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**Title:** OPTIMISM ABOUT SAFETY AND SELF-SERVING ATTRIBUTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY AMONG PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS IN RELATION TO ROAD USE UNDER LOW LIGHT CONDITIONS

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**Abstract:**

Drivers are known to be optimistic about their risk of crash involvement, believing that they are less likely to be involved in a crash than other drivers. However, little comparative research has been conducted among other road users. In addition, optimism about crash risk is conceptualized as applying only to an individual's assessment of his or her personal risk of crash involvement. The possibility that the self-serving nature of optimism about safety might be generalized to group-level identity as a cyclist or a pedestrian, i.e. becoming group-serving rather than self-serving, has been overlooked in relation to road safety. This study analysed a subset of data collected as part of a larger research project on the visibility of pedestrians, cyclists and road workers, focusing on a set of questionnaire items administered to 406 pedestrians, 838 cyclists and 622 drivers. The items related to safety in various scenarios involving drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, allowing predictions to be derived about group differences in agreement with items based on the assumption that the results would exhibit group-serving bias. Analysis of the responses indicated that specific hypotheses about group-serving interpretations of safety and responsibility were supported in 22 of the 26 comparisons. When the nine comparisons relevant to low lighting conditions were considered separately, seven were found to be supported. The four comparisons which were not found to be consistent were spread relatively evenly between pedestrians and cyclists, and between items referring to low lighting conditions and more general items. The findings of the research have implications for public education and for the likely acceptance of messages which are inconsistent with current assumptions and expectations of pedestrians and cyclists. They also suggest that research into group-serving interpretations of safety, even for temporary roles rather than enduring groups, could be fruitful. Further, there is an implication that gains in safety can be made by rendering road users safer than they realize, such as through the adoption of visibility aids like biomotion, a central focus of the broader research project from which this study was drawn.

**Keywords**

Pedestrians, Cyclists, Self-serving, Optimism bias, Visibility