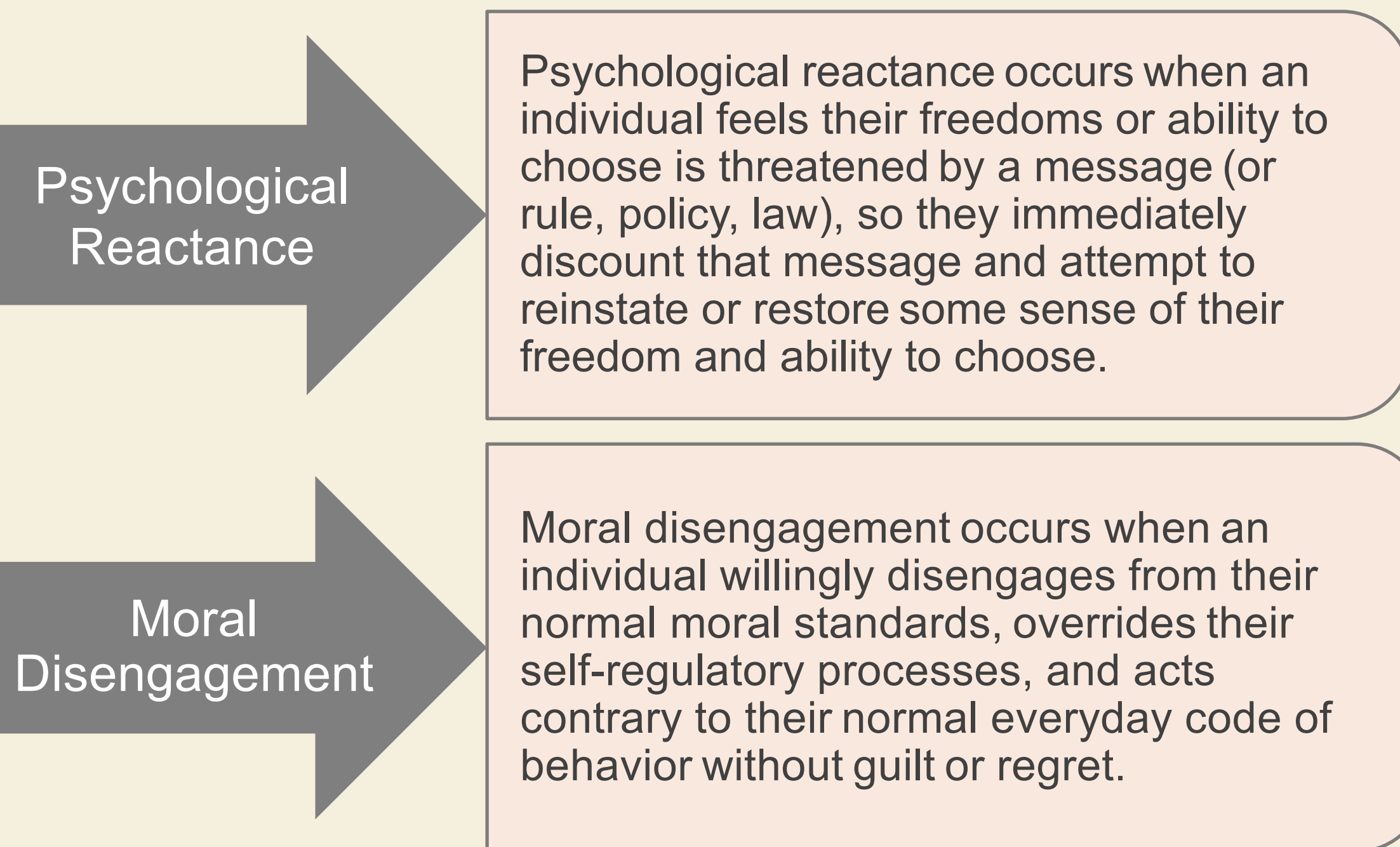


## OVERVIEW

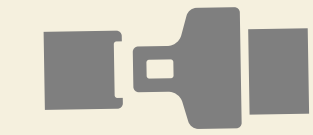
Not wearing a seat belt and speeding are two significant contributing factors in motor vehicle-related fatalities.

Traditional traffic safety messaging may not be as effective with individuals who do not wear a seat belt and engage in aggressive driving (speed, follow too closely, and pass excessively) because of two psychological phenomena identified as psychological reactance and moral disengagement.

This project explored these two psychological phenomena in the context of traffic safety and how adjusting traffic safety messaging could mitigate these phenomena and influence the small group of people still engaging in risky traffic behaviors.



## MAJOR FINDINGS



Those who rarely or never used a seat belt were found to exhibit more situational psychological reactance (in response to two messages about seat belt use) and exhibit more moral disengagement than people who usually or always used a seat belt. No differences in proneness to psychological reactance were found based on seat belt use.

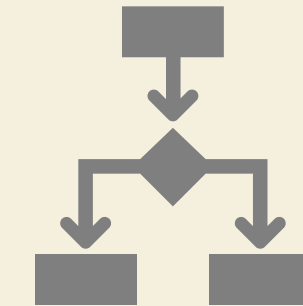
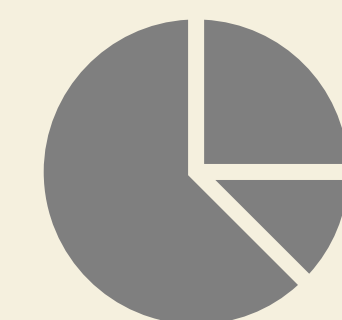
Psychological reactance decreased slightly with age and increased slightly based on education attainment; however, no meaningful associations in situational psychological reactance were found based on sex or geography.



Those who frequently drove aggressively were found to exhibit more proneness and situational psychological reactance and exhibit more moral disengagement than people who rarely or never drove aggressively.

Among those responding to the aggressive driving survey, psychological reactance decreased with age and increased with education attainment (for two indicators); however, no meaningful associations in psychological reactance were found based on sex or geography.

Among those responding to the aggressive driving survey, males indicated more moral disengagement than females, and moral disengagement decreased with age. There were no meaningful associations between moral disengagement and education attainment or geography.



## GUIDANCE ON MESSAGE CONTENT

### Potential Message Content to Increase Seat Belt Use

- Using seat belts is a way to protect ourselves.
- Using seat belts sets a good example for our children.
- People are less likely to be seriously injured or killed if they always use a seat belt.
- Most people (in your community/at your workplace) use seat belts.
- Family/workplace rules about always using a seat belt increase use.
- People may choose to use a seat belt because they care about others and recognize that their own injury or death would negatively impact others.

### Potential Messages Content to Decrease Aggressive Driving

- Aggressively passing, tailgating, and driving over the posted speed limit increase the likelihood of a crash, injury or death, and financial loss.
- Speeding does not really save that much time.
- Many people, even those close to you, may consider aggressive driving unacceptable.
- Most people (in your community/at your workplace) don't drive aggressively.
- Speeding, when you are late, will not get you there much sooner and may result in a crash.
- Consider the way you drive as you would any other social interaction like being in a store or waiting in line at a movie theatre.

These recommendations are based on correlational analyses of the behavioral models and have limitations. Correlation is necessary but not sufficient to prove causality.

## GUIDANCE ON MESSAGE COMPONENTS

### 1. Message Style

- Consider the language that is used in persuasive messaging.
- Use a narrative or storytelling approach.
- Prepare or caution of the potential for reactance before it has the chance to occur by using a forewarning or inoculation message.

### 2. Message Structure

- Consider how the message is framed.

### 3. Message Content

- Offer behavioral choices.
- Promote critical thinking and social regulation.
- Emphasize empathy and prosocial behaviors.
- Accentuate perspective taking.
- Strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms.

### 4. Message Delivery

- Consider who is delivering the message.

## CONTACT INFORMATION



Jay Otto, Research Scientist  
Center for Health and Safety Culture  
Montana State University  
jayotto@montana.edu

Project URL: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/trafficsafety.shtml>

This document is printed at state expense. Information on the cost of producing this publication may be obtained by contacting the Department of Administration. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Human Resources and Occupational Safety Division, Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone: 406-444-9229. Those using a TTY may call 1(800)335-7592 or through the Montana Relay Service at 711.