Boy Racers, Dunkirk Spirit and the Pompey Bounce: The use of movement and mobility in impression management and identity formation

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**Abstract**

The importance of being mobile is linked to utilitarian (the need to get from A to B as quickly and safely as possible) and affective (independence, freedom, status, roles, identity) needs. This paper re-analyses primary qualitative data from four research projects, exploring people's motivations for travel. Findings show how people impression manage their transport and travel choices in order to deliberately alter their self and group identity, from owning, using and driving a car and its associations with independence and freedom through to variations in walking style. How affective and utilitarian needs interact in differing contexts are examined, for example how battling congested traffic is associated with feelings of achievement and accomplishment as well as a sense of belonging and solidarity. Implications for considering travel in this wider social context for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Impression management, identity, qualitative data, motivations and needs

1. **Introduction**

This paper starts with the premise that travel behaviour cannot be viewed in isolation to its social context (Musselwhite et al., 2010a,b; O’Connor, 2002) and hence decisions made about mode of travel (e.g. choosing whether to use public transport, to walk, to cycle or to use a car) and behaviour therein (e.g. driver behaviour, user behaviour) are intrinsically linked to social processes. The proposed paper will look in particular at the social importance of movement through travel and transport as an expressive activity, examining, for example, the desire and use of the different modes of transport and how user behaviour is managed and expressed to give certain impressions of the self.

The desire to travel, especially by car, is not surprising in a hypermobile society, where society is increasingly geared around the need to be privately mobile in order to gain access to essential goods, services and shops (Adams, 1999). Indeed, traditionally, research suggests that travel behaviour is primarily motivated by utilitarian or practical needs, and is largely shaped by quantitative factors such as journey length, cost, time and frequency (see for example, Dargay and Hanley, 2002; Jansson, 1993). More recently, research has highlighted the importance of affective and psychosocial needs as motivation for travel behaviour, including identity, self-esteem, autonomy and prestige (Ellaway. et al., 2003; Guiver, 2007; Steg, 2005). Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist (2005) suggest driving is linked to personal identity and is associated with masculinity, youthfulness, status and power. Building on this, previous research suggests that motivation for travel amongst older people can be said to inhabit three main categories: practical, social and aesthetic needs (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b, 2007), where a third category is travel for its own sake, rather than to fulfil a practical or social need. Furthermore, it can be suggested that utilitarian and affective motivations are not mutually exclusive, especially from the point of view of the transport users themselves (Gardner and Abraham, 2007). However, understanding of the affective or social desire of using a car is still poorly conceptualised and understood.

This paper draws upon data collected on four of the author’s recent projects to consider how people use the transport that they choose in order to express elements of the themselves to an outside world. This includes modal choice between different modes (choosing between walking, cycling, using public transport or a car, for example) and within modes (for example, choice of make and type of car). At a further level expressive activity using the mode can take place during travel time itself, building on previous work on travel time use on the bus (Andrews, et al., 2011; Webber, 2010) and the train (Watts, 2008). In addition, driver behaviour can be said to have an affective or expressive capacity. Traditionally research into driver behaviour has concentrated on a skills approach (e.g. Brown and Groeger, 1988; Groeger, 2000; Groeger and Brown, 1989) or a social approach (Musselwhite, 2006; Rolls and Ingham, 1992). This paper plans to examine the relationship between skills and social aspects of driving and address how driver skills can be affected by social factors associated with driver behaviour.

Hence, the paper will therefore explore social concepts that may explain the affective side of travel behaviour and will in particular explore self-identity, impression management and social identity. Identity theory suggests that we construct our sense of self through our interactions with others and that we further shape our self through establishing difference or similarity with others (e.g. Erikson, 1954; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). There is a growing realisation that self-image is constructed and maintained through the consumption of goods and lifestyles as well as verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Belk, 1988; Goffman, 1982). Identity has been found to significantly increase the predictive power of the Azjen’s Theory of Planned Behaviour in various behaviours, including blood donation (Charng, et al., 1988), ethical shopping (Sparks and Shepherd, 1992) and recycling (Terry, et al., 1999; Mannetti, et al., 2004). Steg, *et al.* (2001) found the symbolic aspect of driving, in particular, may satisfy a need individuals have to express themselves and reveal their social status, thus revealing social identity. Wright and Egan (2000) have shown the importance of the symbolism of the car and the affective function it fulfils in a society. In terms of other modes, affective motivations for cycling (Gatersleben and Haddad, 2010) and for motorcycling (Christmas et al., 2009; Musselwhite et al., 2010) have been noted. But as Hounsham (2006) notes, however, more research is needed on identity and modal choice,

“We’ve also misunderstood what consumer goods actually *mean* to people, ignoring their connections with personal identity, esteem and belonging. Nowhere have we got things more wrong than in understanding car use. Pleas for people to cut car use in favour of public transport are on their own more or less a waste of time because they miss the fundamental point. Cars are much more than a means of getting from A to B. Indeed if that were all they were good for, these expensive items wouldn’t be needed at all in many, if not most, people’s lives. The car is less about transport and more about a sense of freedom, perceived convenience and personal identity.” (Hounsham, 2006, pg.8)

**2. Method**

The research involved re-analysis of findings from qualitative data emanating from four completed research projects:-

2.1 Study 1. Driver and road user attitudes, behaviour and speed management interventions (2000-2004)

The project looked at driver attitudes and their risk taking behaviour, examining how risk may be mitigated through various interventions (such as speed limiters, traffic calming and increased speed camera enforcement). A total 57 participants (32 male, 25 female) took part in semi-structured interviews. The participant ages ranged from 17 to 81 years-old, although the oldest driver was 64 years old. A total of 19 had one or more children aged less than 16 years-old. The majority of the interviewees lived on a residential estate..A total of 47 of the interviewees held a full UK driving licence (between 3 months and 47 years). Of the ten that did not hold full UK driving licences: nine did not hold a licence and one held a provisional UK driving licence. One individual held a Public Service Vehicle (PSV) licence and drove buses regularly. The sample drove a similar number of trips and miles per week as the UK national average. For further details see Musselwhite (2004, 2006). The interviews, lasting around one hour each, examined individual’s attitudes and behaviours with regards to general driving and road user practice on a variety of different types of road and included self-perception of driving, walking and cycling behaviour compared to other drivers’ behaviour. Attitudes people have towards driving and active travel in general were also discussed and the opportunity for individuals to analyse whether these attitudes affect their behaviour and to search through the interconnecting relationships of background variables, attitudes and behaviour also took place. Finally the interviews examined speed management interventions including traffic calming, dynamic speed humps, street reclaiming, traffic enforcement, intelligent speed adaptation (technology that limits the vehicle to a top speed, for example the speed limit of the road being driven on), adaptive cruise control (technology that keeps the vehicle at a consistent speed and distance to the vehicle in front) and black box technology (technology that records and logs a variety of driver behaviours, that could be used in pay as you go insurance). These variances in driving context were examined in order to ascertain more variety in terms of attitude to driving and cars.

2.2 Study 2. Public acceptability of road pricing (2006-2008)

This project aimed to study in-depth people’s attitudes to being charged in different ways to use the road (road pricing). The methodological approach involved 7 waves of data collection and in-depth qualitative analysis. For full details see Musselwhite and Lyons (2009) and Owen et al. (2008).Participants were purposively selected from the general public to take part in the study on the basis of a variety of key variables, including: age; socio-economic group (ABC1 and C2DE); level of interest in current affairs; gender; ethnicity; disability; and car usage. Groups of participants were identified initially for eight local authority areas in England and Wales selected because they were considering the potential for introducing road pricing (to varying degrees). With six groups per area reflecting a range of urban and rural locations, a total of 46 groups took part in the first phase of the research with each group convened twice (one area had difficulty recruiting and only ran with four groups). A total of 446 participants took part in wave one. All the participants were invited to attend the second wave of group discussions, and 380 (85.2%) returned. A total of 259 participants took part in wave three, who were selected from five of the eight areas, in order to concentrate on a smaller number of areas in more depth. It was ensured that quotas of the demographic background of participants from the remaining areas were kept. A total of 143 participants took part in wave four, who were recruited from three areas. All participants in wave four were invited to attend the group discussions for wave five, and 137 (95.8%) returned for wave five. At wave six, 20 participants were invited to attend each workshop who had been involved in at least three waves of discussion groups. A total of 89 participants attended the workshops in the five areas who took part in wave three. Each focus group lasted one and a half hours. In addition, at wave seven, 48 of the participants who took part in the group discussions were recruited to take part in telephone depth interviews which lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Each participant was rewarded with an incentive for taking part in each wave with the level of incentive ramped across the seven waves.

Wave one and two discussions focussed on the issue of congestion and what it meant to the participants and to society as a whole and addressed whether it was a significant enough problem that required some form of solution. At wave three more depth was given to discussing congestion and solutions at a local level in an effort to move the discussion on from ‘knee-jerk’ reactions to more considered and personal responses. Wave three also introduced the principle of road pricing in line. Waves four and five required the discussion to move beyond these levels to look at the attitudes towards and acceptability of road pricing when more specific aspects were introduced. Wave six concentrated on bringing together the main findings from waves one to five and seeking public attitudes towards them and investigating the effect of communications on the acceptability of road pricing. Wave seven refocused on the key areas of discussion that had taken place in waves one to five. A particular area of focus in the interviews at wave seven was to explore whether the participants felt that their acceptability of road pricing had changed since they became involved in the research and the reasons for this.

2.3 Study 3. Prolonging safe driving through technology

This project looked at whether older people would accept technology that might prolong their driving behaviour, reducing the need to give up driving, while making it safer. In addition and most relevant for this project, it also addressed older people’s travel needs. Full methodology and results can be found in the report (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2007) and a paper (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010). A total of 26 participants (18 males and 8 females) who were still driving took part in 2 focus groups and completed a travel diary and an interview. The sample consisted of ages ranging from 68 to 90 years old (with the mean average being 75 years old). All of the participants had a current driving licence and owned, or had access to, a car. On average, participants drove 109 miles per week, ranging from 20 to 400 miles. This compares favourably to the national statistics on driving in the UK at the same time. Wave one of the focus group was semi-structured, so that the needs and issues raised came from the participants themselves. Driving experience was discussed including common journeys made by car, journeys by other modes, reason for mode choice, main barriers faced while driving and how such barriers are overcome. In order to generate a discussion on the relative merits of functional and psychosocial factors involved in travel, a card-sort task was devised where participants worked in two groups (split by gender) to discuss the relative importance of functional (e.g. travel is important to allow me to complete my daily tasks), identity (e.g. travelling helps define who I am), self-esteem (e.g. travel makes me feel good about myself) and prestige factors (e.g. travel makes me feel like I am doing well in life) and asked to rate each on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree and then place 16 cards in relative order . The statements were developed from previous questionnaires and interview schedules (e.g. Ellaway et al., 2003; Musselwhite 2004, 2006). In addition, a discussion on giving-up driving and associated issues also took place. The second wave of focus groups used a board-game to initiate and develop a discussion about travel and driving needs and issues. The game involved matching cards concerning specific motivation and reasons for travel with mobility and driving barriers (all previously discussed in the earlier stages of data collection). As cards appeared a discussion on the issue named on the card took place. The board-game approach to the focus group allowed topics to appear in a random-order, reducing order-effect bias, and create a friendly yet competitive spirit which influenced conversation and directed focus. In addition, it enabled some of the quieter members to engage and reduced the effects of dominant individuals. In-between focus groups, participants completed a driver diary. The aim of the diary was to get participants to record their driving, mobility and travel needs as and when they happened, rather than retrospectively as would happen in the interviews and focus groups. The diaries were given out at the first focus group and collected in at the second focus group and were discussed during the telephone interview. Individuals had a proforma to keep details of any journeys made (date, number of miles, number of passengers, destination etc), journey purpose and the opportunity to record anything unusual that happened and any particular issues or problems that arose. They were asked to keep the diary and record details for as long as they liked. They were kept on average for 19 days and covered 8.2 journeys (many of them return journeys) with an average mileage of 240.7 miles (an average of 29 miles per journey or 88.7 miles per week).

In addition, interviews with 31 drivers (18 males and 13 females), who had given up driving in the previous 18-6 months period prior to the interview also took part in an interview. The sample consisted of ages ranging from 65 to 92 years old (mean = 76 years old). On average, participants drove 91 miles per week prior to giving-up driving, ranging from 15 to 200 miles. This again compared favourably to the national statistics on driving in the UK at the time. The interviews were semi-structured and involved re-visiting travel and driving needs from wave 1 focus groups and assessed barriers to meeting such needs. The interview allowed researchers to explore the findings in more depth at an individual and personal level rather than in a social group setting. This was particularly useful for quieter members of the group who felt able to articulate their views in more depth in a one-on-one situation but also acted as a first level validity check on answers being given.

2.4 Study 4. Attitudes to road user safety

This research aimed to address the public attitudes to road user safety and engaged 228 members of the public across the following four locations in the UK: London, Bradford, Glasgow and North-West Wales (Llandudno and Wrexham). The areas were chosen to reflect a range of socio-economic variables and well as a mix of urban (London, Glasgow and Bradford) and rural (North-West Wales) environments. Within each area an attempt was made to recruit 60 participants into one of six groups, with ten participants in each group, selected in response to include different road user groups, life-stages and attitudes to risk. This was a deliberate attempt to engage a diverse range of participants known to have differing views on road user safety as had been found in the extensive literature review (Musselwhite et al., 2010a), rather than simply base recruitment on socio-demographic details as is the norm.

Each group met on 3 occasions and hence participants were engaged in three reconvened workshops across the four areas. Workshops were held approximately three weeks apart. The first workshops were held during the evening and lasted for 2.5 hours. The final workshop was held over the course of a Saturday and lasted 7 hours. Each workshop focused on a different road safety issue. Workshop 1 explored risk taking on the road in the context of wider risk taking and norm guiding behaviours. Workshop 2 explored the relationship between different road user groups, including car drivers, motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. Workshop 3 explored participants’ views on potential road safety interventions, in terms of perceived effectiveness and fairness. Full details and findings in a final report (Musselwhite et al., 2010b)

2.5 Re-analysis of the data

In each case original transcripts were read and a new thematic analysis took place in light of searching for elements, nodes and distinctions that describe affective notions relating to expressive and affective notions of mobility and travel. A process of detection of units of meaning into areas of distinction: general; essential; and relevant and of recurring themes using axial coding was then established and further reduction is possible by selective coding which places the axial coded responses into discrete categories. The analysis technique will lead to reporting as a narrative which represents the knowledge acquired in a human and cultural dimension. Thus, actual examples of knowledge will be included in the form of speech narrative and dialogue highlighting the main outcomes. Of equal importance to the themes is the context within which the themes are being discussed, in this case the form of transport and situation within the travel behaviour that themes relate to. Hence, the dominant context for the expressions were noted alongside key themes. Three contexts were found: driving, congested environments and walking.

**3. Findings**

The re-analysis showed three contexts where the affective notion of movement is clearly found. First, affect is found in the case of younger drivers and the independence, freedom and identity. Secondly, affect is found in being held-up in congested traffic. Finally, affect is seen in terms of pedestrian behaviour. Each context will be taken in turn and described by the participants. A discussion including implications follows.

3.1 Context 1 – Expression, cars and driving. The case of the boy racers.

There is great anticipation of driving that is remembered amongst younger people, prior to when they drive,

*“at school we’d all been looking forward to driving”*

*[Nods all round]*

Study 4

Some of the excitement about driving continues when the younger driver drives. This can be related to the concept of perceived freedom the car brings.

*“yeah I love driving. It gives me freedom. I can go when and where I want”*

Study 1

*“No one tells me to what to do with it. I’m free”*

Study 1

In addition, the car can be decorated to say something about the person themselves. A deliberate manipulation of impression management,

*“F: I dress my car up, you know to make it look nice*

*M: Typical girl*

*F: Shut up.*

*M: (mocking) Like a dolly?*

*F: Shut up you. I mean, you know you give it you know a personality...*

*M: Yeah and a name. I bet you have haven’t you*

*F: well yeah, it’s called Olly.*

*LAUGHS from group*

*F: But you know it’s mine and I want to show the world it’s mine. Stamp my personality on it. So I have stickers...cuddly toys.*

*GROANS from the group*

*F:what you don’t at all*

*M: no*

*F: no modifications?*

*M: well yeah. Hell yeah. I’ve got an ace ICE (in car entertainment system) I put in. I saved up and put in myself. Sub woofer in the boot*

*F: there you are*

*M:that’s not dressing it up. That’s essential (laughs). Well it is. It has a function. It ain’t just pretty*

*F: The lights and stuff are. On it. The dials and knobs, lights and that they’re pretty*

*M: shut up”*

Study 2

Females were more forthcoming about their decoration and did not feel the need to attribute it to anything in particular. It was often for its own sake! Males on the other hand, usually related it to something functional. More aesthetic decoration tended to be related to wanting to be seen as knowledgeable about a car.

*“M: you got go faster stripes.*

*R: Have you got them?*

*M: No no way.*

*R: have you got nothing on your vehicle then?*

*M: er no no. Well I did put a spoiler on the back and I bought a crome finishing pack*

*R: OK, so why?*

*M: looks nicer doesn’t it?*

*R: do people say so?*

*M: yes*

*R: who?*

*M: mates and that. And sometimes people who know you know. They say you got nice wheels mate. It matters, shows you know what you’re doing with cars and that*

*R: And that’s important*

*M: yeah it is I think.”*

Study 4

Females more likely to use the car to say something about themselves, perhaps even an embodiment of the car itself and certainly not related to motoring,

*“My car. It’s pink and fluffy inside but it has a 2 litre engine, spoiler and alloys. It kind of like me. A tomboy. Hard on the outside but still soft and girly on the inside”*

Study 1

There is evidence that this extends to driving too, this was linked to behaving in a way that was expected of them, especially at a young age. Even though younger drivers admitted risky driving occurred when friends were present, when there was immediate social or peer pressure to drive riskily, such driving could occur because it was believed friends might be present and might see them outside of the vehicle,

*“M: I’m probably an aggressive driver, yeah. I am. My mates would say so. I don’t think I’m dangerous, but I take risks yeah.*

*R: why?*

*M: I don’t know really. I just do you know, It’s me.*

*R: Are you a risky person would you say?*

*M: not really. I think you do just drive like that don’t you. You know at my age. You know. I think you’d look silly driving slow and that like an old dodderer when you’re my age.”*

Study 3

It was often linked to fun,

*“M: It’s fun isn’t it. To floor the accelerator. You get a buzz.*

*R: Do older people do that?*

*M: No way!*

*R: Why not?*

*M: Er I suppose they’ve done it. Haven’t they. It’s no longer a thrill*

*R: And they don’t have the reactions to do it, as you do when you’re young”*

Study 4

Older drivers also noted such behaviour was not appropriate for them, some mentioning they did drive more aggressively when younger,

*“We all used to didn’t we though. The thrill of speed. You sort of grow out of it!”*

Study 4

Others thinking it was more of a modern day behaviour,

*“Everyone’s in such a hurry. And youngsters today doing their car up. And driving like mad things. They don’t care. We used to. We had to. But now its different. Live for the moment, impress your mates. Well it doesn’t impress me.”*

Study 3

Yet older people wish to be seen to drive in a certain manner. Many older males, for example, noted the importance of driving safely and how that expressed their capability to drive,

*“I like to think I’m very safe. It’s important I convey that to others, so they have confidence in my driving. So I drive extra specially safe”*

Study 3

3.2 Context 2 – Dunkirk Spirit and battling through congestion

On the whole people discussed being stuck in congestion in negative terms, especially in relation to practical difficulties. But also the negative affect of being in congestion

*“It’s just like proper road rage. I could just ram everyone out the way.”*

Study 2

*“It is very tiring in the morning, and by the time you get to work, you are snappy, and can’t be bothered.”*

Study 2

They tended to feel it was worse when attributable to deliberate

Also, could distance themselves from congestion by saying someone other than people like themselves was likely to be causing it.

Ownership over being part of the cause of traffic jam or congestion was more likely amongst younger people,

*"I think one of the things is because we are all sort of relatively young we have grown up in our short driving lives, that is how it has been, whereas, like I noticed the (other focus) group when I came in was slightly older, they have probably seen it get worse and are probably more concerned than we are because we don't know any different.*"

Study 2

However, underlying this it could be argued individuals gained something positive from sitting in congested traffic. It enabled them to story tell in quite a lot of detail, quite often with a competitive element to it,

*“M: I sit in traffic every day going along the M4, it takes about an hour to go seven miles. Ihaven’t any other choice. I have to do it for getting to work.*

*M: Me. Mine is around 2 hours for 10 miles, seriously. Every day., It drives you crazy but you’re right you gotta do it for work”*

Study 2

It was also noted it was now an acceptable excuse at work for being late

*“People are more tolerant I would say, if you say I am late because I was stuck in traffic and like 10 years ago it’d be ‘like you what?”*

Study 2

It enabled them to discuss scenarios that they enter and win, like soling a puzzle, and they enjoyed telling others about this

*“You don’t have to go that way mate. No. I try a route via Corkhill Way, turn left at the Radlett Roundabout and then right then left onto Thomason Street, take a right and you’re back on the main road, much quicker”*

Study 4

*“People’ll help you. Down the pub a stranger overheard me saying how I get stuck and he suggested a new route which I do now. It helps a little!”*

Study 1

It is an important status symbol, being linked to the importance of going to work, especially in light of entering this battle everyday to provide for one’s family,

*“It’s like a battle ground you go through each day on your way to work. You know what I’m saying. When I get there you are tired and stressed but you have to do it don’t you. It’s part of the working day. It’s what you do for your work, for your family, you know, for yourself”*

Study 1

*“yeah yeah. It’s hard every day to do it. But what choice. Someone’s got to do work and bring the money home. So I sit there and think that otherwise I’d stress out big time”*

Study 2

*“Although it’s awful, right, I suppose it’s what you have to do now. I have to work, I have to get to work. I don’t like either! But what else is there. It’s a big investment the time, the stress, but I get paid and I have a job”*

Study 2

There is also a social element to the congestion, a feeling of solidarity,

*“I mean it’s no different for others is it. We’re all going to work. We all moan about it. But we all face it together. And we do all get through it!”*

Study 2

This was termed by one participant as Dunkirk Spirit after the sense of pulling together that British troops faced in adversity during the evacuation of over 338,000 allied troops, during the Battle of Dunkirk in World War 2, following being cut-off by German soldiers,

*“It is I guess like a very British thing. We’re all in this together and we’ll pull through. We moan a lot us Brits, but we do it and you know we can laugh about it afterwards, you know how hellish or nightmarish your journey was. Bit like we have a sense of Dunkirk Spirit about us”*

Study 2

3.3 Context 3 – Walking and the Case of the Pompey Bounce

Deliberate manipulation of mobile behaviour is not confined to vehicles. During discussions on pedestrian behaviour amongst the research, distinct types of walking were identified by the participants. As an example, the Pompey Bounce, was labelled by groups in Hampshire. It was a prominent swagger characterised by almost as much vertical as horizontal movement from the hips.

People identified the particular walk to particular types of people, typically young (14-25 year olds), male and working-class; often linked to wider elements of youth culture like dress,

*“It’s what them geezers do. Sort of walk with a high energy and that. It’s a mush thing.”*

Study 1

*“I think it’s their trainers. All pumped up they are. Girls do it too. Sometimes”*

Study 1

The walk is also often linked in to large peer groups of people and to wider social situations and contexts, especially informal events,

*“You see groups of them on the ferry on a Saturday night. All dressed up and doing that kind of walk thing”*

Study 1

Younger people asked in the focus groups if they walked like that. Some were affronted,

*“I don’t deliberately do it. No way. It’s just the way I walk”*

Study 1

Other noted the wider context of the walk, such as it being about being confident

*“I think I walk confidently. I’m proud of who I am.”*

Study 1

Finally, some admitted they walked in such a manner and did so deliberately to create an impression of themselves,

*“Yeah, it’s a swagger, it’s a statement of intent of who I am. It gives me gravitas. It announces this is me”*

Study 4

**4. Discussion**

In the three different contexts it is clear that transport and travel is used in deliberate ways by individuals to express something about themselves to the outside world. This is done both through the medium itself, for example by presenting the mode in certain ways, and through discussing the transport and travel with people after the event. This has implications for the way we view travel and transport in society. Transport policy, practice and research has traditionally viewed transport in terms of practical functions, of getting from A to B as quickly, cheaply, efficiently and safely as possible (e.g. Dargay and Hanley, 2002; Jansson, 1993). However, it is far more than that for people, it contains an affective and expressive component, a vehicle to demonstrate connection with others, with society, with certain groups, a communicative vessel for demonstrating affiliations, status and roles. Hence, any attempts commensurate with achieving modal shift from the car to less polluting modes need to be highly aware of the affective and expressive side of transport. Thought needs to be given as to how other modes, especially public transport, might be developed or altered to encourage synergy with this emotive element. Further research should investigate whether travel by bus or train, for example, contains emotive and expressive channels for people and, if so, how these might be maximised.

The concept of the car being something to express the individual personality is contrary to deindivduation theory which suggests the car cocoons the individual allowing them to hide behind the anonymity of the car and behave differently to how they normally would do so. This theory underpinned much work on road rage (Fraine et al., 2007). Further work on the tension between deindividuation and impression management is needed. Is it possible both could be at play in a transport context? For example, the car allows both an expression of the self and a place of refuge and hiding. The car is at once a social and a social-less vehicle and individuals can alter how they use the vehicle for expression between the two extremes. How far this is evident again on less polluting modes, such as public transport is also worth noting. Individuals create a sanctuary for themselves through the use of listening to music through headphones, create their own territory through use of props such as books, magazines, bags and laptops. Yet they can also express something about themselves in the process by managing how this is done and what magazines, books and the like are on show to others. There is always a social side to our travel, it is not done in isolation and individuals seek to manipulate expressive activities within the social sphere to display something about themselves to others.

It is also the case that amongst younger drivers, especially male drivers, that driving in a risky manner, especially showing speed, is commensurate with a positive identity and expressing something about their personality. How this changes over time needs further investigation, as research tends to suggest that older drivers drive with less deliberate risk taking (e.g. Musselwhite, 2006). Is risk taking not championed by older people? Have they reduced or filtered the need to be seen as reckless or risk taking? Has this been moved to other elements of life? Or are the factors that they are determined by or begin evaluated by different in later life? For example, Musselwhite and Haddad (2010a) suggest that driving safely through driving slowly and cautiously is held in high regard amongst older people to prove to others that they are highly experienced and capable drivers. How norms and expectations might be changed to create new safer behaviour in younger drivers should be examined further, there needs to be a move away from positive appraisal taking risks and surviving them.

It is shown that younger people are using their vehicle to express something about themselves, but why this might be is not completely clear from the findings. How did people express their identity before vehicle ownership? Or indeed, is there now a new modern-day need to show identity in this manner that used to be absent? It could be argued that a lack of independence in other elements of life could be causing this need. Younger people are living at home longer than previous generations in the UK and in other western countries (ONS, 2010) due to a variety of reasons including costs of housing, which delays independence. It could be argued that perceptions of an increase in temporality and uncertainty in the job market mean it is more difficult to make a career than ever before and hence difficult to show identity through career choice. So, perhaps the car has become an achievable symbol of independence and adulthood and thus in turn of the self, taking over from traditional permanent life definers such as house, job and family. Similarly, perhaps situations where risk can be displayed have been reduced in society, as children are kept indoors and chaperoned much more often and later on in their childhood than ever before (Huttenmose, 2005; PlayEngland, 2008, Russell, 2010) delaying their ability to explore, discover and take risks Opportunities for exploring, discovering and risk taking are reduced and perhaps not discovered until the independence of driving allows these elements to be present.

It becomes complex to convince the public that congestion is a problem worth solving. On the one hand the public are very much against being held up in congestion. But at the same time it is used as a mechanism to create narratives over the importance of the individual. Hence, attempts at reducing congestion may not be fully embraced if substitutes for such narratives cannot be found elsewhere. The value of travel-time use has been shown to be positive (Jain and Lyons, 2008) and the findings here add an extra dimension. The narrative around congestion creates a situation in which people need to conquer and battle their way through. Something for them to enter and win, a possible path to self-fulfilment and self-actualisation, otherwise absent from their daily commute and possibly their daily lives. Could this mental challenge be re-directed away from congestion to other elements of travel or life to allow congestion to be reduced? Other modes might offer this kind of battle, cycling through traffic or being on crowded trains or buses, but transfers a mental battle to a physical one, perhaps one people do not feel able to engage with. Are such mental battles missing from our everyday lives? Are they missing from the workplace as tasks become more mundane, structured, regimented and computerised? Are they missing from our home lives ever situated around mechanisation and structure? Evidently more research is needed on this.

Importantly these expressive activities happen not just when peers or passengers are present. People are expecting to be watched and evaluated by others and that others will attribute meaning and perception to these observations. Hence, this requires people to manage impressions of themselves at all times. These impressions are context specific and are bound by norms in society such as ages, culture and class. From the findings it seems people are different in both their awareness of the expressive nature of their being in transport and their motivation to use this expressive activity. Hence, not everyone uses transport to express something about themselves. Further research should look at where amongst the population such differences reside and why, for example why are there age and gender differences (e.g. the concept of “boy racers”) and are there other differences due to the context or personality of the individual.

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