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Motonormativity

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Alan Tapp and Adrian Davis

University of the West of England

The Is-Ought Problem

(David Hume, 1739)



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Double standards?

There is a cultural blind spot about the negatives of motoring

Lack of ambition to tackle law-breaking or pollution

Death and injury constructed as unavoidable

- cf. air travel, where planes are grounded until lessons from crash investigation can be implemented, and where even near-misses are analysed



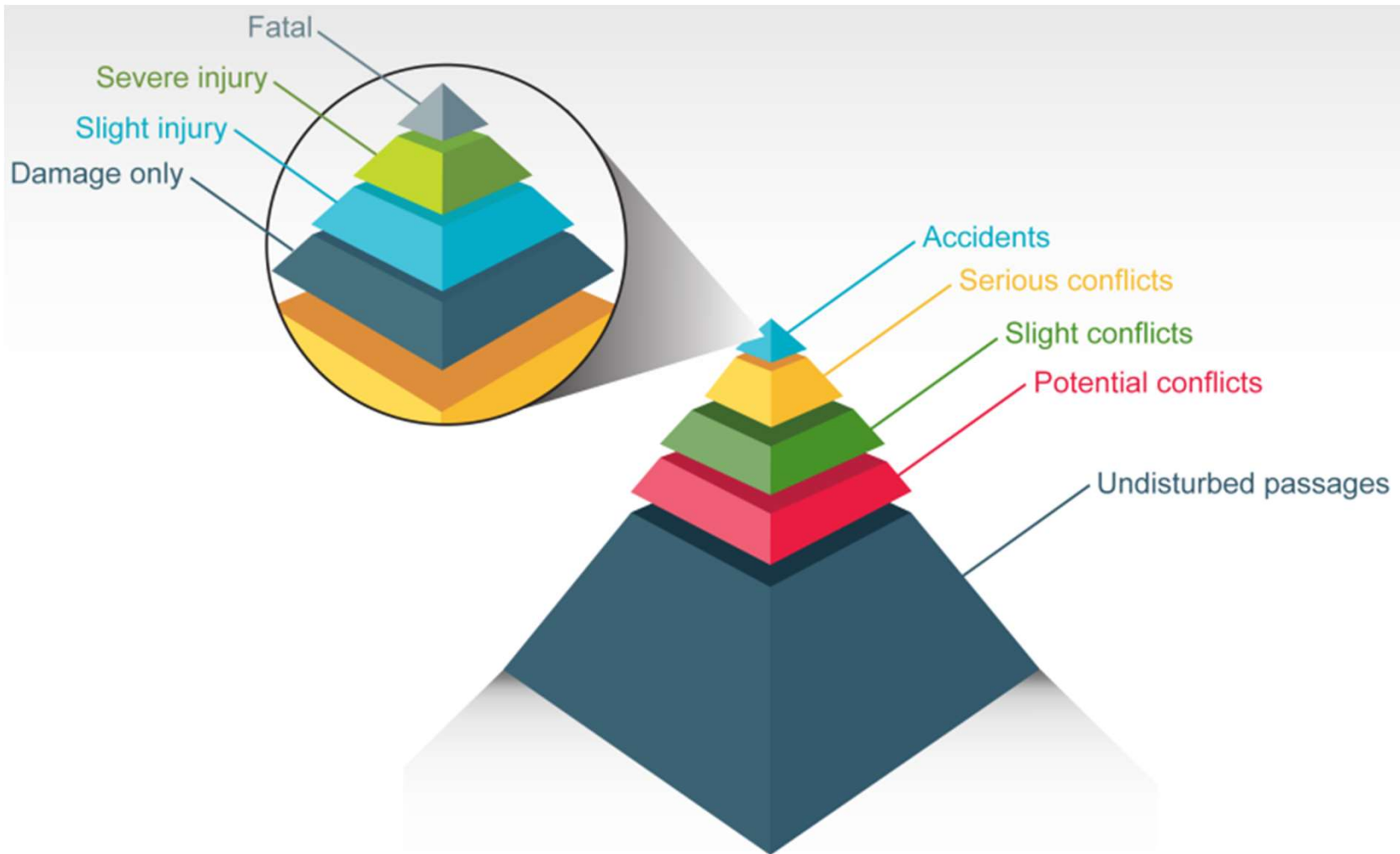
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Based on Hyden, 1987

Motonormativity in policy and practice



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What crashed what now?

Car crashes head-on into Tesco supermarket in St Austell

WEST COUNTRY | TESCO | DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE | ST AUSTELL

🕒 Sunday 10 September 2023 at 3:37pm

News | 07th Sep 2023

Woman in serious condition as car crashes into Donegal pub seating area

by SIMON KELLY

12 April 2024

Enfield: Land Rover crashes into house following police chase



News / Edinburgh & East

Car destroys bus stop after flipping on its roof on city street

Car crashes into building Wimbledon school crash: Girl, 8, dies after car hits building

🕒 7 July 2023



Car crashes into ambulance

Window was cracked

Car hits house as it crashes off road



Three injured after car crashes into shop

Traffic and Travel

Garstang High Street crash sees car smash into newly refurbished toilet block

Pictures from the wreck show the car buried beneath a heap of bricks and a gaping hole left in the toilet block...

Can we show double standards?



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Original plan:

“Should people who operate dangerous machinery in public be liable for any consequences?”

“Is it acceptable to put another person’s life in danger if that makes things more convenient for you?”

“Is it the country’s job to support people’s lifestyle choices?”

“Is it acceptable to barge in front of another person?”

“Should the state help people live beyond their means?”

Double standards?

Final approach: change single words

“People shouldn’t **drive** in highly populated areas where other people have to breathe in the **car** fumes”

“People shouldn’t **smoke** in highly populated areas where other people have to breathe in the **cigarette** fumes”



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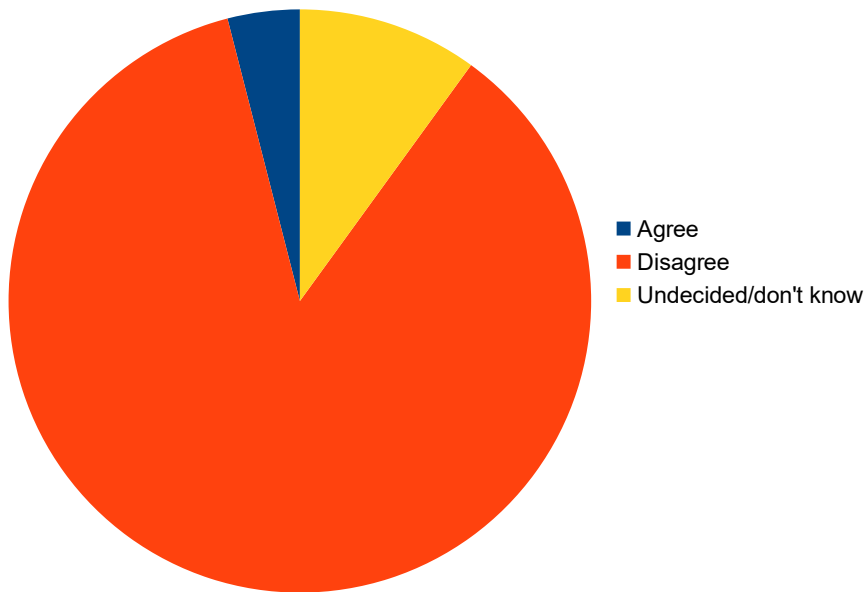
If somebody leaves their car/belongings in the street...



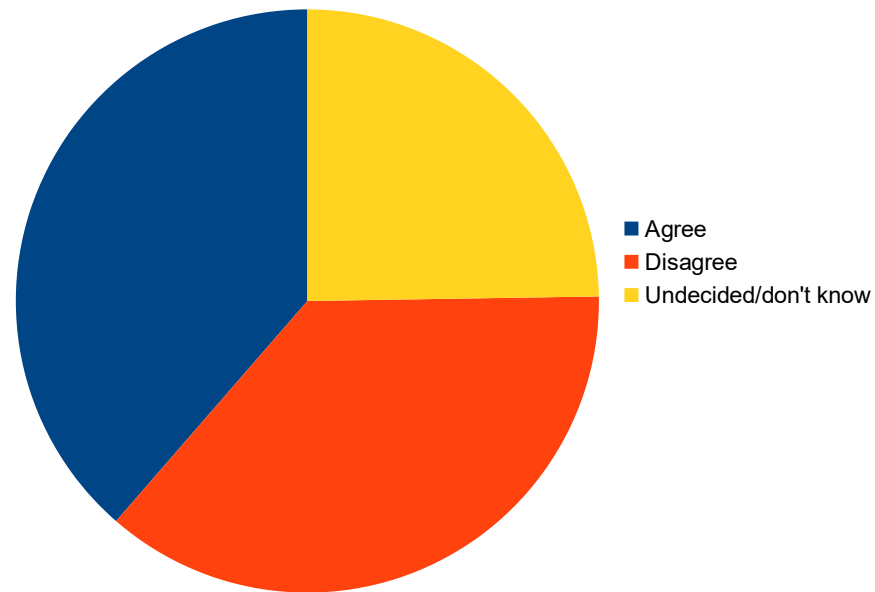
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car



belongings



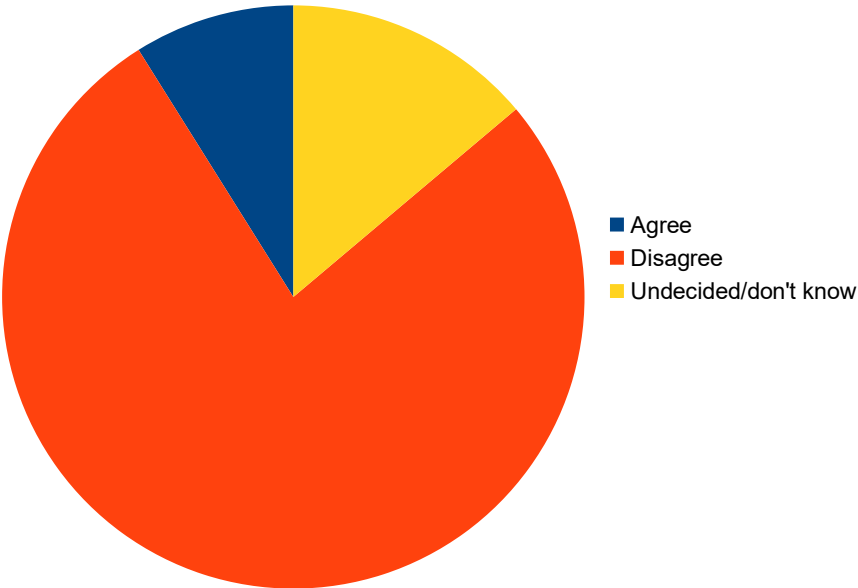
It's okay for a delivery driver/chef to cut corners with safety...



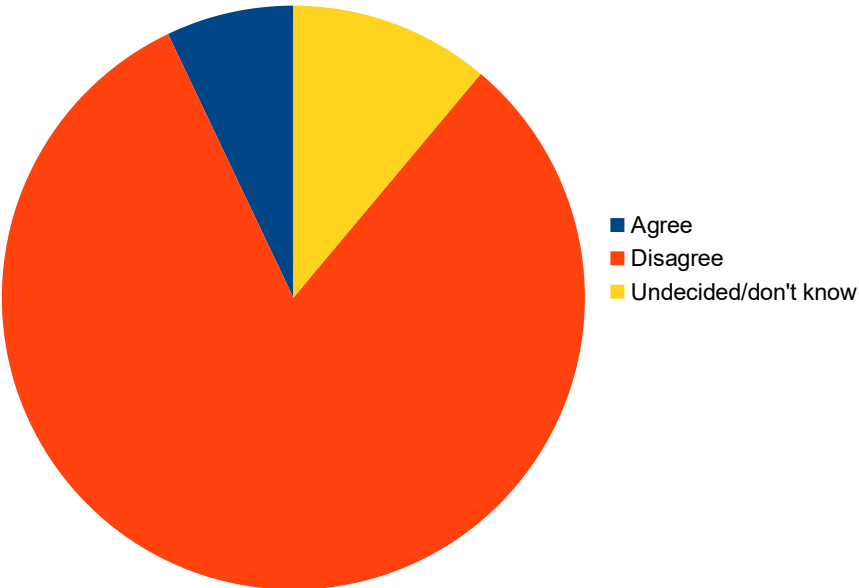
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delivery driver



chef



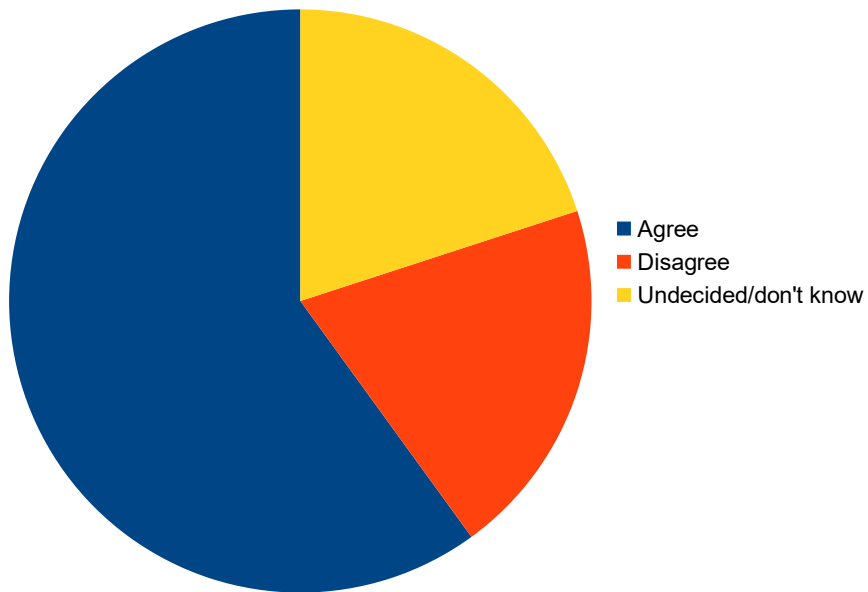
Risk is a natural part of driving/working...



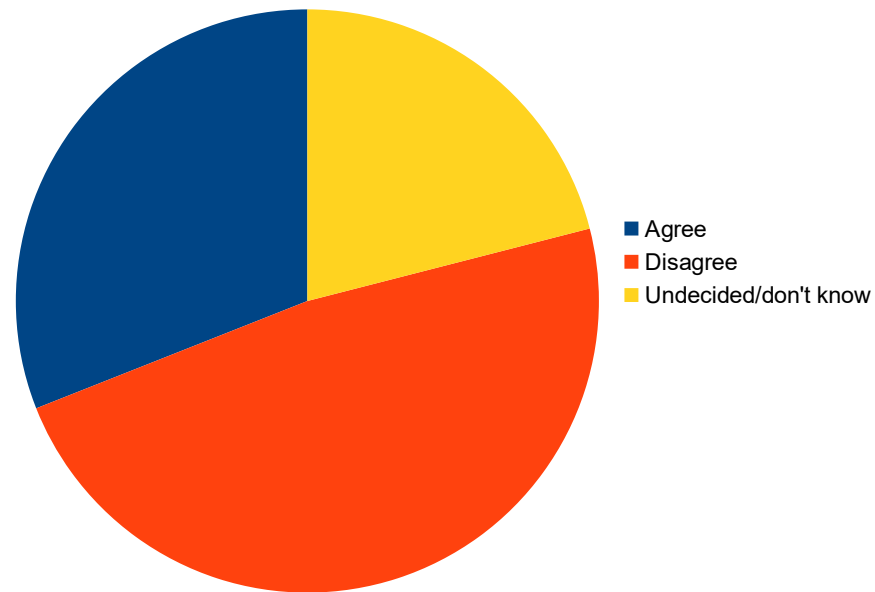
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driving



working



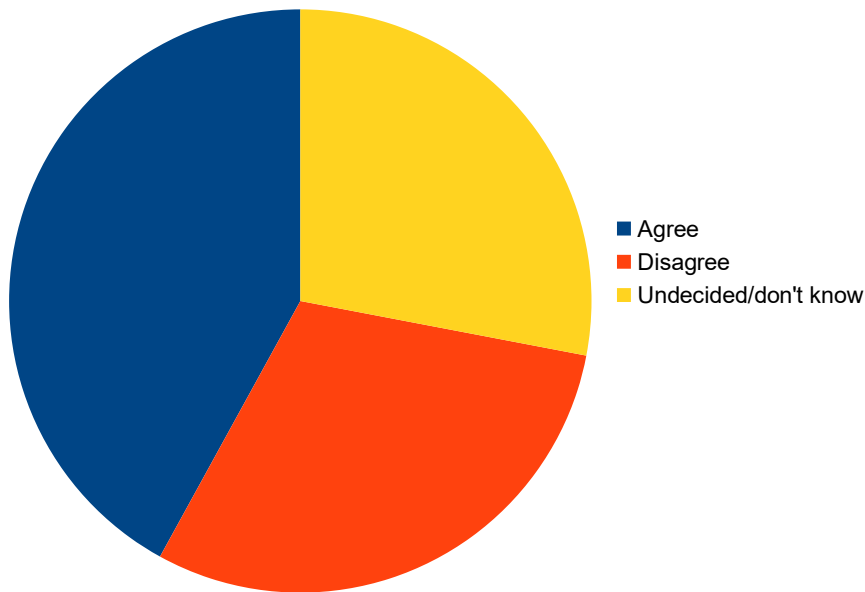
There's no point expecting people to drive/drink less...



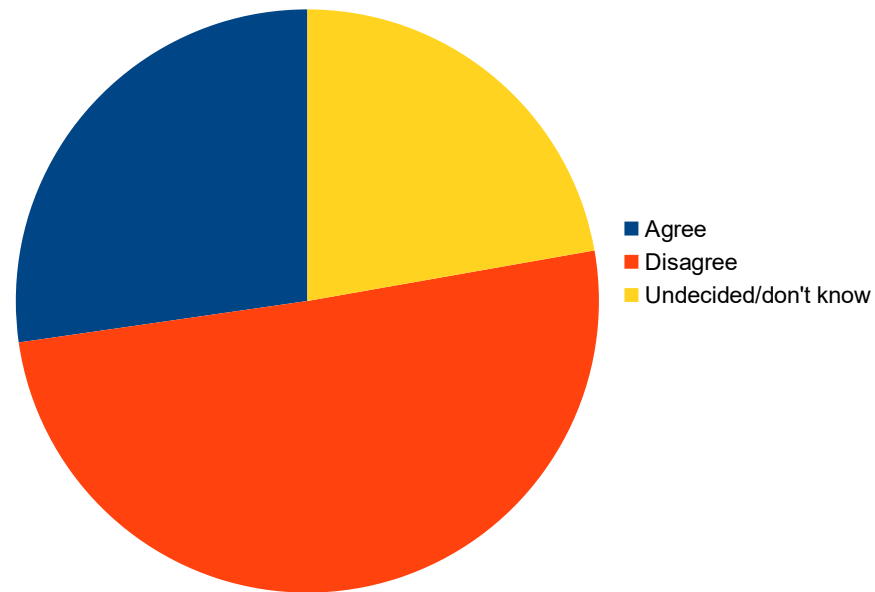
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drive



drink



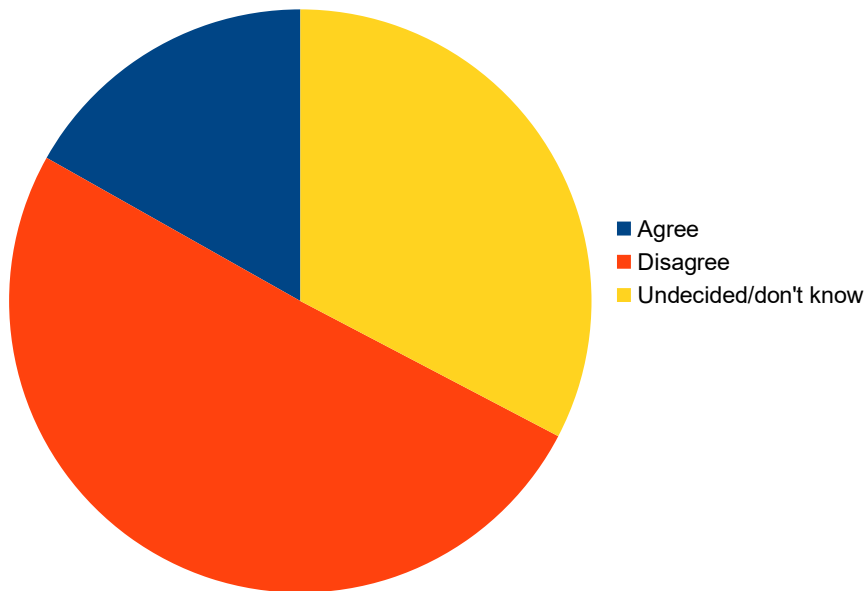
People shouldn't drive/smoke...where other people have to breathe in the car/cigarette fumes



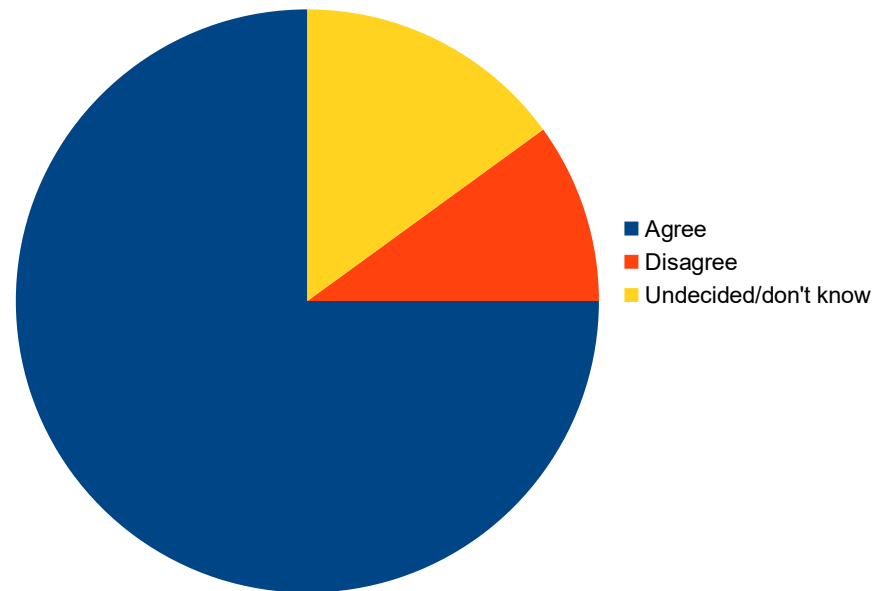
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drive



smoke



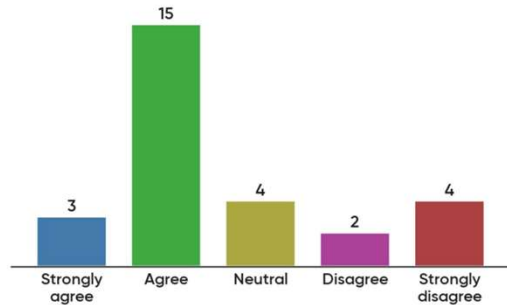
Michael Szell's students in DK



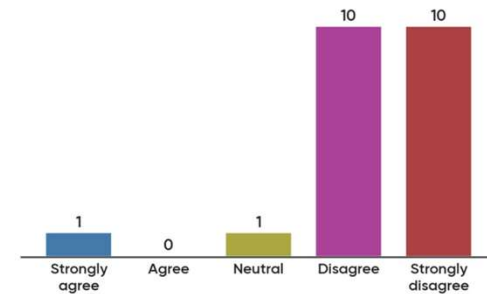
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If you leave your belongings in the street and they get stolen, it's your own fault for leaving them there and the police shouldn't be expected to act



If you leave your car in the street and it gets stolen, it's your own fault for leaving it there and the police shouldn't be expected to act





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IPPR recently asked 2041 UK adults

FIGURE 2.6: THE HARMS CAUSED BY CARS ARE MORE ACCEPTED THAN SMOKING OR LOUD MUSIC, WITH THIS AFFECT VARYING BY SEGMENT, CAR OWNERSHIP AND ETHNICITY

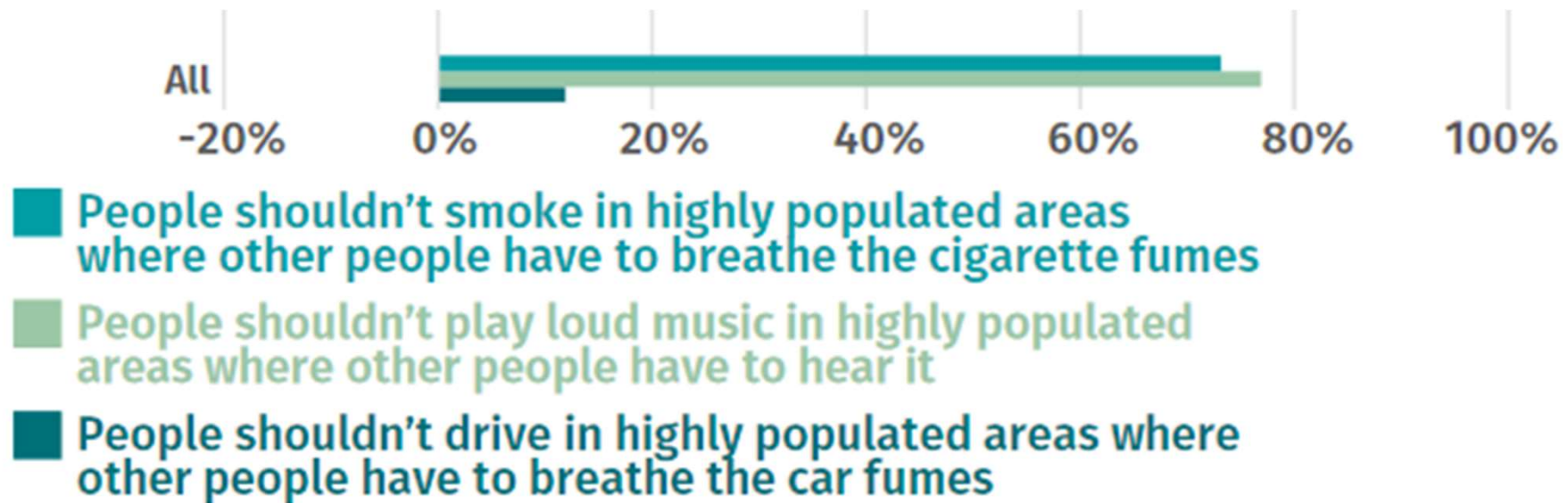
Level of net agreement to the statements that 'People shouldn't smoke/play loud music/drive in highly populated areas where people have to breathe the cigarette fumes/hear it/breathe the car fumes'





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**Drivers and non-drivers
responded essentially the same**

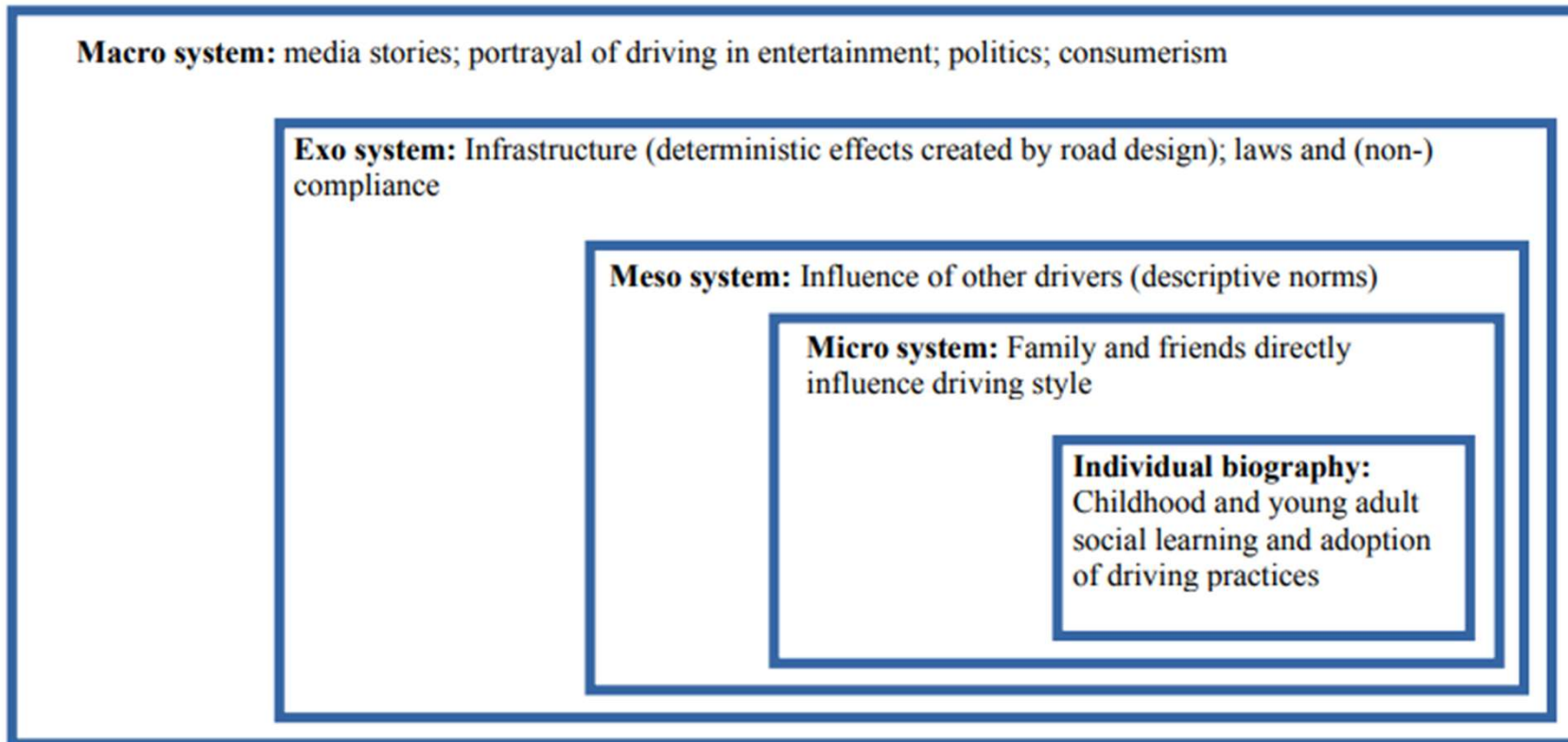
We are products of our environments?



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Figure 2 The social ecological model, representing the multiple influences on an individual, presented here in the context of driving behaviour influences(see online version for colours)



Micro system: Children observe that cars are commonly used even for short journeys; they are given toy cars to play with; they absorb their parents' driving styles through observation



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Meso system: Speeding, aggression and mobile phone use observed on the road are internalised through descriptive norm processes



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Exo system: Transport systems make car use easy, even for short journeys, by absorbing externalities, subsidising parking, providing priority over other modes, providing ineffective public transport alternatives; traffic safety laws are unambitious and poorly enforced



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Macro system: Discourses and narratives about driving are shaped through representations in news media (which under-report traffic crashes and present them as less important, and less preventable, than injuries from other sources); advertising substitutes the reality of driving (congestion, unpredictable arrival times) for images of pleasure and control; entertainment promotes dangerous and antisocial driving through the imagery of heroes in films (James Bond) and television (Top Gear)



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Our central claim is that lifelong exposure to multiple, nested environments where motoring is prioritised, and where the harms of motoring are systematically downplayed, leads people not only to see this as normal, but also to see it as proper.

Implications

This is a form of unconscious bias, and should be recognised as such

Decision-makers and planners could audit their decisions and implement processes to counter their biases

Change is most effective if it starts large (laws, infrastructure) and influences individuals later



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Thank you

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