



The influence of roadway police justice on driver emotion

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ABSTRACT

Perceived justice occurs when good behaviour leads to a positive outcome, and when bad behaviour leads to a negative outcome. Punishment for offending motorists is a negative outcome resulting from a collision or police enforcement. Punishment of traffic law/norm violators may reduce recidivism and drivers who observe the punishment may be less likely to perform similar infractions. Punishment may also influence the emotions of witnesses and victimised drivers. This study examined the effect of various punishments on witnesses' feelings of anger and happiness on roadways. 142 individuals were randomly assigned to one of five punishment conditions (i.e., police enforcement; collision with roadside object; collision with other vehicle; collision with roadside object and police enforcement; collision with other vehicle and police enforcement). Participants viewed four animated videos depicting unjust driving behaviours and were told that the violator in each scenario experienced one of the five forms of punishment. Participants indicated how angry and happy the each scenario made them, before and after learning of the punishment. Analyses indicated that perceived punishment by police reduced feelings of anger and increased feelings of happiness compared to the other four forms of punishment. In addition to increasing roadway safety, the current study demonstrated the importance of enforcement's positive impact on the emotional states of witnesses of unjust driving behaviour.

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1. Introduction

The driving experience may be pleasant or unpleasant depending on the purpose for driving or events experienced while driving. The specific car being driven, the scenery viewed en route to the destination, or the destination itself may contribute to an enjoyable driving experience (Hagman, 2010; Halo & Manning, 2009). Similarly, driving at night may be enjoyable for drivers who enjoy the city lights or night skies. Other events such as traffic congestion or behaviours of other drivers may make the driving experience unenjoyable (Hennessy & Wiesenthal, 1999; Roseborough & Wiesenthal, 2014; Wickens, Roseborough, Hall, & Wiesenthal, 2013). Creating a more pleasurable and safe driving environment is the goal of the current study, by examining factors that may influence driving emotion and driving aggression.

Police enforcement may have several influences: (1) police enforcement punishes violators of laws; (2) witnessing police enforcement may decrease the likelihood of other individuals from violating the law; and (3) witnessing police enforcement may reduce negative feelings resulting from a perceived injustice. Witnesses or victims of unjust driving may experience stress and anger. Replacing angry moods with happy moods would make driving a more pleasurable experience. The goal

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of the current study was to determine the influence of perceived justice on feelings of anger and happiness for witnesses of unjust driving behaviours. Specifically, this study examined the influence of the application of several forms of justice on feelings of anger and happiness in witnesses of unjust driving behaviours.

1.1. Driver emotion

Two common emotions experienced by individuals are anger and happiness. Anger has been conceptualized as both a trait and an emotional state. Trait anger is defined as the predisposition to experience anger with increased frequency and intensity in a variety of situations (Spielberger, 1988). State anger is defined as an emotional state marked by subjective feelings varying in intensity from mild annoyance or irritation to intense fury and rage (Spielberger, Johnson, Russell, Crane, Jacobs, & Worden, 1985). Research has found that increased anger is related to hostile cognition, cardiovascular effects, and aggressive behaviour (Siegman, 1993; Tiedens, 2001).

Related to the concepts of trait and state anger are trait *driving* anger and state *driving* anger. Trait driving anger is similar to trait anger, but it is more situation and context specific (Deffenbacher, Oetting, & Lynch, 1994). State driving anger could be defined as an emotional state marked by subjective feelings ranging from mild annoyance to intense rage in response to factors or situations encountered while operating a motor vehicle. Driving anger is a likely contributing factor of aggression for several reasons. Anger can provide a justification for retaliation. Throughout development, individuals create interpretational and behavioural scripts that allow them to respond to situations more easily (Huesmann, 1988). If an individual develops a script where aggression is preceded by feelings of anger, then experiencing anger in the driving environment may result in driving aggression. Additionally, driving anger may interfere with higher-level cognitive processes inhibiting aggression. Increased driving anger has been associated with increased acts of aggressive driving in several studies using a variety of methodologies (Jovanović, Lipovac, Stanojević, & Stanojević, 2011; Roseborough, Wiesenthal, Flett, & Cribbie, 2011; Vallières, Vallerand, Bergeron, & McDuff, 2014; Wickens, Wiesenthal, Flora, & Flett, 2011). Such aggressive behaviours include driving too fast, tailgating, flashing high beams, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and using one's automobile as a weapon (Deffenbacher et al., 1994).

Happiness can also be conceptualized as a trait and state emotion. State happiness occurs when an event is goal congruent and does not involve blame or threat (Mesken, Hagenzieker, Rothengatter, & de Waard, 2007). Research has found that increased happiness is related to increased prosocial behaviour and physical health (Cunningham, 1988; Steptoe, Wardle, & Marmot, 2005; Veenhoven, 2008). The determinants and consequences of happiness have received relatively less attention from the driving research (Mesken et al., 2007; Roseborough & Wiesenthal, 2014). In-situ research has shown that driver happiness increases as a result of events that are congruent with the driver's goals and events contributing to increased driver safety (Mesken et al., 2007). Due to the negative consequences of anger (e.g., aggression) and the positive consequences of happiness (e.g., prosocial behaviour) it is important identify the causal factors of these emotions in order to control them.

1.2. Justice, injustice, and driver emotion

Perceptions of justice and injustice may lead to happiness and anger. Equity theory states that an individual will perceive a situation as just when their ratio of input to outcome is equivalent to the ratio of other individuals (Adams, 1965). Justice is important as it allows individuals to enter psychological contracts with society. Individuals behave positively because the existence of justice ensures positive outcomes. Individuals avoid behaving negatively because the existence of justice ensures behaving badly leads to negative outcomes.

We may speculate that the human need for justice is so important that we possess a psychological barrier to reduce the effects of injustice, that is, the belief in a just world. The belief in a just world is the belief that people get what they deserve. Individuals are motivated to believe in a just world because it allows them to confront their physical and social environment as though it were stable and orderly, serving as an adaptive function (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Individuals with an increased endorsement of just world beliefs have been found to have reduced feelings of anger in anger-evoking situations on and off the road (Nesbit, Blankenship, & Murray, 2012; Dalbert, 2002). The evolution of this psychological mechanism suggests how important the perception of justice is to humans.

Perceived injustice results when an event occurs leading an individual to believe they have not received what they deserve (Mikula, 1993). The perception of injustice can result in uncomfortable and distressing emotional and physiological states (Adams, 1965; Markovsky, 1988). The most common events that individuals consider to be unjust are those that are perceived to be disrespectful (Lupfer, Weeks, Doan, & Houston, 2000; Mikula, 1986; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990). In the context of driving, an individual who cuts into a queue of vehicles may be seen as disrespecting those who lined up properly. An individual who believes he/she has been intentionally cut off may also feel disrespected. Similarly, an individual who uses a lane improperly (driving in a bus lane or on a road shoulder) may be perceived as disrespecting the laws or norms of society. Motorists abiding by the rules and norms of their society may perceive violations of these standards as a personal affront as well. The most common emotional response to disrespect or injustice is anger (Clayton, 1992; Mikula, 1986; Scher, 1997). Perceiving injustice may lead to feelings of anger leading to retaliation. Retaliation may be engaged in to inform the offender that he/she is worthy of injustice and not the victim, to inform the offender that his/her actions were unacceptable, or to cause the offender equal pain/inconvenience (Miller, 2001; Lennon & Watson, 2011).

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