Pedestrian distraction: Seldom seen yet loudly heard

Seth LaJeunesse
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Outline

• What is “framing” and why is it important?

• How is pedestrian ‘distraction’ framed in TV news media of traffic crashes?

• How can we re-frame the conversation around traffic injury?

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What is “framing” and why is it important?

• **Framing** - focusing attention on certain events over others, thus placing stories within a field of meaning.

• Media frames guide the audience in discerning which story details are most pertinent, such as who is involved, how they were involved, and who may be responsible for a traffic crash (*Ralph, Goddard, Thigpen, and Iacobucci, 2019*).
18 CBSAs involved in study

- Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH
- Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC
- Cleveland-Elyria, OH
- Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington
- Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO
- Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI
- Erie, PA
- Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX
- Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV
- New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA
- Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL
- Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Salt Lake City, UT
- San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX
- San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA
- Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA
- Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL

- The top 2 TV broadcast stations in each of the 18 CBSAs (36 stations)

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A few results of our coding of 1,156 broadcast TV news articles featuring traffic crashes from 2012—2019
Who’s featured in media posts? (N = 1,156 posts)

- Car drivers/passengers: 55.8%
- Adults: 41.4%
- SUV/truck drivers/passengers: 29.2%
- Children and teens: 24.3%
- Heavy goods vehicles: 19.2%
- Cyclists/pedestrians: 18.7%
- City bus/school bus/train drivers & passengers: 10.6%
- Other mode users: 6.1%
- Motorcyclists/moped/scooter users: 6.1%
- Bystanders: 6.1%
- Seniors: 5.2%

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Injury severity

- Fatality: 45.2%
- Serious injury: 17.8%
- Minor injury: 10.4%
- No injury: 5.1%
- Not mentioned: 8.8%
- Unknown: 12.7%

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What were crashes attributed to (N = 1,156)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost control</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit and run</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating outside of designated area/wrong way driving/running off road</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use/abuse</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional distress (e.g., road rage)</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeding</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to impart harm</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad weather</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of/poor roadway lighting</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percentage of crashes attributed to pedestrian distraction?

0%
How does TV news media handle road user distraction?

Admonishment
• “STOP FOR SCHOOL BUSES! This 7-year-old boy was nearly hit by a car as he was crossing the street to his school bus. His father says this video shows the dangers of distracted driving.”
• “DON'T TEXT AND DRIVE: Police in Massachusetts released dashcam video of a texting driver crashing into a utility pole as a warning to others about the dangers of distracted driving.”

Comedy?
• “BURRITO TO BLAME: Surveillance video shows a city bus driver was eating a burrito with both hands seconds before causing a multi-car pileup.”

Conjecture
• "Over a dozen people were hurt were injured following the collision between two Mattapan Trolleys. Crash attributed to possible distraction.”
• “Crews are on the scene of a multi-car crash that is causing significant delays on I-15 in Weber County. Investigators believe a distracted driver didn’t notice traffic was slowing down near an exit.”
• “We had four young kids crossing, looks like they were in the crosswalk at time, and for whatever reason he seems to have lost control of the vehicle. I don't know if it was medical or some type of distracted driving. We’re not sure.”
• “Beyond tragic: A New Hampshire firefighter pulled a dying woman from crash this morning only to learn later it was his daughter. Investigators are looking into whether Cullen was distracted while driving.”

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How do viewers respond to stories featuring road user distraction (median # of y)?

- Stories referencing road user distraction (n = 7)
- All stories (N = 1,156)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Shares</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All stories</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Expanding the frame around traffic injury
Ways we can re-frame the conversation around traffic injury

- Appeal to **intrinsic** values of concern for others
- Depict **themes** over events
- Inspire **pragmatic** “can-doism”
- Identify opportune times to contribute to the safety narrative
Thank you!

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