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**THE ACQUISITION AND SEVERITY
OF DRIVING-RELATED FEARS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Rachman's theory of fear acquisition proposed that directly-conditioned fears would differ from indirectly-conditioned fears in magnitude and anxiety response patterns, however this theory has received inconsistent empirical support. The aim of the present study was to examine pathways of fear acquisition for a general community sample who reported driving-related fears. One hundred and ninety subjects completed a questionnaire which comprised three anxiety scales, a comprehensive set of fear onset items, a driving situations scale, and two scales related to experiences of and reactions to motor vehicle accidents, all used in prior research. Additional questionnaire items addressed self-reported driving-related fears, helpseeking behaviour, treatment needs of respondents not already in therapy, and driving history. Subjects completed the questionnaire for their most-feared driving-related situation. Results failed to support Rachman's predictions. However, results supported the prediction that respondents who had been involved in a motor vehicle accident (MVA) would be more likely to ascribe to the direct pathway than those who had not been involved in a motor vehicle accident. Post-hoc analyses comparing respondents who had and had not been involved in MVAs were conducted as a means of expanding the ability of the study to test the hypotheses. These analyses also failed to support the predictions derived from Rachman's theory. The theoretical and methodological implications of the findings are discussed, as are the implications of the results for professional psychological helpseeking following motor vehicle accidents and assessment of those with driving-related fears.

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“We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring will be
to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.”

(T.S. Eliot)

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