

# Road Rage Behaviour In Movie *Unhinged* Directed By Derrick Borte Through Psychoanalytic Approaches

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## Abstract

Road rage is a phenomenon that involves the connection between human anger and driving performance. This study aims to discover how road rage is portrayed in movie *Unhinged* and to know the interconnection between characters based on their background and motives. This research uses Freud's psychoanalysis theory in "*Unhinged*" to discover the characters' backgrounds and motives. The research adopts a qualitative approach. Through non-numeric data analysis, the study provides an overview of road rage, including its causes and severe consequences depicted in the movie. The examination of various scenes in the movie reveals similarities in the motives of the characters, despite their distinct backgrounds and personalities, which are both explicitly and implicitly explained. By analyzing the backgrounds of the characters, an interconnected negative influence between them is inferred. Ultimately, this study concludes that *Unhinged* prominently highlights road rage as its central theme, and through a deep analysis of character backgrounds, it unveils the overwhelming burden of thoughts experienced by both individuals, leading to heightened sensitivity on that particular day.

**Keywords:** *Literature; Movie Analysis; Road Rage; Psychoanalysis*

## 1. Introduction

Literature is a part of life and an action of human society, whether it is fiction or not (Akhter, 2022). Literature is an interconnection between everything, it portrays human frailty and vulnerability in a more immersive way (Bennett & Royle, 2023). Literature is defined as a work of art with numerous philosophies and theologies that have survived throughout the ages and across various countries (Totawad, 2019). It means that literature connects the different parts of each variable to make a logical relation between them. Literature can also be considered a medium or way of describing the traits, behaviors, and real events carried out by living things, especially humans. It is attractively packed to make it more fun to enjoy. Literature is very close to humans because it is related to social life. It can be real or fictionalized. Every form of literature could portray social experience, although books and movies seem the most common. Simple situations like getting trapped in heavy traffic while driving a car are frequently found in movies, proving that it does not always have to bring up major problems to be included in a scene.

Movie is defined as an art that can be a reflection of human life since it is made based on social phenomenon and cultural values (H et al., 2021). It means that movie is an art that can represent society in current and past events. It also often carries cultural aspects and presents them to the world. In a movie, actors are appointed to play characters according to what has been created by the scriptwriter. A movie usually has many actors to support the story, but normally there is only one protagonist and one antagonist. The protagonist is generally described as the good main character, while the antagonist is the opposite (Jimmi et al., 2022). However, the use of the word protagonist to refer to the main characters has also been frequently used in conversations between the enthusiasts of a movie.

## *Road Rage*

In this discussion, there is one informative term that people still rarely recognize has been well portrayed in the movie entitled *Unhinged*. A form of anger that only occurs in the context of driving which overlaps with driving anger (Bjureberg & Gross, 2021), an illegal, law-breaking behavior (Alonso et al., 2019), a way of dealing with unexpected

unpleasant situations in the road (Shamoa-Nir, 2023), and the altering of an individual's personality whilst driving through a process of dehumanization and a total loss of self-control (Miller, 2020). This has become the primary topic of discussion and a source of tension that affects the movie's butterfly effect. Road rage is still often not given much attention and is often ignored even though a conducive atmosphere on the road depends on how we behave towards others. As a result, it is anticipated that this research will contribute to the development of both readers and new researchers by offering fresh perspectives. Since road rage literally means a burst of anger on the road, it is very connected with one of the human emotions: anger. Anger is defined as a negative response to an alleged violation that includes a desire for vengeance (Tanesini, 2018). Anger is referred to as a reaction to offending feelings followed by a strong urge to avenge the hurt with something equal or worse. Road rage itself has various types according to Coleman (2022), which include rude or inflammatory gestures, profanity, acts of harming the vehicle physically, misuse of headlights to intimidate, overtaking other car's lane, tailgating, and honking. Some of these actions can cause damage ranging from material to psychological.

### Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was established in the early 1890s by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud as cited in (Zhang, 2020), psychoanalysis is a theory of personality that attributes thoughts and actions to unconscious motives and conflicts. It refers to what goes on in a person's subconscious and the conflicts they are going through. Psychoanalysis is a theory about a person's personality based on their own thoughts. Psychoanalysis is defined as a method for investigating and understanding the function of the mind and the importance of unconscious phenomena for someone's mentality (Emmert-Streib et al., 2019). Psychoanalysis is a method to discover the function of the mind in influencing mental states. Thoughts that exist in the subconscious are hidden, in fact, they are often not even realized by the owner of the mind. An unresolved problem or a very dense emotion can settle in the subconscious. Without realizing it, it will affect how a person acts and affect their personality. Thus, in this study, the writer will focus on how the main antagonist's (Tom Cooper) aggressive behavior on the road in the movie *Unhinged* is triggered by the main protagonist's rage (Rachel Hunter) by using Freud's theory about psychoanalysis. The writer will also discuss the understanding of road rage according to Miller and its various types presented in the movie *Unhinged* based on Coleman's theory.

## 2. Method

In order to gather information for this paper, the writer will use qualitative research to analyze the theories and references about road rage in the movie *Unhinged*. It comprehends the topic using non-numeric data. Qualitative research in particular deals with gathering and interpreting non-numerical data for the purpose of understanding the human and social environment (Adedoyin, 2020). It focuses on collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to better understand ideas, opinions, or experiences. It aims to offer comprehensive insights into the issue. Since it is more subjective than quantitative research methods, it uses observation and case studies to collect data. Therefore, the writer can gather and analyze data from the speech, scenes, and plot devices from the movie to identify road rage behavior.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the theory of road rage will be explained using data obtained from the movie *Unhinged*. The data collected can be in the form of narrations, scenes, and dialogues which will be presented in the form of screenshots or supporting dialogues. The writer will focus on the theory of road rage according to Daniel Miller (2020), the classification of road rage according to Coleman (2020), and the use of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

### 1. The Analyze of Road Rage in Movie *Unhinged*



Source: *Unhinged* (00:22:08)

Figure 1. Tom Cooper tries to negotiate with Rachel

Supporting dialogue:

Tom : Yeah, I admit to being a little zoned out back there. I've been kind of having a hard time lately.  
 Rachel : Yeah, well, join the club.  
 Kyle : (to his mom) Stop it.  
 Tom : Well, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you are, and I'm sorry that... I might've made it worse. You accept my apology?  
 Rachel : Sure, whatever.  
 Tom : Perfect. If you could just do the same, we could press reset. Ma'am, I was saying, if you could just apologize...  
 Rachel : (cuts his words) Yeah, I heard you.  
 Tom : And?  
 Rachel : I don't have anything to apologize for, sir.

(At the road, 00:21:37-00:22:19)

This scene and dialogue show how Tom is trying to get an apology from Rachel. It can be seen from the scene that Tom is starting to pant again and he grew impatient to hear Rachel's answer. He is trying to control the last string of his sanity at this point. Based on Miller's theory of road rage, the effort he makes to keep his composure can be included as the cause of road rage because it is part of the process of losing control over his anger. Tom just needs to hear an apology from Rachel, but she refuses. It made him feel that the kindness he offered was only considered nonsense to Rachel, which made him offended. Tom's personality starts to alter from a polite man to a rude one. Rachel's bad attitude has triggered his instability to come out. It shows a very significant change in his personality.

Supporting dialogue:

Tom : We seem to have developed a fundamental inability to apologize to anyone, for anything. I don't even think you really know what a bad day is! But you will find out. You hear me, miss? You're gonna fucking learn.

(At the road, 00:22:31-00:22:56)

It can be concluded from this dialogue that Tom finally shows his hidden true self. Tom was threatening her, he was determined to help Rachel to learn a true bad day by giving her the vengeance. Based on Miller's theory of road rage, his action of showing his true self is included in the cause of road rage because it is the peak of his altering personality. Tom no longer acts like a good gentleman and has changed into a rude, psychopathic man.

## 2. Types of Road Rage in The Movie *Unhinged*

*Unhinged* was intended to portray the clearest interpretation of road rage. In this session, the writer will identify the types of road rage in the movie *Unhinged* using this theory of Coleman.



Source: *Unhinged* (00:19:55)

Figure 2. Rachel honked aggressively at Tom's truck

The scene takes place at the intersection where Tom was supposed to drive when the lights turned green. As she cannot maintain her patience anymore, Rachel honked aggressively at Tom's car. Based on Coleman's classification, honking is included in road rage because it is meant to show a protest of unpleasant feelings towards another driver.



Source: *Unhinged* (00:19:56)

Figure 3. Rachel shows an angry gesture toward Tom

This scene comes along after Rachel finishes honking at Tom. While she is passing his car, Rachel makes an angry gesture as a protest of Tom's driving skills. Thus, based on this theory of Coleman, making rude or angry gestures is included in road rage because it is a sign of protest and disappointment.



Source: *Unhinged* (00:23:51)

Figure 4. Tom's truck was cutting Rachel's way

In this scene, it can be seen that Tom's truck is suddenly cutting her way, and then he hits the break very suddenly. It makes Rachel flustered and almost crash into his truck if she does not stop her car on time. Thus, based on this theory of Coleman, cutting the lane is included in road rage because Tom was trying to intimidate her with his action.



Source: *Unhinged* (00:34:00)

Figure 5. Tom was bumping his car into Rachel's

This scene shows how Tom's car is bumping into the back side of Rachel's car. Rachel was trapped in a traffic jam while she was being chased by him. Tom took advantage of Rachel's current helplessness to hit Rachel's car several times. This can be one of the forms of road rage that has a physical impact due to the direct attempt to attack. Thus, based on Coleman's theory, bumping a car is classified as road rage because it is included as an attempt to avenge Tom's anger and as an attempt to damage to her car.

Source: *Unhinged* (00:34:34)

Figure 6. Tom was tailgating Rachel's car

This scene shows how close Tom's car with Rachel's. He does not want any gap between them to exist because does not want to let Rachel escape from him. Based on Coleman's theory, tailgating is included in road rage because it is intended to put pressure on the victim. It is a form of driving without giving any sufficient distance between two cars.

Source: *Unhinged* (01:24:34)

Figure 7. A multiple-car crash caused by Tom

Tom was raging even more when he noticed that Rachel was trying to seek help from a police car near them. Before the officer had time to pull over his car, Tom hit the police car until it was causing a multiple-car crash. Thus, piling up is happening because Tom is crashing his truck onto the police car. Based on Coleman's theory of road rage classification, hitting or crashing into another car is included in road rage since it is meant to endanger everyone in the area, especially the target victim.

### 3. The Analysis of The Main Character's Background and Motives Using Psychoanalysis

*Unhinged* focuses on stories from two main characters' perspectives. A bit of their background is clearly explained through dialogue between supporting characters and also through scenes in the prologue. Thus, the writer will use psychoanalysis to comprehend Rachel and Tom's background, which has become the ulterior motive for them to act impulsively. In this session, the writer will analyze the motives for their behavior from a psychoanalysis perspective.

#### a. Divorce

Supporting dialogues:

Andy : Hello. You up?

Rachel : I am now.

Andy : Well, that's good, 'cause your soon-to-be ex filed another motion.

Rachel : What does he want now? Just say it.

Andy : He wants the house.

**(Rachel's talk with Andy on the phone, 00:08:16-00:08:28)**

Andy is the attorney Rachel hired to help her settle her divorce from Richard. This proves that the struggle for rights and assets is still going on between them. Based on the dialogue above, Andy contacted Rachel because Richard demanded to give the house Rachel currently lives in. The motion certainly makes her feel stressed, which is included in psychoanalysis because it affects her unconscious mind.

b. Financial Problem

Supporting Dialogue:

Rachel : I really love having you and my brother here, but if you're so fiscally responsible, maybe it's time to kick in some rent here.

Freddy : Rachel, you're the one who said that said that we couldn't stay at Mom's.

Rachel : We need to sell it, and you know that, okay? I can't afford to pay for her care, and you really can't either.

(At the kitchen, 00:11:11-00:11:40)

Freddy is Rachel's brother who lives in her house. He also brings her fiancée (Mary) to live together. However, they do not help her pay rent because his work project is never starting. It can be concluded from the dialogues above that she is having financial issues due to the responsibilities she must meet. Based on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, the responsible feelings she had is included in her conscious mind since she is aware of her finances.

c. Tardiness



Source: *Unhinged* (00:08:39)

Figure 8. Rachel realizes she is late

While talking to Andy, Rachel realizes that she forgot to set her alarm for the morning. Rachel must take Kyle to school, and then go to the salon where she works. However, she was definitely late for both of those things because she overslept. The panic she feels can be analyzed using psychoanalysis as a form of awareness of what kind of bad things will happen to her.



Source: *Unhinged* (00:12:59)

Figure 9. Rachel faced a traffic jam

While they are on the road, they encounter congestion which makes Rachel feel slightly impatient. She then planned to take the freeway with the hope that the traffic would be better there. It can be concluded that she is trying to find a solution for one of her bad luck, but it is also shown how she is starting to get a bit anxious about getting late. Based on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, her actions can be included as a form of life instinct, it comes from her consciousness.

d. Small argument with ex

Supporting dialogues:

Rachel : Well, it probably shouldn't be planned. It should be more of a spur-of-the-moment thing, right? I mean, 'cause plans can be hard to stick to.

Richard : Yeah, yeah, yeah. I just need to keep my new boss happy so I could get my own place...

Rachel : (cutting his words) Yeah, and maybe stop relying on other sources of income.

Richard : Look, I just want everything to be fair and square, okay? That's why I called, actually. I needed to talk to you about moving...

Rachel : (cutting his words) Richard, we gotta go, okay? We're just getting to school.

(Rachel's argument with Richard, 00:15:00-00:15:32)

Their brief debate only added to the stress she felt at that time. It is included in psychoanalysis because Rachel's stress is happening in her unconscious mind. Based on Freud's theory, the unconscious mind is a place where all feelings and conflicts are kept in our memory.

e. Got fired



Source: *Unhinged* (00:17:14)

Figure 9. Rachel's boss fired her through a phone call

Deborah called Rachel to ask about her whereabouts, and she immediately became irritated with Rachel who always gave her the same excuses. Turns out Rachel is having a habit of coming late. With a heavy heart, Deborah fired Rachel right away and hung up the call. Based on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, venting is included as her coping with stress because it is influenced by her unconscious mind which affects how a person will respond to some situations.

f. Tom Cooper

Supportive dialogue (narration):

The news reporter : Police are actively searching now for the homeowner's ex-husband, who was last seen fleeing the scene in a gray pickup truck early this morning. Our own Pat Devereaux spoke with a neighbor about the suspect's history of substance abuse and violence after a workplace injury.

(News report on television, 00:10:02-00:10:20)

The dialogue spoken comes from the morning news when Kyle was watching the television. Based on the news, Tom Cooper became the suspect in a homicide and burning down a house in the neighborhood. He murdered his ex-wife and her boyfriend, then burned their house to ashes. A neighbor who was an informant has given testimony about a bit of Tom Cooper's track record. She said that Tom was known for his substance abuse and violent behavior after he quit his previous job. It turns out Tom was taking too many prescriptions for his *hydrocodone* pills and he did it repeatedly. This is proof of the violence that comes after letting his intrusive thoughts win. Based on Freud's theory, intrusive thoughts are included in psychoanalysis since they come from Tom's unconscious mind.

#### 4. Conclusion

Drawing upon Miller's theory of road rage, it can be concluded that Rachel's unfavorable demeanor had an impact on Tom's mental state, despite Rachel not intending or anticipating such tendencies in Tom. Feeling disrespected and devalued by Rachel, Tom unleashed his anger, transforming from a well-mannered individual into a violent psychopath. It can also be concluded that many scenes show how the movie displays the types of road rage. The first form of road rage shown in the storyline is the sound pressure given by Rachel through her horn. This was followed by her hand gesturing which indicated her displeasure. These two behaviors that Rachel aimed for Tom successfully triggered other forms of road rage. Some of the other forms of road rage committed by Tom included cutting off Rachel's lane using his car and then braking suddenly. After some time, Tom hit a pedestrian who tried to intervene in their business. Finally, Tom speeds up to chase Rachel's car and bumps the back of Rachel's car several times, followed by tailgating or closing the distance between cars.

*Unhinged* has two main characters with different backgrounds and personalities which are explained both clearly and vaguely. However, both characters have a similarity in their motives. By analyzing the correspondence between the female protagonist Rachel Flynn and the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind in Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the writer believes that the reason for Rachel's rage towards Tom is that she is having overwhelming stress and emotions. Meanwhile, by using the same Freudian theory, the writer believes that the reason for the male antagonist Tom Cooper to rage back towards Rachel is that he is having mental issues and is provoked by Rachel.

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