The chance for a more inclusive new normal in transport

Professor Glenn Lyons

IMAGINE

NOT BEING

W H I T E

AND NOT BEING MALE

AS A TRANSPORT PROFESSIONAL

AND/OR AS SOMEONE USING THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

C   A   N   Y   O   U   ?
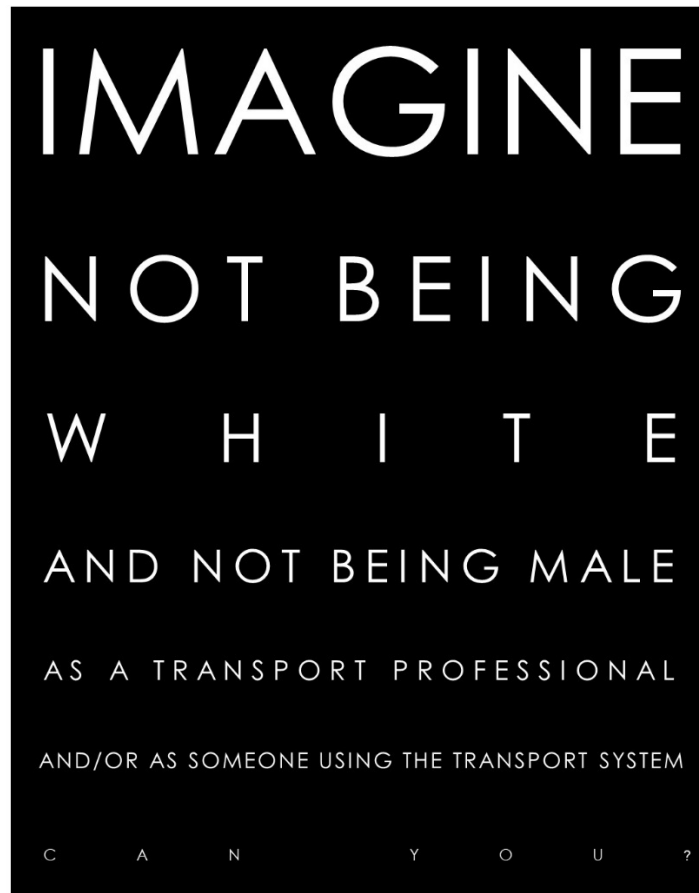
Have you tested your eyesight lately when it comes to seeing race and gender issues in transport? If not, here is an opportunity to do so.

The article is a writeup of the ninth PTRC Fireside Chat that took place on 15 April 2021. The event, attended by around 200 people, was an opportunity to take a serious look at an issue that should be firmly in the minds of transport professionals and yet often isn't: diversity and inclusion – in particular matters of race and gender. White male privilege has been a defining characteristic of the transport profession which has in turn shaped the transport system used by others – the majority of whom are *not* white and male. The pandemic has substantially contributed to a state of flux in society and mobility. When we talk about a 'new normal', this must surely be an opportunity to think about a more inclusive new normal – a sector that can respect and embrace diversity and in turn one that can help shape a more inclusive transport system for the future.

You can watch the full recording of the event on YouTube. As this write-up reveals, we can and should all be doing more as part of our continuing professional development to make change for the better. To help with this, the write-up includes numerous links to other resources – starting with a reading list suggested by our panel and audience.

Please refer to this write-up as follows:

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Headlines

If you're in a hurry, here are the headline messages:

- Transport touches, and is fundamental to most people's lives - a transport system is not successful if it is not supporting the needs of a diverse society

- Race and gender are all around us in our daily lives - they may be invisible like oxygen, but like oxygen, they are an essential part of life on this planet

- The pandemic has highlighted inequalities and prejudice but it may also have created a state of flux and introspection that provides a chance to move towards a more inclusive new normal

- If you haven't tested your eyesight lately when it comes to seeing race and gender issues in transport, the resources are there, you just need the time and inclination to make use of them

- There is great value in becoming self-aware of how different things can be when you change position (including looking beyond white male privilege)

- Beware of having an orientalist mindset in which you impose generalisations about country, race and culture in ignorance, with a saviour mindset linked to inherent privileges and biases – seek training to raise your cultural intelligence

- Empathy is important but do not be presumptive - ask, don't assume (it's a false economy to do otherwise), and certainly don't presume to tell others when in ignorance of their own legitimacy of perspective

- On a fundamental level, equity and design of inclusive transportation systems cannot be addressed without a representative workforce, without people who bring in more diverse perspectives

- Workforce turnover is a crucial dynamic through which to help change the makeup of the profession for the better, provided that the approach to recruitment and promotion is consciously (if not unconsciously) competent regarding matters of diversity

- The race and gender data gap is very real - if we are going to have a user-based perspective on supporting travel that meets the needs of all in society, we need to understand the diversity of users and collect data that supports this

- We need to move as individuals from unconscious incompetence regarding racial and gender inequality towards becoming unconsciously competent in how we behave to promote more inclusive transport

- Don't be a bystander when it comes to addressing diversity and inclusion, be an upstander – it's never too late to speak up and start conversations – and this applies especially if you are white and male: be an ally and don't be afraid of making mistakes (learn by doing)

Reading list

Suggestions from the panel and audience for reading material that can help us all in our personal and professional development are detailed below, with links to interviews and other resources about the books in the list also included. **All many of us need to be better educated about race and racism, gender inequality, and steps towards a more inclusive society is the time and inclination**.

1. [Cycling & Mobility: We have failed to engage in the conversation about racism – but it's not too late to start](#) - Georgia Yexley (blog post)

2. [Along for the Ride](#) – Sarah Barnes (weekly newsletter)

3. [Why is a lack of gender balance in transport planning an issue we must address to move forward?](#) - Jo Ward (blog post)

4. [Invisible Women](#) - Caroline Criado Perez (book) – watch an [interview with the author](#)

5. [Me and White Supremacy](#) - Layla F. Saad (book) - watch an [interview with the author](#)

6. [Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race](#) - Reni Eddo Lodge (book) – read or listen to a [long-read blog from the author](#)

7. [Travel in London: Understanding our diverse communities 2019 - A summary of existing research](#) – Transport for London (report)

8. [What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition](#) - Emma Dabiri (book) – watch a [panel session with the author](#) from 10 April 2021

9. [Natives Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire](#) – Akala – watch an [interview with the author](#)

10. [Orientalism](#) – Edward W. Said (book) – [watch a documentary on Orientalism](#)

11. [Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do](#) – Jennifer Lynn Eberhardt (book) – watch an [interview with the author](#)

12. [The Tipping Point - How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference](#)- Malcolm Gladwell (book) – watch an [interview with the author](#)

13. [Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World--and Why Things Are Better Than You Think](#) - Anna Rosling Rönnlund, Hans Rosling, and Ola Rosling (book) – watch a [public lecture based upon the book](#)

14. [The Madness of Adam and Eve: How Schizophrenia Shaped Humanity](#) - David Horrobin (book) – [reviewed](#) by Roland Littlewood

15. [Messy: How to Be Creative and Resilient in a Tidy-Minded World](#) – Tim Harford (book) – watch an [interview with the author](#)

16. [Transport Demand Management and Social Inclusion – the need for Ethnic Perspectives](#) - Fiona Rajé (book)

17. [Building Inclusive Transport and Places](#) (LinkedIn Group)

Our panel

We had an outstanding panel for this Fireside Chat comprised of: [Nishma Mistry](#), [Sarah Barnes](#), [Georgia Yexley](#), [Jannat Alkhanizi](#) and [Stephen Cragg](#). All of them are respected transport experts. Yet how often have you seen a panel like this in your experience as a transport professional?

Nishma Mistry
Safety, Health & Environment Business Partner at Transport for London

Sarah Barnes
Government Partnership at Lyft Author of Along for the Ride

Georgia Yexley
Head of Cities UK & IRE at TIER

Jannat Alkhanizi
Transport Consultant at Mott MacDonald and Associate, RTPI

Stephen Cragg
Head of Appraisal and Model Development at Transport Scotland

Setting the scene

In this ninth event in the Fireside Chat series we turned our attention to the underexamined, contentious and fundamentally important issue in transport and society: diversity. In particular, considering women of colour.

Trading places

I love heavy metal music and loath a lot of chart music. In this respect I am in a minority. I've spent my life enduring going into shops and cafes where the latter is piped out. I've never walked into Starbucks and been made to feel good by hearing Motorhead! But that's a trivial example.

Five years ago this month, I took part in my university's Wheelchair Challenge as part of Disability Awareness Month. As an able-bodied individual I spent a couple of hours trying to complete tasks in a wheelchair – seemingly simple things like heading between lectures (on time), moving between buildings, going to the toilet, and ordering something from the cafeteria.

I will never forget it. In that short space of time I came to realise how very different everything is when you change positions. The terrain between buildings was hard going in places in a wheelchair, especially under time pressure. I felt awkward and exposed trying to shuffle into the disabled toilet. The cafeteria design no longer seemed to have me in mind. I became invisible to a colleague who knew me as they walked past. It made me realise what I took for granted as someone in the majority, for whom the world around me seems to be designed.

White men

I'm a white man as you can see. In the transport sector I stand on the shoulders of other white men before me, presiding over a transport system designed predominantly by white men for white men in a society that is made up predominantly of....people who are not white men. We don't have the results of the March 2021 census for England and Wales yet; but the last [census in 2011](#) revealed that 51% of the population were female; and 14% of the population (nearly 8 million people) were not white.

While I could experience disability in small measure by using a wheelchair, its not so straightforward to have first-hand experience of being a woman of colour in the transport sector, or a woman of colour using the transport system. Yet surely it matters, and matters greatly that we are accounting for others who are different to ourselves?

Invisible women

Having been introduced by Stephen Cragg, on our panel today, to the book 'Invisible Women' by Caroline Criado Perez, I'm not so sure it does seem to have mattered. Her book highlights glaring and fundamental gender data gaps across society, including transport, that are affecting the lives of women. Half the population are *hidden in plain sight*. Consider this example from the book found in Chapter 9 (which is aptly titled 'A sea of dudes'). Did you know that when it comes to crash test dummies "*for decades they were based around the fiftieth percentile male*"? Cars are, in the main, not designed for women to be (as) safe in - "*when a woman is involved in a car crash, she is 47% more likely to be seriously injured than a man, and 71% more likely to be moderately injured*". Yet consideration of females (driving) in crash tests has been all but non-existent. Remarkable and, frankly, shocking.

So, if women are invisible, imagine how it might feel to be a woman of colour. As I've learnt from a colleague on our panel today, if you think it's uncomfortable talking about race and gender as a white man, you really should try and imagine how much more uncomfortable it feels as a woman of colour.

White male privilege

Before George Floyd's death in the United States last year and the Black Lives Matter protests that followed, I'm ashamed to say that I don't think I'd properly considered the implications of the term 'white privilege'. Google tells me it means "*inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice*".

Until I had read Invisible Women, I'm also ashamed to say that I don't think I'd properly considered the implications of the term 'male privilege'. Imagine how ignorant that makes so many of us when it comes to 'white male privilege'?

In the spotlight

Here in the UK, issues of race and gender have been brought to the fore in recent weeks. On 31 March, Downing Street published the controversial report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. Following from the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests, it says "*we also have to ask whether a narrative that claims nothing has changed for the better, and that the dominant feature of our society is institutional racism and White privilege, will achieve anything beyond alienating the decent centre ground – a centre ground which is occupied by people of all races and ethnicities*". Black Lives Matter UK responded by saying that the report "*whitewashes the daily challenges faced by black and minoritised communities*".

The killing of Sarah Everard in early March prompted a national outcry. She went missing after leaving a friend's house near Clapham Common to walk home. Her death provoked protest about a society in which women do not feel safe, and may not be safe, alone outdoors. Like many others I'm sure, I discussed with female family members their own longstanding feelings and experiences which seem to remain significantly, if not entirely, invisible to the system, and to the dominance of white males presiding over it.

Constructive challenge

The importance of *constructive challenge* has been emphasised in the revised competencies expected of a Transport Planning Professional, launched at the end of March. I believe this needs to include challenge to invisibility of diversity and to discrimination.

I hope this scene setting has opened your eyes and minds, if they were not already, to how easily we can be blind to diversity, unintentionally or otherwise, and to how challenging it can be if you are on the receiving end of a system that doesn't adequately take your circumstances and needs into account. If you read this article in full or watch, or have watched, the recording of the Fireside Chat, please play your part in encouraging wider awareness and positive action in our sector.

This Fireside Chat series has been focused upon the transport implications of the pandemic. Through the series we have addressed topics including public transport, walking, roads, early career professionals, modelling and climate change. This latest Fireside Chat aimed to consider the series as a whole through the lens of race and gender.

Diverse perspectives

Each of our panellists began with a set of opening remarks.
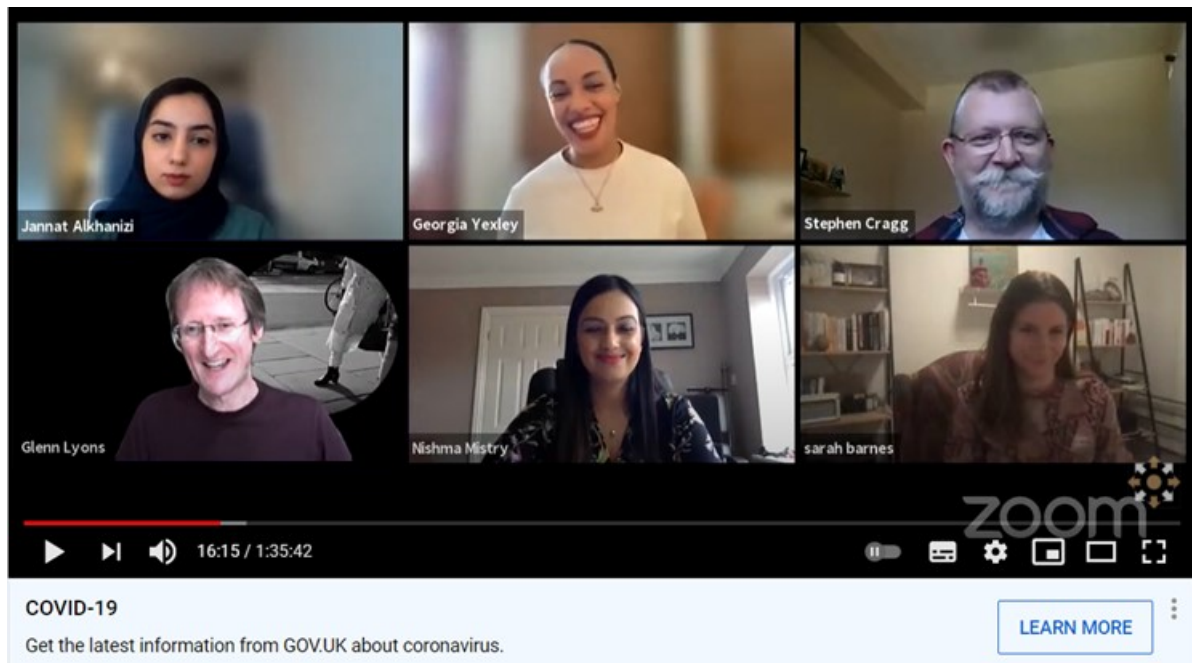
Let's start a conversation – can you hear me?

Georgia started her career in mobility in China where she was part of a small team of non-Chinese people. In that position she was confronted with complexities of her own privilege, as were others in her team. She was part of her company's journey from startup to fastest growing unicorn company to acquisition through an IPO. "I was one of three black women, that worked there internationally in a business that covered 200 cities, and was in the mobility sector" Georgia recalls, "at the point of the IPO, I was one in 43,000 employees, so the gap is stark". In her 5+ years in the industry, she has worked with more white men named Steve or Phil than with other black women she told us.

On returning to London she was shocked that in spite of the multicultural society celebrated in the capital, this still was not reflected in her industry of micromobility. The Women@Beryl network (set up by Sarah on the panel) helped make her feel more supported, providing a platform to give more attention to inequalities and disparities in the industry. Such disparities seemed to amplify with COVID-19, George Floyd's killing and the Black Lives Matter movement. "I wasn't sure how to address them and whether it was okay, and right to address them in my professional space" she reflects. What emerged, having thought about it long and hard, was an article from Georgia "Cycling & Mobility: We have failed to engage in the conversation about racism – but it's not too late to start". It was reading this article that promoted me to make contact with Georgia and seek her guidance and involvement for this event. I'm very grateful to her for responding so positively.

To help bring the conversation about race and racism into the workplace during lockdown and homeworking, Georgia had a Black Lives Matter placard visible in meetings on the wall of her home office – though what was notable was how rarely it was spoken about or acknowledged by others in her meetings. She recalls how her industry had acted to support keyworkers in the pandemic with free access to bikes and yet by contrast how deafening the silence was within the industry when a black teenager Huugo Boateng on a charity bike ride with his father was aggressively arrested by police in a case of mistaken identity.

We should be considering what action can be taken to address matters. Race Equality Week, while not receiving the attention yet that it deserves, provided her with an opportunity to highlight networks to engage with that are helping address diversity, for example: the Women of Colour Cycling Collective (find them on Twitter: @wccc_uk) and the Cycling Diversity Alliance (find them on Twitter: @cyclediversity).

Georgia's message is about the importance of having the conversations – its never too late to start.

The system is a product of who has a say in it's design

Having studied geography, Sarah (speaking to us early in the morning from San Francisco) finds transportation a wonderful industry to be 'stuck' in – "we can have such a tangible impact on the wider society, transportation is an area that touches most people's lives". She notes how it's fundamental to how we access the things that we love. But she recognises well that not everybody is given the same opportunity. "There are plenty of people who face fundamental and systemic barriers in our transportation system based on the way that it's been designed" she says, going on to give the example of London's cycling superhighways, designed (it can appear) to get men on mondays from home to the city where they work in finance or whatever. This relates to the makeup of 'experts' in our industry and points to a "fixation on who the expert is and what the expert looks like" with a tendency to appoint people based upon being highly educated and trained in transport terms, rather than appreciating a much greater breadth of contribution that is possible when realising how wider perspectives and experience of the transport system can also constitute expertise. "On a fundamental level, we can't design inclusive transportation systems without a representative workforce, and without people who bring in more diverse perspectives" she suggests.

Sarah tries to promote this in her area of work which is bike-share which she loves and sees great potential to be inclusive when designed properly. Indeed, she sees micromobility as a "huge opportunity to bring more people into the sustainable transport space" and help achieve the mode shift goals. This said, bike share (in Europe and North America at least) "still skews strongly towards relatively wealthy, relatively highly educated white men". From this, Sarah concludes that "at some point in that system design, something happened where it was not designed for wider society". Her day to day work within government partnerships tries to address this and she thinks fundamentally that it's about "who's in the room when we're talking about it". Her concern is about the 'expert effect' again here, with "people who are in positions of power, who are making decisions, and not necessarily inviting and including the more diverse, more representative voices in the room".

She has also focused previously on autonomous vehicles and urbanisation which she sees as a microcosm of technology and transportation. "It's so solutions focused" she says, pointing to the industry makeup involved being "again, highly technical, predominantly white, predominantly male, strong engineering focus". Inherent human biases get built in. Sarah often questions "is this

going to be safer for black folks?". She referred to the homeless woman in Arizona who was the first autonomous vehicle fatality walking across the street – "she wasn't seen, the algorithm didn't catch her in the dark of night". Equity considerations have been neglected.

Sarah write a weekly newsletter Along for the Ride in which she tries to bring such issues to the forefront – "it's the first time in my life where I've publicly shared my own personal thoughts". The events of the last year, including the killing of George Floyd made Sarah realise that "there was like a bit of a shitty thing that happened like week after week after week … that's just how life has been for people who are not white for, you know, pretty much all of human history". She feels she can use her platform to try and help "move the dial". Importantly, this addressed a point from the audience from someone who is conscious of their whiteness and wondering if they have a right to represent views of people of colour. Sarah has been trying to figure out how to use her platform to "better embed wider perspectives within the news" that she shares about transport developments. Her view is that a transportation system cannot be deemed successful if "there are entire swaths of our societies that aren't well-served and that the technology or a transportation system doesn't work for".

Cultural geography matters

Jannat wanted to focus upon an international perspective, particularly in relation to project delivery in a consultancy environment. She began by emphasising that "every experience is unique and this is my personal experience, from the point of view as an early career Middle Eastern female". As an early career professional in her first job, she didn't expect to be experiencing a pandemic. The appeal for Jannat in her first job is the opportunity to work on international projects and the ability to work in different places and amongst diverse teams. She wished to note her *choice* to be working in the UK and yet to address the cultural challenges she faces as a result.

"Prior to the pandemic, one of the most challenging aspects of working on international projects in a predominantly white team, is that work attitudes change based on the geography of the project" she says. Jannat goes on to explain this. She had the experience of working in parallel on a project in an Arabian Gulf city and another project in a western city outside the UK. She came across some colleagues who talked down about the Middle East in general, perceiving appalling lifestyle choices people make, seemingly favouring a lack of sustainability ("you know, the amount of money people have, that type of reason"). Her Arabian Gulf project was about pedestrianisation. Meanwhile the western city project was about Mobility as a Service. At some point in this project is was mentioned that for the area concerned, the average household had three cars. "The attitude towards that was not the same; it was, oh well, at least they're trying to change that right now", Jannat observed. "I wondered what that reaction would be if that statistic came from the Middle East" she added.

She suspects from her wider experience that colleagues may not be aware of what she refers to as their 'Orientalist mindset'. For certain geographies it would be assumed that the people there "do not know how to do transport and we will go and fix it for them". Meanwhile for other geographies it would be more like "we're helping them in their journey towards improving their transportation system". Shivani Bhatnagar in the audience remarked: "really good points Jannat - this saviour mindset is linked to our inherent privileges and biases. To be inclusive beyond tokenistic gestures we need to confront our own and challenge others' biases". Jannat uses the word 'Orient' to reflect the attitude she has noticed when people start speaking about ethnic minorities from Asia in general. The Orient is "an inaccurate use of the word to describe people anywhere from the Far East to India to Central Asia and the Middle East, and even geographies beyond that". This can affect data collection as well with a neglect of recognising and respecting different cultures, attitudes and behaviours in different countries (people are forced to identify only as 'Oriental' in response data – see more of this later).

Jannat believes that one consequence of COVID is that cultural challenges may have been amplified as restrictions on movement have resulted in a decline in the presence of ethnic minority colleagues, which could further affect attitudes towards certain geographies. Meanwhile, she hopes that "since

the world has gone through this pandemic together, I hope we will be more appreciative to be around people from different cultures as the world starts to reopen".

Jannat had three points to offer about being inclusive of ethnic minorities: (1) when operating in different geographies, companies should deliver training to raise cultural intelligence of their employees; (2) white privilege still exists when going to work in non-white countries – be aware of your privilege and your (limited) cultural understanding – "instead of going there to fix a place, I think an approach should be taken 'what can I learn by going to this country?' and also 'how is my experience relevant to their needs?'"; and (3) when it comes being women of colour in the workplace, beware of internalising the "stereotypes and negative talk you are experiencing constantly". She offered the following book recommendation: Orientalism by Edward W. Said. For her, this really helps in understanding the origin of the orientalist mindset and "truly helped me fight against the internalised Orientalism I was experiencing" she says.

From Jannat's remarks I was very struck by the spectrum of treatment of human experience from the uniqueness of individual perspective right across to the gross generalisations that can be made about multiple populations. The word 'presumptive' stood out very strongly. It's not enough to presume we understand or know how others are or how other cultures are in different geographies (Stephen would come back to this later). In the audience chat, intersectionality was also being highlighted ("e.g. the experience of a single parent, which links with race and class. Hard to think about any of these social identifiers in isolation"). The chat also highlighted microaggressions ('common, everyday slights and comments that relate to various intersections of one's identity such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, and age, among other aspects').

Calling out inequality and speaking up for others

Nishma works for a public sector organisation where her focus is upon the safety of individuals. She is also heavily involved in volunteering and working with networks focused upon gender and race and maximising people's potential (including Women in Transport). She believes there is a need for more people to move from being bystanders to being upstanders when it comes to addressing diversity and inclusion, and calling out inequalities. She senses that "people really know there is a need for change". Like our other panel members, Nishma spoke from very personal experience. As women of colour she says "we're not always given the same opportunities as other people, especially in the transport sector … the transport sector has been very male-orientated, people with engineering backgrounds, who have been very privileged or had the opportunity to learn, have been given grants or had those opportunities in front of them, that some of us may not have". Nishma is keen to help open doors for others, just as for herself. She wants her contribution to diversity of thought to be recognised as an important ingredient to achieving the transport system innovation that is needed.

She referred to consequences for ethnic minorities of COVID-19 including: hate crimes against people in New York from Asian heritage and backgrounds, in relation to the origins of COVID-19; and black and minority ethnic frontline transport workers who are more susceptible to the virus due to pre-existing inequalities and associated health issues (returned to later). She sees so much learning and progress that can and should be happening, against the frustration of what appear to be perennial issues of inequality. Nishma is committed to taking time out to help others and "be that voice for those people who may not feel comfortable to speak up to others".

I was interested to know whether it was harder to speak out and champion change or to suffer in silence. Does speaking out and helping others come at a personal cost? Nishma was emphatic that she wishes to speak out and help others and recognises in her personality a confidence to do that. Those less able to do so need to be given the right tools to speak up but there is also a need for a lot more allies who are prepared to speak up for women of colour, including those who are white like Sarah. "No one should ever feel like they should suffer in silence" she points out.

I was getting a sense from Nishma's remarks, as well as from other panel members, that we are perhaps bearing witness to a nexus of global developments and change including the pandemic but

also the Black Lives Matter protests and instances of outrageous injustice as well as the climate emergency. Might we dare hope that the state of flux and imperatives in society currently might help move us in a positive direction in terms of racial and gender equality?

Ask, don't assume

Stephen acknowledges himself to be stereotypical of people found on many panels: white, middle-aged, middle-class, male and non-disabled – and someone who has never been discriminated against in relation to these attributes. He is Head of Appraisal and Model Development at Transport Scotland: his professional life revolves around identifying change and having the data to understand and model that. Stephen observes in terms of responses to the recovery from COVID-19: "I've seen very little *in my bubble* of news and social media, in relation to how it can affect different people, whether it's ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other personal characteristics. It's usually been about a green recovery, what's the future of cities, what's the future of public transport, what's the future of the workplace." Matters of gender and race hadn't entered his bubble until being invited into this Fireside Chat. He was introduced to Georgia's blog article (referred to above) which he recommended as a "brilliant read". He acknowledged how much he had learnt from reading it, but how it had also exposed a lot of ignorance on his part regarding ethnicity and racism. Like me, Stephen's enlightenment to gender only came about after reading Invisible Women. He also finds Twitter to be a really useful source for learning about other individual perspectives on transport, pointing in particular to blind tweeter Dr Amy Kavanagh (@BlondeHistorian). Amy has "been promoting a concept of 'just ask, don't grab' after rightly getting fed up of people invading her space, even if they have been well meaning" says Stephen. The lesson he says is that while trying to empathise may be important, "it's still no substitute for actually finding out what others are experiencing". With over 20 years' experience in the transport sector, Stephen asks himself "how on earth has it taken me so long to arrive at such a gobsmackingly simple revelation of 'ask, don't assume'?". This brings him back to data.

Stephen loves data and has gigabytes of it "scraped from all sorts of places", but, he observes, "virtually none of it has any form of user information beyond the mode of travel". The concept, in traffic modelling (where he started working), of the people using the modes wasn't really considered. "If we're going to have a diversity perspective, we absolutely must ask people about their experiences with travel, and we must make sure we know about their personal characteristics" he concludes.

Georgia was taken by the phrase 'ask, don't assume' and her mind turned to examples, one of which was the following - a roundtable discussion on connected journeys and trip chaining and how to link up different forms of transport, and what barriers are experienced and need to be overcome. In that conversation safety became a focus and very quickly the attention centred upon equipment types, helmets etc. "But it was the two women in the room, myself included, who were able to point out that safety wasn't just about equipment and helmets, it's also about personal safety and for me the choice of transport that I take is often influenced by my personal safety or where I feel safest to be at that given time". While on this occasion Georgia and the other woman were able to comfortably input to the conversation, she acknowledges that there are many situations when such voices are not heard, or event invited – either because it feels uncomfortable to ask or it hasn't occurred to the person able to invite alternative views. Jannat reflected on her experience of how it can sometimes go even further. Not only 'assume, don't ask' but being told what to think or told her views were not correct in a situation where the subject of discussion is the Middle East and the other person does not have the cultural experience she has.

As mentioned at the start, it is only of late that I have been startled, perhaps like Stephen, by my level of ignorance about race and gender. It's not that I was totally ignorant but that I hadn't taken a close enough look, enough effort to really start educating myself. Truly trying to look beyond my white male privilege results in a sense of great discovery: race and gender are all around us in our

daily lives - they may be invisible like oxygen, but like oxygen, they are an essential part of life on this planet and we need to work harder to makes them visible - and in turn be more inclusive.

Tokenism and collective responsibility

In introducing Stephen, while it is not the case (Stephen was invited to join the panel because of his ability to listen and empathise), I suggested how it might be seen that Stephen was our 'token white male' on the panel. Georgia was keen to pick up on the issue of tokenism and how, outside of this instance, it can be seen as a very demeaning term. She noted how Stephen felt obliged to defend his reason for being on the panel – something that no-one should have to do in entering into such conversations. She sees a problem in assuming that diverse panels inherently mean some tokenism and an associated compromise in terms of experience or educational understanding.

When it comes to speaking (out) on issues of racial and gender inequality, it's a matter of collective responsibility. Far from it being a matter of whether white people or men can make a contribution to speaking out on inequality, it should be seen as a collective responsibility. "The onus is not on the marginalised and the people that are suffering because of this to fix the problem, it's on the people that are benefiting from the inequities in society, to participate in that" says Georgia. She recognises that we are all starting from different places in this agenda and have to examine our own privileges; she goes on to note how COVID has perhaps brought us all to a point of introspection and "looking into how we're experiencing the world and how others might be experiencing it differently".

Emerging from the pandemic, can the time and inclination be found to address inequality?

Addressing inequality calls for introspection, greater empathy, a willingness to ask rather than assume, and an appetite for learning. Yet this cannot be a substitute for having more diversity in the sector. How confident can we be that the effort will be made in the sector to take more time, inclination and resource to foster greater inclusion when we face the pressures of societal recovery from the pandemic, and the greater crisis of climate change? Will it be all too easy to allow a culture of racial and gender inequality to persist or even worsen by remaining blind to it in the face of other demands and perhaps in pursuit of self-preservation in troubled (post) pandemic times? As Tom Sansom in our audience observed, with a finite (and perhaps diminished) pot, if we are – as we should - to try and do more to address inequality in how we behave, collect data and so on, won't something else have to give?

Nishma was clear that if diversity of perspective is not brought to bear on the sector's ongoing efforts to shape the transport system then the system will continue to have inequality built into it. Her comments implied, ultimately, a false-economy from assuming not asking. Stephen built upon this, underlining the prospect of poorer outcomes by not engaging diversity of perspective. He reflected upon the evolution of the motor age from a focus on supply and demand, to journey time savings, to accessibility: "but they're all very top-down system metrics" he says. He believes Scotland's National Transport Strategy (published last year) is transformative in this regard as it looks at transport from a user perspective, taking a bottom-up approach. In terms of the outcomes is seeks to achieve, "they are not about the system, they are about people". Importantly he goes on to remind us: "we don't consume transport for the sake of it, it's because we're trying to get to do lots of other things - so our successes are based around how people are able to achieve the things they want to do, not how people travel as such". He points out that "if we are going to have a user based perspective on supporting travel, we need to understand the users, not the system".

Hiring

Sarah also wanted to comment on workforce matters. Her frustration was evident when she explained (as a white woman in the workforce) "when conversations of diversity and inclusion are brought up, I often have other white colleagues who approach me and say, well, we can't just hire people from, you know minority ethnic backgrounds - that's not based on qualifications ...and it's a very antagonistic view on hiring and on inclusion". She has found it useful to reframe this by asking "if we're being as

vigilant about the white folks that we're letting into the business?". She senses this concern from others that if women of colour or people with other minority intersectional identities are brought into the business they are just being hired because of their minority characteristics. "Nobody wants to be hired just to be the token person…the idea that we look at every person who is not white and male as 'pushing the limits of qualification', its fundamentally untrue" she pointed out. Sarah went on to suggest we are far from perfect in our hiring processes anyway, leading to people appointed who are not appropriately qualified, for reasons including nepotism and other systemic ways in which white supremacy works.

All this needs to be addressed at its root, otherwise we will continue to have the workforces that we do, she emphasises. "People see it as getting special treatment, but our discomfort with giving non-white folks special treatment is rooted in the fact that we're not used to seeing non-white folks have the same 'advantages' that white people have had for centuries". Food for thought for anyone who cares about equality and inclusion when sitting on hiring committees and selection panels.

My own sense was that diversity and inclusion training, and unconscious bias training are only taking us so far when it comes to addressing this – there's a big difference between awareness and knowledge (from such training), and experience and proficiency (in putting that into practice). We need greater self-awareness and demonstrable and sustained effort to address these matters in everyday practices. Sarah's remarks took me back to the very wise advice from a female associate dean in the university when I was building a new team – "please take care not to build the team by only appointing in your own image".

Visibility of race issues during the pandemic

Nishma pointed us to the Public Health England report from 2020 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19' that highlighted how people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have been disproportionately affected during the pandemic. This relates to pre-existing inequalities such as health, benefits and employment issues. Concern is notable regarding care workers and transport workers such as taxi drivers who have had to continue to work during the pandemic, she points out. They can endure treatment from others that instils fear while they are playing their part to help others and remain employed – she gave the example of frontline transport workers who have been spat at – in some cases resulting in COVID-19 infection and death. The pandemic seems to have really highlighted inequalities, and prejudice. Nishma's insights remind us well how easy it can be to see the pandemic experience only through our own eyes and circumstances without appreciating how it can be for other human beings around us.

What implications for career prospects for women of colour from COVID-19?

It is hard to yet contemplate what implications there may be for career prospects and experiences of women of colour as a result of COVID-19 in the time ahead. Though simply through natural staff turnover in businesses, over a period of five years ahead we could either see an appreciable change for the better in workforce diversity and progression opportunity or conversely see things deteriorate. In relation to what has been seen during the pandemic, Jannat points out that career prospects for women of colour have been very dependent upon the roles concerned. Through speaking with friends she is conscious of the disproportionate affect of the pandemic on women of colour in frontline transport roles (relating to Nishma's points above). In terms of office-based roles it depends upon grade, in part. There are/were fewer women of colour in higher grades to begin with, whose numbers may have been depleted for reasons Jannat mentioned earlier. She imagines women of colour in lower grades may have been more likely to be furloughed, being deemed not to be in essential roles. It is clear that workforce dynamics have been affected by the pandemic and the state of flux now is an opportunity for improving or eroding prospects for women of colour.

What societal consequences from the pandemic as a result of the race/gender data gap?

Georgia commented on how notions of working to balance the scales with taking something away from the perceived majority to the benefit of the majority risk creating the wrong framing and a misperception that "issues of race and gender don't affect the majority of the population, when in actual fact, they do". Being a black woman of mixed heritage does not mean Georgia is in a minority – though it would be easy to internalise a notion that she is. Rather, it means that she has been "historically excluded and marginalised". In fact, catering to the most marginalised and excluded group within our majority female population can lead to bettering the experiences of the whole – the majority.

This brings us to the problem of missing the mark in how we collect data - in transport, though not exclusively. She gave the example of the Metropolitan Police recently being asked for statistics on hate crimes and the rise in hate crimes against people of east and south-east Asian heritage who are in the UK. "There is clear connection with the rise in such crimes and the pandemic" she says yet the data shared were inadequate in their breakdown. "The current ethnicity and nationality categories available for people of east and south-east Asian backgrounds when they're victims of crime in the UK is Chinese, other Chinese, and - just incredibly offensively – Oriental... this is in a nation where we've reported there's no issue with systemic racism". So how can we expect to understand experiences and improve experiences of the transport system for a diverse population (in relation to safety but many other matters too) if we are not capturing that data? This said, Georgia does see improvement taking place and refers to the e-scooter trials taking place in collaboration with the Department for Transport where efforts are being made to scrutinise data at a really granular level. She sees a paradigm shift happening in her industry of micromobility where it may have started with an approach of growth at all costs (a move fast, break things mentality), but things have changed. Her industry is beginning to see "how valuable it really is to take a genuine view of access and community and really embed your services in society, because those players who have survived and thrived, throughout this situation, have been those that have taken it seriously". It is increasingly about being able to evidence that business decisions resonate with the needs of the community being served.

Opening up conversations about race and racism in the new normal

Opening up conversations about race and racism as we look to the future, "is on white folks" Sarah is clear, endorsing Georgia's earlier point on this. "This is not a burden to be carried by the non-white community any longer" she says. To support this, people need to access the resources available to them – hence the reading list at the front of this writeup. Sarah wants attention to be given to how the power that is disproportionately held by white men can be shifted. Part of this will involve improved education about our history. Sarah shared how she asked herself whether or not she was deserving of being on the panel as a white woman, and whether she should pass up her place for someone more deserving. However, Georgia had pointed out to her that it can't just be women of colour who are talking about this. Sarah said "if you are white, if you are in this industry and you don't feel marginalised by the industry, go have conversations with other people – start education circles, start working groups ... begin! ... don't over think it, you're going to get it wrong, I get it wrong, but just begin somewhere and normalise the idea that when you learn something it can change your mind". She stresses that rather than worrying about discovering "shit, like I got it wrong for so long", celebrate this as the best step forward that you can have. We all need to open our minds and be prepared to change our understanding and behaviour.

Getting better at collecting data that can help

Stephen emphasises that while anecdotal insights can often be dismissed, they can be invaluable in helping to challenge and change the data that we collect and use. Otherwise we risk being in a position of assuming that we have no problem because we have no data; but as Stephen emphasises "we may have no data but that doesn't mean there's no problem". What follows is a need for people

to challenge data and data gaps – beginning with anecdote perhaps but leading to insights from data collection itself that changes in scope of coverage and attention.
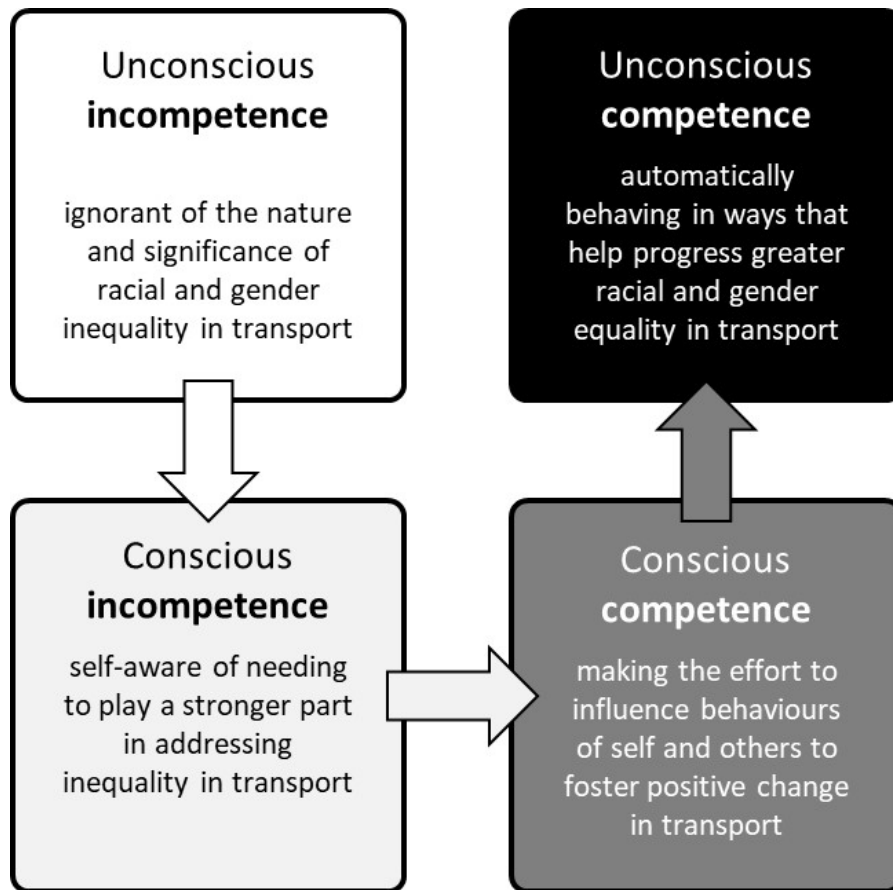
Final words

Panel members were asked in the closing minutes to offer their takeaway views and messages. For Sarah, she wanted to emphasise how the book 'Orientalism' (see reading list) mentioned by Jannat had fundamentally changed her view on the world, and encouraged others to read it. For Georgia, her message is 'just start' – begin from wherever you are in whatever way you can – and in doing so, try and appreciate the nuance in individual experiences, and intersectionality. Jannat's advice to other women of colour is to stop internalising it and, she says, "if you don't know what I'm talking about, you're probably still internalising". She also advises to attach yourself to a goal or a purpose, not to a person or an organisation or a project – you have to do this for yourself. For the white majority, her advice is to make space in the working environment to not only open discussion on race or gender but to make the effort to support and include the individuals concerned. Nishma's message is to celebrate and learn about diversity and to work together because, as she says, "oh my god, we can do amazing things together". She reminds us all not to be scared to ask questions (it's better than assuming). Encourage white allies to engage with events such as this to help their learning experience, she advises. Stephen's takeaway is that he will be going to find the book 'Orientalism', recommended by Jannat. He also offered his own recommended read 'Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World--and Why Things Are Better Than You Think' (see reading list) which helps expose the wrong assumptions we have about different places in the world.

For me, I'm left hopeful that the state of flux we are currently in may be a unique opportunity to create something for the better in terms of diversity and inclusion – a chance for a new normal in transport that embraces race and gender. We should all be engaged in continuing professional development and today's topic should surely be a high priority in this regard. The insights from this event and the reading list at the beginning of this write up offer a great place to start. Please spread the word.

Postscript

Before the event, Stephen Cragg had pointed me to a foresight article which included the 'four stages of competence' model from psychology. Reflecting upon the Fireside Chat, I thought it might be helpful for me to draw up a representation of the model as applied to addressing women of colour in the transport sector, 'the four stages of personal development to promote more inclusive transport':

| Unconscious **incompetence**

ignorant of the nature and significance of racial and gender inequality in transport | Unconscious **competence**

automatically behaving in ways that help progress greater racial and gender equality in transport |
| Conscious **incompetence**

self-aware of needing to play a stronger part in addressing inequality in transport | Conscious **competence**

making the effort to influence behaviours of self and others to foster positive change in transport |

Thinking especially of my fellow white men, if you are reading this article you are probably already beyond unconscious incompetence. We need to help ensure others are too and with a direction of travel towards automatically behaving in ways that help progress greater racial and gender equality in transport.