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Trends. When Air Rage is All the Rage: An Airing Out

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The usual suspects--journalists and self-appointed experts (at times) working in collusion--are citing air rage as the human problem of the moment. As usual, there is less than meets the eye.

Air rage is most often defined as anger-related behavior disruptive to aviation safety. Such behavior is said to occur in an airport terminal or aboard an aircraft and is viewed as a novel development in human psychology. However, the news of transportation-related anger that disrupts transportation safety is certainly not new. We still have road rage via the automobile--with many more fatalities. There's been stage coach rage and horse rage during the days of "yesterday year" in the "Old West" in the United States (US). And there's been chariot rage in antiquity.

Air rage often is cited as a growing problem. Yet statistics collected by the US Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration suggest that incidents and prevalence have remained static during fiscal years 1997 through 1999 and may even be decreasing in 2000. Moreover, inconsistencies and varying developments in reporting procedures and analyses impede meaningful interpretation of data. In addition, variations in the very salience of air rage stories through the mass media not only can influence perceptions of air rage incidence and prevalence but also directly affect incidence and prevalence. The same can be said for announcements of changes in response strategies and formal penalties for air rage.

One might conclude that the air rage is as likely an example of social savants acting badly than air passengers. (See Banks, S. (1951). Relative severity of air line passenger complaints. Journal of Applied Psychology, 59, 365-368; Bryan, G.L., & Rigney, J.W. (1960). Emotional behavior of airline passengers. Aerospace Medicine, 31, 123-126; Dukes et al. (1991). Stereotypes of pilots and apprehension about flying with them: A study of commercial aviation scenarios. Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine, 62, 722-726.; Sharma, G.C., & Pal, R.K. (1985). Air India and the psychology of Indian travellers. Indian Psychological Review, 29, 53-56.) (Keywords: Aviation, Air Rage, FAA.)

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