

# An Experimental Study of Defensive-Attribution Theory : Judgments of Responsibility of Perpetrators and Victims for Traffic Accidents

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An experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis that self-protecting attribution of responsibility for traffic accidents is a function of outcome severity and personal relevance. One hundred and fifty-three undergraduates were asked to assign responsibility to the perpetrators and the victims in 4 traffic accident situations.

Hypothesis of the severity-dependent attribution of responsibility, proposed by Walster (1966), was supported only in the judgments of responsibility to perpetrators. No support was found for Shaver's (1970-b) hypothesis of personal relevance. However, post hoc analyses produced results consistent with the personal relevance hypothesis.