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Expert Opinion

Cyclist and academic Kevin Hylton is Professor of Equality and Diversity in the Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, at Leeds Beckett University

The unbearable whiteness of cycling...

I want to talk about my experience of cycling as a black man in the north of England. I ride mainly in the green and urban spaces around Yorkshire where I have noticed, depending on who I am riding with and where, that I will receive a different gaze from cyclists or passers-by. I'm keen to find out if others have observed similar patterns, ways in which 'race' is significant in our sport — where 'race' is rarely discussed.

I'm interested in how perceptions of 'race' affect inclusion and exclusion, as well as the relationship between 'race' and other identity categories such as gender and class. Promising racer Ayesha McGowan has said: "If I had seen another black person in cycling when I was a kid, maybe I would have been inspired to get into it sooner." McGowan has climbed the gender and race ladder on her journey to becoming the first female African-American professional cyclist.

Researchers of cycling in London, Steinbach and Green asked: How do gender, class and ethnic categories affect the uptake of cycling? Answering this question is complex, since 'race' affects attitudes to cycling in different settings, at personal as well as structural and institutional levels, in many different ways.

As the sociologist CW Mills pointed out, the familiar can be made strange if we use our sociological imagination. For example, as a cyclist of African-Caribbean descent, I seem hyper-visible in a group of white friends, yet when I cycle with a group of black friends, the group is hyper-visible and been subject to racial slurs.

The African World Tour team [MTN-Qhubeka](#) have expressed concerns about racism in the sport. Meanwhile, in the US there are copious examples of black cyclists being fined more often than white cyclists by the police for traffic infractions. Cycling is subject to some of the same problem attitudes towards 'race' and racial bias as seen in other social activities. The fact that black riders stand out by dint of their scarcity is something we must reckon with by asking why there are fewer black riders than in other sports, while demanding to know: what are the key stakeholders in cycling doing to make cycling more inclusive?