



“Get the f#*k out of my way!” Exploring the cathartic effect of swear words in coping with driving anger



Simona A. Popușoi*, Grigore M. Havârneanu, Corneliu E. Havârneanu

Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 October 2015

Received in revised form 13 April 2018

Accepted 13 April 2018

ABSTRACT

Previous studies suggest that swearing is a prevalent expression of verbal aggression among drivers, but the role of swearing as a coping mechanism with anger remains unknown. The current article explored the cathartic role of swearing in situations when drivers experienced strong negative emotions. First we conducted a structured interview ($N = 35$) to identify the primary traffic situations when drivers regularly swear. In the second pre-study ($N = 28$) we examined the levels of negative and positive affect generated by these situations in order to identify the scenarios most likely to generate anger. The main study ($N = 250$) tested the cathartic role of swearing in these scenarios, by measuring its influence on the self-reported negative affective valence and level of physical activation. Results indicated three frequently swearing situations which are characterized by negative affect and high physical activation for the driver: (1) being forced to slow down by pedestrians who cross the road in illegal places; (2) being refused the legitimate right of way by another driver; and (3) traffic jams caused by cars which are stopped or parked illegally on the roadway. However, results showed that swearing had a cathartic role only in the first of these three situations. These findings suggested that swearing is not only an expression of verbal aggression towards another road user, but occasionally a way to cope with anger, which leads to better outcomes for the driver such as more positive affect and lower physical activation.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Aggressive driving behavior is an alarming phenomenon for road safety because it is associated with an increased risk of road crashes (Clarke, Ward, & Truman, 2002; Krahe, 2005; Snyder, 1997). Aggressive driving includes behavioral means to harm, intimidate, threaten, dominate, retaliate upon, frustrate, or otherwise express displeasure with another driver or user of the roadway (Deffenbacher, Richards, & Lynch, 2004). It emerges from anger (Ellison-Potter, Bell, & Deffenbacher, 2001) or frustration (Shinar, 1998), as well as from the driver's impatience, hostility or motivation to reach the destination in a short time (Tasca, 2000).

In Eastern European countries such as Romania, there is an increasing effort to study and prevent aggressive driving. A Romanian survey conducted on a national sample of drivers revealed that aggressive behaviors are frequent: 50.00% of the drivers declared they had stressed others with horns and flashes, 21.00% used verbal aggression, and 13.00% used obscene gestures (ICPC, 2010). Additional Police data collected on a sample of 1119 drivers indicate several sources

* Corresponding author at: Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Iasi, Toma Cozma Street No. 3, 700554, Romania.

E-mail address: simona.popusoi@uaic.ro (S.A. Popușoi).

of anger: 78.70% of the respondents complained about flashing lights and horns; 48.80% reported threatening or obscene gestures; 43.50% mentioned being verbally harassed; 39.10% reported finding their car blocked in the parking lot; 6.00% complained about tailgating behavior; and 3.30% reported being physically harassed by another driver (Traffic Police Direction, 2011).

1.1. Approaches to aggressive driving

The differential approach in Traffic Psychology has tried to establish the inter-individual differences regarding the possibility of presenting driving anger, measured by the Driving Anger Scale (DAS) (Deffenbacher, 2000; Deffenbacher, Oetting, & Lynch, 1994) and the manifest expressions of anger using the Driving Anger Expression Inventory (DAX) (Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Swaim, 2002). In general, drivers with high scores on the DAS engage in aggressive behaviors and take risks more frequently compared to those with low scores (Deffenbacher, Huff, Lynch, Oetting, & Salvatore, 2000; Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Yingling, 2001; Deffenbacher, Oetting, & DiGiuseppe, 2002); they are also more frequently involved in road crashes (Clarke et al., 2002; Deffenbacher et al., 2000, 2001; Gras, Cunill, Sullman, Planes, & Aymerich, 2004; Iversen & Rundmo, 2002; Joint, 1995; Krahé, 2005; Lajunen & Parker, 2001; Parker, Lajunen, & Stradling, 1998; Underwood, Chapman, Wright, & Crundall, 1999). In addition, drivers with high DAS scores declare reacting more intensively in driving situations that have the potential to generate aggression (such as traffic jams, being insulted by another driver, etc.). Moreover, Deffenbacher et al. (2002) have shown that drivers express their anger in different manners: some prefer verbal aggressive expressions (e.g. insults), physical expressions (e.g. obscene gestures), or using the vehicle for aggressive expressions (e.g. tailgating); in contrast, others may not express anger, trying instead to manage it in an adaptive/constructive way (e.g. thinking of positive solutions to deal with the situation, paying even closer attention to being a safe driver, etc.). In summary, driving anger is not only trait-specific but also situation-specific, so its expression would also be influenced by the situation.

The social approach to road user behavior emphasizes the situational character of aggressive driving and is based on one of the reference models of aggression: the frustration-aggression paradigm (Berkowitz, 1993; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). Aggressive driving is studied in specific situations where the other driver can be clearly identified as the source of the anger (see for example, Ellison, Govern, Petri, & Figler, 1995; Ellison-Potter et al., 2001; Kenrick & MacFarlane, 1986; Pouliot, Vallieres, Bergeron, & Vallerand, 2007; Yagil, 2001). Aggressive expressions are triggered by frustrating behaviors, situations or events (Shinar, 1998) generated by other road users, and are influenced by the driver's emotions (Roidl, Frehse, Oehl, & Höger, 2013), such as anger (González-Iglesias, Gómez-Fraguela, & Luengo-Martín, 2012; Mesken, Hagenzieker, Rothengatter, & de Waard, 2007). Driving anger involves strong negative affect and high physical activation (Jefferies, Smilek, Eich, & Enns, 2008). The aggressive expressions are moderated by situational factors such as: anonymity given by the vehicle (Doob & Gross, 1968; Ellison et al., 1995; Ellison-Potter et al., 2001), high ambient temperature (Kenrick & MacFarlane, 1986), the presence of aggressive cues on the road (Ellison-Potter et al., 2001; Parker et al., 1998; Turner, Layton, & Simons, 1975), long waiting times (Shinar, 1998), as well as congestion and being in a hurry (Deffenbacher, 2003; Hennessy & Wiesenthal, 1997, 1999).

The existing literature has shown that these factors are common in daily road traffic, but research on the potential role of swearing as a coping strategy with driving anger is limited. To our knowledge there are no studies investigating if swear words would be able to act as coping strategy for the swearing driver, hence the need of more research in this area.

1.2. The effect of swearing as verbal expression of anger

Although offensive language and swear words are prominent expressions of verbal aggression (Deffenbacher et al., 2002; Elliott, 1999), it remains unknown whether the act of swearing can regulate drivers' emotions and under which circumstances this could occur. Swearing is a verbal expression referring to taboo words, mostly culturally stigmatized (insults, rude and offensive comments, etc.), which are used to express emotions (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990; Jay, 2000; Rassin & Muris, 2005). The primordial utility of swearing is the ability to express strong negative emotions (Jay, 2000, 2009; Laskowski & Morse, 1993), and to protect individuals from psychological tension, due to a cathartic effect (Pinker, 2007). One popular process model of emotion regulation highlights five regulation strategies, including situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 1998). The last of these strategies refers to responding as directly as possible for example by regulating emotion-expressive behavior. Uttering a swear word may be one such accessible response when experiencing a negative emotion and when there are no social restraints (e.g. in anonymity). Regarding this cathartic effect, the emotional strength of swear words is greater when spoken in native language (Dewaele, 2004). Other studies revealed social uses of swear words: to draw attention to misbehaviors (Pinker, 2007), to express discontent (Daly, Holmes, Newton, & Stubbe, 2004), or to strengthen arguments and habits (Rassin & Muris, 2005). In sum, swearing may have personal benefits for the individual (Clark, 1996; Daly et al., 2004).

The neuro-psycho-social theory of swearing (Jay, 2000) integrates three broad aspects of human behavior, namely neurological control, psychological restraints, and socio-cultural restriction, and states that swearing is a product of these three interlocking systems. The last two systems described in this theory were studied in relation to: (a) personality factors correlated with the frequency of swearing: extraversion, agreeability, conscientiousness (Mairesse & Walker, 2006; Mehl, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2006), narcissism (Holtzman, Vazire, & Mehl, 2010), and religiosity (Shrestha & Ambler, 2008); (b)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7257609>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7257609>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)