



Development and preliminary validation of a scale of driving moral disengagement as a tool in the exploration of driving aggression



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ABSTRACT

Aggressive driving has been found to result in road collisions which are a major cause of injury, fatality and financial cost in motorised countries. Qualitative and survey based studies suggest that drivers use justifications or explanations of their aggressive driving that bear strong resemblance to Bandura's mechanisms of moral disengagement. The aim of the current study was to explore the applicability of moral disengagement to the driving context using a purpose-adapted scale, the Driving Moral Disengagement Scale. A convenience sample of general drivers ($N = 294$) responded to an on-line survey comprised of measures of trait anger, driving anger (DAX revised), moral disengagement and driving moral disengagement. Factor analysis allowed for reduction of the new scale from 23 items to 13 items, and this shortened Driving Moral Disengagement Scale (DMDS) had good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). Scree plot criteria indicated a one factor solution accounting for 34.34% of the variance. Bivariate correlations on the shortened DMDS revealed significant and positive relationships with measures of driving aggression, moral disengagement, trait anger and driving anger, $r = .28-.55$. Moreover the strength of the association between driving aggression and moral disengagement was greater than that with driving anger. Hierarchical regression revealed driving moral disengagement as the strongest significant predictor of driving aggression, accounting for 18% of the unique variation in the DV, and suggesting this may be a more useful predictor than driving anger. In addition, significant differences between participants' mean scores for moral disengagement in everyday situations and their driving moral disengagement scores support the interpretation that drivers may behave differently from their 'usual' selves when driving, and that the driving context may encourage both greater moral disengagement and greater tendency towards aggressive responses. Chi square analysis indicated that those who scored high on driving moral disengagement were significantly more likely to report aggressive responses to driving situations than those with low driving moral disengagement scores (with a large effect size, $\phi = .42$). This suggests that the DMDS may be useful for future driving aggression research. Implications for intervention are that aiming to alert drivers to their usual self-censure mechanisms or to prevent the tendency to moral disengagement while driving may be effective in reducing driving aggression and the risky or dangerous responses associated with it on road.

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1. Introduction

Aggressive driving may have important implications for road safety as it has been found to contribute to road collisions which can result in injuries, fatalities, damage to vehicles and financial cost (Wickens, Mann, & Wiesenthal, 2013). While the more extreme, road violence events are rare, non-violent driving aggression appears to be much more common, and may also be of concern, especially where drivers choose to display riskier behaviours such as following too closely or attempting to intimidate others with the vehicle (Chliaoutakis et al., 2002; Wells-Parker et al., 2002). For this discussion, driving aggression can be regarded as any behaviour that is directed at other road users with an intention to cause a negative physical or psychological effect on the other in an attempt to achieve a goal (Soole, Lennon, Watson, & Bingham, 2011).

Some situations have been found to be more likely to evoke aggression than others. For example: environments involving alcohol (Leonard, Quigley, & Collins, 2003), social pressure (Warley, 2009) or uncomfortably warm temperatures (Carlsmith & Anderson, 1979). Similarly, results from survey studies have suggested that aggression is more common in the driving environment than in everyday situations. Self-report surveys have found that up to 82% of drivers claimed to have been a victim of driving aggression (AAMI, 2007), and as much as half of drivers admit to either initiating an aggressive driving action or responding to another driver's action in an aggressive manner. In addition, one multicountry survey found that people who reported high levels of trait anger also reported that they were more likely to express anger aggressively when on the road than in non-driving situations (Lawton & Nutter, 2002).

While both trait anger and trait aggression have been shown to be positively associated with driving anger and aggression (Deffenbacher, Deffenbacher, Lynch, & Richards, 2003; Deffenbacher, Filetti, Richards, Lynch, & Oetting, 2003; Herrero-Fernández, 2013; Lajunen & Parker, 2001; Stephens & Sullman, 2014; Wickens, Wiesenthal, Flora, & Flett, 2011) it appears that these factors do not fully account for driving aggression, and that other situational or person-related factors such as age and gender (Hennessy & Wiesenthal, 2001, 2004), narcissism (Britt & Garrity, 2006), sensation seeking (Jonah, Thiessen, & Au-Yeung, 2001) or stress tolerance (Beck, Ali, & Daughters, 2014) as well as cognitive factors (Vallieres, Bergeron, & Vallerand, 2005; Wickens, Roseborough, Hall, & Wiesenthal, 2013; Yagil, 2001), may influence whether a driver expresses his or her anger in the driving environment.

One factor that may explain why people may be more likely to express their anger in an aggressive manner on-road compared to their responses in everyday situations, is that the driving environment may encourage drivers to feel more anonymous (Ellison-Potter, Bell, & Deffenbacher, 2001; Ellison, Govern, Petri, & Figler, 1995), less responsible (Wickens et al., 2011) and less connected to their fellow road users. Anonymity may also lead to deindividuation (Diener, Fraser, Beaman, & Kelem, 1976) where a person becomes unselfconscious in relation to his/her behaviour and loses concern for the evaluations of others. In the driving context, deindividuation may render drivers more likely to engage in behaviours that violate social norms (Ellison et al., 1995; Ellison-Potter et al., 2001; Hennessy & Wiesenthal, 1999) and to greater beliefs that the probability of being held to account is reduced (Diener et al., 1976; Wickens et al., 2011) and that the vehicle provides safety and an easy escape (Hennessy & Wiesenthal, 1999). Thus perceived anonymity while driving may result in individuals being less courteous, more likely to display anger or aggression, and less inclined to fear sanction or accountability for their behaviour.

A second, and potentially related factor, is that the lack of connection with other drivers that is inherent in the driving environment may provoke the activation of psychological mechanisms that promote individuals' disengagement from their typical ways of thinking about themselves in relation to others, in particular, their moral values about appropriate behaviour. This has been termed 'moral disengagement' (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

Moral disengagement comes from a broader self-theory which looks at moral functioning and is based on the idea that people normally act in accord with their moral standards, and that behaviour is constrained by activation of self-regulatory mechanisms (eg; self-blame and self-pride). However, sometimes people behave in ways that are inconsistent with their normal morals, even to the point of engaging in behaviour that is generally regarded as immoral. Bandura (2002) proposed that for this to occur, individuals must deactivate their self-regulatory mechanisms, and disengage from their normal moral code. Bandura (2002) termed this moral disengagement, and proposed that eight psychological mechanisms underlie the

Mechanisms of moral disengagement
Moral justification: reframing an act to be for the greater good
Advantageous comparison: comparing the act to more harmful acts
Displacement of responsibility: mentally shifting responsibility for the harmful act to someone else
Diffusion of responsibility: mentally distributing the responsibility for the act across a group
Distortion of consequences: convincing the self that the act did not in fact cause harm
Dehumanisation: adopting the view of the victim as an object or animal to weaken empathy
Attribution of blame: arguing that the victim enticed the harmful act

Fig. 1. Mechanisms of moral disengagement (adapted from Bandura, 1999, 2002; Caprara et al., 2014).

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