casualties reported to the police in 2001 totalled 421; of these 141 (33%) were children less than 16 years of age. Information from hospital casualty departments suggest that there are many more casualties that do not get reported' (Lancashire County Council, 2004). The stated aims of the scheme have nothing to do with pleasure (in fact, an objective is to help the child 'understand the difference between riding and playing on cycles'), or with thinking about and attempting to change the current uses of the road. On the contrary, they focus firmly on the practices and psychology of the individual child: 'to encourage and develop safe cycling' and 'to enable trainees to consider their personal safety and develop a positive attitude towards other road users' (Lancashire County Council, 2004).

Roads are full of danger, and it is children who must be afraid and take care. Road safety educators inculcate 'safety-consciousness' in various ways: they provide children with a variety of reflective gadgets; children are encouraged to wear high visibility clothing and cycle helmets; and exercises in road safety literature teach children to walk or cycle by convoluted routes because they are 'safer' (see Department for Transport, 2000b). The road safety industry thus strives to reduce casualties by inculcating fear in children, and giving them not incentives but disincentives to walk and cycle.

A minority alternative approach, road danger reduction, concentrates instead on making travelscapes less dangerous per se, by for example, reducing the numbers and speeds of cars, and improving enforcement of speed limits. In other words, current road safety education, perhaps reframed as citizenship studies in mobility, could be very different. We do not have to teach tomorrow's adults to fear cars, or to adapt to the inevitability of motorised metal objects tearing through their lives by incarcerating themselves in such vehicles (Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg, 1990). The Cyclists' Touring Club fought through the first half of the twentieth century against the compulsory use of rear lights by cyclists. One leaflet from the 1930s (Cyclists' Touring Club, n.d. a) states that the 'use of any rear warning weakens the sense of responsibility of the driver of an overtaking vehicle to avoid running down a vehicle or pedestrian in front of him'. We could educate children into putting such lost accountability onto the car. The relevant argument, then as now, is that danger comes not from cycling, but from cars. The compulsion on the cyclist to 'be seen and be safe' puts the onus to change on the wrong group. The resonance with the highly controversial contemporary issue of helmets is clear.

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[4] We will see later how also at this time a similar tension between the bicycle and the car was becoming pronounced.

Constructing Fear of Cycling, 2: Helmet Promotion Campaigns

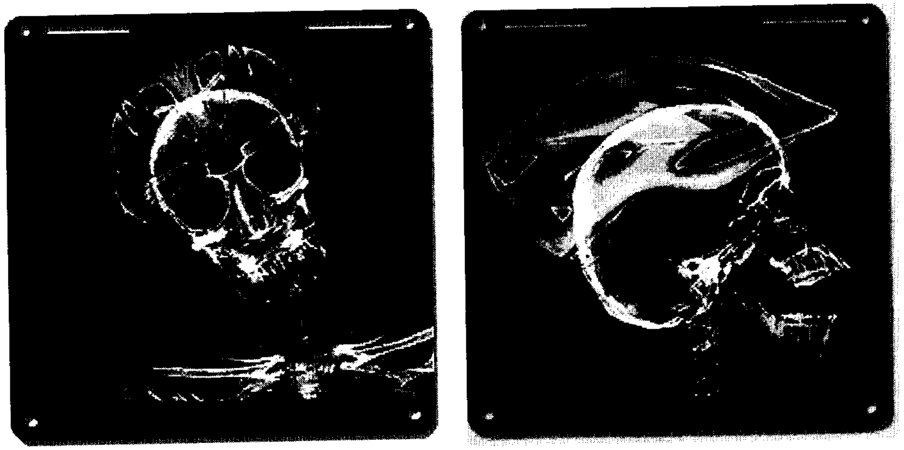
Like road safety education, campaigns to promote the wearing of cycle helmets effectively construct cycling as a dangerous practice about which to be fearful. Such campaigns, and calls for legislation to make cycle helmets compulsory, have increased over the last decade. In 2004, a Private Members' Bill was tabled in the UK Parliament, to make it an offence for adults to allow children under the age of 16 to cycle unless wearing a helmet. Also in 2004, the influential British Medical Association, in a policy turnaround, voted to campaign for helmets to be made compulsory for all cyclists (for comprehensive detail on these developments, and debates around cycle helmets in general, see www.cyclehelmets.org). Helmet promotion, especially to children, has become an established part of the UK road safety industry. In 2005, Lancashire County Council's road safety team ran a 'Saint or Sinner?' tour, with anyone cycling without a helmet deemed sinful; sinners were given the opportunity to repent by pledging to 'mend their ways', and always wear a helmet when cycling (Lancaster and Morecambe Citizen, 2005).

Helmet promotion is hugely controversial among UK cycling organisations (Hallett, 2005). The 2004 Parliamentary Bill was unanimously opposed by the cycling establishment, with every major cycling organisation and magazine rejecting helmet compulsion (Cycle, 2004). The groups opposing the Bill included CTC (formerly The Cyclists' Touring Club, and the UK's largest cycling organisation), London Cycling Campaign, the Cycle Campaign Network, the Bicycle Association, the Association of Cycle Traders, British Cycling, Sustrans and the National Cycling Strategy Board. These groups are not anti-helmet, but argue for the individual's right to choose. This section cannot hope to do justice to the various arguments for and against (the imposition of) helmets, which can anyway be found elsewhere, but key issues include:

- *Efficacy at the individual level.* Does wearing a helmet reduce or increase the risk of sustaining a head injury? Here there are three relevant concerns. First, the technical capacities of helmets, which are designed only to resist low-speed impacts, and only then if correctly fitted (Walker, 2005). Second, the concept of risk compensation which suggests that both cyclists wearing helmets and motorists in their vicinity possibly take less care (Walker, 2007), which therefore increases the likelihood of collision; in implicit recognition of the existence of risk compensation, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents in its leaflet, *Cycle Helmets*, feels it necessary to caution 'Remember: Helmets do not prevent accidents … So be just as careful' (RoSPA n.d.). Third, the greater size of the head, and so increased probabilities of impact, resulting from wearing a helmet;
- *Efficacy at the aggregate level.* Do helmet promotion campaigns make cycling more or less safe, overall? There is evidence that cycling levels decline when helmets are promoted and collapse when they become compulsory (Liggett et al 2004, 12). Australia, the first country to make cycle helmets compulsory, witnessed a post-compulsion fall in levels of cycling of between 15 and 40 per cent (Adams, 1995, 146). According to 'the Mole' (2004, 5), in Melbourne 'compulsion reduced the number of child cyclists by 42% and adults by 29%'. Because cycling tends to be safest where there are many cyclists (Jacobsen, 2003), and most dangerous in places with few cyclists, and because helmet promotion campaigns reduce the overall numbers of cyclists, helmet promotion increases the risk of cycling. The relationship between increased cycling and increased safety appears to be confirmed by the experiences of the Netherlands and Denmark, which have high levels of cycling, very low rates of helmet wearing, and low rates of death and serious injury among cyclists;
- *Equity.* Hillman (1993) claims that cyclists are at lower risk of head injury than motorists, pedestrians and children at play, yet none of those groups is encouraged to wear helmets (see also Kennedy, 1996). Risk theorist John Adams suggests that equitable application of the logic applied to cycle helmet promotion would result in 'a world in which everyone is compelled to look like a Michelin man dressed as an American football player' (1995, 146)!

This should be sufficient detail to indicate why the issue of cycle helmets creates so much interest and controversy among health promotion and accident prevention experts, as well as cyclists. But in the context of my overall argument, my chief point here is to note how helmet promotion campaigns play on people's existing fear of cycling, and contribute to the reproduction and magnification of that fear. One recent UK Government campaign demonstrates my claim in a particularly vivid way.

In 2004, the UK Department for Transport launched 'Cyclesense', a multi-media 'teenage cycle safety' campaign centred on a series of images of skull X-rays and helmets (see www.cyclesense.net; last accessed 4/2/07). Various captions accompany the different images of the helmet-wearing skulls. The script alongside X-ray 01 reads: 'It's no joke: cycling is a fun, convenient and healthy way to get around – but if you don't follow basic safety guidelines the results could be very unfunny' (Figure 7.1). It continues that 'in 2001 nearly 3000 cyclists between 12–16 were



Figures 7.1 & 7.2 **X-ray images used in the UK Department for Transport's 'Cyclesense' helmet promotion campaign, see www.cyclesense.net**

killed or injured on the roads. If you want to protect yourself you must take your cycle safety seriously'. The text accompanying X-ray 02, a helmeted and apparently laughing skull, reads: 'It's no laughing matter', before insisting 'Get yourself a helmet. No joking – in a study of admissions to an A&E Department nearly 50% of injuries suffered by cyclists were to the head and face' (Figure 7.2). Elsewhere on the Cyclesense website, on the 'Protection' page, the text reads: 'If you like your face and head the way it is, then wear a helmet!'.

These captions make clear the central and over-riding message of the campaign; if you want to cycle and keep your skull intact, you *must* wear a helmet. The campaign portrays cycling as dangerous, and instils fear. CTC responded angrily to the images. A rare letter to all members from CTC's Director, Kevin Mayne (2004), set out potential consequences of the imagery; children could be frightened from cycling, and their parents and teachers might feel reluctant to let them cycle. Mayne writes: 'CTC believes [these images] will do huge damage to the perception of cycling as a safe, enjoyable, healthy activity'; and such campaigns 'raise unfounded anxiety about the "dangers" of cycling, and are known to drive down cycle use'. Against the context of broad governmental support for cycling, Mayne's tone becomes incredulous:

> Images which link cycling with X-rays of skulls can only mean one thing – if you cycle you will end up hospitalised or dead. *What sort of message is that to give to young people? ... The last thing the Government should be doing is frightening children into NOT cycling!* (Mayne, 2004, original emphasis)

Of most relevance here is that every call for cyclists to wear, or be forced to wear, helmets demands the association of cycling with danger, and thus the production of fear of cycling. Whilst I am happy to align myself with CTC's position, my wider point is that the promotion of cycle helmets is just one more way in which a fear of cycling is constructed. People with experience in the politics of cycling might realise how controversial are calls for cyclists to don helmets, but the majority of people in societies such as the UK are much more likely to take such campaigns at face value, and to be surprised by those of us who adopt a more sceptical line (although scientific research into how different audiences receive helmet promotion campaigns is clearly required). In other words, even in this, the most contentious of areas, constructions of cycling as a dangerous practice, and thus the production of fear of cycling, proceeds for the most part in a remarkably insidious way.

Constructing Fear of Cycling, 3: New Cycling Spaces

We might suppose that fear of cycling has become locked into a downward spiral from which it seems almost impossible to break, *unless* the practice of cycling can be spatially relocated, and performed under 'new', 'safe' conditions. This section examines recent attempts to create such new, safe cycling spaces (for a recent overview, see Franklin, 2006).

For most of the twentieth century, the great majority of cycling in the UK took place on roads. The dominant, widely shared assumption was that (declining numbers of) cyclists shared space with (increasing numbers of) cars, trucks, buses and taxis. Riding in an environment dominated by potentially lethal motorised modes of mobility was a taken-for-granted, normal part of cyclists' ordinary experience. But over the last decade or so, a fundamental shift in cycling policy and infrastructure has occurred. Cycle lanes have been introduced across the length and breadth of Britain. Many cycle lanes are 'on-road'; the use of white lines and coloured paint is intended to mark a boundary between space for motorised traffic and space for cyclists. Although often criticised and sometimes ridiculed (for example, see the 'cycle facility of the month' pages at www.warringtoncyclecampaign.co.uk; last accessed 4/2/07), at its best this infrastructure aims to make cycling journeys more attractive; quicker, easier, safer, more pleasant.

In the UK, recent years have also seen major development of off-road cycling routes, shared not with motorised traffic but with people walking, dogs and horses (for details, see Cotton, 2004). Many such routes have been developed and promoted by Sustrans, a charitable organisation committed to encouraging sustainable transport (see Sustrans, 2000; www.sustrans.org.uk). These routes are emerging most explicitly around the figure of the cyclist, and they have certainly boosted interest and participation in cycling (Peace, 2004; Sustrans, 2006). However, an unintended consequence of their popularity may be that the dominant public perception of cycling is becoming of an activity which best occurs in 'safe' and pleasant places (on disagreements around this issue within cycling policy circles, see Rosen, 2003; Jones, 2004). 'Normal' roads are no place to cycle; they are to be feared.

It is worth noting here the long-standing contentiousness, among British cyclists' organisations, of off-road cycling routes. The decades spanning the middle of the twentieth century saw British roads struggling to accommodate the car and the bicycle harmoniously. A pamphlet produced by the Cyclists' Touring Club and titled *Road Safety: a fair and sound policy* (n.d.b [c.1935]) states: 'It is often said that there is not room on our present roads for everybody and so the cyclist should be removed. The only traffic that cannot safely use our present roads is high-speed motor traffic, for which special highways should be provided'. In the ensuing battles over which group of users should be 'pushed off' the roads, cyclists eventually 'won', with the development of the motorway network for which they had long campaigned. However, the rapid growth in levels of motorised traffic meant that there was no going back to 'the golden age' of cycling which they presumably had hoped the provision of motorways, by taking cars off existing roads, would enable. The organisational views expressed in the 1930s, during cyclists' resistance to the idea that cycling should be relocated to cycle paths, ought perhaps to provoke reflection on the situation today. For instance, in *Making the Roads Safe: The Cyclists' Point of View*, we find the following:

> It is impossible to escape the conclusion that most people and organisations who advocate cycle paths are not actuated by motives of benevolence or sympathy, although they may declare that their sole concern is the welfare of the cyclist ... A great deal of the cycle-path propaganda is based on a desire to remove cyclists from the roads. That is why the request for cycle paths is so often accompanied by a suggestion that their use should be enforced by law. Therein lies a serious threat to cycling. (Cyclists' Touring Club 1937, 11–12)

Of course, the situation today is different. Perhaps most obviously, many people who fear cycling on the roads apparently desire to cycle elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, forms of off-road cycling – not only leisure cycling on 'traffic free' routes, but also BMX, mountain biking, cyclo-cross, trials riding and track – all seem to be gaining in popularity. And with the expansion of places to cycle off-road, the expectation grows that such places are *the places* to cycle. The road stops feeling like a place to cycle; it begins to feel as though cycling does not belong there. The institutionalisation of this sensibility, anticipated by cyclists 70 years ago, is potentially not far behind. In 2006, the draft of the revised Highway Code instructed cyclists to use off-road routes wherever they exist. These planned revisions were opposed by cyclists, led by CTC, but they nonetheless make clear how the provision of 'attractive' alternatives produces the cyclist-on-the-road as ever more out-of-place. New ideas of 'normal' are being produced, and it is becoming less normal to see roads as appropriate places to cycle.

Meanwhile, riding on the road becomes an ever more fearful prospect for ever more people. Without any necessary objective change in the conditions prevailing on the roads, the provision of off-road routes increases people's fear of on-road cycling. Further, the promotion of such routes tends to feed (on) this fear. Sustrans' publicity material, for example, makes regular use of an adjective which has assumed enormous power in UK cycling promotion; 'safe'.[5] One recruitment leaflet calls on people to 'help us build *safe* attractive cycle routes in your area' (Sustrans n.d., my emphasis).

Arguably therefore, today's youngsters are growing up with the expectation that, if they cycle at all, it will be away from cars. It would of course be wrong to see these shifting sensibilities as unopposed. Cycling advocates are increasingly insistent that today's youngsters must be trained to ride on the roads, and government funding towards that aim has recently been forthcoming. But tensions around the proper place of cycling constitute a major new battleground of mobility and sustainability conflicts in the twenty-first century. It is also worth noting, for what is to follow, that spatial re-allocation of cycling away from the road is shifting the object of fear, from cycling to the cyclist. On off-road routes, the cyclist is no longer so viscerally threatened and endangered, and instead becomes perceived as the source of threat and danger to slower-moving, more leisurely others. The source of fear shifts from the practice to the practitioner.

Before continuing on the theme of fear of the cyclist, I want briefly to summarise this section. The road safety industry, helmet promotion campaigns and anyone responsible for marketing off-road cycling facilities all have a vested interest in constructing cycling – particularly cycling on the road – as a dangerous practice. Cycling, in other words, is made 'dangerous' by these attempts to render it 'safe'. Each of the cases I have discussed is (perhaps unwittingly) therefore implicated in

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[5] Another Sustrans project is 'Safe Routes to Schools', which aims 'to create a Safe Route to School for every child in the UK' (see www.sustrans.org.uk; last accessed 5/2/07). This project might have been called 'Nicer Routes to Schools', 'Better Routes to Schools', or 'Fun Routes to Schools'. That it was not again testifies, I would claim, to the salience of 'safe' as an adjective in a contemporary transport climate characterised by fear.

the production of a fear of cycling. This fear of cycling stops people cycling, and stopping people from cycling is an effective way of continuing the reproduction of a fear of cycling. But now I want to tackle more directly something at which up until now I have only been hinting, the potential relevance of a fear of the *cyclist* to a fear of cycling.

Making Cycling Strange

I am now switching from thinking about a fear of cycling which is produced from constructions of cycling as inherently dangerous, and thinking instead about how the identity of 'the cyclist' tends to invoke fear. There is undoubtedly scope for using psychoanalytic theories here, and in particular ideas to do with projection and transference. But I do not venture far into that territory in the remaining part of this chapter, and draw instead on Georg Simmel's classic sociological account of the stranger (1971 [1908]), as well as more recent sociological work on stigma (Goffman, 1968), stereotyping (Pickering, 2001) and scapegoating (Cohen, 2002 [1972]).

In the UK during the twentieth century, cycling gradually moved from being a major mode of mobility to being a minor one. As the volume, speed and dominance of motorised vehicles grew, cycling was designated ever more marginal road space. We have seen that the impulse to altogether eliminate cycling from the road only succeeded on motorways, for which cycling organisations campaigned. Nevertheless, cycling was everywhere else reduced to a practice taking place on the edges of a transport infrastructure which increasingly centred on the car. Automobility's massive power is well expressed by its current monopolisation of space.

The seemingly taken-for-granted dominance of automobility saw UK cycling in a perilous state across the latter third of the twentieth century.[6] By the century's end, cycling was spatially in the gutter. The spatialities of a practice always have implications for people's identities (Lefebvre, 1991; Shields, 1991; Sibley, 1995). If cycling was spatially in the gutter, then so were cyclists' identities. Cycling, and most especially urban utility cycling, had become a polluted and polluting practice and 'the cyclist' a polluted and polluting identity.

The cultural acceptability of cycling's spatial marginality, particularly when combined with the cyclist's stigmatised identity, is highly consequential. It means that those cyclists who do not stick to the margins, but either consciously or unconsciously attempt to 'centre' themselves, are experienced as threatening and unsettling, and are demonised – most visibly and powerfully within the mass media. So cyclists' collective protests, such as Critical Mass, are particularly vilified (Carlsson, 2002). But even the least 'political' of cyclists will sometimes break from the invisibility of the margins and therefore inadvertently challenge automobility's spatial monopoly. This cyclist can execute a whole range of manoeuvres designed to take short-cuts, avoid hold-ups and escape danger. It should be stressed that many such movements, whether actually 'illicit' or simply unavailable to people in cars, are risk reduction strategies, tactics developed by cyclists to reduce conflicts and risks of collision with others. But unlike road safety education, helmets and new cycling infrastructure, many are not officially sanctioned and are therefore not regarded as wholly legitimate. Those very same tactics which have enabled cycling to survive as an urban practice can also therefore reinforce the cyclist's already stigmatised identity.

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[6] The negative consequences of automobility's monopoly on space were/are not of course confined to cycling. Automobility has led to much public space that was once common space being allocated to traffic flow. So community severance (and by implication the marginalisation of community-based use of space) is an important problem here, not just the marginalisation of cycling.

The mass media is very alert to the potential of the cyclist's stigmatised identity to make 'a good story', especially in a social context which increasingly encourages people to reflect on transport choices and question their own automobilised lives (see below). Newspaper editors are attuned to knowing what their readers and advertisers want (and we should note how a high proportion of those advertisers belong to the system of automobility, on whose revenues newspapers depend). Media accounts are therefore likely to reproduce dominant representations of the cyclist as a 'yob', law-breaker and outsider (for example, Hoey, 2003; see also Fincham, this volume). Such stereotyping works by isolating certain behaviours, stripping them from their meaningful context, and attributing them to 'everyone associated with a particular group or category' (Pickering 2001, 4). And these stereotypical representations contribute to the maintenance of the cyclist as a strange 'other' Field (1996); Basford et al. (2003); Dickinson (2004); Reid (2004).

Against the context of socially and ecologically destructive automobility, the reproduction of concerns about cyclists' behaviour is a classic example of scapegoating (Cohen, 2002). Scapegoating deflects attention away from greater crimes, by in this case sacrificing the cyclist in the ideological pursuit of 'motoring-as-usual'. Through representing the marginal practice of cycling as 'deviant', the dominant practice of car driving is reproduced and reaffirmed as 'normal'. Representations of cycling as deviant and cyclists as outsiders both contribute to, and are facilitated by, low levels of cycling which mean that few people are able to take, and defend, the cyclist's point of view.

But times are changing. Cycling has become strange, and the cyclist has become a stranger. Yet there is an intense ambivalence about the stranger (Simmel, 1971). The stranger's presence suggests the possibility of another way. Against a backdrop of increasingly vocal concerns about climate change and growing unease about 'the car', the cycling stranger embodies the possibility of a different social order.

So here is another challenge to cycling as a marginalised practice and the cyclist as a stigmatised identity. But this time it is not Critical Mass or aberrant cyclists who, by moving from the margins to a more central position, are issuing the challenge. It is governments. More accurately, it is transport discourse and policy, which especially in light of a range of social and environmental 'problems', is now pushing cycling back towards 'the centre'. UK Government transport policy (most notably Transport for London) is recognising cycling as 'a good thing', and making it clear that people should give cycling a go. The mass media, albeit at its more progressive end, is also now representing cycling in more positive terms. On 7 June 2006, the front page of one UK newspaper, *The Independent*, featured an image of the front wheel of a bicycle alongside the headline 'Revolution! Britain embraces the bicycle' (Milmo, 2006).

For the last third of the twentieth century, the cyclist was relegated in favour of the motorist. But the cyclist is coming back. And again, it is experienced by many people as a threat. The radical separation of the cyclist from the motorist within UK society returns as an unsettling haunting. The push to bring cycling in from the margins suggests that car-centred lives will not continue forever. Forcing an encounter with the idea of oneself as a cyclist, it provokes fear of cycling. So my argument is not only that a fear of cycling is produced by varied attempts to make cycling safer, but also that a fear of the cyclist is related to people's anxieties that they, too, might end up taking to cycling, and becoming a 'cyclist'.

Conclusions

Fear of cycling constitutes a significant emotional barrier to cycling. Ironically, this fear is partly produced through attempts to make cycling safer. For as long as cycling remains something to fear, it remains a marginal and marginalised practice. The constant cultural construction of cycling as dangerous justifies the continued spatial marginalisation of cycling practice, which then enables the continued construction of the cyclist as other, a stranger pedalling on the margins. The ideological, spatial and cultural marginality of cycling are continuously reproduced, together.

But cycling is pedalling in from these margins. There are – admittedly tentative – signs of a cycling renaissance. A range of actors is today seeking to elevate cycling's position in transport policy, to move it into the mainstream. If this push continues into the future, we may well see people's anxieties, about change away from currently dominant automobility, increasingly projected onto the cycling stranger (Sandercock 2002, 205; Sigona 2003, 70). As people feel increasing pressure to get on bikes themselves, and thus really start to engage with the realities of currently dominant cycling conditions, we may also hear more cries that cycling is too dangerous. People's fears of cycling will become more real and powerful as the prospects of their cycling grow greater. And people will feel and fear the loss of a way of life as it has come to be lived, as automobilised. When these anxieties become intense and the calls that cycling is too dangerous become really vociferous, we should I think take them as a sign that – as a culture – we are getting really serious about once more getting on our bikes.

In the meantime, what can be done to allay people's fears of cycling? Although it is constantly produced and reproduced, fear of neither cycling nor the cyclist is inevitable. Both the conditions for cycling practice and representations of the cyclist can change and be changed, and thereby produce different effects. Many people who cycle today – racing cyclists, touring cyclists, cycle campaigners, bike messengers – belong to cycling cultures which produce and reproduce positive experiences and representations of cycling. These people may be aware of constructions of cycling as something to be feared, and of the cyclist as deviant and strange, but such negative representations are easily exceeded by the celebratory and confirmatory evaluations of cycling and the cyclist continually flowing through their specific cultural worlds.

Correspondingly, we can in varied ways promote a pro-cycling culture. At the level of representation, our task is to generate and continuously reaffirm positive representations of cycling as an ordinary and enjoyable practice, something I am pleased to see happening in, for example, the recent marketing campaigns of both Transport for London and Cycling England. Certainly, we must stop communicating, however inadvertently, the dangers of cycling, and instead provide people with very many, very diverse, positive and affirming representations of both cycling practice and cycling identities. Current fear of cycling can be otherwise, but we must help make it so.

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Chapter 8

Men, Women and the Bicycle: Gender and Social Geography of Cycling in the Late Nineteenth-Century

Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Glen Norcliffe

Social geographers have spent much of the last two decades investigating the influence of gender on geography. They have sought specifically to understand the spatial effects of the social construction of femininity and masculinity in both contemporary and historical societies. On the strength of countless studies, geographers of gender confidently assert the efficacy of gender in and on the social production of space, place, landscapes, and environments.[1]

This chapter demonstrates the gendered construction of space and society, especially as it concerned cycling in the late nineteenth century, which shaped Victorian understandings of not only cycling, but the spaces and places where it occurred. The spaces through which cyclists so visibly passed included the streets, roads and highways, paths, parks and parkways of Victorian cities and countrysides, while the places where they reinforced their identities included club-houses, photographers' studios, racetracks and gymnasia.[2] Men and women on bicycles, particularly in the 1890s, undertook a purposeful occupation of these urban and rural geographies (Mackintosh and Norcliffe, 2006). In so doing, cyclists also promoted well-established constructions and divisions of gender (Kerber, 1988; Vickery, 1993). Many women, in an age marked by conspicuous consumption (Horowitz, 1985; Abelson, 1989), interpreted the safety bicycle (primarily a technology of class privilege; Mackintosh and Norcliffe, 2006) as a domestic vehicle for 'ladies,' well suited to what Mackintosh (2005) has called the 'domestic public'. Bourgeois men tended to express masculinity and masculine activity in opposition to the increase of urban effeminacy (Carnes and Griffen, 1990; Chauncey, 1994; Kimmel, 1996; Ditz, 2001); the conspicuous use of the highwheel bicycle can be regarded as an overt expression of 'cavalier masculinity' (Norcliffe, 2006), and a resistance to bourgeois

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[1] The gender of geography is well established. Readers interested to locate this literature would do well to peruse good social or cultural geography textbooks, such as Valentine (2001), or Mitchell (2000).

[2] Geographers differentiate between space and place. An oversimplification will help non-geographers distinguish between the two: *space* tends to identify absolute, relative and cognitive spatial structures, *place* the dynamism of unique and interdependent spatial and social processes.