

RSTF 2020

TRAFFIC SAFETY CULTURE

AND THE MEDIA



Housekeeping

- Number of attendees
- Webinar recorded
- Using Q&A and Chat features
 - Use Q&A for questions
 - Use chat to relay technical issues and action items

Audience Q&A

The image shows a Zoom meeting window with a Q&A overlay. The background video shows a woman in a blue shirt walking on a crosswalk next to a white car. The Q&A overlay is a white box with a title bar and a text input field.

zoom.us Meeting View Edit Window Help

Zoom Meeting ID: 762-562-895

Talking:

Q&A

Welcome

Feel free to ask the host and panelists questions

Type your question here...

avrpc
REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION

Audio Settings ^

Chat Raise Hand Q&A

Leave Meeting

Technical Issues & Action Items

zoom.us Meeting View Edit Window Help

You are viewing Marco Gorini's screen View Options

Talking:

From Me to All panelists:
test

RSTF 2020

INTRODUCTION TO
TRAFFIC SAFETY
CULTURE

DELAWARE VALLEY
dvrpc
REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION

Audio Settings ^

Chat Raise Hand Q&A Leave Meeting

To: All panelists

Your text can only be seen by panelists

Opening Remarks

- **Kelley Yemen**, Director of Complete Streets, City of Philadelphia

Why We Postponed

- Please share your thoughts in the post-meeting survey
- Link to the survey will be provided after the meeting

RSTF Goal:

To reduce roadway crashes and eliminate serious injuries and fatalities from crashes in the Delaware Valley

Share the conversation!

Use **#rstf** during today's meeting, and tag **@DVRPC**

For minutes and recordings of previous meetings, visit:
<https://www.dvrpc.org/Committees/RSTF/>

Sam Ozer



Source: Philadelphia Inquirer

Introduction

- **Kevin Murphy**, Manager, Office of Safe Streets,
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission



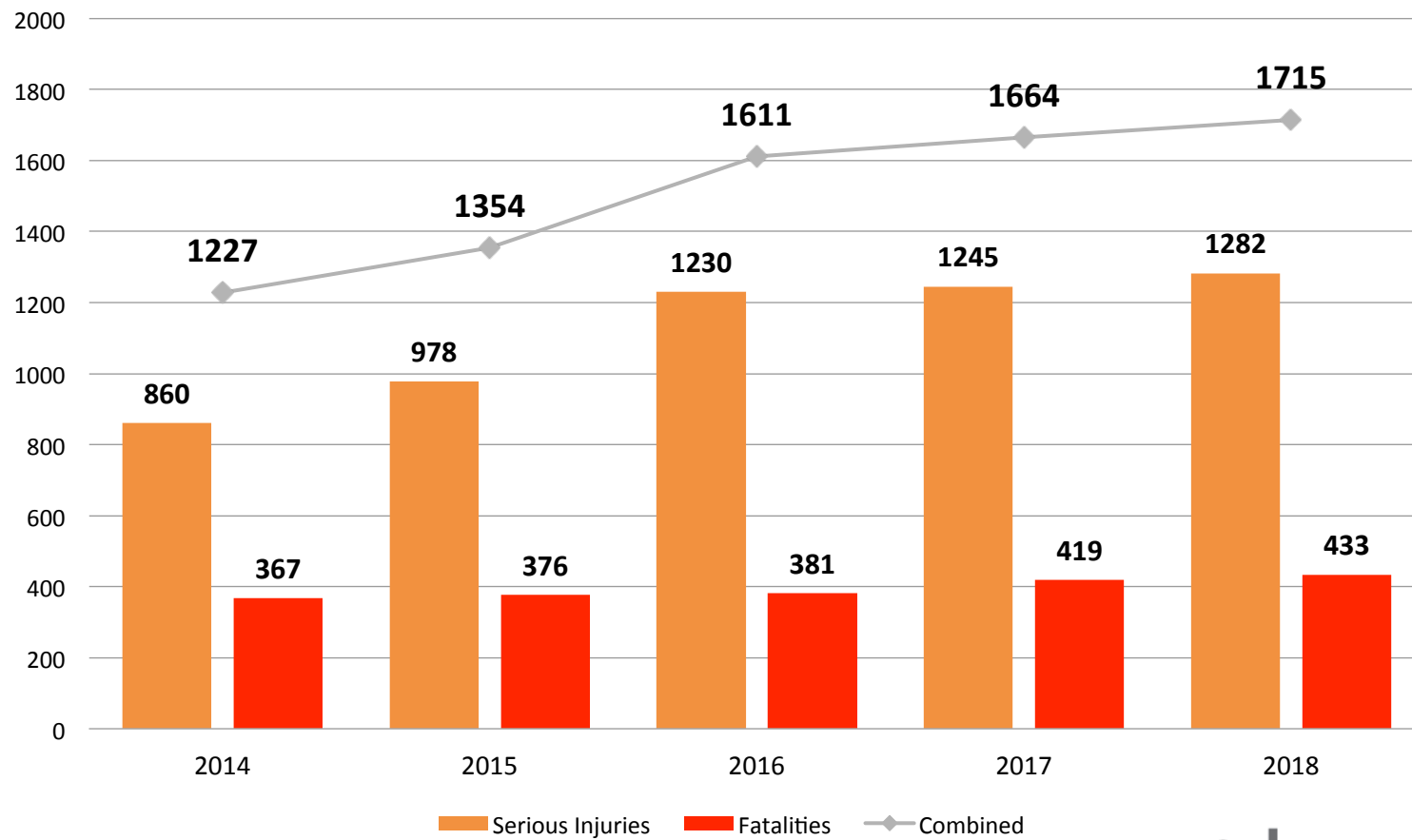
The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for a diverse nine-county region in two states: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer in New Jersey.



DVRPC's vision for the Greater Philadelphia Region is a prosperous, innovative, equitable, resilient, and sustainable region that increases mobility choices by investing in a safe and modern transportation system; that protects and preserves our natural resources while creating healthy communities; and that fosters greater opportunities for all.

DVRPC's mission is to achieve this vision by convening the widest array of partners to inform and facilitate data-driven decision-making. We are engaged across the region, and strive to be leaders and innovators, exploring new ideas and creating best practices.

Total KSI – Regional Trend (by person), 2014-2018



RSTF 2020

FOCUS ON

TRAFFIC SAFETY CULTURE



dvrpc

➤ Media

➤ Law

➤ Health

Intro to Traffic Safety Culture

“A zero deaths vision requires a change—a shift in culture both within transportation agencies and other organizations as well as within communities. Everyone must accept that fatalities are unacceptable and preventable.”

<https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/zerodeaths>

Intro to Traffic Safety Culture

- Safe Systems may be key to achieving Vision Zero.
- However, Safe Systems may not be implemented without a supportive traffic safety culture.

Barriers to Safe Systems

- The media frequently blames victims, perpetuating a narrative of safety individualism.

NEW YORK

Cyclist in critical condition after being struck by driver on busy Brooklyn street



By BRITTANY KRIEGSTEIN and CLAYTON GUSE
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | OCT 30, 2019 | 4:52 PM



Witnesses said the man was not wearing a helmet when he was struck.

Action Item Development

- Action item: a discrete task that the volunteer can take on to further traffic safety in the region
- Sample Action Items from March meeting:
 - The Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia intends to develop a Vision Zero advocacy toolkit and host 3 community meetings (in person and virtual) annually.
 - SJTPO committed to investigating the agency's cell phone use policy, affirming they may not use handheld devices while on the road.

*Submit an action item using the "Chat" tool and with the format "**Strategy: [insert action item]**"*

Media Toolkit Action Item

- Proposed Action Item for today:
 - A media toolkit working group – let us know if you would like to join!

Like
this!



Journalist's Resource
Research on today's news topics

HARVARD Kennedy School
SHORENSTEIN CENTER
on Media, Politics and Public Policy

Government ▾ Economics ▾ Environment ▾ Politics ▾ Society ▾ International ▾ Tip sheets Syllabi About Us Contact

Search the site

6 tips for reporting on gun policy and gun violence

Related Posts

- Covering NASCAR's ties to the Confederate flag and conservative politics: 5 tips for journalists
- 7 tips for journalists reporting on surprise medical bills

Submit an action item using the “Chat” tool and with the format “**Strategy: [insert action item]**”

Featured Speaker

- **Kelcie Ralph, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor, Rutgers University

*Submit an action item using the “Chat” tool and with the format “**Strategy: [insert action item]**”*

Panel

- **Matthew Skoufalos**, NJ PEN
- **Patricia Madej**, Philadelphia Inquirer
- **Captain Mark Overwise**, Philadelphia Police Department

- Moderator: **Elise Turner**, DVRPC

*Submit an action item using the “Chat” tool and with the format “**Strategy: [insert action item]**”*

Closing Remarks

- **Patricia Ott, P.E., RSP**, Managing Member, MBO Engineering, LLC

*Submit an action item using the “Chat” tool and with the format “**Strategy: [insert action item]**”*

DVRPC Long Range Plan

- Help set the regional agenda by...
 - Understanding the challenges we face now and going forward
 - Identifying a broadly shared set of values and goals to influence decision making
 - Communicate and coordinate across regional boundaries and institutions
- For details, visit www.dvrpc.org/2050








PLEASE COMPLETE THE MEETING SURVEY!

Contact

Marco Gorini, Senior Transportation Planner
215-238-2884 | mgorini@dvrpc.org

Kevin Murphy, Manager, Office of Safe Streets
215-238-2868 | kmurphy@dvrpc.org



Connect With Us!  |  |  |  | 

Let's improve crash coverage and save lives

Dr. Kelcie Ralph @kmralph



Based on work with Dr. Tara Goddard, Dr. Calvin Thigpen + Evan Iacobucci

Media

Perceptions

**Traffic
safety
culture**



Q1 What does news coverage look like today?

We reviewed 200 local news sources on crashes involving people biking and walking



Q2 Does coverage affect perceptions?

Experiment with 999 participants

Each group read a slightly different news story

Asked about blame and preferred solutions

Opinion: To Save Lives, Let's Cover Crashes Better

Kelcie Ralph

On a typical day, 100 Americans lose their lives in car crashes. That is like a commercial airplane falling out of the sky every other day. Yet crashes have not generated sustained outrage and society doesn't treat them as a public health crisis. The way the media covers crashes is partly to blame for this muted response. Fortunately, simple changes to newsroom editorial practices could increase public support for road safety and help save lives.

My evidence comes from two studies: one examined how journalists report and write about crashes, while the other examined if, and to what extent, coverage mattered — if it influenced the way people thought. The first study reviewed 200 local news stories from across the United States that described a car crash involving a person walking or biking. The second study was an experiment. We took a group of people and randomly assigned them to read one of three slightly different descriptions of the same crash. Some people read typical coverage, while others read a revised text where the driver — not the pedestrian or the vehicle — was the focus. The third group read coverage that provided more context about the crash location, and also provided broader statistics about traffic safety in the area. We then asked each person questions about the crash, to see

if these minor editorial changes affected their perceptions of it.

First, the news coverage. We found that it had two key weaknesses. One was that it treated crashes as isolated incidents rather than as part of a broader public health crisis.

With regard to the second weakness, by far the most common way to describe a crash was to use the passive voice: "A pedestrian was hit" or "A car was involved in a crash."

First, the passive voice. When we examined them, we found that the passive voice is nice because it's neutral. It's what scholars call "exonerative" because it focuses on the victim rather than on the driver. In three-quarters of crash coverage, they shoulder considerable responsibility in readers' eyes.

Second, both sentences use the passive voice to play tricks with agency. Writing "A pedestrian was hit" omits an agent altogether. The crash just *happened* to the pedestrian. No one caused it. And if no one caused it, no one is accountable. There's a reason people sometimes call this type of passive voice the *exonerative* tense — it's how people talk when they need to acknowledge something bad happened, but would rather not dive too far into why. Fully one-third of the crash coverage we examined omitted an agent.

Third, the coverage blames the victim by using object-based language. Journalists were four times more likely to grant agency to vehicles than to drivers, despite the fact that autonomous technology is exceedingly rare. Journalists should report that a driver, not a car, hit a pedestrian. Some people may cringe at this formation, but it really isn't unusual. No one says "a gun shot a person." We say "someone shot a person with a gun." If they are really worried about being misunderstood, journalists could write "a driver hit a pedestrian with their car."

In addition to victim-blaming, coverage of collisions usually lacks context. Most articles treat crashes as isolated incidents, and in

Given these results, I implore journalists to alter their editorial practices. An easy-to-implement — albeit incomplete — fix is to shift focus away from the pedestrian and focus instead on the driver. A more complete overhaul would require journalists to connect the dots between seemingly isolated crashes. In particular, journalists should describe crash settings, include local and national data on crashes, and mention safety measures that the city or state has implemented or is considering. Time permitting, journalists should consider contacting local transportation, planning, or public health experts to provide further context.

I recognize that these recommendations constitute just one more demand on already overstretched journalists. But they are also straightforward. Practitioners can help by proactively contacting journalists and making themselves available for quotes whenever a crash occurs. Advocates can bring these suggestions to the attention of local journalists and hold them accountable. Revising crash coverage can shift perceptions, and shifting perceptions can save lives.

Author Bio

Kelcie Ralph is an assistant professor at the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University.

Further Reading

Goddard, T., Ralph, K., Thigpen, C., & Iacobucci, E. (2019). Does News Coverage Affect Perceived Blame and Preferred Solutions? Evidence from an Experiment. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2019.100073>

Ralph, K., Iacobucci, E., Goddard, T., & Thigpen, C. (2019). "Editorial patterns in Bicyclist and Pedestrian Crash Reporting" *Transportation Research Record*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361198119825637>



Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment

Tara Goddard ^a  , Kelcie Ralph ^b  , Calvin G. Thigpen ^b  , Evan Iacobucci ^b  

[Show more](#) 

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2019.100073>

[Get rights and content](#)

Under a Creative Commons [license](#)

[open access](#)

Highlights

- Readers assessed fault after reading one of three article versions about a traffic crash involving a pedestrian
- Even subtle differences in editorial patterns significantly affected readers' attribution of blame and choice of punishment
- Shifting from pedestrian-focused to driver-focused language reduced victim-blaming and increased perceived fault of the driver
- A thematic frame significantly increased support for infrastructure improvements

What does news coverage look like today?

Two major issues:

- **Problem #1:** Shifts blame toward pedestrians
- **Problem #2:** Frames crashes as isolated incidents

Other issues in crash reporting

- Pedestrian v. Person walking
- Crash v. accident
- Use of counterfactuals
- “The driver remained at the scene”
- Whose crashes get covered?

Problem #1: Sentence-level issues

Coverage consistently:

- 1) Focuses on the victim
- 2) Omits an agent
- 3) Grants agency to vehicles

Grammar Choice	Example Sentence	Effect of Status Quo	Prevalence
Focus on the pedestrian	“A <u>pedestrian</u> was hit by a car.”	More <i>blame</i> for the focus of the sentence.	3/4 of coverage focused on the pedestrian.

Passive tense is the *exonerative* tense

It is how people talk when they need to acknowledge something bad happened, but would rather not dive too far into why.

Grammar Choice	Example Sentence	Effect of Status Quo	Prevalence
Focus on the pedestrian	“A <u>pedestrian</u> was hit by a car.”	More <i>blame</i> for the focus of the sentence.	3/4 of coverage focused on the pedestrian.
Non-agentive	A pedestrian was hit.”	Obscures role of a human actor.	1/3 of coverage lacked an agent.

Grammar Choice	Example Sentence	Effect of Status Quo	Prevalence
Focus on the pedestrian	“A <u>pedestrian</u> was hit by a car.”	More <i>blame</i> for the focus of the sentence.	3/4 of coverage focused on the pedestrian.
Non-agentive	A pedestrian was hit.”	Obscures role of a human actor.	1/3 of coverage lacked an agent.
Object-based language	“A <u>car</u> jumped the curb.”	Obscures the role of a human actor.	Refers to cars 4x more than to drivers.

Three simple revisions:

Don't write:



Do write:



Focus on
the pedestrian



Focus on
the driver

"A pedestrian
was hit by a car."

"A **driver** hit
a pedestrian."

Three simple revisions:

Don't write:



Do write:



Focus on
the pedestrian



Focus on
the driver

"A pedestrian
was hit by a car."

"A **driver** hit
a pedestrian."

Non agentive



Agentive

"A pedestrian
was hit."

"A pedestrian
was hit **by a driver.**"

Three simple revisions:

Don't write:



Do write:



Focus on
the pedestrian



Focus on
the driver

"A pedestrian
was hit by a car."

"A **driver** hit
a pedestrian."

Non agentive



Agentive

"A pedestrian
was hit."

"A pedestrian
was hit **by a driver**."

Object-based
language



Person-based
language

"A **car** jumped
the curb."

"A **driver** jumped
the curb."

A driver hit a pedestrian?



We don't say "a hammer hit a person".

If necessary, clarify that "A driver hit a pedestrian with their car."

Shouldn't the focus be on the pedestrian?

Yes! Take steps to humanize the person walking,

...but do **not** do it in the sentence describing the crash. This will subtly blame the victim.

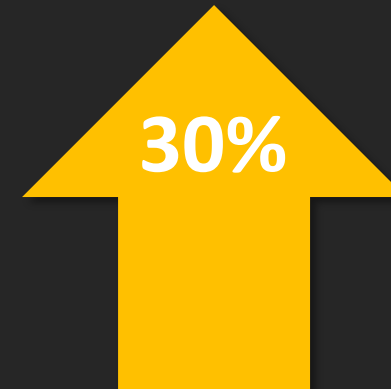
Do these changes matter?

Yes!

Blame
on the pedestrian



Blame
on the driver



But...

Our goal is to save lives,
not shift blame to drivers.

Two ways to frame a story

Treats events as
isolated incidents

Episodic framing

Identifies
connections
between events

Thematic framing

How often does coverage use thematic framing?



Not often

Just 16% of news stories
included thematic elements

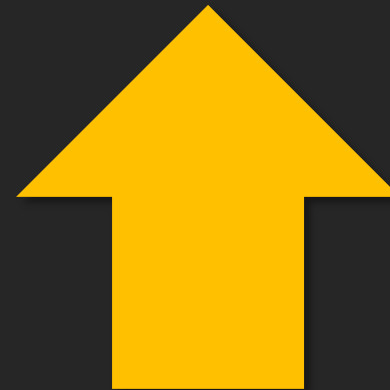
What happens when we connect the dots?

Readers are more likely to blame “other factors”

Support for individual-
level solutions



Support for systems-
level solutions



Reading **just one** news story dramatically affected how readers perceived a crash and what they thought should be done to improve traffic safety.

Imagine if better crash coverage was universal.

Recommendations

Recommendations

#1: Say “A driver hit a pedestrian”

- Include an agent, preferably the driver
- Shift the focus away from the pedestrian

Recommendations

#2: Include thematic elements

- Include crash statistics
- Describe the area

Recommendations

#3: Be proactive

- None of the articles quoted a transportation expert
- Make yourself available as a source
- Draft a statement before crashes occur

While I am unfamiliar with the details of this specific crash, I can say that this is **not an isolated incident**. Today's crash is just the most recent in an epidemic of crashes that claims the lives of thousands of Americans each year.

To meaningfully reduce traffic fatalities in XXXXXXX, **we need to address** [road design/speed/distracted driving/etc.].

We can save lives, **like the life of [victim's name]**, by making common-sense changes to our road network.

To recap

Existing coverage shifts blame to victims.

Coverage obscures the public health nature of crashes

Simple editorial changes can shift perceptions.

Changing coverage can save lives.

Opinion: To Save Lives, Let's Cover Crashes Better

Kelcie Ralph

On a typical day, 100 Americans lose their lives in car crashes. That is like a commercial airplane falling out of the sky every other day. Yet crashes have not generated sustained outrage and society doesn't treat them as a public health crisis. The way the media covers crashes is partly to blame for this muted response. Fortunately, simple changes to newsroom editorial practices could increase public support for road safety and help save lives.

My evidence comes from two studies: one examined how journalists report and write about crashes, while the other examined if, and to what extent, coverage mattered — if it influenced the way people thought. The first study reviewed 200 local news stories from across the United States that described a car crash involving a person walking or biking. The second study was an experiment. We took a group of people and randomly assigned them to read one of three slightly different descriptions of the same crash. Some people read typical coverage, while others read a revised text where the driver — not the pedestrian or the vehicle — was the focus. The third group read coverage that provided more context about the crash location, and also provided broader statistics about traffic safety in the area. We then asked each person questions about the crash, to see

if these minor editorial changes affected their perceptions of it.

First, the news coverage. We found that it had two key weaknesses. One was that it treated crashes as isolated incidents, and in

With re- by far t describ hit" or " sented ways.

First, th them th nice ge scholar focus te pedestrians are the focus in three-quarters of crash coverage, they shoulder considerable responsibility in readers' eyes.

Second, both sentences use the passive voice to play tricks with agency. Writing "A pedestrian was hit" omits an agent altogether. The crash just *happened* to the pedestrian. No one caused it. And if no one caused it, no one is accountable. There's a reason people sometimes call this type of passive voice the *exonerative* tense — it's how people talk when they need to acknowledge something bad happened, but would rather not dive too far into why. Fully one-third of the crash coverage we examined omitted an agent.

Third, the coverage blames the victim by using object-based language. Journalists were four times more likely to grant agency to vehicles than to drivers, despite the fact that autonomous technology is exceedingly rare. Journalists should report that a driver, not a car, hit a pedestrian. Some people may cringe at this formation, but it really isn't unusual. No one says "a gun shot a person." We say "someone shot a person with a gun." If they are really worried about being misunderstood, journalists could write "a driver hit a pedestrian with their car."

In addition to victim-blaming, coverage of collisions usually lacks context. Most articles treat crashes as isolated incidents, and in

that y tell ds, the shes e it. e e was affects a e, a third ash. r- o blame y to blame the driver. That is extraordinary. Simple changes to sentence-level grammar dramatically shifted readers' perceptions.

Article-level framing matters too. Readers who were provided with more context were less likely to blame the driver or pedestrian, and were more likely to blame "other factors," like unsafe road design. These readers were also less likely to support a *Walk Smart!* campaign to "train pedestrians to cross the street more safely" (a classic pedestrian-blaming intervention) and more likely to support new pedestrian infrastructure and lower speed limits.

Given these results, I implore journalists to alter their editorial practices. An easy-to-implement — albeit incomplete — fix is to shift focus away from the pedestrian and focus instead on the driver. A more complete overhaul would require journalists to connect the dots between seemingly isolated crashes. In particular, journalists should describe crash settings, include local and national data on crashes, and mention safety measures that the city or state has implemented or is considering. Time permitting, journalists should consider contacting local transportation, planning, or public health experts to provide further context.

I recognize that these recommendations constitute just one more demand on already overstretched journalists. But they are also straightforward. Practitioners can help by proactively contacting journalists and making themselves available for quotes whenever a crash occurs. Advocates can bring these suggestions to the attention of local journalists and hold them accountable. Revising crash coverage can shift perceptions, and shifting perceptions can save lives.

Author Bio

Kelcie Ralph is an assistant professor at the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University.

Further Reading

Goddard, T., Ralph, K., Thigpen, C., & Iacobucci, E. (2019). Does News Coverage Affect Perceived Blame and Preferred Solutions? Evidence from an Experiment. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2019.100073>

Ralph, K., Iacobucci, E., Goddard, T., & Thigpen, C. (2019). "Editorial patterns in Bicyclist and Pedestrian Crash Reporting" *Transportation Research Record*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361198119825637>

