

# When It Comes To Driving, Most People Think Their Skills are Above Average

August 28, 2014

If you ask someone to rate their driving skills on a one to 10 scale, there's a good chance they'll give



themselves an above-average rating like a 7.

Psychological scientists Michael M. Roy of Elizabethtown College and Michael J. Liersch of New York University found that although people may rate themselves as above average, they don't think others would quite agree. Across four experiments, Roy and Liersch found that people often believed that others would rate them as a worse driver (about 10% worse) than they rated themselves.

Because there is no standard definition for "good driving," people tend to use their own unique, individual definitions. So, a slow and cautious driver could have a totally different definition of "good driving" than someone who likes to drive fast and aggressively.

"For a portion of drivers, their ability to text message while driving might be one of the characteristics that they believe makes them a unique and superior driver," they wrote in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, "or at the very least that "texting" while driving does not make them a bad driver."

In the study, college students completed questionnaires asking them to rank specific driving skills, assess their own driving ability, and assess what driving skills were most important to them compared to others.

As predicted, across all experiments participants believed that they were exceptional drivers—but only according to their own definitions of good driving. Participants assumed that others would rank important driving skills, like checking blind spots or using turn signals, differently than they would.

In one experiment, people thought others would rank only two out of seven driving skills as the same

importance as them.

Even when participants were provided with clear definitions for good driving behavior from the National Safety Council, they rated their own individualized definitions as better. The discrepancy between self-ratings and the ratings of others only disappeared when participants were explicitly told to use the expert guidelines as the basis for rating driving behavior.

The results of this study suggest that even though drivers are aware that others are using different standards for good driving, people often view their own standards as superior. This could help policymakers design more effective interventions for decreasing dangerous driving behavior.

## **Reference**

Roy, M. M., Liersch, M. J. (2014). I am a better driver than you think: examining self-enhancement for driving ability. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(8), 1648–1659. DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12117