

Mobility, Gender & Young Drivers

Second report of the **Transforming Drivers** study
of young people and driving



› Sarah Redshaw

› Greg Noble

ABN 77 000 010 506
National Roads and Motorist's Association
Level 23, 388 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000

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Sarah Redshaw and Greg Noble

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We hope the report will be a useful contribution to the crucial task of reducing road trauma to young people.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents findings of a study of young people's experiences of and attitudes to driving, especially in relation to issues of gender, mobility and control. Its aim was to situate these experiences and attitudes in a larger socio-cultural context by linking participants' responses to broader driving practices and cultural meanings. It also aimed to capture the complexity of driving as a socio-cultural practice.

Ten focus groups involving 65 young people were held across urban and rural NSW. The groups involved wide-ranging discussions around the uses and meanings of cars, issues of access and control, and the importance of driving to their experiences of work, social life and locality.

MOBILITY AND SOCIAL POWER

Focus group discussions demonstrated how young people's driving practices are located in a wider network of social practices and cultural meanings. Rather than simply elicit individual attitudes and opinions, the focus groups provided keen insights into the uses and meanings of the car in the wider domains of their lives and the network of social relationships in which the car plays a pivotal role.

Central to these insights was the ways in which driving afforded young people greater mobility in their lives. Discussions of the uses of the car invariably focused initially on the pragmatic dimensions of this mobility – 'getting from A to B'. However, as the participants elaborated their responses this mobility was shown to be a much more complex phenomenon, both because of the symbolic value of the car and because the 'pragmatic' uses of the car – getting to a range of different places – also meant getting access to different social sites and groups. It meant extending access to work, family and social life in particular places and at particular times.

This mobility was often articulated through the language of 'convenience' but what this often meant was the offer of a degree of control over their diverse worlds. The car represents a form of social enablement as a result.

The senses of power that arise, both symbolically and practically, from the new forms of access made available through participation in driving culture are, however, heavily circumscribed by new responsibilities and constraints. Far from being 'convenient', the car could also be a burden, although this didn't necessarily diminish the powerful cultural meanings around cars shared by these young drivers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENDER, POWER AND CARS

The forms of social power afforded by the car and the experiences they shaped, however, were crucially mediated by gender, but in complex ways. In contrast to some conventional research into road safety driver practices which uses gender as a relatively straightforward category, this research demonstrated the various and changing ways gender was played out in young people's experiences of driving culture. While on the one hand the participants often articulated fairly stereotypical views of the relation between gender and driving – talk of 'girl cars' and 'guy cars', for example – they could also be highly critical of those stereotypes and often reflected contrary opinions and experiences.

Further, the groups showed how cars facilitated certain kinds of gender performances – that is, rather than being natural or automatic expressions of a biological difference, driving offered opportunities to develop their sense of who they were, which is particularly important during the crucial stages of transition between childhood and adulthood. The car afforded occasions of display and self-presentation, but they also allowed for moments of socialising with developing peer groups in which gender involved a set of relationships and meanings.

There were different experiences and expectations around gender – especially in relation to cruising – that demonstrated the centrality of what has been called 'hydraulic masculinity' (Walker, 1999). Central to this form of masculine performance were the knowledge and skills deriving from immersion in driving culture. Certain types of events – like changing a tyre – could produce moments of embarrassment, but they were also 'tests' of this performance that engendered a sense of masculine power and control.

An awareness of the gendered nature of this power was more common among female participants than male, as was a sense of the responsibilities and dangers that resulted from driving. Young men tended to 'naturalise' their relation to cars and their perceived greater skills and competence, although there was some evidence that the importance of this form of masculinity tended to recede slightly as they got older.

INTRODUCTION

This report forms the second stage of the ARC Linkages Project ***Transforming Drivers: Driving as Social, Cultural and Gendered Practice***, a partnership between NRMA Motoring and Services and the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. The report from the first stage of the study – *Youth, Media and Driving Messages* – focused on how the messages in car advertisements and road safety campaigns, as part of a larger ‘driving culture’, are reflected in the driving practices and attitudes of young drivers. This, the second report, examines broader aspects of the social dimensions of driving for young people, particularly around issues of mobility and gender and the ways these shape the ability of young people to function as active citizens.

The first section of the report explores the uses and meanings of driving for young people through a discussion of the forms of mobility a car offers. It examines the ways driving is constructed through a focus on ‘convenience and ease’, which implies certain types of freedoms and pleasures for young people. As a result, driving offers a feeling of enablement for young people through providing forms of mobility that offer a sense of independence. As we shall see, however, increasing use of the private car may bring dependence on it, and this may diminish that freedom and autonomy. Both enablement and dependence may be affected by differences in attitudes between young men and women, so the second section of the report deals more specifically with the roles gender plays in shaping the experiences and meanings of driving for young people, and how gender is actually played out through driving culture.



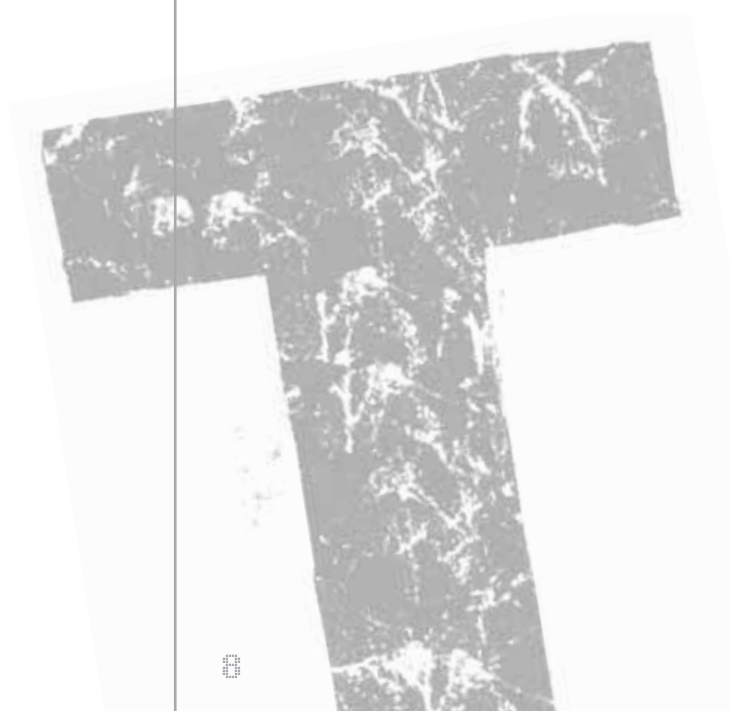
This report is based on discussions with 10 focus groups of young people held in 2004 and 2005 in urban and rural New South Wales (see Appendix A for details of the groups). A total of 65 young people aged between 15 and 25 years participated. Thirty were male and thirty-five were female, and there was some representation of young people from different cultural backgrounds. Thirty-eight of the participants had a provisional drivers licence, nineteen had their full licence, two were disqualified, two did not have a licence and four were learners.

Given that the research was interested in issues of mobility, groups were chosen from areas that experienced a degree of geographical isolation – the western suburbs of Sydney, and towns and rural areas outside Sydney. These groups were asked a range of questions about cars: the activities they conducted using their cars, the various experiences they have had, their feelings about driving, their skill and knowledge about cars, and the control afforded to them through cars (see Appendix B).

As we have argued in the earlier report, research on young drivers has rarely done justice to a complex understanding of the cultural meanings and uses of driving (Sofoulis, Noble and Redshaw, 2005). This is also true in discussions of the relation between cars and social power, which have tended to focus more on questions of social status and the abstract symbolic dimensions of cars themselves (Bayley, 1986).

Little analysis from a socio-cultural framework has been applied to the specific practices and experiences afforded by cars as they exist within a broader driving culture, especially for younger people. We think it is important to make a link between the forms of mobility and social access made available through the car, and larger social categories such as gender.

'Mobility' has become an increasingly influential category in social and cultural analysis because it captures something of the complexity in which we live our lives. Urry's (2004) important recent discussion of 'automobility' focuses on the 'systemic' nature of automated transport. He examines this system in terms of production and consumption, and on technological and environmental dimensions. He does discuss the cultural dimensions of automobility, but in a relatively general way, linked to broad conceptions of freedom and flexibility. Apart from being far too abstract to capture the specificities of young people's lives, Urry also shifts the focus to an argument about automobility as a system that coerces people into a flexibility that is not, ultimately, particularly free. The following section attempts to link the specific experiences of mobility offered to young men and women through the car, and the ways these capture the paradoxes of driving for young people.



Getting from A to B

One of the most common ways of framing the importance of having a car is the instrumental rationalisation of 'getting from A to B'. As one young woman from Bankstown explained, when asked how important cars were to her:

“As long as they get us from A to B, it's alright. I don't really care.”

But this practical logic is somewhat misleading: young people's needs are rarely exhausted by simple dictates of pragmatism. Having a car means, for this same young woman, that the 'A to B' is altered: 'It's good to have a car, to go places that are a bit further away, that aren't easily accessible by public transport' (Bankstown). One Goulburn male only used his car 'to travel a long distance, go to the beach' (Goulburn).

Yet this sense of mobility has several dimensions. Some described the mobility offered by particular vehicles in specific circumstances: 'if I'm running late for something I'm more inclined to ... go around traffic and not just stay in one particular lane' (Blacktown). Similarly, one young woman described the pleasure in being able to 'park anywhere' in her four-wheel drive vehicle, and recounted an incident where she simply jumped a gutter to find a parking spot: 'there was no driveway and, I'm like, "How's that? Up the gutter" Oh yeah, but I love that now: that I can drive where I want, whenever I want!' (G?). While this extreme physical access is specific to the four-wheel drive, it nevertheless exemplifies the extension of mobility made feasible through motor vehicle technologies generally.

In other words, it is not just a logic of 'getting from A to B' that is at stake, but the much broader ambition of 'getting from somewhere to somewhere' (Bankstown). Mobility isn't reducible to a simple pragmatism, but articulates the kinds of social choices increasingly made available to young people. Perhaps more powerful than the actual ability to go from one place to another is the symbolic power of the car as something that could be mobilised: that is, its potential was an enabling aspect itself. This symbolic dimension is also realised in the ways that these uses represent different social domains.

*Many places, many worlds*

The same young woman (Bankstown) who emphasised that cars were for 'getting from A to B' later added, 'I guess, without them you wouldn't really go to as many places as you do, so [they're] very important'. A male in the same group elaborated that cars were important 'for emergencies', but then listed a range of places one could go – McDonalds, shopping, 'if you're going out, if you're going to work', and so on. These are, as one young man put it, 'social-type things' (Goulburn). His car allows him to get to his TAFE college – a one-and-a-half hour trip one-way. Another young man in the same group said he sometimes drives a long distance for 'the fun of it ... Wollongong, Queensland, ' and was planning a trip around Australia soon (Goulburn).

These are not just many places one can go easily with a car: they also indicate access to the different 'worlds' of work, education, leisure and social life. These different domains were once much more highly circumscribed for young people, and much more linked to the immediate neighbourhood: now social and geographical mobility are linked. They more readily travel distances to go to the 'nearest', or most popular, takeaway outlet; they readily go to key sites of consumption beyond the local shopping centre. They may even more readily go to several different places in the course of one outing (see the discussion of 'cruising' in the second section).

The exaggerated nature of one man's comment that you 'can't go anywhere without a car' (Fairfield) indicates that much more is at stake than a simple pragmatism: 'anywhere', like 'somewhere', implies a place of significance, where others can go and where things may happen. As a young man from a country town says, 'it is, like, to get to the places where everyone is' (Goulburn).

In other words, the car enabled a particular lifestyle or, rather, a series of lifestyle choices that were seen to be necessary to contemporary youth culture. As one young woman said, in talking about the penalties of drink-driving:

“Who wants to lose their licence when it's a way of life? You lose your licence, you can't get to work. Your friends aren't always going to want to pick you up if you want to go down to the corner store and get a movie or something. Your mum's not going to keep picking you up. They're going to get sick and tired of it! [laughter] You've got to go and pay your bills, so your way of life is lost, really.” (Warrawong).

This could be expressed in very emphatic ways which capture the investment in this 'way of life': one female from Goulburn said she'd 'die without a car', adding that you were 'screwed' if you lived in some areas and had to rely on public transport. A male from Wagga said it would be 'pretty crap' without a car: 'I've only got my bike and you can't take anyone on it'; another said 'if I didn't have a car, I'd be stuffed'; 'I couldn't live without my car' (Lawson).

The emphatic nature of their responses was common across groups, signifying the central role the car played in their social and working lives, yet this was obviously a very strong sensibility for those living outside the main urban areas. A young woman from Warrawong said her social life would be 'horrible' without a car. One young woman from Shellharbour said simply that cars were important because, 'You have to get in a car to go anywhere. It's just part of where we live'.

This underlines the huge attraction of the car for rural and outer suburban youth, especially since it tacitly defines 'where we live' as 'nowhere'. The car is necessary just to access spaces that are counted as 'somewhere'. It also reminds us that the very idea of automobility implies a city built around cars, and sprawling out into a huge hinterland, which creates many 'nowheres' out of isolated suburbs and towns.

Convenience and ease

The instrumental logic we noted earlier has its corollary in the ways young people adopted a discourse of convenience and ease to describe the usefulness of the car. As a male in the Bankstown group said, the car was necessary for emergencies, and for 'the drive-through at McDonalds, and so on: 'say you want to do some, shopping, you've got a car. You can't do shopping on a bus and car with millions of bags'. Further, he added, it was 'handy' because it meant he could pick up his girlfriend if she needed him to.

For most, this handiness was linked to the limitations of the alternatives. A young woman described having a car as 'convenient, as opposed to catching public transport, having to wait all the time for it to come' (Fairfield).

Sometimes this sense of convenience related to the particular characteristics of the young person's car:

“With my car, I guess it's just, it's easier to drive around for parking and stuff like that, so if you're driving into the city and your friend had a huge car and you had a small car, you'd be more inclined to take your car because it's just a lot easier to get around” (Blacktown).

But note that this 'easiness' is in contrast to the alternative of public transport, where driving around looking for parking doesn't apply!

The language of convenience and ease is crucial to the marketing of new consumer items, particularly for new technologies (Markussen, 1995; Shove, 2003). These constructions of convenience and ease are rarely innocent: they capture both situated rationalisations of subjects' interests and larger systems of cultural meaning which articulate ideas such as technological progress and consumption as emblematic of western freedom.

They also involve a selective approach to the costs and benefits involved, and a selective approach to the kinds of technological and social alternatives that exist in relation to these interests and meanings. They therefore play a role in the regulation of personal conduct in particular social contexts. For young people, convenience often has specific resonances related to life stage transitions: cars are convenient because they encourage certain types of mobilities that allow for valued relations and interactions:

“Not many of my friends have cars ... so it's good that when we go out there's one of us that'll have a car. Especially when we were doing our HSC, right, a lot of us had the same exams so we could couple together, which is good and easy for us. We don't have to rely on our parents to take us places” (Blacktown).

As one young man from Wagga said, you become a 'convenient [sic] and independent person': 'not so much [having] my own car, but just my licence. Driving around with mates instead of bloody having to get your parents to drop you somewhere, or something ...'. This construction of the car as essential to a young person's independence fosters a positive view of the empowering dimensions of private transport.

The car as an enabling device

The capacity of young drivers to go 'somewhere' is not just a vague assertion of freedom and potentiality: the mobilities that come with having access to a car enable young people to do things and go places that otherwise would be difficult or unthinkable. As studies have demonstrated, this is true particularly for young people in isolated areas around issues of work and education (Shucksmith, 2000), but it is true of many young drivers wherever they live.

As discussed above, the places that are increasingly available for young people may be particular social worlds. For some, this is stated forcefully: 'If I can't drive, I can't work' (Bankstown). Another young man argued that 'Some places you can't get to by public transport, so it's better to drive, so it's a necessity to own a car' (Fairfield).

A woman in another group described how it was getting 'harder and harder' to take things when she went to TAFE on public transport, 'so when I got the car I'm, like, "Fantastic! I can take this. I can take that! Fold down the seats!" Yeah, so that was really good' (Blacktown). Her joyous experience of enablement (not liberation or freedom per se) is visceral. So a crucial part of this experience, as we have seen, is that this sense of the enabling capacity of driving is linked to the way the car enables young people to travel to and enter particular spaces. This spatial freedom also has a social or symbolic dimension, in so far as these spaces represent different spheres of life.

These spheres, however, also mark a transition in the status of a young person. This enabling capacity, for example, is typically experienced as no longer having to rely on parents. One male complains about his reliance on his parents – to pick him up from social events and from late shift work at McDonalds, to stress that tis 'goes back to freedom and ability': that is, the car creates certain 'freedoms' in the sense that it would enable him to do much more, and to do this more easily (Shellharbour).

This independence also relates to a lessening reliance on friends as well as family. One young woman recounted how much easier it was to move house (itself a symbol of autonomy) now she has her licence: 'Instead of having to ask friends to do that, hire a truck or something like that, I can just do it myself. I like the feeling of independence' (Lawson). Relying on friends wasn't



such a problem for some, especially if, like one male from Wagga you have a range of people who can transport you so as to distribute the reliance:

“I usually just rely on my friends who have their Ps, because I’ve got five or ten friends who have Ps, so there’s always someone to take me. I’m not in any rush to get my own. ”

While the car might make young people more independent of parents, then, it could also involve them more in systems of inter-dependence with peers.

Independence and control are linked, of course, and we will return to this below. But two crucial points can be made here. The first point is that these forms of mobility initiate a kind of coming of age process, where young people can increasingly assume a degree of maturity, function on their own and enter worlds of work and so on. The activities they describe mark the entry into an adult world of responsibility and independence. Yet it is not the adult world of their parents: freedom from parental control allows for the creation of a generational identity and the more independent organisation of peer activities and relationships.

The second point is that mobility involves, at least theoretically, the ability to go when and where you want, as several interviewees have noted. So it allows for spontaneity: ‘You can go wherever you want. You don’t have to wait for anyone else. Like you go when you’re ready and that’s it ... say your family, your parents, want to go somewhere and you don’t want to go there, you’ve got something to do, you can go to that place where you want to go’ (Warrawong). But it also allows for organising events in advance: ‘for me, it’s more being able to plan things’, one young woman, with a small child, argued (Lawson).

Independence is also experienced then not just as a spatial freedom, but as control of one’s time: this woman also talked about the waste of time she felt when she had to use the train:

“I’d be hanging around here for at least half an hour, forty-five minutes ... In the car, I can pull over and feed him and then be on my way again ... I think mainly, to do with control of your life, it’s being able to plan your day. ”

This sense of control is linked to the ability to plan events around the car, in contrast to the constraints of public transport. A male in Shellharbour talked about the difficulties of ‘coordinating’ activities when you had to rely on buses and trains connecting. Another young man in the same group talked about the facility of ‘planning trips’ that the car afforded.

The enabling dimensions of the car also meant the power to change those plans: ‘say you go to a friend’s place or to a party and it’s pretty crap, you don’t have to wait for someone else who’s having a good time, you don’t have to wait for them to go home. ... You can go whenever you want’ (M3, Warrawong).

It is being able to choose between planning and spontaneity that fosters a sense of convenience and ease. This sense of choice articulates clearly the ways these spatial and temporal freedoms capture for many young men and women the acquisition of maturity, independence and control. However, the experience of agency these offer can be highly contained.

The limits of convenience

This language of convenience is somewhat misleading, because the nature of the car as a machine that operates in the system of automobility means that it has its own forms of prescription and circumscription. As one woman explained (Bankstown), when she goes into the city, ‘we tend not to drive; we catch a cab up, because there’s no parking in the city’. This indicates not only that the car isn’t always the most convenient form of transport: the habituation to private car travel means that, from Bankstown, they automatically prefer to spend the money to catch a taxi than take the extra time to catch public transport.

Convenience is measured by time rather than money. Similarly, the convenience of not having to wait for a train, mentioned above, is in stark contrast to the convenience of a small car parking in the city. Like a young man from Shellharbour, who saw cabs as ‘expensive’, the ‘costs’ of driving aren’t always clearly factored in. As we shall see, there is more than just inconvenience at stake here – ‘convenience’ is interwoven with themes of freedom and enablement, so ‘inconvenience’ reflects the limits to those freedoms and the dependence on cars young people develop.

The first issue to note is that many participants acknowledged a kind of trade-off between what the car allowed and what it disallowed. Some young drivers, for example, recognised that if you wanted to drink – that other key symbol of freedom from constraint – you need to forego the use of the car: ‘it’s no good taking it out. If you know you’re going to drink and you can’t take it, then, if you do take it and you do drink, then you’ve got to leave it behind and try to organise some way of getting back to the thing when you are on zero blood alcohol’ (Goulburn). This was particularly pressing for those living in rural areas. As the same young man elaborated:

“If you live in town it’s alright, but if you live out of town, you come in, you drink and you have to leave the car wherever you put it, then you’ve got to try to find somewhere to stay, then you’ve got to try to get back to your car when you’re sober again! [laughter] ... it’s an inconvenience! ”



This man asserts a degree of admirable responsibility, but it's a responsibility that is also experienced as inconvenient.

Becoming more used to the access granted by the car meant that when it wasn't available, the dependence on others was even more sharply felt as an inconvenience. One female, who had been driving for several years, recounted the indignity of having to rely on her parent after her car was put in for repairs: "Mum picked me up and dropped me at work, I had to be ready when she was ready, and that's just ! [laughter]" (Goulburn). The interesting thing about this young woman was that she lived 'just around the corner' from work, but travelling by car was so habituated that being picked up seemed the necessary thing to do. She was one of the interviewees who said she'd 'die' without her car: 'I'm too lazy to walk now!'

Routinisation of new technologies means not simply the acquisition of new capacities and habits, but the loss of others. Walking long distances has always been part and parcel of country life, but was now obviously no longer a 'choice' for some young rural people. Two young women in the same group also admitted to being 'lazy when you get your licence': they lived only a few blocks from the shopping mall but still drove. Once we become highly habituated to driving private cars, then independence quickly becomes dependence, and a diminishing of the mobility it offers.

Another limit on the convenience of driving is that driving in faraway places often brought its own constraints: several in the Goulburn group said that, despite wanting to go up to Sydney on a regular basis, that, as one young woman put it, 'I wouldn't drive in the city. No way!' Similarly, if having a car makes it easier to get a job, the necessity of driving for your employment can mean that the pleasure of driving is reduced: for a male from Shellharbour, the fact that he travelled all around the south coast, 'driving backwards and forwards all day', meant that, as he said, 'when I get home, the last thing I want to do is go for a drive just for the hell of it! I'll just get to someone's place and I'll just stay there, or I'll ... do something out, but I won't keep driving. It costs too much as well'.

There is another way in which our habituation to the car seems to shape our behaviour rather than grant us freedom. One young man talked of how a 'nice car' was more likely to 'give you more incentive to drive fast' (Goulburn 1). Particular cars seem to have particular styles of driving associated with them; indeed, they seem to compel them. For example, 'hot cars' demand to be driven in ways that could be described as 'hot'. Powerful cars 'suggest' take-off power, as this comment from a young woman illustrates:

"If I get in my dad's car, which is a Commodore, because it's an automatic, I do drive differently but I don't drive recklessly. It does have the power to go faster, so you tend to take advantage of that."
(Blacktown, 21 years)

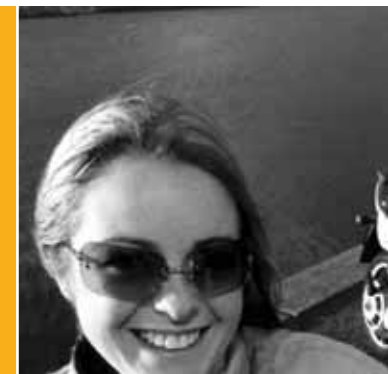
Far from being convenient, the car could become a burden; far from being a tool for mobility and conviviality, it could become a source of constraint; and rather than being something we control, it begins to control us. The young people we interviewed were keenly aware of the social and financial costs of driving, but for the most part expressed views that suggested that their investments in driving, and the very real forms of mobility and enablement that driving offered, were greater than these costs.

So far we have explored some of the paradoxes of driving for young people: the contradictory pleasures of freedom and agency alongside the limits of these freedoms and the constraints and burdens they bring. This suggests the complex place of driving in the acquisition of social power as young people participate in the transition to adulthood. The relation to these processes and meanings is not, however, distributed evenly amongst all young people. There are obvious constraints of finance, related to social class, for example. Significantly, the meanings and possibilities of driving often vary for young women and men. It is important then to turn to the way gender shapes the experiences of agency and control offered in driving culture.

Given that men outnumber women in almost all categories of road trauma (as cyclists and pedestrians as well as drivers), with women only outnumbering men as passengers (ATSB 2004a; 2004b), gender – or, more specifically, masculinity – has come to be seen as a crucial dimension in understanding driving culture (Walker, Butland and Connell, 2000; Vick, 2003). Yet the way we conceive gender is important if we are to understand how it functions in driving culture.

Too often gender is seen simply as a pre-given, even 'natural' category based simply on biological and neurological differences. Gender here is understood as a complex, social construction which weaves together identity, practices, aspirations, relationships and power. Moreover, it is not simple or singular: researchers now recognize the plural and contradictory forms gender can take (Connell, 2002).

Recognising these things is important because the relations between gender and driving practices can be divergent and uneven. For example, while young women are now equally as likely as young men to get their driving licences, the meanings and uses of getting a licence may vary. Similarly, as one study of consumer choices shows, the cars that men and women actually drive may vary only slightly, but the cars they say they would like to own differs significantly (Bennett, Emmison and Frow, 1999:46-47), suggesting there are important symbolic differences in the relations between gender and driving.



On this basis, we would argue that, on the one hand, gender functions as a social norm or script, such that social expectations shape how gender is defined. These expectations function in relation to different material objects and practices, such as cars and driving, as well as general social behaviours.

On the other hand, when we look at the ways in which young men and young women express themselves in and through cars we can also see how gender is a performance: that is, young drivers actively produce their gendered identities through driving (Walker, Butland and Connell, 2000). These performances of gender are linked to driving performance and are produced within the context of social influences, particularly those of family and peer groups (Sarkar and Andreas, 2004).

Previous sections have explored the way the car is enabling for young people and how they deal with the limitations as well as the freedoms offered by the car. This part explores the differences in the way young men and women relate to driving and the significance of cars to acting out, or challenging, their gender identities.

Girl cars and guy cars

Perhaps the most overt way in which gender is associated with driving is the broadly held opinion that many cars could be identified as being for males while others were seen to be driven by females. The gendering of cars, the difference between what were regarded as 'guy cars' and 'girl cars', was evident in comments from women as well as men. Indeed, for some the distinction between these categories was self-evident. As one young woman in the Blacktown group commented:

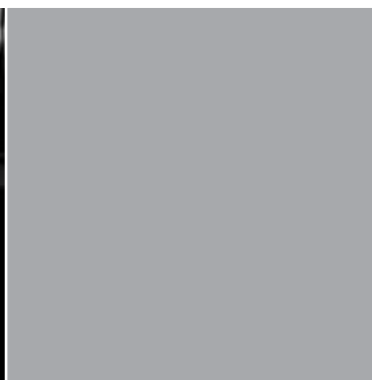
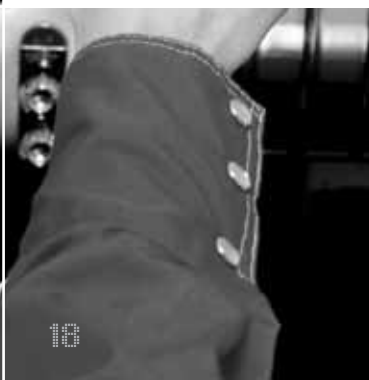
“I think it's easier with guys – like, the difference between what girls drive and what guys drive a lot of the time, you can usually sort of tell, but there are a lot of factors that come into it.”

Despite the qualification that there are 'a lot of factors' involved, and despite the admission from another young woman that she drove a car favoured by young men, the general consensus remained that women drove particular kinds of cars:

F1: The typical girl car is just the stock standard ...

F2: Barina or something.

F3: A little hatchback that doesn't go far.



What defined a car as male or female came from a variety of factors as well as the type of car itself itself: size, style and performance, but also whether it had been modified, how you drove it, and so on. The young Blacktown women maintained that the 'guy cars' were "'look at me"-type things': they were either big or sporty or were 'done-up cars' that drew attention to them by expressing a certain male style. The 'flash cars' preferred by young men were described in the Fairfield group as 'fast ones' with 'nice paint jobs' and 'big rims' (Fairfield). A young man in the Blacktown group, who had recently gained his licence, said that having a car with a bit of power gave him 'bragging rights'.

Even when individual personality was seen to be the defining feature, gendered assumptions about what was appropriate continued to pervade the discussions:

F3: Sometimes a car suits the person.

F1: Yeah, it's more sort of what expresses you. Like, I think my car suits me pretty well because it's sort of cute and run-around and stuff like that. And I've got friends who are big, butch guys in tiny little bubble cars and it just doesn't work.

F3: Yeah, I don't get that! Like my dad, he's big, pot-bellied, a really big sort of guy in this tiny run-about sort of car. It just doesn't suit him.

Although these women are trying to avoid simple claims about gender stereotypes, they articulate their sense of personality through gendered oppositions, and though clearly there were examples of men driving small cars, this was considered as not quite right. Terms such as 'cute', 'tiny' and 'run-around' are deemed to suit their personalities as women but were not seen as suited to men who were 'big', 'butch' or 'pot-bellied'. Men's size was given in other groups as a reason for men needing to drive bigger cars (Wagga Wagga), but rather than physical size being the issue, it is the way in which gender is symbolically defined that makes larger cars 'necessary' for men. The women in the Lawson group were disparaging of the men who didn't match up with their assumptions:

F3: there's a guy across the road from me and he's got this little tiny, shitty car and he's decked it out with a big stereo, it's so stupid!

F2: Most young guys I can see are just in beat-up old Holden Commodores with huge wheels and they're skidding everywhere, and the worn-down tyres and...

F4: A WRX !

Many of the participants associated males not just with sporty cars, then, but with larger or more rugged cars such as Falcons or Commodores, utilities and four-wheel drives. If one of these choices wasn't available, then cars could be modified to express their masculinity in a similarly modified way. Some of the young men in the groups, for example, reported that if their first car was a 'crap' car they would fit a big stereo to it to compensate for the lack of power under the bonnet. As one young man from the Fairfield group put it:



“My friend, he can’t afford a good car so he does up his sound system! (laughter) If he can’t get one, he’ll try to get the other! ”

One of the more popular vehicles in Wagga Wagga was a ‘Lowlux. It’s like a lowered Hilux! Nice utes.’ This was a work vehicle that had been modified (lowered) and thus suited the tastes of the young men. Some of the young men drove small cars but the way they drove them afforded a sense of masculine power, as one young man in the Goulburn 1 group explained:

“They’ve got power, you’ve just got to know how to use it. I’ve got a small car but it’s definitely got a bit of power. It’s got 240 on the speedo, but I reckon it’d definitely go off it. ”

It was apparent that the power of the vehicle was important for many young men. Where the type of car was not associated with power or ruggedness, driving style could nevertheless be used to compensate for this lack. One male from the Wagga Wagga group talked about ‘hooning around’ in his girlfriend’s car: ‘Yeah! It’s a ‘99 model Barina. It’s got a pink interior and stuff.’ He said it did not bother him driving it when his girlfriend was in it (although he would not drive around in it by himself).

For women in the Goulburn 1 group there were particular reasons for their preferences for particular kinds of cars, such as the importance of colour and style. The impression it gave mattered to them:

“I guess you always want a good car, so I guess therefore, like, if someone has a good car you go, ‘Oh, wow, look at their nice car.’ Not like, ‘Oh my God, I want it!’ You know what I mean? It’s more about style, more or less, for most girls. It’s just about style. You buy the car because of the colour of the car and not...a four cylinder and an eight, that doesn’t mean anything to me because you still have to go 50 in the 50 zones... like, you still have to do the speed limits everywhere you go, so it doesn’t matter. You just waste more petrol. That’s why I like four cylinders. They’re good on petrol! ” (Female, Goulburn 1)

It’s clear that this sense of style involves a process of differentiation from the masculine concern with power. One young woman explained that the car she wanted was seen as a ‘butch’ car, as had been pointed out to her by her boyfriend. While she knew she possessed the ability to drive the car, the power of the car was such that it was not seen as a car a ‘girl’ could drive. She could not drive it in the sense



that it would not be proper for someone of her gender. While she appeared to agree with this she nevertheless remained indignant about what was a ‘girl’s’ car:

“My dream car is a Ford GT. My boyfriend said, ‘That’s not a girl’s car! You can’t! It’s too butch for you.’ I said, ‘No, I can drive it, if I could drive that, I would drive that!’ But he’s like, ‘It’s not a girl’s car.’ What’s a girl’s car? Pink? (laughter) When anyone sees my car they go, ‘Oh, that’s such a chick’s car,’ because of the colour. ” (Bankstown, 20 years).

The young woman’s statement illustrates a distinction in the way women are expected to relate to cars. Where it is seen as appropriate for men to drive bigger and more powerful cars, or to modify or drive their cars in such a way to give this impression, women were associated with, and associated themselves with, smaller cars in both size and power, with colour and style, and with less adventurous uses of the car.

Challenging gender

Despite distinctions between men and women in their relation to cars appearing to be obvious and natural, there were instances where gender boundaries and distinctions were challenged or problematised. Despite the assumptions about masculinity and femininity, there were several moments such as the one we’ve just recounted, when the participants registered a degree of unease or self-awareness that demonstrated a recognition of the constructed nature of gender identities. These included admissions that there were exceptions to the gender rules: some young women drive large cars and some men drive small cars that did not necessarily have a lot of power. A young man in the Shellharbour group explained his experience of the apparent misfit between car and person others perceived:

“When I said I was buying a small car instead of the VP Commodore, everyone said it wouldn’t suit me, that my car matched my personality! People are just blown away that I’ve gone out and got a little, small 1.8 litre...they don’t get it! (laughter) It just doesn’t fit. They say it’s not right. ”

While many young women in the focus groups were wary of being seen in cars that could be considered too masculine for them, they were also aware of the social perceptions around gender, cars and driving:

“I have a Daewoo now. (laughter) And my dad went out and got that for me. We looked for a few hours. It was the longest few hours of my life! Looking at cars! And even in the caryard, they’d go straight to Dad because he knew what he was doing, whereas I was looking at colour, and said, ‘Oh, look! It’s pink!’ Yeah, my interest in the car is totally not what’s important, apparently! (laughs) ” (Female, Shellharbour)

The laughter in this and other moments in the focus groups is significant: it reveals a degree of self-awareness, even irony, in the ways these young people spoke of themselves, their tastes and social expectations around gender norms. These are glimpses into the social constructedness of gender tastes and values. This self-awareness not only offers some resources for differently conceived safety campaigns; it also allows some way into thinking about the ‘performative’ nature of gender in driving culture. It is not simply that gender is a pre-existing category that we ‘express’ through certain styles; rather, it is something we actively produce through our practices around cars.

Performing cars, performing gender

Significant numbers of young men in their enthusiasm for cars put a lot of effort into them, spending Friday and Saturday nights taking their cars to popular places to show them off by cruising around a block, displaying the modified body work and possibly their driving skill, stopping and lifting the bonnet to discuss the modifications to the engine with other young men, and playing their car stereos loudly. One young woman described her boyfriend’s current interest in cars, which included displaying his car at The Rocks in Sydney, a popular hang out for young men and their cars:

“My boyfriend has a hotted-up car as well, so we go cruising. He’s down at The Rocks every Friday and Saturday night showing off his car. If not, he’ll go to Wollongong, Bondi, Brighton. All the young spots for the young, because he’s a young guy. All the hot spots where all the fully sic guys are! That’s what his weekend consists of, and I hope he snaps out of it soon! (laughter) ” (Bankstown, 20 years)

It is clear that gender and age are playing a part in the performance of driving recounted here, and this is expressed through the type of car for which there are particular specifications if participating in Friday and Saturday nights at the Rocks, and will involve particular displays of driving to go with them. This is very similar to the displays of adolescence found in shopping centres (Langman, 1992) through which young people rehearse and develop gendered and other social identities.

This desire for display relates to the fact that young people often respond strongly to the ‘drivability’ of particular cars and the call to demonstrate their prowess. If you have a flash car, you are going to drive it in ways that show it off since, as some of the young women put it, ‘If you have a nice car, you’re going to go faster.’ As we have suggested above, cars themselves then, in combination with the gender and age of the driver, can be seen to invite particular driving performances. Even the surroundings can be an influence. The slow speed appropriate for ‘lapping’ around the streets in specific locations such as the Rocks or Brighton, contrasts with the displays of fast acceleration and speed on highways and motorways.

Many of the participants expressed the importance of fitting in with gender expectations and this included performing in specific ways ascribed to particular cars. The connection between gender performance and the type of car and style of driving is evident in the following comment by one young woman:

“I think the sort of car you have can reflect what sort of driver you are, as well, especially with young drivers. You can tell if a young man or a young woman is driving the car by what car it is, some of the time, and you expect to know what sort of driver they are, to a point I think, as well. ” (Blacktown, 19 years)

There is a tension here between the force of expectations young people experience in relation to driving and the very active ways they go about not simply living up to these roles, but producing them in their leisure practices. This tension can be productive, but it can also encourage feelings of shame.

Image and the embarrassment of driving the wrong car

A young woman from the Goulburn 1 group explained how it felt to her to drive a work vehicle known as the ‘blue ute’, an experience she found embarrassing and felt unsuited to:

“How do you think I felt when I first got in it! I know the blue ute and I’m like, ‘Oh, my god, I’ve got to take the ute!’ So I get the P-plates and I go to the ute, and I’m like, ‘Here we go...’ so I get in, I couldn’t get, you know the handbrake thing, how you’ve got to turn it? I’m sitting there for ten minutes going, ‘Oh, my god, I can’t get this thing off!’ And if I get the gear stick, I don’t even know where this is going! I really wish I had said that I don’t know how to drive a manual, I would never have got the blue ute! You’re in fourth gear and it’s only puttin’ along at forty, you’re like, ‘Come on! You can do it!’ (laughter) You, like, slide down in the seat, ‘No-one’s seen me!’ (laughter) ”

This young woman is expressing the extent to which the vehicle did not fit her sense of herself as a driver, not simply her lack of familiarity with the type of vehicle. Though she knew how to drive a manual, the blue ute involved managing a truck-like vehicle which was slow and somewhat cumbersome and thus did not fit with her performance of her gender and her age. Other young people similarly referred to being happy or unhappy to be seen in certain types of vehicles, or cars of certain colours or styles, or in particular situations. It was important for many of the young people to be seen in the right cars doing the right things.



A young man in the Warrawong group, aged 19 years, initially claimed indifference, then expressed his attachment with emotive language:

“It doesn’t matter what it is. Like, I’m a guy. I love my cars, you know? It’s taken me two years, I have a Holden Commodore, it’s a ‘94 model, it’s taken me two years to get what I wanted in my car. ”

A discussion about cars and image then followed:

F2: I had a Gemini, alright! A little (Holden) Gemini that does 60 up a hill! Anyway, I went and bought myself a (Honda) Prelude, and it’s much easier to drive. I put my foot down and it will go, and it feels so much better driving my car. But I still love the Gemini. It was my old car. But this is much better. It keeps the speeds I want to do. I can actually do 110 in 110 zone without thinking that the car’s going to blow up! (laughter)
Researcher: Does that make you feel different?

F2: Yes. It does. I’m happier to be driving it. And if anyone sees me ...!

F1: Image! Image is everything!

F2: Yeah...

M1: For a girl, it is.

The women went on to taunt the young man saying his car was about image as well while he insisted that it was about what kind of car he liked. Eventually he admitted that he previously had a Gemini also and the women continued to insist that his car was related to his image:

M1: No! You might like Fords, I might like Holdens. I don’t like the new Holdens that are coming out now. No way. It’s just not my taste, you get me? But I had a Gemini, too, and it was older than S...’s.

F2: But yours was hotter than mine!

The young women were determined to maintain that for this young man the image of the car was just as important as it was for them. For the young man the relationship to his car was more fundamental than being concerned with image. He strongly resisted the idea that his choice of car had anything to do with image since for him it was about a ‘natural’ experience of liking his car, despite the fact that the expression of this experience was the decidedly unnatural technology of the car. He went on to say that he referred to his car as his girlfriend, in order to demonstrate his close relationship with his car.

For the young man, image was a ‘girl’ thing while his connection to his car was of a more fundamental nature but the discussion itself presented a moment during which their assumptions about males and females were questioned or challenged – a moment of what has been called ‘gender trouble’ (Butler, 1990). The idea that his car was part of his image was thus challenging for him in that it exposed the connection of his car choice to his gender as a social requirement rather than a ‘natural’ connection.

The young women were happy to talk about cars as an important part of image in most of the groups. The fact that young women were more willing to talk about image could be a result of the perceived connection between men and cars as ‘natural’, whereas it is perceived as more natural for women to be concerned with image. At stake is a particular form of dominant heterosexual masculinity that Walker (1999) calls ‘hydraulic’ – a dominant form of masculinity that is aggressive and competitive, prone to risk-taking and defined through ‘tests’ of courage, technical knowledge and competence. In this case the young man is not willing to participate in the self-reflection the women register and which might challenge his sense of masculinity.

Related to image and being part of the social context of cars is dealing with the inevitable failures of social performance. Many of the young people commented on being embarrassed in some way in their dealings with cars. A younger man from the Blacktown group stated the need for the correct image when he commented on being embarrassed about the type of car he was driving:

“Yeah, being a male it’s a big thing to have a decent car. I always before I got my car, I was always pretty embarrassed saying, ‘I’m driving Mum’s car.’ It’s a big thing. Not necessarily status but just kind of who you are. If you’re driving a little car you’re kind of looked on like me and my mates were very sarcastic about it. We kind of looked at them as though they’re lower on the food chain, shall we say. It also does something for your ego, too. You say, ‘My car can do this, my car can do that,’ you feel bigger and better than everyone else. ”

There was no issue about stating the importance of the type of car for this young man. It seemed to him an obvious fact that for men, certain types of cars were important for their image, and embarrassment was associated with the wrong type of car and made them easy targets for ridicule and contempt in a hierarchy of social acceptance. It is important to note that the performative dimensions of driving heightened the tensions around the enabling potential of cars, since they could also demonstrate social failure as a failure of technical incompetence or as a lack of adult independence.

Women also suffered humiliation through the car. Being part of the traffic was recognised by many young people as part of a social context where their performance was likely to be judged. Embarrassing incidents referred to by women related to occasions where the car was too slow and holding up traffic, broke down or stalled in traffic, or where they had a crash:



“When I was on my L’s I was really confident, and then I had a crash in the main street! And then after that I was so cautious. It changed everything, because I thought, ‘Oh, this is so easy,’ and I was waving to people and carrying on, and ugh! I crashed! I was so embarrassed. I’ll never do it again!” (Female, Goulburn 1)

Having a crash at such an early stage in her driving experience in such a public place was a significant embarrassment to this young woman, and even more so since in Goulburn it was important to be seen doing laps in the main street when young people did get their driving licences. A woman in the Goulburn 2 group said that she was too embarrassed to go ‘lapping’ when she got her licence because she was slightly older and felt that people would notice her age and comment on her having just got her p-plates.

A number of young women did relate stories of minor crashes they had had without necessarily expressing severe embarrassment. For some of them crashes were part of the process of becoming more familiar with driving, the dimensions of the car and developing their manoeuvring skills.

There were differences in the extent to which the car itself was an important part of self image and social interaction. One of the women in the Bankstown group commented that the type of car was not something she would be embarrassed about:

“For me personally I have a crappy car and I have very high confidence in myself, and my self-esteem is high, and I don’t think my car has anything to do with it. It’s an old car, but saying, ‘I’m embarrassed because I’m driving this car...’ my confidence wouldn’t grow, I don’t think. I don’t think that if I’m driving a better car now, I’m going to feel better about myself. I think if you’re true to yourself...I don’t know. I think it just depends. My car does alright. It speeds. I can drive fast.”

While not concerned about the look or style of her car, being able to maintain good speed related to her social performance in traffic, and this was seen as important. How young people were able to perform was a significant aspect of their sense of self. Here the social performance in traffic was equated with the car’s performance in traffic.

Riding in cars – cruising as performative

Cruising is a specific type of performance in cars with the emphasis often on seeing and being seen, much like young people’s use of shopping centres. Both men and women talked about experiences where they engaged in cruising, yet despite a shared recognition of the social dimension of cruising, it meant different things to different young people. In the Fairfield group cruising was defined by the women as an open-ended, group activity, where a number of friends travel in the same car but where the destination is spontaneously decided during the journey:

“You meet up, chat for two hours, drive, stop somewhere, eat, chat for another hour, then drive again.”

A young man in the group described cruising as driving in different cars, ‘a day dedicated to driving around’, to which the young women responded incredulously saying they could not see the point. The young man pointed out that ‘you’re not driving alone’ because even though they were in separate cars he had his mates driving along with him.

For the young women, the point of cruising was to socialise in the immediate physical presence of friends, whereas for some of the young men it was a form of virtual, mediated socialisation in which the cars and driving were central and the road itself became a social space. Butcher and Thomas (2003) similarly note the dual role of cruising in Brighton-le-Sands in Sydney: to meet up with like-minded young people and to see the latest engines, parts and accessories. Yet the sense of spatiality is significantly different for young men and women. The women seem more likely to use the cabin as a social space, while for young men the road is a site for their forms of mediated sociality.

As mentioned previously, cruising the main street is common practice in many country towns, especially when young people, including women, first get their licences. This discussion, about the purpose of cruising ‘to see who’s out’, is from the Goulburn 1 group:

M2: ... the lappers come out. The hot weather definitely brings them out. Just people out driving on the main street, seeing who’s out. Just driving their car. Seeing what the opposite gender’s doing.
Researcher: Do any of you do that? Cruise in your cars?

M3: Just cruise...

F3: I think everyone does, but we don’t like to admit it!

M4: Laps!

F1: When we first get our P’s, it was like, ‘God! Let’s go lapping!’ (laughter)
Researcher: You’d drive around the block, or something?

F1: The main street...

M3: It just passes time, really. If you’re going somewhere and you’re like, ‘We’ve got fifteen minutes to spare’, you’ll just go down the street to see who’s out and then you’ll go from there.

Cruising the main street made a statement about the young person’s status as a young adult and gave them a ritual to participate in as part of their emerging social performance. Gaining a licence changes the social performance of young people in important ways and gives them a sense of being part of a different scene. Other kinds of cruising included just driving to other towns with a number of friends and enough cars to fit everyone in:



M1: Just with your friends, now and again on Sundays we'll either go to Yass or just anywhere. With two cars, three cars of people and just drive, have a good time. Not really have anywhere to go (Goulburn 1)

Being in different cars and connecting with different friends was an important part of cruising for the Goulburn 2 group:

F1: You can explore around town quite a bit. Like, you drive down a street and you see someone and you sort of chase them around...well, you don't speed and chase (laughter)...and you pull over and have a chat and say, 'We'll go for a drive up here...'

F2: Yeah, and they'll jump in your car or you'll jump in their car

Young people from Wollongong talked about going up to the city to go out together and young people from Bankstown talked about driving down to Wollongong with friends. Opportunities for spontaneously meeting up with people and deciding where to go on the spot – which cruising permits – is a key part of socialising amongst young people, especially when they first obtain their licences. In cruising, then, the car facilitates and shapes young people's entry into social spaces and the development of their social performance.

Opening the bonnet - knowledge of cars

Knowledge is central to any convincing performance of social or technical competence and it is generally assumed in some of the groups that men have superior knowledge and mastery when it comes to cars. The young women in the focus groups sounded quite knowledgeable about cars at times and were keen to show their knowledge, yet the kinds of knowledge young men and women were concerned with were often different. Knowledge could mean knowing 'how fast a car is' (Male, Warrawong) or 'how to control it' (Female, Warrawong). Young women in the Bankstown and Blacktown groups talked about needing to know the capacity of their cars because they 'thrashed' them. For most of the women, knowledge meant knowing some of the basic things about cars in case anything goes wrong and knowing how to deal with unfamiliar cars.

One young woman said she had been given a crash course by one of her friends and knew how to change a wheel, oil and indicator lights (Bankstown). She said that if she did have a problem she would have some idea of what it would be. Others in the group said their fathers had taught them to change tyres, the oil and fill the water. Knowing cars also meant knowing whether the car had power steering and how powerful it was because being comfortable with the car was related to what they were capable of driving:

“But I think it's good to know what cars you can drive and what cars you feel comfortable driving, rather than, “Oh yeah, it looks good, I'm going to drive it.” To kind of know which ones you're capable of driving. ”
(Bankstown)

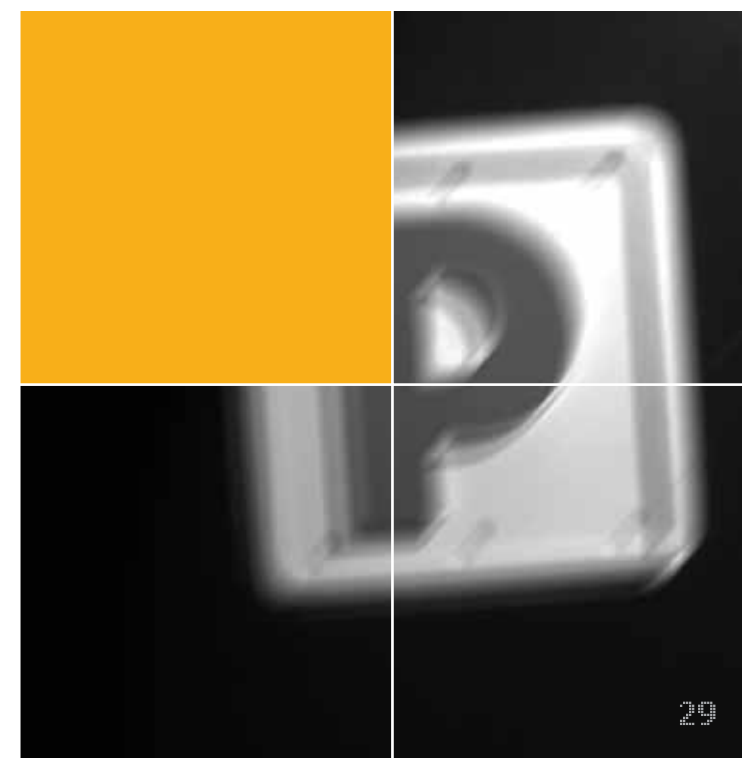
The women talked about 'flattening' the accelerator and what happened in different cars, and knowing the difference between different types of cars. Most of them acknowledged that having some knowledge was desirable, especially if they had an older car, but that they would not necessarily use the knowledge. A few said they would just call the NRMA or a family member or friend. One woman stated:

“I'm happy, like I said, with the basics, but when it comes to the technical stuff I'm not really fussed. I don't want to get my hands dirty in the bonnet. I'll open it, but that's about it. I'm not really into that sort of thing. I'll call my dad or take it to a proper service person, a mechanic. ” (Bankstown)

Women in the Goulburn 1 group talked about knowing 'how the water squirters work' and how to put air in the tyres, and also expressed a lack of interest in touching anything under the bonnet. As one woman said, 'I know where it is...like, Dad comes out and gives me a quiz, where's this, where's that. And I'm like, “Yeah, there...”'. Some of the males were equally uninterested in knowing about how cars work or dealing with problems, yet it seemed a more typically female response to these issues. One young woman demonstrated the extent and focus of her knowledge of cars:

“So you have the two different sides of the blinkers (laughter), and you turn on the windscreen wiper! (laughs) That's annoying, too, so you need to kind of think...even my mum, who's been driving for ever, she still gets confused because the X-Trail and the Astra are on different sides. ” (Bankstown)

Young men were highly unlikely to talk about where indicators and windscreen wipers are located and were more likely to demonstrate knowledge about performance and skill:



“We talk about top-end and acceleration and stuff like that, and they get off the mark quickly, but we’ll smash them once we catch up to them, and stuff like that. Just getting it sideways every now and then, taking off really hard, stuff like that. ” (Blacktown)

The contrast in the way the young men and young women spoke about driving is evident in these comments about dealing with slipping tyres:

“The other day I was turning off Clinton Street into Sloane Street, it was just raining a little bit and I was going round a corner and the tyres started to slip and I thought, stuff it! And I gunned it! Woooh! It was just sittin’ on steel, and there were all these cars starting to bank up behind me, and I was just going, yay!! The tyres were going and I wasn’t moving. I wasn’t going sideways, I wasn’t going forward. I was just sitting there.... ” (Male, Goulburn 1)

In this account the young man expressed excitement and sheer pleasure in having to deal with a situation and a vehicle that was difficult to control. He described the wheels just spinning on the spot to the point that it felt like the wheel hubs were grinding on the road as the vehicle failed to move forward. The experience for this young man is bodily and contrasts with the careful consideration of the young woman in the following:

“I think knowing your car, as in exactly how it is. Knowing the grip of the tyres and things like that. I’ve got a few cars in my family and I just drive around whenever. And going by the different cars, you can tell when you take a corner. One flies out but the other one doesn’t. Things like that. So, just knowing the car, pretty much. And the roads. That’s very important, because if you’re in a place where you don’t know the roads and you’re speeding, there’s no chance. You’re gone, because if there’s a blind corner, you’re gone. That’s how I feel. Know the roads, know your car, you should be right. ” (Female, Warrawong)

For the young man the experience was exciting: he takes it as it comes, and enters into the moment with the car and the road. He remained in control in his merging with the vehicle, whereas for the young woman the over-riding sentiment was caution, getting to know the situation, the car and the road in a very deliberate sense. It is not just the way each speaks about their experiences that is of interest, it is also the experience itself and what each was inclined to do that



was different. The young man ‘gunned it’, while the young woman preferred to exercise forethought and vigilance. The contrast is perhaps between enjoying the sensation of ‘sittin’ on steel’ and knowing the car and the streets in a reflective sense.

Getting your hands dirty

Just as knowing about cars was a form of performance of a gendered technical and social competence, so too particular experiences which involved fixing a problem. The likelihood of young men and women changing a tyre or dealing with mechanical problems with their cars was a point of contention amongst the participants. In most groups the young men maintained that women would not ‘get their hands dirty’. It was a vital element of gender performance for the men to see themselves as capable with cars and having a more hands on relationship with and knowledge of cars. It was equally vital for the gender performance of some of the young women not to be seen ‘getting their hands dirty’.

In the following exchange between a young man and a young woman in the Goulburn 1 group, it was clear that while the young man thought everyone should know how to change a tyre, the young woman was equally clear that there were circumstances in which she was not going to be seen changing a tyre:

- M2: Well, I reckon everyone who gets their P-plates should know at least how to change the oil, the water, and how to change a tyre. Absolute basics. It’s ridiculous.
- F1: That’s why you get services, and you have a dad! (laughter)
- M2: Say the engine blows up, or the head just brakes or something. You can’t drive it, well that’s understandable, you have to get someone to come and fix it, but if you get a flat tyre and you can’t change it yourself and you’re way out in the scrub...
- F1: If it was out in the scrub, I’d do it. No-one could see me! (laughter)

Ultimately for the men it was important to be seen to be able to fix basic problems and to change a tyre. For at least some of the women, being seen changing a flat tyre was the last thing they wanted as it did not fit with the image of being female. Gender was in this way defining what they could and would do with cars.

Some young women did not subscribe to the perception of women as less engaged with cars. One participant in the Bankstown group recounted how she had learned to fix her car because it kept breaking down in the traffic:

“I only learned because...why I developed an interest was when I first got my car, my radiator hose blew up and, like, that is the smallest thing, and easiest thing. Just to change a tyre, you can do it at home. I had no idea! I’m, like, really angry! In Punchbowl, King George’s Road at five pm, people were honking me and sticking their fingers up at me. I’m like, ‘What am I going to do? I’m stuck, I can’t move!’ And that really made me want to learn. And then I had a problem with my car overheating. Every single day when I came to work or went home, it overheated. All on King George’s Road! In a very difficult place. Then I realised what it was, and I was able to ‘treat’ the car. (laughter) ”

The young woman’s willingness to engage with the car to fix it presented a challenge for a young man who immediately following this story commented:

“The difference sometimes with guys and girls: see, girls don’t want to give it a chance. They don’t want to get all dirty ”

Another woman in the group retorted:

“I love getting dirty! ”

The young man nevertheless continued on the same tack, attempting to maintain the distinction between men and women’s relationships to cars:

“But with guys, if my car breaks down, I’ll try to fix it before I take it to someone. If I can’t fix it, then I’ll take it to someone else to fix it. But girls sometimes, they don’t want to take that chance. ”

The first young woman who told the original story came back with the point that many men would also not want to ‘get their hands dirty’:

“Ask the NRMA. They probably get more calls from guys about coming to change their wheels than they do from girls! All these businessmen with their suits and their computers and clean fingernails (laughter) they don’t like it, either! ”

At stake in this argument is a fundamental set of claims about the gender of technical competence: a phenomenon that echoes the literature on the gendered nature of skill and technical know-how (Cockburn, 1985). It was evidently problematic for the young man to acknowledge that a woman could deal with a mechanical problem and engage with a car in ways that are generally reserved for men. The women in this group did not consider it as problematic as it was for the young man, since they were able to persist and point out that some men also did not engage with cars.

Guys are in control

While performance is an often discussed feature of cars, it is not only the performance of the car that matters. The power of the car was significant for many young men as noted above, and this often had to be accompanied by a driving performance that matched the vehicle. Cars appeared to be significant for some of the young men in that they suggested important things about themselves as males, and this could also involve demonstrating a style of driving that is considered more fitting for young men. At issue here is the ‘hydraulic masculinity’ spoken of earlier (Walker, 1999: 183). Some male participants could occasionally reflect upon the risks of the driving style linked to ‘hydraulic’ masculinity:

“Well, the car I’ve got at the moment is pretty stock-standard, you know. Like, you see so many of them running around, but my first car, I seriously attribute it to me still being alive, because I know when I was 17 I was an absolute hoon and I wanted to get myself a VK Commodore, and I had to have a manual car because, you know, I can drive a manual so why drive an automatic when you can drive a manual, and I know I would have wrapped myself around a tree because the speedo says you can do 220 ks an hour, so I want to see if it can do 200ks an hour! You know? ”

He highlighted how much the power of the vehicle and the demonstration of driving skill were factors in wanting to drive a manual and to try to do 200km/h. He was clearly attributing the possibility of getting himself killed to the type of car and the driving style that would have to accompany it. He also showed a significant level of knowledge of the ‘right’ kind of car for a young man and how important that was. He went on to talk about the first car he did end up with and its lack of power:

“And we’ve been out and looking a bit, me and Dad, to try and find a car for me, and we went to the auctions, and the week before they had a whole heap of VK and VL Commodores, and they were going for under three grand. So, it was like, ‘Right. If we go there, maybe we’ll get lucky this week.’ They didn’t have any there but they had the Bluebird there, and it was something completely different and it was just very basic. It had 22 horsepower, and if you had a tailwind and you were going down a hill, I think that had got it up to, like, 75 miles an hour, which is about 120. So it was one of them cars that you really couldn’t drive fast, and it just suited my needs at the time. It didn’t have a radio and you couldn’t put one in because it was the wrong way. ”



The car was lacking in power but suited his needs to get himself where he needed to go and he clearly appreciated this at 22 years of age. His friends nevertheless found a way to code the car he had as male by invoking animal power:

“It was just it was my car and all my mates saw it and they were like... instead of calling it the piece of crap that it probably was, they were like, ‘Yeah, that’s Dazza’s beast!’ It was something completely different. ”
(Shellharbour)

The car could still perform the function of saying something about the masculinity of this young man even though it was not the most masculine car or the kind of car that was regarded as typically male, like the Commodore. It became a ‘male’ car in being claimed as such by his mates who thereby made it socially acceptable.

The cars and driving performance that are considered appropriate for young men could be extremely costly for them. It is not just the power of the car that is significant, it is the ways in which the power must be demonstrated and mastered amongst young men. Not only is risky driving considered acceptable amongst males, having a male passenger in the car makes it more likely that the driver will take risks (Simons-Morton, Lerner and Singer, 2005; Ulleburg, 2004; Harré, Field and Kirkwood, 1996). It was not only knowledge of cars and their willingness to get their hands dirty that made men different in their relationship to cars.

Young men wanted to be seen as better drivers. In all of the focus groups there were discussions where the relationship of men and women to cars was distinguished and clarified. Challenges to the superior driving and relationship to cars on the part of the men were taken up and dealt with convincingly enough for many of the young women to eventually agree with them. These challenging incidents were mostly initiated by women, whereas men tended to focus on maintaining the gender distinction.



Women related stories about their involvement with cars that appeared to challenge the distinction between men and women in relation to cars and driving, but eventually the gender distinction was maintained. Many of these discussions centred around controlling a car and having a flat tyre, and how women dealt with these.

When a young woman in the Warrawong group exclaimed that female drivers were safer, one young man responded; ‘Not the ones I know mate! I don’t really like going in cars with them.’ When asked why, he said at first he did not know and then referred to ‘their’ braking strategies: ‘they just brake at the last moment and go over the gutter.’ A woman in the group countered by arguing, ‘statistics say that males are the biggest problem.’ The same young man responded by saying that males are ‘obviously stupid when they are in a car’ to which a woman declared ‘there you go’. The young man went on to outline the difference between men and women drivers in some detail:

“Yeah, but I’m just saying that women don’t know how to drive! Like, if I’m in a car and I’m speeding – it’s stupid if I’m speeding, but say something happens, I can maybe control it, you get me? A woman, a girl, something that happens to her. I know a friend, a chick, she lost control and she smacked it into a pole. And one of my mates was speeding. He lost it and, like, he controlled the car. I’m not saying that women are worse drivers. How do you say it – a man knows cars better than a woman does. That’s just what I’m trying to say. ”

In this statement the man who ‘loses it’ is regarded as remaining in control whereas a woman is not because ‘a man knows cars better than a woman does’. At the same time he said he was ‘not saying that women are worse drivers’. He was trying to find a way to express the ‘obvious’ gender differences in how men and women express themselves in relation to cars. In his example the woman crashed into a pole while the man only ‘lost it’; even though he was speeding, he was able to regain control.

The fact that men were ‘stupid’ in cars was not a problem for the men in the group, nor was the fact that they tended to speed or lose control. Somehow the crashes and ‘stupidity’ men were involved in were excused because men were seen as having a stronger affinity with cars. This affinity was part of how they engaged with cars and was demonstrated in their driving style, and this was regarded as part of being male.

The young woman who initially challenged the young man in this group then agreed with him stating; ‘You could have a point there.’ Neither she nor any other women in the group took him up on his statement that ‘females just don’t know how to drive’. He convincingly redefined driving to suit male styles of driving. He was encouraged to go on:

“You see a woman there, she’s got a flat tyre and she’s just standing there at the side of the road! (laughter) And she waits for someone to help her. A male will know what to do. ”

The young women in the group agreed and he continued, defining male capacities:

“I’m just saying we can react quicker. We know what we can do. A woman will just let go and hope for the best, and accelerate or brake.”

He was not quite saying that women were incompetent but his comparison suggested that the difference between men and women was their skill and this stemmed from men’s willingness to engage with cars in more intense ways. The gender distinction was kept in tact in this discussion. The male view that men ‘react quicker’ and ‘know what to do’ while women ‘hope for the best’ was not challenged even though the men’s style of driving might be more dangerous because it involved speeding.

The idea that men are more likely to be able to control a car is a familiar claim even though men have more crashes and more serious crashes (Clarke, Ward and Turman, 2005). There are differences in the types of driving skills males and females focus on (Laapotti, Keskinen, Hataaka and Katila, 2001) but this is not so much an issue of competence and incompetence as it is usually framed, but of different relations to the car and the surrounding system of traffic.

Control through familiarity

Many of the young people thought about their driving from the perspective of their own familiarity with their car and their surroundings, indicating an idea of what was acceptable in driving behaviour and control of the car that was based in what was comfortable for them. In other words, their idea of what was appropriate driving behaviour and control of the car was determined by their own position from within the vehicle suggesting that their awareness of social space perhaps does not extend much beyond their own vehicle to other vehicles and road users. This is significant for many young men who, as we saw before, see the road as a site for their peer sociality, yet they don’t see it as a space involving interactions with others. For example, one young man described his driving from the perspective of his mother and contrasted it with his own sense of control:

“My mum’s constantly on my back, telling me to slow down...she thinks I drive too fast, but really, I just drive to what I feel comfortable. That’s the thing. Like, people may think it’s too fast or too slow but really when you get in the car and you just drive the way you think you should be driving...”

He did not say whether he was driving to speed limits or not, but whether he was driving fast or slow enough for his own comfort. He continued insisting that being too concerned with speed could have consequences for concentration and result in a crash. He was suggesting that the real problem was distraction, not speed and that he knew what speed he could handle:

“... and if you worry too much about the speed and where you’re going, it’s taking your mind off other things and you end up having a crash. Because it can happen just like that. Like, when I ran into Aaron, I took my mind off it for, like, a second and it just happened...”

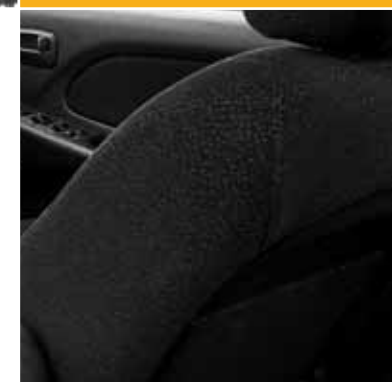
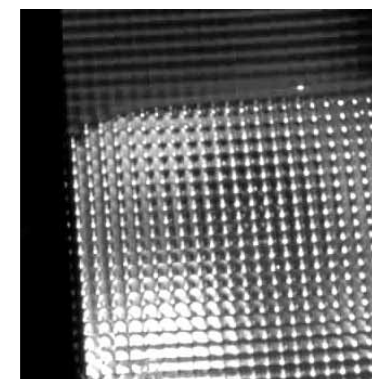
When talking about having friends in the car he said he would not try anything he did not know he could handle, again not making it clear how he actually drives except from his own perspective, taking into account what he was comfortable with. This seems harmless enough except that he also mentioned that if he thought the speed limit was fair he would stick to it, with a bit of leniency:

“If I’ve got a full car I’ll never try anything I know I can’t handle. If I’m by myself I’ll just drive how I normally would. Just drive how you feel comfortable. And if the speed limit is fair, I’ll stick to it, but be a bit lenient, sort of thing.” (Goulburn)

This young man is himself deciding whether speed limits are fair and his driving is appropriate without taking into account his own passengers or the surrounding environment. Central to a masculine sense of control is the sense that the driver is the arbiter of what is right and wrong, not the social system of traffic in which they exist, nor other drivers, who might more likely be constructed as obstacles. Fundamental to this is the absence of an awareness of the ‘physics’ of driving – that is, driving is defined by the bodily experience of the driver and their sensation of control, not by an appreciation of the consequences of speed and velocity of a system of moving and stationary objects. It is easier to maintain the illusion of ‘owning the road’ if this is centred on the sensory experience of the vehicle as an extension of the driver’s body and not the broader sociality of traffic.

For others, the car they were driving might influence how they felt about their control, feeling more control with their own car with which they were familiar, and therefore able to handle their risk-taking better:

“Well, when I drive my car I have more control on the road. I can avoid accidents much better. Swerving, braking’s much better, accelerating’s better.” (Male, Fairfield)



A young woman described how driving herself made her feel more in control and how her speed was not related to being safe but to her sense of being in control:

“I feel confident when I’m driving, but that’s ‘cause I’m in control. It’s not like safe speeding, it’s more like controlled speeding! (laughter) Like, a speed where you can control it, and you know you can brake in time and stuff like that as well. ” (Fairfield)

Feeling comfortable and familiar with their speed and style of driving appeared to allow these young people to justify their driving behaviour in a way that did not necessarily show responsiveness to others, inside or outside the car, or the driving and traffic environment. This is not necessarily a characteristic of young people themselves, however, but is rather a feature of the driving cultures young people are entering into and the culture of the roads as a social space.

The sense of control that young people articulated related very little to the social space of the roads and traffic and the need for negotiation and compromise within it. This aspect of driving is not often discussed in the broader community or considered as a primary feature of driving. The emphasis is more often on the independence, freedom and individuality expressed in relation to cars and driving, and the mastery of skills in manipulating cars. For young people, however, the social performance facilitated through cars is relevant here in that they seemed to be particularly focused on performing for each other although family members were also referred to.

Awareness of responsibility

Some young people showed a strong sense of awareness of others in how they thought about cars, taking into account the impact the car itself could have:

“Well, something Dad said when I was just getting my L plates really stuck with me. It’s, “You’ve got the power to drive the car, look at the number of people who are killed on the roads each year. You’re driving the car, you’ve got the power to take a life, so you’ve got to make sure that you’re doing it right and paying attention and everything else with it.” And that really stuck with me. I figured, like, if you’ve got the power to take someone’s life just by driving your car, you know, it adds to the responsibility aspect of it, so I guess it was more a growing-up than a power issue per se, but it also is a power issue, because it does give you that power to take someone’s life by you being a goose behind the wheel. ” (Male, Shellharbour, 22 years)

This awareness of the impact of the car as a powerful machine was rare, especially amongst men. The young women were more likely to express concern for others and the implication of their driving for others, both inside and outside the car:

“Yeah, I think it’s that independence and freedom and something that I think when you first get your licence you feel like you do have, yeah, some level of control and whatever, and then there’s kind of a realisation that, especially if you know people who’ve been in accidents, you then start to realise the potential of the power and the consequences of the power, and that’s when I think you start to reassess or recognise that you do actually have a level of responsibility to deal with. ” (Female, Shellharbour, 23 years)

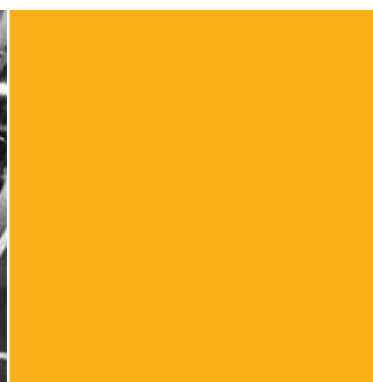
Others related stories of a crash, which helped to bring out for them the implications of driving a car and the responsibility that entailed. Many of the young people talked about being more careful in their driving when they had particular people in the car, such as their grandmothers and friends. This was partly attributed to performance in so far as they did not want to do something that would embarrass them or make them look bad in the eyes of their friends or relatives.

However, it was also evident that when they had other people in the car they felt a greater responsibility as drivers to keep their passengers safe which they did not feel when they were alone. This demonstrates that, despite some sense of responsibility towards others, there is still a limited awareness of the social context of traffic and its involvement of other road users not known to them.

The power of a car was recognised amongst the young people in the groups as an enabling power, giving them self-esteem, prestige and confidence, particularly, as for many of the males, when the power related to how fast the car could go and how well they could control the car. For the women, power was more related to socialising and independence

Enjoyment, boredom and ‘natural’ experience

As we suggested in the first report, the affective dimensions of cars and driving are central to the culture of driving. The enabling aspects of the car were also linked to its pleasures. Many of the young people said that they enjoyed driving when they first got their licences but then the novelty had worn off a bit. Driving had since become more of a necessary chore where boredom, monotony and frustration with traffic had become commonplace. Initially much excitement was invoked with the achievement of getting a licence and this was expressed in a range of ways. Many did not enjoy their



regular drives to work and some of the women preferred to be a passenger so that they could 'enjoy the sights', while others were happier if they drove because then they were 'in control'.

Freedom and independence were central to the initial sense of enjoyment of driving and then opportunities to be alone became reasons to enjoy driving for a number of the men. Driving could be a way of unwinding and being alone on weekends or after work.

Enjoyment of driving was connected by some of the young men to a 'natural' experience of driving which was valued as important in itself and was regarded as a marker of gender in that it signified that men had a closer and more genuine relationship to cars. In the Goulburn 1 group when discussing enjoyment of driving a man stated:

"If you don't enjoy it and you're not expecting it and you don't know for sure what to do, well, then you're only going to make it worse, really. Like, most female drivers that I know, if they get a flat tyre, for instance, they'll put their foot on the brake straightaway, slow it down, where I've been in a car at 170, and it got a flat tyre, and just held it. Because I knew what to do, didn't put the foot anywhere near the brake and let the car slow down itself a bit, and when it's controllable just use the brake a little bit, but not much, you know? I've been in a car where we've got a flat tyre and my sister slammed on the brakes and the car nearly flipped, it started fishtailing a little bit, and then it just went to flip over. She still managed to control it, but that was the whole difference, you know. Like, she could have just kept on driving as if nothing happened, but seeing that she didn't know what to do, she nearly killed us."

The fact that he was increasing the risk by travelling at a speed like 170km/h and still managed to control the car, while the woman he mentioned managed to control a similar situation where she was not speeding, only increased the competence of his driving for this young man. He said, further, that he had never had a crash



while doing the speed limit. He was able to discount the ability of the woman to control a similar situation by considering his experience as more 'natural' since he was prepared to take additional risks. His comments contrast with those of a young woman who has only had minor crashes:

"I've scraped into a car reversing, and I went up the gutter because my drink fell over and I let go of the steering wheel. But I just put it back on, I haven't had major crashes."

The young woman clearly did not express the competence in driving the car the young man valued so highly. Her language was not a challenge to his competence even though he had had several significant crashes and she had had only minor ones. She said in response to his story that it was 'pretty scary' and she would 'panic' in that situation, confirming his view that women would not 'know what to do'.

The certainty that men 'know what to do' runs counter to those studies that have shown that men are not only involved in more crashes, but that there are more fatalities when male drivers are involved (Monárrez-Espino, Hasselberg and Laflamme, 2006; Williams and Shabanova, 2003), but it remains a powerful belief.

The connection between enjoying driving and a closer understanding of the car was often assumed to be a 'natural' relationship with the car and explained the greater control men were supposed to demonstrate:

"The more you enjoy it, the more you want to drive, so the more you drive you get better. If you don't enjoy driving you probably wouldn't drive that much, so then you probably wouldn't be that much of a good driver." (Goulburn 1)

A woman in the group disagreed:

"I don't think [there is] much difference, how in control of the car you are, whether you're enjoying it or not. Like, if you're not enjoying driving you're not going to go and slam into a tree just because you're not enjoying it. You're still going to be in control of the car..." (Goulburn 1)

For some of the women enjoyment of driving gave them confidence and they felt they were more focused, suggesting that being bored with driving might be problematic in that they might be less inclined to pay attention. Many mentioned boredom in talking about driving to work and dealing with traffic, and for some driving was just boring. Men who got bored when driving talked about taking back roads where there were more corners to deal with or going a bit faster so that they would be less bored.

The enjoyment of driving in itself was talked about as an exclusively male experience that showed a closer relationship to cars on the part of men and excluded women from a similar experience, even when they explicitly stated it. How the enjoyment of driving is expressed is crucial since, interestingly, con-

nections have been made between boredom proneness and sensation-seeking in predicting unsafe driving practices (Dahlen, Martin, Ragan and Kuhlman, 2005).

For young men who express a 'hydraulic' masculinity through cars, boredom could lead to speeding to keep themselves interested, for example, particularly in country areas where speed is a major cause of crashes. For young men, the desire for their masculine prowess to be tested and proved underlies this tendency towards risk-taking.

A number of young women in the groups wanted to express some technical understanding of cars, but they rarely confronted the men's views directly. When a young woman in the Fairfield group stated, 'it's just easier being a passenger', a man said 'It's a female thing.' Another young woman challenged him stating; 'I love to drive, I'm always driving.' The first young woman, perhaps encouraged by this then said, 'But I do want to learn a manual', to which the man responded 'Why is that?' She subsequently retreated a little saying 'I don't know' and suggested it was cheaper to buy a manual car, rather than making a point related to driving a manual car. The man took this up and muted the point stating, 'It's harder to get than auto'. The women then left the point, not wishing to pursue it further.

Again, there is a moment here when the gendered assumptions of driving rise to the surface but the investments in these assumptions are so great that there develops no sustained discussion into the issues at stake. Even though there are examples of young women who are very interested in cars, modifying cars and in developing their driving skills (Noble and Baldwin, 2001), young men retain a sense of themselves as superior in their mastery and knowledge with cars. This is related to the broader context of driving cultures and driving as a social and cultural practice where car handling skill is often valued more highly, and connected directly to men, than other driving performances such as the more cautious approach of women.

When you are young

Earlier in this report we argued that the enabling aspects of the car were linked to the transition in life-stage and the attainment of adulthood. There is another way in which age and generation play out in narratives of maturation. Age was clearly a key factor in the different forms of socialisation through cars and relationships with cars demonstrated by young people. Differences in age were evident, even between 17-to-18 year olds and those aged in their early twenties. This young 23-year-old man from the Fairfield group referred to the 'old days' when he was younger and more into cars:

“So you just get a normal, decent car, but back in the old days I used to like knowing how your car performs and all the dynamics and that sort of stuff, but these days I'm starting to forget everything because there's just no time to keep up with it.”

A few male focus group participants stated that they were 'into all that modified car stuff' when they first got cars but now that they were older they were more interested in comfort and convenience. There were exceptions where the interest in cars was carried on into the twenties. The following exchange is from the Fairfield group:

M3: I think as you get older you get more into luxury cars than sports cars. How old are you?

M2: 24.

M3: Like, when you're 18 or 19 you're really into the performance car ...

F3: 26 all the way up to 30

M2: I know people 30-plus and they're still into it, like me.

M3: But with most of my friends, we're more into luxury cars, so when we have enough money we'd rather buy a luxury car than a sports car. Like a BM or something. Creature comforts! Rather than a sports car.

The BMW said something different about themselves that became more important to them as they got older than driving a sportier type of car, which many of them were interested in when they were younger. The modified cars many of the younger men are interested in take quite a bit of effort to keep on the road in their characteristic uniqueness so that they are eventually less inclined to make the effort. There was also some reference to the different ways they drove when they were younger:

“I do drive like an idiot sometimes, but I think I've settled down a lot now. When I first got my P's I was just an idiot. Now when people are in the car I think I drive a lot better, but when I'm by myself I still give it a little bit just to feel the G's or something. (laughter) I don't know. When people are in the car, now, I drive a lot safer than what I used to, and I've had my licence for two years now.”
(Male, Goulburn 1)

The earliest stages of driving are clearly crucial for young people with statistics showing more crashes occurring in the first few months of gaining a licence. The pressures on young people adding to the inexperience already extensively noted in research (Ferguson, 2003) include developing the appropriate gender performance.

For young men this is particularly acute as their gender performance involves acting in and through cars in ways that are more dangerous and risk related (Harré, 2000; Clarke, Ward and Truman et al., 2005). Young men also demonstrate a greater self-enhancement bias whereby they consider themselves better drivers than their peers (Harré, Forrest and O'Neill, 2005), and have been found to have a less positive attitude to traffic safety and rules than women (Laapotti, Keskinen and Rajalin, 2003). It is clearly an important part



of the social performance of young men to demonstrate a willingness to take risks in cars and this is an additional pressure that needs to be carefully addressed in road safety.

The young people were also keenly aware of class and financial status and the kind of car that would be associated with higher incomes. This young woman referred to the kind of car available to the young people in her area:

“Well, rich people obviously drive good cars. Like BMWs and stuff like that. You’re not going to see them driving around in, like, a 1990 model Commodore or something like that. They drive something a bit higher class. Lexuses and stuff like that. Young people, just in Year 11 and 12 at school and have just got their licence, normally they don’t buy new cars. Their parents usually buy them a two thousand dollar older car. ”
(Goulburn, 20 years)

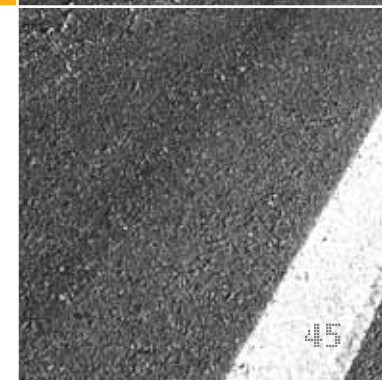
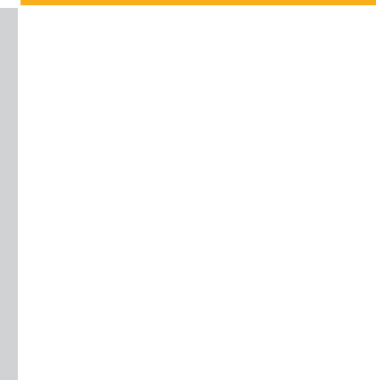
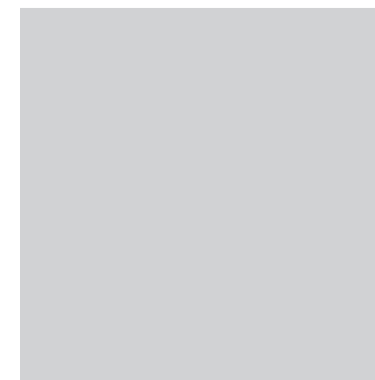
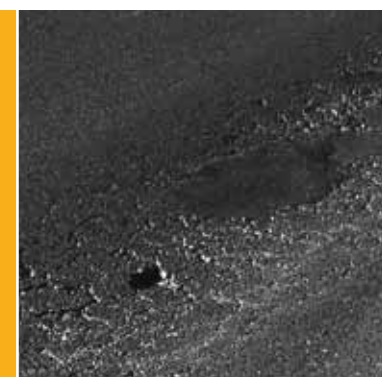
The young people were clearly aware of the values attached to cars and the status they could convey, and were thus familiar with the desire for the comfort and convenience of reliability.



As with the first report of the Transforming Drivers project, this report attempts to contribute a more nuanced understanding to driving amongst young men and women. In particular, while social norms are referred to in the psychologically-orientated literature on road safety they are rarely outlined and considered in much detail. As in the first report, we see a similar paradox in the relationships between young people and their driving practices. On the one hand they show enormous understanding of their driving culture, and yet, on the other, they reproduce many of the myths and values of driving which underscore risk-taking behaviour and dangerous driving. Most particularly, they demonstrate critical insights regarding the nature of gender as a socially constructed relationship and identity, and yet they also reveal significant investments in those ideas and assumptions, especially as they relate to cars and driving.

Other paradoxes abound. There is an overwhelming sense of the power and freedom that the car offers to young people, and the way it enables them to make transitions into adulthood and to access worlds of work and leisure. The car allows them to experience forms of personal and social control, it offers mobility and ‘convenience’ and allows them to extend their social relationships and shape their sense of self in ways that are independent of others, especially parents. Yet there is also a sense of the kinds of problems and burdens the car throws at them – the costs and responsibilities of driving, of which they are only partially aware.

The enabling aspects of driving are qualified not simply by these burdens, but by the ways in which gender shapes their distribution. Men and women often experience the mobilities of driving culture in different ways, and the car functions differently in fostering particular performances of gender in social spaces. Particularly crucial here is the acting out of a form of ‘hydraulic masculinity’ which encourages risk-taking, the need for a strong sense of control defined through technical knowledge and competence in driving style. For some young men, and women, this is too frequently seen as a ‘natural’ expression of masculine competence. Optimistically, there is also much evidence of a self-awareness that disrupts conventional assumptions about gender, especially amongst young women.



Unlike the first report, which lent itself to clear suggestions for driver safety campaigns, this report offers more general insights into the relations between young people and cars – nevertheless, these insights could inform new ways of dealing with driver training and safety programs.

The first insight would be to complement the legislative and technical emphases of driver training with a stronger sense of the social and cultural dimensions of driving. As we have seen, for young people, driving has a crucial role in developing a self-image especially in terms of the formation of a sense of one's competence and autonomy, and in developing a sense of collective identity around socialising practices. The car has an expressive quality and an importance in the work and social lives of young people that has to be acknowledged in driver training. It is also central to the transition to adulthood.

The second point is that these involve gender norms that also need to be addressed. It would be hard to change aspects of driving without changing aspects of gender performance, but it is not impossible once we acknowledge the cultural and social dimensions of those norms, and how they are tied to investments in things like driving performance.

The third is that this addressing of the socio-cultural dimensions of driving practices involves grappling with the myths of individuality, convenience, autonomy, mobility and power that underlay the respondents' views about driving. These values are also linked powerfully to forms of gender and sexuality.

The fourth is that there are moments of self-awareness that young people articulate that could be used to both trouble conventional assumptions about gender, and to found a greater sense of driver responsibility related to their own lives, not imposed as a form of moralising discipline.

We hope that a more sophisticated understanding of the experience and meanings of driving for young people will eventually inform better ways of promoting safer driving, fashioning more meaningful safety messages and fostering shared, peer responsibility. If we can continue to challenge the gendered assumptions about driving, we may also help to challenge the practices that endanger many young lives.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Groups

Number Of Participants	
Bankstown Arabic	8
Blacktown	4
Fairfield	7
Figtree Philipines	8
Goulburn 1	8
Goulburn 2	7
Lawson	4
Shellharbour	5
Wagga	6
Warrawong Portuguese	8
Total numbers: 65	

Focus groups were held with different ethnic groups in order to consider the possibility of ethnic differences in the way young people relate to cars. Six identified as Portuguese, 1 as Arabic and 7 as Lebanese. There were also some who identified as Polish, Japanese and Filipino. Just over half identified as Australian or 'Anglo'.

No distinct differences were found across these groups, so this hasn't been developed in the report. Rather, it was clear that young people of all ethnicities embraced the car with comparable enthusiasm, particularly those living in areas where there is less public transport available such as rural, regional and Sydney suburban areas. Moreover there wasn't a pattern of perceptions about the relationship between ethnicity and car use, despite media coverage about specific groups – such as those of Lebanese background – being particularly prone to risky and demonstrative driving practices.

Given the focus on mobility, the groups were chosen with a view to addressing issues around degrees of geographical isolation. To this end we did not include a group in the inner city area of Sydney in this study, for example: such a group would be less likely to be dependent on private cars and also less likely to experience problems of isolation and more likely to use public transport

Gender of Participants			
	Males	Females	Total
Bankstown Arabic	2	6	8
Blacktown	1	3	4
Fairfield	3	4	7
Figtree	5	3	8
Goulburn 1	5	3	8
Goulburn 2	2	5	7
Lawson		4	4
Shellharbour	3	2	5
Wagga	6	0	6
Wollongong	3	5	8
Total	30	35	65

APPENDIX A

Age Groups

	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Total Participants
Bankstown Arabic				2	2	2	1	1				8
Blacktown				1	1		1	1				4
Fairfield					1		3		3			7
Figtree			2	2		1		1		1	1	8
Goulburn 1				2	4	2						8
Goulburn 2					2	3	1		1			7
Lawson			2		1	1						4
Shellharbour				1				2	1	1		5
Wagga	1	1	2	2								6
Warrawong					5	1	1			1		8
Total Age Groups	1	1	6	10	16	10	7	4	6	3	1	65

Licence Type (note: one participant in Fairfield group described licence as HR)

	Learner Driver	P Plates	Full Licence	Disqualified	No
Bankstown Arabic	1	6	1		
Blacktown		3	1		
Fairfield	1	2	4		
Figtree		6	2		
Goulburn 1		5	1	2(P's)	
Goulburn 2		3	4		
Lawson	1	3			
Shellharbour		1	4		
Wagga	1	3			2
Wollongong		6	2		
Total	4	38	19	2	2

Educational Background

	Year 10	Year 11	HSC	TAFE Qualifications	University degree	No Answer or unclear	Totals
Bankstown Arabic	1		1	6			8
Blacktown			2	2			4
Fairfield			2	3	2		7
Figtree	2		5	1			8
Goulburn 1	1		6			1	8
Goulburn 2		1	3	3			7
Lawson	2	1		1			4
Shellharbour			2	3			5
Wagga	3		3				6
Wollongong			4	3		1	8
Total	9	2	28	22	2	2	65

APPENDIX A

Work and Study

	Work	Study	Both work and study	Unemployed	Sole parent
Bankstown Arabic	5	3			
Blacktown	4				
Fairfield	2	2	3		
Figtree	4	2	1	1	
Goulburn 1	2	5	1		
Goulburn 2	5				
Lawson	1	2			1
Shellharbour	4	1			
Wagga	1	5			
Wollongong	6	1		1	
Total Age Groups	34	21	7	2	1



APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

- How many of you have cars or have access to a car?
- How important are cars in your life? In what ways?
- What sorts of social things do you do in cars?
- What sorts of community activities does having a car allow you to be involved in?
- How important is it to your community to have access to cars and people who can drive?
- How important to you is knowledge of cars?
- Do you like driving? In what ways? How does that contribute to you feeling part of your community?
- Does the type of car influence who you are and what you do in some ways? Do you drive differently in different cars? How and why?
- Are there particular kinds of people you associate with particular kinds of cars?

AND/OR:

- Are there particular kinds of cars you associate with particular kinds of people?
- Does driving a car give you power? In what ways?
- What sorts of things does the car or traffic entice/encourage you to do? Does driving influence or direct you or who you are in some ways?
- Does other people being in the car affect your driving? Which people – friends, parents?
- Do you feel in control of the environment of the car when you have friends with you?
- What makes you feel in control of the social environment within the car?
- Can you tell a story or recount an event in which the car, driver, or passengers went out of control or threatened to?
- What other aspects of your life do you feel in control of/have power over?
- Do you feel more in control of your car than other aspects of your life?