

Shaping the narrative around traffic injury: A media framing guide for transportation and public health professionals

This guide calls for professionals who work in injury prevention and transportation planning and design to coordinate with journalists and re-shape the narrative around traffic injury in our communities.

Messages and framing of media stories evoke values. For example, a media story that frames a road injury as delaying motor vehicle traffic appeals to Power values for control over one's time and use of road space. Activating people's values for control (Power) can suppress their concern for the welfare of others (Universalism). On the other hand, the "human interest" or "victim narrative" story appeals to values of Universalism, concern for others.



Above: Universal human values arranged in a circumplex (Common Cause Foundation, 2014); Right: Types and definitions of human values (adapted from Bardi and Schwartz, 2016).

Types of Values	Definition
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life
Self-Direction	Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection of the welfare of all people and of nature
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self

We recommend that transportation, public health, and journalists frame road trauma in three humanizing and inter-related ways:

1. Appeal to intrinsic values
2. Depict themes over events
3. Inspire pragmatic "can-doism"

Appealing to "bigger than self" problems (intrinsic values); centering crashes in a larger narrative themes about road injury, rather than treating injuries as isolated from one another; and framing serious crashes as preventable through use of common-sense can activate people's sense of concern for others, increase public support for addressing social issues, and tap into an American sense of "can do" (Maio, 2012; Swim and Becker, 2012; Ting, 2017; Thompson, 2016).

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