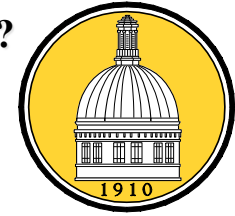


Understanding Aggressive Driving: Is There A Role For Positive Psychology?



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Abstract

Research on aggressive driving has focused on identifying aspects of driver personality which enhance risk (e.g., sensation seeking, impulsiveness, driving anger, etc.). This study examined two positive factors presumed to reduce risk: trait forgiveness and consideration of future consequences (CFC). The utility of these variables in predicting aggressive driving was evaluated among 316 college student volunteers. Independent of gender, weekly miles, and driving anger, both forgiveness and CFC predicted aggressive driving and driving anger expression. Research on aggressive driving may be enhanced by greater attention to adaptive, potentially risk-reducing traits. Moreover, forgiveness and CFC may have implications for the prevention of motor vehicle accidents.

Introduction

In spite of improvements to automobile safety and driver education, motor vehicle accidents remain a serious public health problem. A growing body of psychological research focuses on aspects of driver personality which contribute to aggressive driving and other forms of high-risk driving behavior. The bulk of this research deals with identifying individual differences in driver personality which contribute to risky driving and accident involvement (United States General Accounting Office, 2003). Driving anger, sensation seeking, and impulsivity are among the variables with the most support for predicting aggressive driving, however, much variance remains unexplained. This study was designed to explore the role of two potentially risk-reducing factors: forgiveness and consideration of future consequences.

Methods

Participants were undergraduate volunteers (N = 316) recruited from psychology courses. The majority were young (Mdn age = 20) women (65%) were female who identified themselves as either African American (33%) or Caucasian (61%). Students received experimental credit for their participation. Participants completed the following questionnaires: (1) Driving Anger Scale (Deffenbacher et al., 1994), (2) Driving Anger Expression Inventory (Deffenbacher et al., 2002), (3) Driving Survey (Deffenbacher, 2000), (4) Consideration of Future Consequences Scale (Strathman et al., 1994), and (5) Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry & Worthington, 2001).

Key Findings

- Trait forgiveness and consideration of future consequences predicted aggressive and risky driving behavior, demonstrating incremental validity beyond driving anger.
- More forgiving drivers reported less aggressive driving and were less likely to express driving-related anger in destructive ways.
- Drivers who were more likely to consider the future consequences of their actions were less likely to express driving anger in physically aggressive ways and more likely to cope effectively with driving anger.

Variables	AB	RD	DAX-PA	DAX-UV	DAX-AC	DAX-VA
1) TFS	-.25**	-.12*	-.25**	-.25**	-.13*	-.27**
2) CFC	-.14*	-.15**	-.24**	-.21**	-.21**	-.08
3) DAS	.41**	.28**	.23**	.40**	.16**	.44**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$
Note. TFS = Trait Forgiveness Scale; CFC = Consideration of Future Consequences; AB = Aggressive Behavior; RD = Risky Driving; DAS = Driving Anger Scale; DAX-PA = Physically Aggressive Expression; DAX-UV = Use of the Vehicle to Express Anger; DAX-AC = Adaptive/Constructive Expression; DAX-VA = Verbally Aggressive Expression.

Criterion Variables	Predictor Variables in Equation	R ²
Aggressive Driving	DAS (.39, 15%) and TFS (-.164, 3%)	.23
DAX – Physical Aggression	DAS (.21, 4%), CFC (-.16, 2%), and TFS (-.151, 2%)	.16
DAX – Verbal Aggression	DAS (.42, 17%) and TFS (-.22, 4%)	.25
DAX – Use of Vehicle	DAS (.38, 14%), CFC (-.14, 2%), and CFC (-.15, 2%)	.25
DAX – Adaptive/Constructive	DAS (.18, 3%) and CFC (.14, 2%)	.11

Note. TFS = Trait Forgiveness Scale; CFC = Consideration of Future Consequences; DAS = Driving Anger Scale

Implications

- Research on aggressive and risky driving could benefit from examination of protective factors which may reduce risk.
- The treatment of high-anger drivers may benefit from forgiveness-based approaches which have been found to be useful in reducing general anger (Fitzgibbons, 1986; Lin et al., 2004).
- Training drivers to reflect on the potential consequences of their behavior while driving may prove useful in reducing problematic driving behavior.