

Competition on the Roads:

What Fuels Road Rage?

Ann Travers

University of Massachusetts at Boston

Master's Project

Advisor Dr. Susan Opotow

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Preface

This project is an overview of road rage as a conflict for drivers. One driver has power to influence another. The rage, counter rage, and escalation that plays out during competitions on the road demonstrate dangerous ‘games’ drivers play. The project has several useful components. It consists of a Public Service Announcement (PSA) video, PSA poster, Driver education lesson plan, and paper describing theories of conflict and how they translate and transform into road rage.

Competition on the Roads: What fuels road rage? consists of three main parts. First, I will discuss several theories of conflict that relate to road rage. The concept of *Gaming* will be introduced as an action that takes place in this competitive and increasingly dangerous interaction between drivers. The application of the theories of conflict in Road Rage then steers this project toward actions that can bring awareness. The next part of the project is a public service campaign. This includes a video to present awareness for the issue of road rage. The video is on VHS format with a simple and universal message for awareness and possible prevention. The third part of this project is a paper explaining the methodology of utilizing the video and other potential settings for awareness education. Specifically, a lesson plan for a module on Road Rage to be used in a driver education class is provided. An index is provided for quick reference to each part of the project as well as AAA study data as background to the phenomenon of Road Rage.

To clarify what is meant by Road Rage, the definition for this paper includes hostile actions toward another driver or between drivers. Road Rage behaviors (exhibited to other drivers or passengers) include tailgating; flashing lights in order to get the other driver to

move to a different lane; aggressive maneuvering; blocking traffic deliberately; obscene gestures; and verbal or other type of abuse.

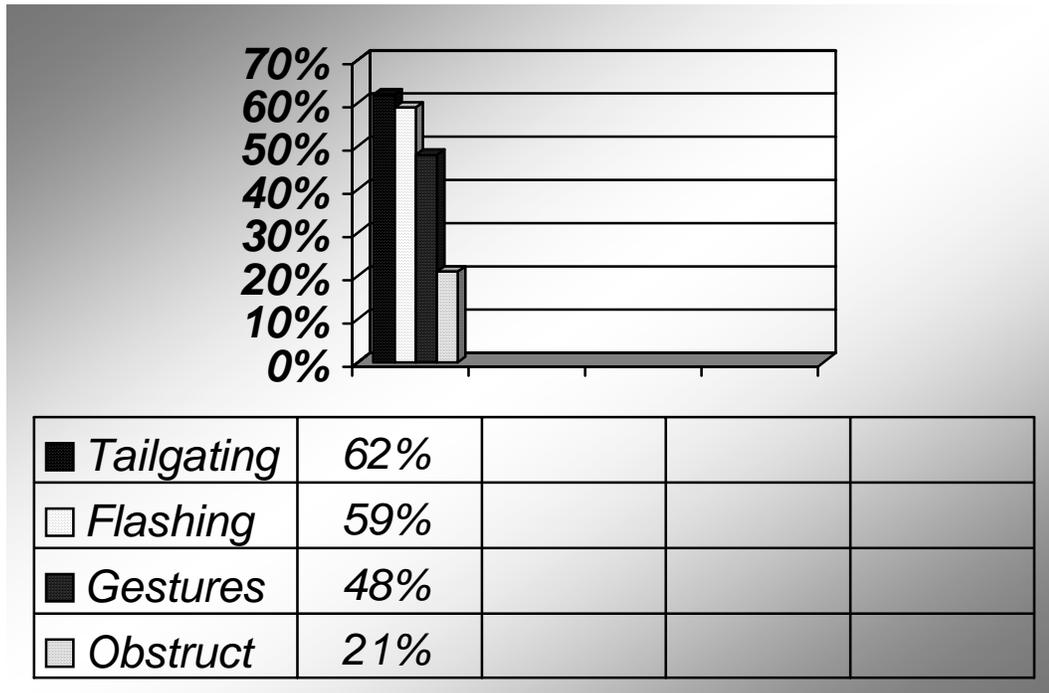
A Clear Sense of Direction

According to the AAA statistics outlined in a study in 1995, an average of at least 1,500 men, women and children are injured or killed each year in the United states as a result of “aggressive driving”. No one wants to become or contribute to that statistic. Yet, the data also indicates that there is no one profile of the so-called “aggressive driver”. We may all be guilty of it. Let this project, raise *your* awareness.

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Motorists were asked which of a list of particular types of behavior had they experienced from other motorists in the last 12 months. (AAA Study, 1995) (526 Respondents)



- Aggressive Tailgating 62 Percent
- Headlight Flashing 59 Percent
- Obscene Gestures 48 Percent
- Deliberately Obstructing other vehicles 21 Percent
- Being Physically Assaulted 1 Percent
- None of these 12 Percent

60 Percent of all respondents admitted to doing one or more of these behaviors to other motorists!

A car is in the passing lane and the car behind it flashes its lights. The car in front is obviously not going fast enough for the car in the rear and signals in this way to get the driver to move over. Aggressive driving? Yes. Impatient driver? Yes. The same can be said of tailgating which also demonstrates aggressive, impatient driving. What if the first car purposefully slows down? This person is demonstrating road rage as well. Could this become an escalating conflict? People could get hurt.

Road rage is hostile actions toward another driver or between drivers. An incident of retaliation against a person in a road rage encounter was reported in a local New Hampshire newspaper. *The Derry News* (1999) reported the following as the initial road rage incident that led to the person's home being burned and his vehicle being fire bombed.

James Ahern was arrested and charged with four counts of assault with intent to murder, four counts of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon [his 1999 Ford Expedition] two counts of destruction of property, threatening to commit a crime, murder and reckless operation. The incident began when a Volkswagen Jetta allegedly cut off Mr. Ahern's Expedition. Ahern rammed the other vehicle from behind. The car was pushed into a center lane at 55mph, despite the driver fully applying the brakes. Witnesses then reported seeing the Expedition ram the passenger side of the car, then cross back to the driver's side and ram the car at 70 mph to force it off the road (pp 1-2).

The transformation of actions and counter actions on the road into road rage disputes are variable. They are variable to the extent that every action on the road by one driver or another can be potentially labeled as actions creating a drivers' dispute. Actions that are both

independent or in reaction to the other may be perceived as disruptive. When it is perceived as disruptive it is labeled as a road rage dispute. The presence or absence of a definition of road rage by one or more parties makes road rage an implicit conflict. Nonetheless, the actions are real and demonstrate an escalation of conflict.

Conflict

In defining competition and conflict, Deutsch (1973) observes that the presence or absence of conflict is never rigidly determined by an objective state of affairs. Factors such as misperception, misinformation, and misunderstanding exist in conflict. Psychological factors exist as well. He states that the psychological process of perceiving and evaluating are also “real” and are involved in objective conditions into the experienced conflict. In thinking about road rage in these terms, then the point that it can be identified as a conflict demonstrates that there is not a fixed point of determination. Other factors come into play that make conflict subjective rather than objective. According to Deutsch (1973) there are six types of issues in conflict: Control over resources; Preferences and nuisances; Values; Beliefs; the Nature of the Relationship between the parties; and False conflict. Control over resources would include space, power, money, property and is viewed as nonsharable. Preferences and nuisances are activities and tastes in one group that impinge upon another. Values correspond to the concern of “what should be”. It is when one value dominates another value which displaces another’s value or different values. Beliefs reflect “what is” and consist of facts, information, and knowledge about reality. The nature of the relationship between the parties themselves may be a source of conflict. False conflict is the occurrence of conflict when there is no objective bases for it. It represents misperceptions and misunderstandings.

Defining Road Rage Conflict

How can we define the kind of conflict that elicits road rage? It would appear to be a latent conflict having no objective basis (Deutsch, 1973). These conflicts stem from misperception or misunderstanding. The person driving whom gets angry because someone ‘cut them off’ or ‘is driving too slow’ personalizes the reason, thinking that the other driver is doing it on purpose and that it is deliberate. This person’s perception is limited and she might misunderstand the events. Now if the angry driver displays road rage behaviors, such as blasting the horn, what kind of effect might it have on the other driver? This behavior may elicit new motives and change the attitude of the target of the road rage. They, in turn, may show signs of aggression or retaliation. Then, the latent conflict becomes a *true* conflict (Deutsch, 1973).

Actions That Elicit Road Rage

Previously stated, Deutsch (1973) outlines the six basic issues that present conflicts. Two of the resources that people battle over are power and space. In driving, both of these exist. Drivers compete for their space on the road. Power is prevalent in conflict. How much power does each driver use to influence other drivers or create conflict? Another issue surrounding road rage is nuisances. Simply put; one person’s driving enrages another driver. The way one person drives is a nuisance to another, such as driving too slowly or cutting someone off. But is road rage an acceptable way to deal with a perceived nuisance? Why must another driver deal with a nuisance this way rather than ignoring it, or contacting the police after taking down the license plate number? This is vigilante justice if it seems disproportionate to the incident that elicited the response.

Explanations of Road Rage Through Conflict Theory

There are several conflict theory models to examine that when outlined in general terms can then be applied to an issue such as road rage. These are Moral exclusion, Belief in a Just World, Power, Naming, Blaming, & Claiming, and Competition.

Moral Exclusion

Moral exclusion occurs when a person or group is outside the boundaries of moral values, rules, and fairness principles apply (Opotow 1990). They are perceived as nonentities, undeserving and expendable. When something bad happens to those outside of this boundary, it is seen as acceptable and just. The boundary of fairness that we have is the scope of justice. The scope of justice is autonomous. That is, either you are seen within the scope of justice or outside of it. The scope of justice may be different based on historical periods. The scope shifts and changes. One's scope of justice is determined in the most part by the prevailing social order (Opotow, 1990). This prevailing social order on our nation's highways may be telling us something noteworthy about society.

Morally Excluding Other Drivers

Moral Exclusion in road rage is the process to which the other driver is seen as a nonentity and therefore outside of the scope of justice. Hostile actions on the road are seen as justifiable and acceptable. This is up to and including a manifestation of violence. In looking at Road Rage, when cars were first invented those that had them would have been horrified to have another driver aggressively try to cut them off. Those behaviors were not acceptable then, and yet by the 1990s, they may be a 'normal' part of driving. The unconnectedness that one driver feels to another driver is taking this theory and viewing those outside of the scope of justice as all other drivers. When people step into their cars, do they become less human and perceive other drivers as non-entities? This perception further leads people to feel unconnected to the other

driver, which provokes negative attitudes (Opatow, 1990). Drivers on roadways rarely know one another yet they make assumptions about the others' driving behaviors. However, the deeds of road rage are distinct and demonstrate violent tendencies. The scope of justice for the party demonstrating road rage shrinks. As this occurs, the boundaries of harm doing expand (Opatow, 1990). The expansion of the harm doing is alarming. Actions that appear minor such as a blasting horn or flashing lights can escalate to more consequential results. *Is road rage even acceptable?* It has existed for decades. Somehow, the intensity and consequences are becoming more explosive.

Normalizing Violence

With all the driving a person does, these perceptions of deliberate acts or nuisances that trigger road rage perpetuate a cycle that normalizes violence. Just as in normalizing violence to the point that some acts are accepted, road rage becomes justified when there is acceptance of the repeated occurrence of it (Opatow, 1990). The processes that incorporate moral exclusion reflect directly on the phenomenon of road rage and lead toward the process of normalizing violence. Behaviors that reflect discourteous driving have changed over time into acts that are more egregious. People's acceptance of these acts have mutually changed the scope of justice. Does this acceptability reflect the change in society of excusing behaviors that have increasingly become more violent? To even question its acceptance is to look at the behaviors in terms of the past. Recent society would state an attitude of "that's just the way things are now". The irrelevance of the other driver is a perception held by **both** drivers. Normalizing violence is accepting behaviors that are justifiable in the eyes of the driver committing the acts of road rage.

How, then does a process such as blaming the victim explain the reciprocity of road rage? (Opatow, 1990). In that respect, if the 'competition' resumes, the processes of either diffusing or displacing responsibility is highlighted (Opatow, 1990). Similarly, in a childish

tussle between toddlers, when each bellows, “They started it!,” they point at each other. Little does the young mind comprehend that one finger is pointing straight at them!

Belief in a Just World

To accept another’s suffering, one has to alter one’s view of the victim either to eliminate our own awareness of his suffering or to persuade ourselves that he really is not suffering at all, or that he is the kind of person who brings suffering upon himself, or that he is somewhat less than human. The Belief in a Just World Theory is how people orient themselves to their environment (Lerner, 1980). The assumptions are of orderliness and controllability of our environment. These assumptions are tied to the image of a manageable and predictable world. We see reality as the way we live our life. We believe it is the “right” way and it is an ought quality as Lerner (1980) puts it. An ought quality is one that that we feel entitled to.

A Just World is when people “get what they deserve”. The outcome is what they are entitled to. There are two bases for entitlement, one’s behavior, and one’s attributes. People then interpret events to fit into this Belief of a Just World. People want to see good prevail and bad to suffer. However, this belief is taken to the point that the line between reality and fantasy is sometimes hard for people to distinguish. Perhaps that is why in road rage, the behaviors become so disproportionate to the initial actions on the road. The so-called aggrieved driver (the one that was cut off etc.) then takes it into their own hands to seek ‘justice’, to see his good prevail.

Applying The Belief in a Just World to Road Rage

Belief in a Just World in road rage is the belief that in order for one driver to be the target of road rage, they had some initial action to bring about the behaviors in others. (Blaming the victim) Just as in Belief in a Just World Theory, the target, deserved the road rage behavior leveled at them (Lerner, 1980). The target had it coming, simply put. The driver pulled out in

traffic without signaling, so the horn blaring at them or the aggressive move to ‘drive them off the road’ was justified.

The displacing of the responsibility in Road Rage leads to the more distinctive normalization of violence. That is, similarly situated individuals may agree that flashing high beams or other road rage behaviors are fitting. This, of course is based on the target driver ‘irresponsibly’ driving below the speed limit. That in itself complicates the scenario of where the initial responsibility may lie. The roads have become faster and faster (perhaps, as our lives have become so), since 65mph really means setting the cruise control for at least 70 mph. The groupthink process, too, takes over in road rage. People start thinking the same way about the driving experience. Rather than thinking for themselves about the consequences of acts of road rage, they participate with other drivers. It becomes an almost pack-like existence. The pace on the roads and the competitive driving overtakes the masses on the road. The 1995 AAA study reports that over 90% of drivers have experienced road rage. 60% have personally participated in one form or another. The symbolism of the road rage perpetrator as holding power over the other driver as the non-entity is both real and imagined.

Power

Kipnis (1976) discusses the metamorphic effects of power. The powerholder, as he describes, influences the other, they devalue the other and maintain a psychological distance from them. Any emotional involvement is kept to a minimum. The very act of devaluing the target person *reinforces* their view to devalue them as the target person complies to their influence. The more the powerholder influences a target’s behavior, the more they feel that they control the target’s behavior, thus having power over them.

Drivers wielding power over others

Power in road rage can be illustrated by driver A influencing another driver B to comply to their wishes. Driver B is then devalued further. Driver A is the powerholder.

One person cannot control another person's behavior on the road. Or can they? Can one driver influence another driver's driving? Kipnis (1976) notes that, the use of directive and controlling means of influence, followed by compliance by the target, shows that behavior is not self-controlled but controlled by the powerholder. For instance, imagine if two cars are at a stop sign, the driver behind, Chris, beeps his horn incessantly to have the other driver, in front, Sandy, proceed. When Sandy pulls forward, it seems as she is doing so as the result of the Chris' action. Now Chris is in another situation. He flashes his high beams in an effort to influence Lou the driver ahead to move over into a slower travel lane. If Lou then complies, Chris may perceive once again his actions as causing the other driver's actions. The driver is able to elicit a response from other drivers. He is a powerholder in at least his *own* mind. They not only control their own vehicle but they also believe that they have control over other drivers and their vehicles. Kipnis's (1976) work suggests that along with the belief that they are influencing the other driver's behavior, they also devalue the other driver, as the driver distances himself both socially and psychologically from the target of his influence tactics (Kipnis, 1976). Symbolically the driver, with this power, is shielded or surrounded by an automobile. Logically, it would figure that people who participate in road rage behavior drive larger or more powerful cars, SUV's, and trucks. Their vehicle literally becomes a weapon of force, or threat of force, by its imposing nature. A report on road rage in U.S. News (June 1997) indicates that the vehicles themselves fuel feelings of power.

Symbolism in Power

Power in a symbolic form transcends between car and driver. The driver controls the car (speed and maneuvering) and the car itself has an engine and parts that propel the vehicle. ‘Muscle cars’ were so called because they packed a lot of punch. More horsepower, literally created an extension from car to driver of more power. The magnum trucks that have graced the auto dealerships are V-10s not *just* V8s. Do people that drive these ‘beasts of a car’ need that kind of power in a vehicle? Does it give them more power on the road over other drivers? Or does this structural power made of steel and horsepower substitute for a lack of power for them personally? When the layers between drivers are peeled away, when the steel and 33 ½” lifts are gone, would a 5’5” man really say those things or act aggressively to a 6’5” and 300 pound target of his road rage? So then, this powerful exterior in a vehicle transforms the man or woman inside to an equally powerful identity and their actions seek to prove their competitiveness. Does the power make the driver more competitive? Or do competitive drivers feel more powerful?

Competition Theory

A competitive process views the solution to conflict as one imposed by one side on the other (Deutsch, 1990). One person’s power is enhanced while the other is minimized. In driving competition, aggressive moves that serve to influence the other driver are either accepted or challenged. When one driver challenges another on the road, the game is played out with heavy steel vehicles cruising with speed and intention. The intention may be to show the other driver that they were wrong.

Cooperation and Competition in Driving

Competition on the roads describes the posturing for space on the roadway and actions to obtain that space. It is a driver who frames the expectations that orient him cognitively to the

situation that confronts him. If the driver finds the driving experience to be of a cooperative nature, that is, other drivers are yielding the right of way, using directionals, driving appropriate speeds etc., then they, in turn, drive in a cooperative manner. Who determines when it is or is not cooperative? People act like they are entitled to their space on the road and then, compete for it. An experience where a driver perceives that she is in a competitive driving environment could lead to aggression. Driving would be described as a task oriented process (Deutsch, 1982). People, therefore, could be instrumental in carrying out the task. For example, a cooperative driving experience would enable drivers to get to their destination and complete their task. In the road rage setting, people are perceived as interfering with the task. The task, per se could be multi dimensional. People figure on a certain timeline for their commutes. When they perceive that someone is impeding their progress, thwarting their expectations and invading their agenda, they respond with what they consider warranted directive behavior, which might be tailgating or something more hostile (U.S. News, June 1997).

Transformation of Disputes

Naming, Claiming and Blaming

A significant portion of any dispute exists only in the minds of the disputants (Felstiner, Abels, Sarat, 1980-81). The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, and Claiming theory follows how disputes emerge and are transformed from one stage to the next. The way experiences become grievances, and how grievances become disputes focuses on a social process. It speculates that people have a capacity to tolerate substantial distress and injustice. This tolerance actually represents a failure to perceive that there has been an injury. These failures may be self-induced or be coming from external factors. What then does this mean conversely for the intolerance of people to 'accept' so-called injury in the road, i.e., being cut off or someone not signaling properly? The authors introduce the terms unperceived injurious events

that must be transformed into a perceived injurious experience. That is why I presume in road rage not all events are considered to the blaming or claiming stage of a dispute. The description or perception that the individual has in labeling what is injurious can be the problem of defining road rage. Feelings about injurious events are not universal, so comparisons or resolution processes cannot be implemented across the board. The first stage of transformation is that we say that an experience has been injurious is naming. The next stage of transformation is when the injury is attributed to a fault of another's or social entity. This is blaming. As this experience is turned into a grievance in blaming, it is then seen as a violation of norms. As such it is remediable. The aggrieved feels that something must be done about it. This is the step to which, in road rage, action formulates. Retaliation is the action against the perceived event and label of being someone else's fault and wanting something done about it. The third transformation is when the grievance is voiced to that person who is to blame. In road rage, asking for some remedy is not explicit, and the voice takes many forms (counteraction, horns, lights, maneuvers, gestures, and shouting). This is claiming. The claim is transformed to a dispute when it is not accepted for remedy and rejected. Transformations reflect social structural variables and identity issues. The stages, naming, blaming, and claiming are: Subjective; Unstable; Reactive; and Complicated. The stages can be subjective in that they need not be accompanied by observable behavior. The stages are unstable because the process relies on feelings and feelings change. We define and redefine reactive responses based on our own perceptions and definitions. These responses can be based on communication, behaviors and expectations of others.

The stages are considered complicated since other things come into play such as faulty recall, ambiguous behavior, conflicting objectives, and inconsistent and uncertain values and norms (Felstiner, Abel, & Sarat, 1980-81).

A Model of Road Rage

Driving is a daily occurrence for many Americans. The number of hours or miles one spends behind the wheel of an automobile varies by individual. The capacity of people to respond to problems or variances in their driving routines also depends on the individual. The idea of naming the road rage experience, identifying the blame that lead to certain actions, involving oneself in the game of road rage, and then maintaining a claim is outlined in the following sections more closely.

Naming Road Rage

How do we name road rage? Naming means that a person identifies a particular experience as being injurious to them. The problem with this is that the person proceeds with the transformation and definition of what is injurious. What is injurious for one, may or may not be perceived as injurious to another. The person names the behaviors that are perceived to be injurious as reasons for their subsequent road rage. The action that person takes to the target of road rage names the road rage. It *is* the event of road rage. The naming of behaviors that trigger road rage are subjective because driving slowly or not using directionals may, or may not, be interpreted as potential reasons to react with road rage. Some drivers may not perceive either as injurious to them. But when they do, they enter the next phase of the road rage experience. The naming in road rage can get complicated by not just the person to person differences of defining an event as road rage, but the moment to moment items such as mood, driving agenda, and time pressures. These make naming road rage unstable and reactive. You may react today to an event that you describe as road rage because you are late to work. Tomorrow the very same driving event occurs but it does not rise to the level of you naming it as road rage. Today, you

are reactive to naming it road rage. There is no introspection or analysis of your thoughts in naming road rage and therefore, it is incomplete as well.

Blaming in Road Rage

Blaming takes the naming to the next level. Who *is* to blame for road rage? The person identifies the injurious event, and in recognizing that they were aggrieved, feels something must be done about it. They then commit an act of road rage. The road rage *is* the action taken (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat, 1980-81). The range of behavior that can occur in the naming and blaming stages is greater (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat, 1980-81). The behaviors that can be considered road rage can vary tremendously. Road rage actions are also subjective since it is the target's perception of whether tailgating constitute road rage. There can also be regional, gender, or cultural differences that make it subjective. Certain road rage actions could be interpreted as such in New Hampshire but not in New York City. The pace of driving in New York City may be faster or maneuvering more aggressively to begin with. Perhaps, the New Hampshire driver does not use directionals as often as there is no need to signal intention in open lanes. The intensity of the action diminishes the subjectivity of whether it would be defined as road rage or not. Subtle actions carry more probability of a broad range of how it is defined.

Blaming is extremely complicated. The personal factor that surrounds the naming carries to the blaming stage. However, the unstable and reactive factors of the blaming characteristic in road rage is nearly self-fulfilling in itself. Feelings take over that make this stage unstable, and the reactions mold the subsequent counteractions. As stated by Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat, (1980-81), a significant portion of any dispute exists only in the minds of the disputants. The action to blame in road rage is only based on the drivers own perception that they *named* as road rage in the first place. The blaming stage places the **face** on road rage – the other driver.

Gaming in Road Rage

I propose another step prior to claiming (or the dispute stage). I label the subsequent actions of the road rage driver as *gaming*. Gaming is a step in the road rage process after the injurious event has been perceived, after another driver is identified as the blame, and the target or other player competes by speeding, chasing, maneuvering in traffic etc..

Gaming transforms blaming into action. It does not go as far as claiming a dispute, but satisfies the need for asserting that something must be done. *Gaming* emphasizes the competitive realm that the driving has become and turns it into a type of jousting. It is turned into a sport. The driving becomes competitive and actions turn the competitive driving experience into a game. There is also an opponent, the other driver. Actions of one, driver A, bring reactions from the other, driver B. The concept of gaming reinforces the notion of driving as a competitive rather than a cooperative experience. *It is only a game, no harm done*. However, the limits the game can increase danger for all drivers.

Driver 1 speeds up and passes the 'slower' driver, then, remarkably, *slows down!* The driver 2 just passed and now behind, is aggravated by Driver 1's behavior. They are each '*the other driver*' in this road game. The two drivers continue sparring, sometimes oblivious to others on the road. The gaming remains the dangerous part as drivers play chicken. Who is going to lose face first? Who is the most aggravated by the game?

Claiming in Road Rage

Little or no verbal communication takes place in road rage to signify a claiming of the injurious event. Non-verbal behavior, however, may suffice in recognizing the injurious event. The lack of acknowledgement and the continuance of the nuisance may transform the event into a dispute. If reactions ensue that lead to other actions, a dispute of undeterminable proportions could occur. The incident reported in the *Derry News* described at the beginning of this paper

illustrates this point. Another example, in the *New Hampshire Sunday News*, reported that a NH man was jailed after a ‘Road Rage’ stabbing. “Police Sgt. John Frasier would not release many details of what precipitated the stabbing,...but suggested tailgating may have been involved” (New Hampshire Sunday News, December 15, 2002).

Table 1 below, illustrates the stages in conflict and the stages of transformation of disputes in Road Rage. As noted in this text, *Gaming* is a concept stage that exists in Road Rage. Claiming is not usually seen in Road Rage but is part of a dispute becoming a conflict.

Transformation of Disputes	Conflict	Road Rage
NAMING	✓	✓
BLAMING	✓	✓
<i>GAMING</i>		✓
CLAIMING	✓	

Table 1

Maybe it is the reciprocity of road rage that prevents the claiming stage to become realized more often. Neither driver wants to admit to his or her role in the road rage incident. An article in Parade magazine titled, Why Are We So Angry?, quotes Doris Wilde Helmering, a therapist and author of *Sense Ability* as saying, “People no longer hold themselves accountable for their bad behavior. They blame anyone and everything for their anger”. She suggests that we have lost civility and are intolerant of any inconvenience (Parade Magazine, September 9, 2001). When one party, or driver is targeted without the counteractions, then fear of reprisal from the other person may stand in the way of reporting such incidents. The subjectivity of naming road

rage may cloud the ability of claiming in road rage. Road rage, I propose, is under-reported because of this.

In summary, driving experiences that describe road rage represent one driver being annoyed with another. The incidents of road rage appear to be instances of assertion of power from one driver to another. This power may even be symbolized in the cars themselves based on size and horsepower. The separation of the persons from the cars or the driving behaviors legitimizes the actions taken by the annoyed drivers. The actions turn to a type of gaming response. The driver(s) become competitive and their vehicles and driving are part of the game. Treating the other drivers as non-entities normalizes the violence that escalates in road rage. The severity and escalation of this type of conflict cannot be overlooked. Many services are provided that recognize the conflict and give drivers ways to remain safe on the roads (James, 1999). There are groups, such as Citizens Against Speeding and Aggressive Driving and government programs within the National Safety Council that bring awareness and education to this issue (Connell & Joint, 1996)

Do people comprehend what behaviors they are displaying behind the wheel? Are we accepting the behaviors in others because we do it too? Should there be a reason to stop and at least reflect before engaging in such behavior? The average person that engages in road rage is too far removed from the more violent manifestations of road rage to understand the escalation from the minor actions to those more violent in nature. This same average person may not realize the complacency that they exhibit allows the phenomenon of road rage to continue. Who is at risk? What message and medium is more likely to reduce the incidents of road rage?

Despite the statistics that show increases in aggressive driving as well as the injury and death rates that result, there is no federal action that establishes laws, penalties, or even specific education. On the state level, Connecticut, Arizona, and Maryland, have specific provisions that

require attendance at driver education programs (Goehring, 1998). These courses address aggressive driving and how to modify it. At a national level, I propose an awareness campaign with a video public service announcement. I also propose a follow-up of a self-contained road rage driver education module distributed through the National Safety Council.

Looking Into The Rearview Mirror

Do people really think ‘road rage’ is okay? Sometimes drivers are on both sides of the issue – as a target and as an aggressor. I find myself on the road a lot. I have braked for a tailgator. I have flashed my lights. I have been a tailgator. I have been tailgated. I have been yelled at. I have been flashed. I have been patient. I have been frustrated. I have been running late. I have been late. I use my directionals. I use my accelerator. This is my focus in a sense. I took a defensive driving course when I was in college. I was a resident assistant of an outdoor experiential learning dorm that traveled. The instructor said, “What are you going to do when you get there? Absolutely nothing (...to risk a life or limb) so SLOW down”. I do also recall that I received the golden star award during this class. So when I do something stupid behind the wheel, I think of this instructor and feel guilty. Although, nothing curbs my road rage as a deterrent as much as my children.

Imagine a child sitting in a car seat, hearing not-so-kind-words spewing from your mouth. A child that young models behaviors learned and repeats everything! That has been a significant deterrent to me to watch *my* behaviors while driving. Prior to having children of my own, I would judge my character and behaviors on what my mother would think of me. After she died, though it was a deterrent to think always of the impact of my actions, she was not there for me to face. Now, with my children, I am sensitive to their perceptions of my behavior. I cringe when my three year old daughter, Emery referred to our dog as stupid. I explained to her that we do not say that word in our house. With an innocent reply that she did not know would humble me so much, she said, “But, Mommy, I heard that from you!” How the truth hurts! So, how can I say, “idiot!” or “stupid driver” in front of her? I am accountable for my words and actions. These deterrents can be an important part of a public safety message on road rage.

For me to get inside the moment – from this distance of the pen and paper, from the hands to steering wheel can bring a few sensations but not all. If there is a slow driver (defined for me, as at or under the speed limit) my hands grip the wheel so that I feel the tightness. A surge of electric-like sensations fire in my nerves. I feel the tingling of this activity within me. My thoughts race to my purpose – usually to my destination. My type A personality overtakes my body – the irrational actions that follow cloud my usually good judgement. I either try to pass when safety may be an issue, tailgate, or occasionally ‘flash’ my lights as a reminder to the other driver to speed it up. All of this is accompanied by unbecoming, nasty comments borne of frustration.

As I feel this scenario – in my mind’s eye – I stop. What has changed? Maybe like I feel after September 11th, there are things or non-things that are more important. I do not want to put my children’s lives in jeopardy over mere frustration and stupidity. I do not want them – especially my 3-year-old to repeat the words or see the behavior.

MethodSplit Second

The time between the light changing and the driver behind you honking his horn.

Defining when and what behaviors ‘cross’ the line into “road rage” may be an assessment that each of us makes on our own. But is there a need to address this behavior? Start by viewing the acknowledgement of a dispute/conflict as the first step in the resolution process. In mediation, when both parties are willing to voluntarily come to the table with a neutral third party to address their differences then the resolution process can begin. The starting point for reducing ‘road rage’ may be awareness.

Awareness is the key as the first step to *identifying the problem*. Following the theories on power, moral exclusion, and naming, blaming, and claiming by identifying the problem, some people may understand the message by the connection to their own life. For example, in road rage vehicles shield people’s behavior from their ‘human-ness’, then ‘exposing the person within the vehicle separates the non-entity (vehicle) from the driver (similar to everyone else with their human schedules etc.) Awareness allows the driving public to face the problem or moreover, *see the face in the problem*. (And maybe *that face* is staring them back in their mirror!)

Why the Focus?

More cars. According to Geocities statistics on Road Rage, there are 17% more cars in America today than there were 10 years ago, while the number of drivers have increased by 10%. More pressure for time, more aggression.... Aggression which turns into more violent manifestations of actions is prevalent in many arenas in recent history. Violence in sports, violence in sports *fans*, incidents in schools, workplaces, and homes. Road rage is just a snapshot

of the aggression that is happening in other areas of society. Some of the so called 'road rage behaviors' may seem benign to most. The tendency of those behaviors to come out more frequently and from 'average' people is noteworthy. The complacency to accept the behaviors and counter behave is astounding! Have the prevailing social norms shifted and changed? (Opotow, 1990)

There are a number of explanations for road rage. 1. Crowded highways, cause tailgating and near-accidents. 2. Great urgency to reach destinations fast. 3. Combination of ignorance and bad manners. In a summary of more than one thousand adults, the consensus is that people are less courteous than even 5 years ago (US News, August 26, 1997). There may be reactions to overcrowding or traffic that triggers feelings. Human beings are territorial, and their car can be an extension of their personal space (Joint, 1995). Opotow (2000) writes that the physiological predisposition for aggression is readily aroused in adverse environmental conditions. Crowding can be one of these. Aggression also results from greed, fear, and competition. In road rage, moral exclusion conceals injustice, by denying one's own role in direct or structural violence by victim blaming and seeing one's own contribution as negligible.

A report on Aggressive Driving completed for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, says that more violent expressions of aggressive driving are rarely because of a single incident, but are because of a cumulative series of stressors in the individual's life. The so-called reasons for the disputes are actually the triggers. The incident may be trivial but there exists some reservoir of anger, hostility, or frustration that is released by the triggering event (Mizell, 1997). Bottlenecks, merging traffic and construction spots all lead to greater problems of aggressive driving. It is defined as a selfish, "me-first" attitude that is intentionally inconsiderate of other drivers (Walters & Conner, 1998). According to a study on Driver Aggression, Driving represents a situation in which people are forced to take a degree of interest in the movements

and behavior of strangers (Connell & Joint, 1996). This focuses on the degree of anonymity of driving.

What is *normal*?

A newspaper reporter in NY was being interviewed about getting back to ‘normal’ after September 11th, (this was three months afterward) and remarked that someone ‘flipped her off’ on a ramp when she was driving home and she sighed, “Things are finally back to normal”. It is astounding that she focused on a road rage incident to identify the point of normalcy.

But what does that mean? Are drivers’ annoyance with others’ driving being noticed again, instead of being charitable and giving ‘the benefit of the doubt’? Was the grace period over? Was the acceptable time to ‘mourn’ and then resume normal activities reached? If road rage resumes like this, what does it say about the components involved in its existence, ranging from action to reaction, motive and entitlement? The human factor and not the cars are the participants. The cars are the agents – and literally the vehicles of this transmission of aggression.

The Application of Theories

The moral exclusion theory related to ‘road rage’ is speculative of a mere treatment of all other drivers as non-entities. Or does it relate to a specific mindset of large vehicles such as SUVs versus subcompacts or young drivers versus older drivers? Is it driver A exclusive to everyone else. The ‘non-entity issue’ is based on not recognizing the other drivers as people driving cars but just as driving actions and to a lesser degree, machines. Yet, seeing a driver as a ‘non entity’ perpetuates the justification of not making eye contact, or being vulgar or even violent. A personal observation of road rage is that if I don’t make contact I am not seen as

human and I do not see them that way. I am being illogical so I do not want to reason my behaviors or theirs.

What do other people think? Is it the power? Is it moral exclusion? Is it competition on the roads- road rage as a game? Is it bullying? Is it vigilante justice? How many people have had it happen to them? How many people have done it to others? Is it increasing?

I believe a national campaign featuring children witnessing the behaviors or mimicking would be thought provoking. Like the Michelin tires ad featuring a baby and stating, “a lot is riding on them” or a new internal safety campaign for the United States Postal Service showing children quipping, “Dad, all you had to do was wear your seatbelt”. For Road Rage, a face of a child in a rearview mirror and the subscript, “Remember, who’s watching... and they’re listening too!” would be an effective message (Attachment 4, poster).

Psychologist, Arnold Nerenberg considers road rage to be a psychological condition and sees anger as the root of the problem. He has developed the diagnosis as “road rage disorder”. More notable, however, is the familial connection to this disorder. A child growing up with someone demonstrating road rage creates a predisposition to later develop the same behaviors (Goehring, 1998). Children learn this behavior from their parents, cartoons, and the media (James, 1999).

How to Address the Issue of Road Rage

Public service announcements that make people aware of road rage not only highlight the issue but may focus on behaviors that everyone have experienced. If by being behind the wheel, and being encapsulated in a metal structure, it shields a person from other ‘persons’, then focus on the behavior exposes these behaviors for what they are: normalizing violence. I find that when subjects are broken down into something that potentially touches a nerve or personalizes a message the message is accepted. The degree that someone finds ‘road rage behaviors’

unacceptable may be related to how they view those behaviors acted *against* them not *by* them. A video spot is to be thought of as provoking yet universal in its message.

I look at how ads influence behavior or at least raise awareness. What lies behind the persuasive message? In this road rage spot, it is the simplicity that carries the message. The interpretation is for the audience. It is not lecturing, but subtle in exposing the subject matter. The realization from the first scene is that road rage itself may happen subtly. We have heard from sensational headlines of violence resulting from inane acts of aggression on the road. We might even agree that it is a competition on the road. But, do we get the fact that if it is a competition then no one wins, when the aggression escalates? The innocent questions and visual of the children bring us back to reality *within our car*, regardless of what is happening outside of it.

Getting the Message Across

How should this message come across? I wanted to personalize the message, so it can be taken personally. To create a Public Service Announcement on Road Rage I speculate that ‘road rage’ is a common occurrence practiced at one time or another by the *average* person, young and old, men and women, across ethnicities, and across classes. Road Rage reflects a breakdown of civility (AAA Study Report, 1995). People may not recognize that they are engaging in road rage until behaviors they see as their own are identified with it. What, then, might prevent them from continuing to engage in it?

In the past ten years common road rage behaviors are increasing. Escalation to the point of physically harmful violence certainly does not happen to the average road rager. But, the behaviors that normalize violence seem to be tolerated and more acceptable if only by *those doing them*. So, *what if* they or someone they care about were objects of road rage? Would that be acceptable? What would make it stop?

Campaigns about safety or sexual harassment awareness try to ‘hit home’. They seek to bring behaviors to a halt based on personalizing points to those you would not want to hurt if you continued the behavior. The “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk” Ad council campaign illustrates this point. Seventy percent of Americans have tried to stop someone from driving drunk based on this public service announcement (Conlon , 2002) . Companies, for example, focus their safety programs on explaining that when someone is injured at work as a result of an unsafe act, his or her home life is affected as well. As another example, you may not share that ‘dirty joke’ with a coworker if your spouse or son or daughter were listening. Similarly, others may be offended by that joke as well. It suggests “think twice”. Road rage may be responsive to the same message.

What to do with the message

I designed a short public service announcement for Road Rage Awareness (Attachment 1). The pictures, the words, and the messages are simple and brief. Its purpose is to make people aware of road rage and evoke personal feelings of wanting to curb it. In the opening scene, the traffic lights and the words describe what many people experience. That is, no sooner does the light change then the driver behind is honking their horn to go. As frequent as this may be, how often people identify with the driver behind, doing the honking? Are we so impatient that a mere split second has taken us off schedule?

Driving the *Message* Home

Tempo

The tempo of the video depicts images quickly on the screen. The speed of the video is not so much to mirror the speed on the road as much as the pace itself that leads drivers to road rage behaviors. It represents the uncontrollable sensations the drivers find themselves in; backed up traffic, running late, reactions to other drivers. Therefore, the tempo of the video itself has a

message portrayed about road rage. The visual tempo as well as the music accompaniment sets the tone of feeling rushed.

The fast tempo leading to an almost still picture of a child in a car seat is meant to bring the focus to who is more important to the driver. There is a certain innocence of the image. There is usually a barrage of questions from a youngster to explain the current environment. You certainly do not have all the answers to the “why” questions. But, what happens when the “Why” is : “Why did you call that man a stupid idiot?”, “Why did you beep your horn?” How do those explanations make *you* feel? It places the whole road rage issue in another perspective, especially when more “whys” follow.

Images

The images in the video must capture the essence of road rage for the majority and also connect the viewer to the message in a way to allow them to think about controlling it within their own actions. So many ad campaigns about issues such as smoking or drugs focus on the people in our sphere of influence as well as those we care about. Public awareness about child abuse has increased from just Ten percent in the mid-1970s to more than Ninety percent today (Conlon, 2002).

The images must also depict the moment or conditions that generate road rage. Many of these conditions are self-induced, like getting a late start to your destination. And, how much of it becomes physiological? I was in a doctor’s office and saw a sign that read, “How was traffic? How is your blood pressure?” The images must bring a person to the moment to help them understand, what the “symptoms” of road rage are. The images themselves although a ‘One size fits all’ portrayal, gives way to each individual’s interpretation of, ‘If the shoe fits wear it’.

Public Service Announcements

To raise awareness of Road Rage, I propose the Public Service Announcement (PSA) to be aired to help change people’s driving behaviors. Public Service announcements have been

very effective in changing the public's attention so they take action (Fass, 2000). The frequency of the message "has a great effect on public consciousness"(Wooden, 1994). To enhance this message, posters (attachment 4) would be posted in public buildings as other Ad Council Campaign posters are seen.

Other Settings

To follow-up on the message, driver education classes need to include a segment on road rage. Although some programs may have segments devoted to the subject, it is not a universal requirement to include it. Attachments 2 and 3, are a powerpoint presentation I designed with slides and lesson plan for a module on road rage. This can be used for driver education classes and retraining programs. It is also available on CD-rom (Attachment 3).

Lesson Plan Kit

For ease of use, the lesson plan is a self-contained kit that includes an easel-like book with slide pages on one side and instructor notes on the other side. This can be used with a small group. The CD-rom version with powerpoint slides can be utilized in a setting with a larger group to be used with a TV or projection screen. Printing the powerpoint presentation to overhead slide transparencies can extend its use with an overhead projector.

The Seventeen slides go through the conflict theories as they apply to Road rage. The images are simple and help the message to be conveyed universally. The slides can be displayed to the participants in the various mediums discussed earlier. The lesson plan follows each slide. Using the easel-like capacities of the book, the slides can be facing the students and the notes show only for the instructor to refer to. Each slide note includes the summary, key issues, and questions. The intent is to make the module as interactive as possible.

Conclusion

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 66 percent of all annual traffic fatalities are caused by aggressive driving actions, such as passing on the right, running red lights and tailgating. The subject of Road Rage needs both awareness and action. As many cases are under-reported, it points to the reciprocity of the actions involved in Road Rage that prevents the claiming in the dispute process. With over 60% participating in Road Rage themselves, drivers do not claim that a Road Rage incident occurred since they took part in the escalation themselves. Perhaps, that is crux of this type of conflict, that a vigilante mode of justice takes over the drivers and they, themselves, think that they will take justice in their own hands. This vigilante justice, however, is disproportionate to the injustice originally committed.

The naming stage of the transformation of this road dispute is often an interpretation of one driver to the actions of the other. Looking at the attributes of the other driver's behaviors as wrong driving behaviors produces faulty conclusions. In some cases it appears that incidents of road rage are caused by simple misunderstandings between drivers. A driver may have a momentary lapse in judgment but the perception of another is that he is driving aggressively (Joint, 1995). Further justification of not reaching the claiming stage, are the competitiveness of the driving that leads people to *game* with each other as part of Road Rage. Not fully understanding and knowing the mindset and motives of the other driver lend the unexpected violent outcomes to transform. According to a geocities.com statistics page on Road Rage, the public is more fearful of aggressive drivers than they are of impaired drivers.

The longer we accept the normalization of violence in road rage, then the more it will perpetuate. The success of Public Service Announcements in the past to heighten awareness and change behaviors provides hope that by introducing a campaign on Road Rage awareness, then

those behaviors will change. In expanding the analysis for Conflict Resolution processes, public education campaigns could be conducted to enhance driver's perception of each other's humanity and decrease tendencies toward distortion and depersonalization of the issue of Road Rage (Scott, 2000). To reach the public, the connection to children also is significant in this issue since it is reported that children are frequently the victims of aggressive driving ([Geocities.com/road rage page](http://Geocities.com/road_rage_page)). Modeling this behavior to our children and potentially propagating road rage to the next generation of drivers is irresponsible as well. That tiny person in the back seat that we keep safe in traffic, may be keeping us safe as they remind us that they are listening to our comments and witnessing our road rage behaviors that bring other potential dangers to ourselves and others on the road. Do *you* know who sees and hears you?

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