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Understanding car cultures

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- Dr Jane Dixon (chair)
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A sociological approach

- Why cities became car reliant
- How individuals resolve multiple interests, pressures and incentives
- The role of skills, knowledge, experience and dispositions
- The reproduction of inequalities

Studying car cultures

“The problem for the study of car cultures... is to retain the link between the micro-history of ethnography and experience and an appreciation of the way these are shot through with the effects and constraints of acts of commerce and the state”

(Miller 2001, p17)

Research strategy

Bourdieu's concept	Research question	Data
Field	Describe the social struggles that shaped the transport environment.	Social history & participant ob
Distribution of capital	Class, gender, place distribution in access to transport.	Descriptive statistics
Competition for capital	What forms of capital are deployed or accrued with transport practices?	Qualitative interviews & participant ob
Habitus	Physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of transport.	Qualitative interviews & participant ob

Two-suburb strategy

Transport and urban form mix:

- ✓ 1 'hardly' car reliant suburb (Fitzroy)
- ✓ 1 'highly' car reliant suburb (Maribyrnong)

A mix of other relevant variables:

- ✓ Socioeconomic status
- ✓ Age structure
- ✓ Family types

Sample characteristics

	Male	Female	Total
Maribyrnong	7	14	21
Fitzroy	8	7	15
Total	15	21	36

Age range: 24-81

Time in suburb: 3 months to 60 years

Sample: transport modes

Type	Mode	Never	Sometimes	Daily
Motor vehicle	Car	3	20	13
	Taxi	25	10	1
	Motorbike	34	0	2
Active	Walk	0	13	23
	Cycle	23	9	4
Public transport	Bus	28	7	1
	Tram	17	16	3
	Train	21	13	2

Interview schedule

1. Structured questions

- Class indicators
- Family
- Transport

2. Semi-structured questions

- Is that how you usually get there?
- Describe the trip (why, who, what, how long?)
- What are the dis/advantages? Do you enjoy?

3. Map exercise



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Historical struggles

Doctors and cars

“The medical profession, composed as it is of highly educated and cultivated men, speaking generally, has from the very first clearly appreciated and welcomed automobilisation, not only for its economic, but also its hygienic advantages. The horse indeed, with its natural disposition to discharge offensive faecal material on the streets, is a source of pollution and, as such, its association with those whose business it is to preach the gospel of health is a contradiction in terms.”

(Automotor Journal 1898, quoted in Fredman 1975, p293)

Changing views about health

- British 'garden city' aspirations
- Hygiene
- Pollution
- Diseases of lifestyle
- Road safety
- Social access and place-based ≠
- Environmental sustainability
- Physical inactivity, obesity
- Time, work-life balance etc



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Modern transport practices

Mobile mothering

- Playgroup, playgrounds, swimming lessons, “kinder gym”, music lessons
- Day trips around Melbourne
- Family holidays, visits to extended family, regular family meals
- Shopping eg. food, birthday presents, hardware, books, or ‘browsing’
- Medical appointments eg. hospital, maternal health nurse, chiropractor, pharmacy
- Post office, Medicare
- Leisure eg. river, movies, zoo

Transport as social practice

“Anything under five kilometres, it’s hardly going to take me any longer on the bike and you save petrol, so it gets me exercise, save on the exhaust fumes, stop using up rapidly diminishing fossil fuel resources. I mean, I could tell my kids at least four reasons why I ride the bike.”

(Timothy, secondary school teacher)

Compounding disadvantage

Dave: 27yo, homeless since 14yo, income \$436/week, owes \$2,000 in fines

“I daresay it will come – a warrant – means you have to pay it... they will pick you up, take you in, and charge you... make it an order so you do have to pay it, if not you do community service”

Compounding disadvantage

Suzana: 66yo, ESL, pension, no license

“Normal life, everyday, everyday walking.
To school, to shop, to church, always...
I walk two kilometres from my home to
school [for English classes] and back
home... because saving money... still
bills come it... it’s really hard always
walking everywhere”

Practical logic

“the practical mastery of the logic... or necessity of a game – a mastery acquired by experience of the game, and which works outside conscious control and discourse”

(Bourdieu 1990, p61)

Being a confident driver

Barbara: “never confident enough to get my license”

Megan: “I’m uncoordinated and can’t drive”

Rose: “I don’t want to lose my confidence”

Fred: “normal sort of history of minor incidents... wounded my pride”

'Practical logics' of travel

Driving

- Learning to drive
- Road rules and infringements
- Car purchase and ownership

Cycling

- Watching traffic and negotiating intersections
- Physical fitness
- Equipment and clothing

Public transport

- Ticket machines
- Taking prams and other items
- Language, maps and timetables

A “Toyota man”

“[My husband has] always been into four wheel driving, hunting, camping... bush-bashing whatever, you know, the outdoors... from a very young age... he’s always had his own cars and he’s always pulled them apart and fixed them... and he’s always had a four wheel drive” ... now they own “a family 4WD rather than more of a bloke 4WD.”

“I’m not a cyclist...”

“I don’t actually like riding to work, and arriving feeling hot and sweaty and dishevelled and all that... I’m not a cyclist... even though in principle I think people should cycle, and I like the idea of cities and cyclists and priority for cyclists and so on... I’ve just had too much to carry I think, and I do actually like the peace and the reading [on the train]. I’ll stick with the train.”

Thesis conclusions

- Car reliance was not inevitable
- Health concerns were always part of the struggle
- Culture as potent as geography
- Multiple interests and purposes
- Travel requires 'practical logic'

Thesis recommendations

Policy paradigm	Sustainable transport (harm minimisation)	Sustainable mobility
Focus	Journey	Origin and destination
Actors	Individual travellers	Individuals, families, communities, trip-generating organisations
Goals	Oil, climate change	Oil, climate change, population health and social equity

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