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AVIATION SAFETY AS A FUNCTION OF PILOT EXPERIENCE: RATIONALE OR RATIONALIZATION?

Bill D. Bell, Ph. D., Charles L. Robertson, Gregory S. Wagner

This study tests the effectiveness of an experience model in predicting aviation safety behavior. The elements comprising the model include: (a) flight hours, (b) ratings and flight characteristics, (c) career status, and (d) malfunction history. Data were derived from a random sample of U.S. pilots in the Fall of 1990 by means of a survey instrument. Significant variance in aviation safety is not explained by the model. The key predictor of safety behavior is the career status (i.e., certificate duration) of the pilot. Flight hours, ratings, and malfunction history are negatively and non-significantly associated with aviation safety. The research: (a) questions the use of these variables in *ex post facto* explanations of aviation safety, and (b) suggests a topology for examining safety behavior.

THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

Pilot experience is an ill-defined variable in aviation safety literature (Campbell, 1987: Schiff, 1985, 1987; Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association [AOPA], 1987a-b). Although its definition is frequently unspecified, it generally refers to the accumulated wisdom attendant upon involvement in flight activities (Kershner, 1981, 1985). The experienced pilot, for example, is regarded as a good pilot, as a safe pilot, and as an individual whose understandings, judgments, and actions bespeak reliable, conscientious behavior.

As an explanatory variable, however, experience has not been generally explored from an empirical standpoint. For the most part, its nature, composition, and importance have been inferred from three sources:

1. the air transportation industry
2. public media
3. various accident investigation organizations (e.g., National Transportation Safety Board [NTSB], AOPA, etc.).

Generally speaking, air transportation employers associate pilot experience with specified degrees of flight activity (Schiff, 1985, 1987; Taneja, 1989) and, in this regard, they often require of employees a certain number of flight hours, specific ratings, and exposure to a variety of aircraft types. This preemployment criteria assumes that one who meets these requirements will exhibit more knowledge of the field, make sounder safety judgments, and engender greater confidence in the public mind than less experienced pilots. In addition, it is considered that such individuals are more easily trained and involve fewer costs to the company.

The philosophy of air transportation employers is echoed by the public media and numerous private, federal, and international agencies (Federal Aviation Administration [FAA], 1977, 1980a-b; 1985b-h; AOPA, 1987a-b; International Civil Aviation Organization [ICAO], 1987a-f). Perhaps the most frequent media commentary to follow a major air catastrophe is the lack of flight time and aircraft familiarization of one or more members of the ill-fated crew. The same impression can be gleaned from examination of NTSB accident statistics (NTSB, 1987a-g). These statistics, like comments from the public media, give the impression that flight experience is a matter of:

(a) accumulated flight time, (b) time in type, and (c) the recency of flight activities (e.g., last 30 days, last 90 days, etc.).

It should be pointed out that, with the exception of the air transportation argument as to the costs involved in pilot training, all explanations of aviation safety relative to pilot experience have been *ex post facto* in nature. That is, both media pronouncements and accident statistics have attempted to assess experience only after tragedies have occurred. To date, no research has attempted to examine contemporary safety practice with respect to flight (i.e., pilot) experience.

The purpose of the present research is two-fold. The first is to suggest a theoretical orientation which can be used to address the cumulative assumptions of pilot experience. Of interest here is the internalization of those norms and values associated with safety practice, as well as an examination of factors which strengthen or diminish these orientations. The second is to examine pilot
experience in relation to current safety practice. *Ex post facto* explanations afford limited insight into the matter at hand. Our first point of departure concerns the extent to which a continuous or discontinuous pattern of socialization affects safety practice.

**THE SOCIALIZATION THEORY AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

Socialization is an interactional process whereby a person's behavior is modified to conform to expectations held by members of the group to which they belong or aspire (Hill, 1960; Brim, 1967). Such behavior includes not only the process by which the individual acquires the ways of persons around him or her, but also the process by which an adult takes on behavior appropriate to the expectations associated with a new position in a group (Hill, 1960). Socialization processes are especially active each time a person occupies a new position, as when joining a fraternity or sorority, being promoted in a business organization, becoming a parent, or being inducted into any special group (Goode, 1957). In essence, the socialization process concerns the attitudinal and behavioral changes which occur through learning.

Socialization theorists suggest that the acquisition of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and values is facilitated by the participatory integration of the individual into the group context (Kohliberg, 1963; Ferster and Skinner, 1957; Goode, 1960). That is, effective socialization is impossible under conditions where the individual is isolated from the system into which he/she is being socialized. Frequent interaction, it is argued, will lead to a more effective involvement of the participants in group life.

Socialization is further facilitated when the norms and other expectational aspects of the group are focused or specific in nature (Bell, 1968). Generalized expectations appear to require a longer interactional commitment of group members than do those which are codified or directive in scope. Generalized expectations often involve identification with specific role models (i.e., significant others), especially models who can be put in dramatic focus (Bandura, 1962, 1969; Bandura et al., 1963, 1967). Formalized expectations can be presented in an instructional format where conformity can be more easily assessed (Bell, 1968).

In addition, socialization effectiveness is increased as the instructional aspects of group membership are intensified (Hill, 1960). Increased social and psychological commitment to the group situation as well as the frequency and intensity of socialization efforts combine to ground the individual more completely in the normative milieu of group life. Socialization theorists argue that this greater integration leads to a more comprehensive identification with the group per se (Ferster and Skinner, 1957; Kohliberg, 1969). The overall effect is to make the individual more susceptible to those social control mechanisms (i.e., positive and negative sanctions) which regulate normative compliance.

Socialization, although influential in establishing attitudinal and behavioral predispositions, is not a unitary process (Merton, 1957). It functions in an environment of many social groups with competing allegiances. Accordingly, socialization should not be thought of as molding a person to a standard social pattern. Individuals are subjected to different combinations of socialization pressures, and they react differently to them. Consequently, socialization processes can produce distinctive differences, as well as similarities, among persons.

Finally, socialization does not stop at a certain age, but instead continues throughout life (Brim, 1967). Therefore, life experiences representing competing group involvements act to modify or condition the attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as behavioral patterns established earlier. Socialization theorists posit that congruence in group experience provides reinforcement to many pre-established behavioral patterns (Gewitz et al., 1956). Generally speaking, patterns of behavior which rehearse or dramatize a previously learned expectation aid in "fixing" this dimension in the individual's behavioral repertoire.

Within the confines of aviation, continued flight activities may be seen as calling forth this repetitive dimension. Accordingly, those respondents with greater flight experience are expected to exhibit more consistently positive safety behavior.
A corollary is suggested relative to the above hypothesis. It must be recalled that socialization is a group phenomenon. Within a group context, an individual is exposed to an interational process whereby behavior is modified to conform to expectations held by group members. As has been suggested, increased integration in the group elicits more comprehensive identification with group members and their normative expectations for behavior. It follows that in those instances where individuals are temporally or geographically separated from the group involvement, socialization effectiveness should be diminished.

In the arena of modern aviation, it is possible to differentiate participants (i.e., pilots) by means of an avocation/profession dichotomy. For a significant number of pilots, flying is incidental to a host of other life activities. An avocation, as opposed to a profession, implies less consistent behavioral involvement. In addition, monetary compensation is normally characteristic of the latter rather than the former. For the avocational pilot, flight related activities are more personalized and less group oriented. The professional pilot, on the other hand, is not only compensated for flight, but performs within the context of a formal occupation. The professional's occupational involvement is characterized by considerable formality, symbolic identification (e.g., uniforms, ranks, professional memberships, etc.), institutionalized training requirements, and both formal and informal mechanisms of social control. From the standpoint of socialization theory, opportunities for interactive identification, behaviors specificity, and expectational rehearsal should be greater for the professional pilot. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that professional pilots will exhibit more consistently positive safety behavior than will their avocational counterparts.

In summary, then, socialization theory acknowledges the importance of group and interational involvement in the formulation of attitudes and behavioral expectations. It describes the manner in which attitudes, beliefs, and values are internalized. It emphasizes those factors deemed essential to successful socialization. And, within the framework of the present research, it suggests a model by means of which behavioral expression may be predicted.

THE RESPONDENT SELECTION PROCESS
The data presented here comes from a sample of U.S. registered pilots polled in the late fall of 1990 by means of a survey instrument. Procedurally, the entire population of registered pilots in the United States was enumerated as 710,000. Twenty thousand of the registered pilots who were non-residents of the fifty states were subsequently excluded from the model to maintain a homogenous flying environment. From the remaining (N=690,000) registered pilots with U.S. residence, a systematic selection procedure was used on the zip code ordered list to obtain a nationwide representative sample of 2,500. Survey questionnaires were mailed to selected pilots. A total of 959 surveys were received, constituting a return rate of 38.4%. No followup measures were instituted.

The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 86 years (the mean age was 43.3 years). Some 51.1% of the respondents were between 18 and 42 years old. Occupationally, for 71.4% of the sample pilots, flying was an avocational and non-monetary compensated activity. Among this subgrouping were farmers, service workers, and laborers (24.7%); clerical workers, salesmen, operatives, and craftsmen (35.4%); and professional, technical, and managerial workers (39.9%). The mean educational level of the overall sample was 15.4 years, a figure well above the national average for the general population (Cremin, 1988). In addition, 96.5% of the sample were caucasian; 91.4% were presently employed; 78.8% owned their own homes; and 85.5% had learned to fly in a civilian environment. Finally, the median annual income was slightly less than $42,500.

MAJOR VARIABLES AND RESEARCH FOCUS
Pilot Experience
Pilot experience focuses on the continuing nature of socialization and recognizes the fact that ongoing life experiences act to modify or condition attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as behavior patterns established earlier. As Gewirtz et al (1956)
points out, congruence in group experience provides reinforcement to many pre-established behavioral patterns. Generally speaking, patterns of behavior which rehearse or dramatize a previously learned expectation (e.g., safety behavior) should aid in “fixing” this dimension in the individual’s behavioral repertoire. As repetitive behavior is taken to reflect normative and/or expectational rehearsal, attention was focused on the temporal aspects of this dimension.

For operational purposes, a panel of 10 aviation educators was polled to elicit those factors most indicative of pilot experience. The factors suggested included:

1. Flight hours
2. Ratings and flight classifications
3. Career status
4. Malfunction history

Respondents were asked to indicate their total flight hours in all aircraft, the number of ratings held with respect to all aircraft classifications, the duration of their pilot certificates, and an enumeration of the number and types of flight malfunctions experienced over their aviation careers. These numbers were totaled in each category and utilized as indicators of overall flight (i.e., pilot) experience.

**Aviation Safety**

From a conceptual standpoint, aviation safety was considered a set of socially conditioned attitudes, beliefs, and values specific to the arena of flight. These elements, it is argued, are internalized to varying degrees and behaviorally modified by a variety of social and experiential components. As such, it can be viewed as a product of the socialization process. For the purposes of this research, aviation safety constituted a particular predisposition toward eliminating human error and its attendant consequences in the aviation environment.

From an operational standpoint, aviation safety was assessed by the extent to which the respondent reported compliance with five safety-related behaviors associated with preflight preparation. These behaviors included:

1. The performance of a thorough walk-around inspection
2. A through check of the weather prior to flight
3. The computation of fuel requirements with regard to appropriate reserves
4. The computation of takeoff and landing distance as well as runway lengths at all airports
5. The use of a checklist for interior and exterior inspections

The respondent was presented a 7-item scale (see Table 1) with respect to each safety behavior and asked the extent to which they perform each item prior to flight. The scales were anchored with the bipolar responses "Never" and "Always". All responses were subsequently totaled to form an Aviation Safety Index.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preflight Preparation</th>
<th>&lt; Never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Always &gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I do a thorough walk-around inspection of an aircraft before I fly it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I check the weather thoroughly before I fly (even on a local flight).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I compute fuel requirements with an eye toward a 30 or 45 minute fuel reserve.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I use a check list for interior and exterior inspection of an aircraft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I compute takeoff &amp; landing distance, as well as runway lengths at airports of intended use, for each flight.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aviation Safety Relative to Pilot Experience

THE RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

A standard multiple regression was performed, to determine the effect of pilot experience on aviation safety, for the Aviation Safety Index as the dependent variable (DV) and flight hours, ratings, career status, and malfunction history as independent variables. Analysis was performed for evaluation of assumptions, i.e. that Pilot Safety Behavior improves with an increase in pilot experience.

Results of evaluation of assumptions led to transformation of the variables to reduce skewness in their distributions, reduce the number of outliers, and improve the normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals. Logarithmic transformations were used on the Aviation Safety Index (LOGSAFE), Career Status (LOGYEAR), Flight Hours (LOGFEXP), and Malfunction History (LOGMALF). One independent variable, Flight Ratings and Classifications, was positively skewed without transformation and negatively skewed with it; hence, it was not transformed. With the use of a p<.001 criterion for mahalanobis distance, ten outliers among the cases were found and subsequently excluded. Seven additional cases had missing data and were deleted from analysis. Analysis was limited to the remaining 942 respondents. To detect the interactive effects of combinations of independent variables; flight hours, ratings, career status, and malfunction history; multicollinearity and singularity investigations of the independent variables were performed and proved negative.

Table 2 displays the correlations between the variables, comparing the predictors to determine which one is more important, using the unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and intercept, the standardized regression coefficients (B), the semipartial correlations (sr²), and R, R², and adjusted R². R for the regression was not significantly different from zero, F(4,937)=2.21, p<.07, hence the regression exercise has not helped to explain the dependent variable (Aviation Safety Index).

One regression coefficient does differ significantly from zero, using a 95% confidence limit calculation. The confidence limits for the Career Status (LOGYEAR) variable were -0.0321 to -0.0049.

Only one of the independent variables contributed significantly to predicting the Aviation Safety Index, respondent's logarithmical transformed–career status (sr² = .008). The four independent variables in combination contributed a .001 in shared variability; however, altogether only 0.9% (0.5% adjusted) of the variability in aviation safety scores was predicted by knowing scores on these four independent variables.

Although correlations between the log of aviation safety and the logs of flight hours and malfunctions were -.035 and -.036 respectively, neither variable contributed significantly to regression. The same was true of the correlation between log of aviation safety and flight ratings and classifications (-.036).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>LOGSAFE</th>
<th>LOGFEXP</th>
<th>LOGMALF</th>
<th>RATINGS</th>
<th>LOGYEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOGFEXP</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>.480</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.0069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGMALF</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>-.0029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATINGS</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>-.0012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGYEAR</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>1.809</td>
<td>-.0190*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>2.890</td>
<td>2.379</td>
<td>1.809</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviations</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.799</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² = .009
Adjusted R² = .005
R = .097

*p < .01

*unique variability = .008; shared variability = .001
Post hoc evaluation of these correlations revealed none to be significantly different from zero \( F(4,937)=1.87, p<.17; F(4,937) = .204, p<.65; \) and \( F(4,937)= .523, p<.47, \) respectively. It seems clear that flight experience (i.e., hours, ratings, and malfunction history) contribute negligibly (both singularly and jointly) to variance in reported safety behavior.

From the results presented in Table 2, it would appear that the research hypothesis has not been confirmed by the data. Safety behavior is not observed to be positively associated with the independent variables in question. On the contrary, all correlations are negative. Although these associations are not statistically significant, they relegate to rationalization the relationship of pilot experience with improved safety practice.

Table 3, seeking to account for differences among pilots, shows a measure of how different the Safety Behavior Indices are. It provides a test of the avocation-profession corollary concerning group involvement. As hypothesized, a statistically significant difference is obtained between the aviation safety scores of avocational (i.e., non-monetary compensated) and professional (i.e., monetarily compensated) pilots. Individuals compensated for flight activities scored higher than did their avocational counterparts (\( F=9.84, p<.001 \)). The implications for the predictive paradigm are seen in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 represents a standard multiple regression of flight variables on the safety behavior of avocational (i.e., non-monetary compensated) pilots. Only one of the independent variables contributed significantly to prediction of aviation safety as logarithmical transformed-flight ratings and classifications \( \text{sr}^2=.006 \). The four independent variables in combination contributed another .040 in shared variability. Altogether, 4.6% (4.0% adjusted) of the variability in aviation safety scores was predicted by knowing scores on these four independent variables.

Although the correlations between log of aviation safety and the logs of career status and flight hours were -.155 and -.174 respectively, neither variable contributed significantly to regression. The same was true of the correlation between log of aviation safety and the log of malfunctions (-.160). Post hoc evaluation of these correlations revealed none to be significantly different from zero \( F(4,661)=1.47, p<.23; F(4,661)=.39, p<.39; \) and \( F(4,661)=.271, p<.10, \) respectively. It seems clear that flight experience (i.e., hours), career status, and malfunction history contribute negligibly (both singularly and jointly) to variance in safety behavior.

From the results presented in Table 4, it would again appear that the research hypothesis has not been confirmed by the data. Safety behavior among avocational pilots is not observed to be positively associated with the independent variables in question. On the contrary, all observed correlations are negative. In addition, these relationships fall short of statistical significance.

Table 5 represents a standard multiple regression of flight variables on the safety behavior of professional (i.e., monetarily compensated) pilots. Only one of the independent variables contri-
Aviation Safety Relative to Pilot Experience

...distributed significantly to prediction of aviation safety as logarithmical transformed—the log of flight hours (r²=.031). The four independent variables in combination contributed another .007 in shared variability. Altogether, 3.8% (2.3% adjusted) of the variability in aviation safety scores was predicted by knowing scores on these four independent variables.

**TABLE 4**
Standard Multiple Regression of Flight Variables on Safety Behavior of Non-Monetarily Compensated Pilots (N=666)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>LOGSAFE (DV)</th>
<th>LOGFEXP</th>
<th>LOGMALF</th>
<th>RATINGS</th>
<th>LOGYEAR</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>r² (unique)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOGFEXP</td>
<td>-.174</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>-.0040</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>-.0095</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGMALF</td>
<td>-.160</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>-.062*</td>
<td>-.089</td>
<td>.046*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATINGS</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>-.366</td>
<td>-.0144</td>
<td>-.0095</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGYEAR</td>
<td>-.155</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.1494</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
<td>1.460</td>
<td>2.600</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>1.749</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>Adjusted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviations</strong></td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  
** p<.001  
* unique variability = .006; shared variability = .040

**TABLE 5**
Standard Multiple Regression of Flight Variables on Safety Behavior of Monetarily Compensated Pilots (N=266)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>LOGSAFE (DV)</th>
<th>LOGFEXP</th>
<th>LOGMALF</th>
<th>RATINGS</th>
<th>LOGYEAR</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>r² (unique)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOGFEXP</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>.040**</td>
<td>-.0007</td>
<td>-.0388</td>
<td>1.377</td>
<td>Adjusted</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGMALF</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>-.0005</td>
<td>-.0388</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATINGS</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGYEAR</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.828</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
<td>1.474</td>
<td>3.579</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>3.808</td>
<td>1.145</td>
<td>.360</td>
<td>Adjusted</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviations</strong></td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  
** p<.001  
* unique variability = .031; shared variability = .007

...Although the correlation between log of aviation safety and log of career status was .067, career status did not contribute significantly to regression. The same was true of the correlations with the log of malfunctions and ratings (.065 and .010, respectively). Post hoc evalu-
tions of these correlations revealed neither to be signifi-
cantly different from zero
\[ F(4,261) = 3.38, p < .07; F(4,261) = .004, p < .95; \text{ and } F(4,261) = .057, p < .81, \text{ respectively}. \]
It seems clear that career status, flight hours, and malfunction
history contribute negligibly (both singularly and jointly) to
variance in safety behavior.

From observation of Table 5, it would appear that only one
aspect of the research hypothesis has been confirmed by
the data. Specifically, those respondents indicating greater
flight hours exhibited more consistently positive safety
behavior \( p < .01 \). Although the
effects of career status, flight
ratings, and malfunction history
are in predicted directions, the
associations are not statistically
significant.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

From the perspective of the
present data, little variance in
aviation safety was explained by
the socialization model. With no
exceptions, the associates were
counter to prediction. Most,
however, were neither strong nor
statistically significant. It would
appear that aviation safety can
not be adequately adduced from
a knowledge of a pilot’s flight
hours, career status, ratings, or
malfunction history.

A second finding of this
research was the suggestion of
group specificity with respect to
aviation safety. That is, when
pilots were differentiated into
avocational and professional
categories, the model proved
somewhat more useful. Safety
index scores were found to be
significantly higher for profes-
sional or monetarily-compens-
sated pilots than for their
avocational peers \( F = 9.84, p < .001 \). For the professional
pilots, 3.8% of the variance in
aviation safety was accounted for
by the model. Whereas all model
assumptions were borne out by
the data, only the respondents’
flight hours proved statistically
significant. Career status, ratings,
and malfunction history were
positively but non-significantly
associated with aviation safety
\( .07, .01, \text{ and } .07, \text{ respectively}. \)

For avocational or non-mone-
tarily compensated pilots, on the
other hand, 4.6% of the variance
in aviation safety was accounted
for by the model. Whereas all
variables were found to be nega-
tively associated with aviation
safety, only the pilot’s ratings
and classifications proved statis-
tically significant. As in the case
of the total sample, the associa-
tions between flight variables
and aviation safety were nega-
tive. In general, it would appear
that these elements provide
insufficient rationale for safety
behavior.

**LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH
SUGGESTIONS**

The present research is not
without its limitations. The defini-
tion of aviation safety is a case in
point. From a theoretical per-
spective, aviation safety encom-
passes both attitudinal and
behavioral elements. That is, the
individual’s predisposition toward
error avoidance includes not only
a repertoire of situation-specific
behaviors, but also numerous
understandings (i.e., beliefs) and
feelings about safety practice. In
the present research, only the
behavioral dimension was
addressed. In addition, attention
was limited to those behaviors
characteristic of a specific flight
situation (i.e., preflight) as
opposed to those consistent with
a complete flight scenario—pre-
flight, flight, and post-flight. It
seems clear that a more compre-
prehensive test of the socialization
model must incorporate not only
a broader range of safety behav-
ior, but must include cognitive
and affective elements as well.

Secondly, the operationaliza-
tion of pilot experience must be
expanded. In this research, pilot
experience centered about flight
activities. Subsequent research
into pilot behavior indicates not
only the multifaceted character of
pilot experience, but also its
social-psychological dimensions.
(Bell et al., 1991a,b,c). Individuals
who view themselves as good
pilots, for example, tend to be
more conscientious in terms of
safety behavior. In this regard, it
is suggested that subsequent
research address an individual’s
aviation-related attitudes, beliefs,
and values as well as hours,
ratings, etc., in assessing pilot
experience.

Finally, the present data are
associated with a cross-sectional
design. As such, they represent
only a snapshot in time. To
assess changes in behavior over
time, a longitudinal format would
be desirable.
Aviation Safety Relative to Pilot Experience

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REFERENCES


Aviation Safety Relative to Pilot Experience

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**Flying Time**

O friends who fly  
On man's mind wings  
And deeply love  
Those flying things

Who yearn for the lore  
Of flying times passed  
Of wings overhead  
And wind streaming past

Let's gather those dreams  
And put them to rest  
For these times that we fly  
Are flying times best

Tim Brady