The Fast and the Spurious: Geographies of Youth Car Culture in Hamilton, New Zealand

by Paul Beere

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ABSTRACT

“Boy racers” or “hoons” attract extensive media attention and are often the focus of public concern. Discourses about “hooning” often focus on notions of public safety and illegal behaviour. What is largely absent from these debates is alternative explanations as to why young people choose to engage in “hooning” behaviour, what drives them to congregate in public spaces and why they choose to express themselves through an “autocentric” culture. When these issues are addressed it is usually within broader policy frameworks which seek ways of dissipating youth activities in spaces constructed as “trouble spots”. This thesis represents an attempt to provide a reverse discourse about youth car culture and young people’s presence in public spaces. Criminal activity not withstanding, youth car culture behaviour in this context is treated as a legitimate form of cultural expression that has the same social validity as other non-mainstream phenomena. Through feminist and poststructuralist understandings of identities, landscapes and place, the complexities of youth car culture will be unpacked in an attempt to expose “concerns” which may turn out to be little more than moral panic.

Key terms: boy racers, hoons, hooning, youth, identities, masculinities, cars

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Burnouts	Spinning the tyres of a car whilst remaining relatively stationary. The result produces a plume of acrid, blue smoke. Also known as wheel spins or wheelies.
Donuts	Performing a tight, circular burnout.
Drop the diesel	To pour diesel on a concrete or asphalt surface to assist the ability to do burnouts. Also known as “laying down diesel”.
Hoons	Colloquial term for “boy racer” specific to New Zealand and Australia.
Hooning	Encompasses driving behaviours ranging from cruising within the road rules to illegal activities. Used both as a negative marker by the wider community and as a positive description by youth car culture enthusiasts e.g.: “Went hooning in the weekend, it was great.”
Laps/Doing laps	Driving in a circuit around urban streets. Usually, but not exclusively, in the CBD and often in convoy with a number of other friends/acquaintances.
LTSA	Land Transport Safety Authority.
Park up/Parked up	To congregate in a place suitable for socialising.
Rotary	Engine with a rotary rather than plumb piston system. Most often associated with the Mazda brand.
Under the hood	Reference to modifications and/or specifications of motor. Any work done to the motor is often referred to as work done under the hood.
V6/V8	Large engine with six or eight cylinders respectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

Here in my car
I feel safest of all
I can lock all the doors
It's the only way to live
In cars

Gary Numan, Cars

America is all about speed.
Hot, nasty, bad ass speed.

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1936

For almost as long as the existence of cars, youths (almost exclusively male) have challenged hegemonic discourses relating to how urban spaces are used. These dominant discourses tend to construct all youth car culture enthusiasts as lawless, public menaces whose behaviour impacts on the financial economies and "safeness" of spaces and places. These discourses often revolve around notions of excessive speed and sound pollution (loud exhausts, stereo systems). Police, vested interest groups (hoteliers association), and central and local authorities have instigated a number of initiatives to curb the impacts of hooning behaviours (harsher legislative penalties, modifying hooning landscapes, surveillance, providing supervised hooning spots and activities). Overall hooning activity appears to have remained constant, if not increased, in spite of actions taken by authoritative bodies.

Historical Context

As someone who was once actively involved in the scene, the resistance of youth car culture in spite of legislative intervention fascinates me. It is now 20 years since I first became interested in cars and the youth car culture community in Hamilton has undergone a number of changes. The most noticeable change is the proliferation of modified cars visible within Hamilton. Whilst Hamilton's population has increased by 12.66 percent from 114,725 in 1986 to 129,249 in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand 2007), this growth is less than the growth in youth car culture participation. Throughout the mid to late 1980s, Victoria Street (the main street of Hamilton) on Friday and Saturday nights was certainly the domain of young people and their cars. However, the financial challenges of getting a car were far greater than today. Unless you were lucky enough to have a car bought for you by your parents, working and saving was the only legal way to gain automotivity.

The introduction of imported second hand cars from Japan in the mid 1980s drove down the cost of cars in New Zealand. This had little impact for my peers and I at the time as prices often remained too high. Even if you could afford one, the cost of modifying the cosmetic and/or performance of the car was only accessible to the wealthy or truly committed and mostly older car enthusiasts. Today, it is possible for young people to obtain loans from finance companies with relative ease. The modifications necessary to produce an "outstanding" vehicle can cost anywhere from $20,000 upwards. Some of the people spoken to during this research had spent at least that much on the engine alone.

Whilst change has occurred, there are still many parallels between youth car culture today and that of 20 years ago. “Laps” still occur in the same places, males dominate the culture and spaces are contested and negotiated within the bounds of surveillance, public opinion and the law. There have also been a number of changes from twenty years ago. For instance, there are now greater numbers of women participating in youth car culture. Technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones are now commonplace, whereas they were completely absent when I was a youth car culture enthusiast. The types of cars and the range of modifications have also changed significantly. In light of these changes (and continuities), and as a means to provide a benchmark to highlight competing discourses of youth car culture, it is necessary to define what youth car culture is within the context of this thesis.

A Definition of Youth Car Culture

Providing a definition of youth car culture is highly problematic. This in part is due to the difficulties of not only what “culture” means but also because of the slippery nature of the term “youth” (Holloway and Valentine 2000, Serafica and Vargas 2006 591). There are likely to be as many definitions as there are youth car culture enthusiasts. My own shifting positionality over the last 20 years, and the fluidity of youth cultures in general (Massey 1998), made me uneasy about settling on a definition of youth car culture. Instead, I have drawn on my historical and contemporary experiences to offer a definition of what youth car culture *enthusiasts* are. In this way, I hope to demonstrate what youth car culture *can be* rather than what it *is*.

For the purposes of this thesis, I draw on Peter Kloos' (1991 15 cited in Advisory Council on International Affairs 1998 9) definition that states 'culture means the entire set of customs, institutions, symbols, conceptions and values of a group. Culture includes not only learned behaviour, but also language, and hence whatever can be thought and uttered.' In relation to the use of the term youth, it is not used here as a reflection of the chronological age of the bodies of youth car culture participants per se. Instead, youth is used to describe the attitudes of participants, the distinct markers that dominate youth car culture, and the discursive representations of youth car culture.

There are four main reasons that inform my use of the term youth car culture. Firstly, the youth car culture scene is dominated by people under 25. However, regardless of age, it is the attraction of owning and modifying imported Japanese cars that is a far more significant marker than age. Secondly, the types of modifications are also generally a departure from other car culture enthusiast groups. Rather than trying to maintain the original look and condition of a car such as for classic car enthusiasts,[1] performance and cosmetic modifications synonymous with youth car culture often alter the car so much that it is difficult to determine what the make of the car is. Modifications such as lowering the car's profile and removal of brand badges, whilst not unique to youth car culture, occur more often than not. Thirdly, it is the spaces and places occupied, and the social practices of youth car culture enthusiasts that also set them apart. This will be discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5. Fourthly, broader discursive understandings of the modified Japanese

import scene generally position youth car culture as something that young people “do”. However, the term normally applied to youth car culture enthusiasts is “boy racers”. The use of the term youth car culture enthusiasts represents a conscious departure from dominant discursive understandings, whilst still retaining meanings relevant to the lives of this group. This definition is treated as problematic, as the ‘activity of representing a culture, subculture, or indeed any coherent domain of collective activity is always strategic and selective’ (Clifford 1999 66). It is important to acknowledge that this definition is far from exhaustive. Further, even though the term culture is vague, it is not redundant. Clifford (1999) argues it is still necessary to be able to refer to a culture holistically, such as youth car culture, as a differentially coherent entity.

In this thesis I have chosen to avoid the use of the term subculture as it tends to set one group up as “other” to the dominant cultural norm. By problematising the use of the term subculture, the extent to which young people’s activities are constructed as oppositional or resistant to dominant cultural forms is necessarily suspended (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002 186). Therefore, youth car culture will not be treated as an aside or a “quirky” stream within a larger cultural umbrella, but rather as an integral part of what makes up Hamilton’s cultural landscape. However, as Carrabine and Longhurst (2002 185) argue, the term subculture is not bankrupt, ‘rather it has been worn out through over use and is burdened under a weight of connotation, when deployed in the service of making sense of what it is to be young.’

Youth Car Culture and the Law

On May 2nd 2003, the Land Transport Unauthorised Street and Drag Racing Amendment Act 2003 (herein referred to as the Act 2003) was passed, giving police the power to impound vehicles they suspect have engaged in street racing or sustained loss of traction (also known as wheelspins or burnouts). The intention of the Act 2003 was to reduce the number of deaths and accidents resulting from "organised" illegal street activity involving cars. However, from

> May 2002 to April 2003, racing contributed to 55 crashes, including five fatal accidents, compared to 39 crashes (including four fatals) between May 2003 and April 2004. In the year leading up to the bill, wheelspins contributed to 21 crashes and no deaths; in the year after the Act, wheelspins contributed to 19 crashes and one death.
>
> (*Sunday Star Times*, 12th September 2004 9)

It is clear then that the Act 2003 has not achieved its objective. The failure is often attributed to offenders finding new ways of 'dodging the law - in particular, by monitoring police movements with scanners and alerting other racers by text messages. "All these guys are doing is thumbing their noses at the law."' (*Sunday Star Times*, 12th September 2004 9).

The Act 2003 has been criticised by other road users as well. A number of innocent drivers and car club members have fallen prey to the new legislation. In one instance, a man had his car impounded after he lost traction in his car after pulling away from traffic lights in heavy rain. The Act 2003 has also penalised class A (road legal) rally car owners as

exhaust modifications necessary for increased race performance had been outlawed (*The Press*, 20th May 2003).

Since coming into law, a number of local authorities including the Hamilton City Council have noted no decline in the incidence of activities the Act 2003 was designed to curb. Letters to newspapers continue to lambaste the actions of young people driving cars with loud exhausts and sound systems. Public scrutiny and surveillance is often directed at young people for no other reason other than they are in a “hoon car” or they have congregated in a “hoon space”. However, narratives of young people (Dawes 2002) and the police tend to suggest perpetrators are in the minority.

Much of the focus from the police, city councillors and other groups has focused on legal transgressions and the rights of citizens to be free from the impacts of excessive noise. While it is important for citizens to operate within the road laws and rules, what is largely missing from the debates is an understanding of youth car culture as a valid means of cultural expression. This is particularly evident in the media where the positive contributions of youth car culture are often overshadowed or become confused with illegal behaviours.

Through channels such as the news media, I argue understandings of young people and their means of expressing themselves have been skewed to such a degree that young drivers are arbitrarily demonised. The dismissive caption in the Tui billboard shown in Figure 1 is a clear

example of this. Mass media sources such as the film *The Fast and the Furious*[2] have also been blamed for encouraging negative driving behaviours in young people. Ignoring the cultural depth of youth car culture and the role cars play in the construction and maintenance of young people's lives and identities not only leads to young people being demonised, but also impoverishes our understandings of youth culture. It is not only young people who become disadvantaged through this process as there are very real implications for policy makers, law enforcement officials and the wider community.

Figure 1: Hamilton Billboard 12th October 2006.

By allowing legality to dominate debates, ironically the efficacy of legislative initiatives has been rendered virtually impotent. This, in part, can be traced to the absence of direct engagement with the role car culture plays not only in young people's lives, but also in Western societies

as a whole. Whilst at first it seems this is a sweeping generalisation, the cultural specificities that have emerged in youth car culture in Hamilton have their origins in a global culture of autocentricity. Most of the rhetoric focuses on stamping out the “boy racer” menace. Very few initiatives designed to achieve this goal have succeeded. Reasons given are that, through the use of communications technology, the “perpetrators” have become more resourceful in avoiding detection. I argue this perspective misses the point altogether. As Sheller and Urry (2000 cited in Sheller 2004) argue, solutions to issues relating to car usage are dealt with in normative and disembodied ways. The resilience is not simply a sign of what is often constructed as traditional youth rebellion but also it is evidence that youth car culture is a deeply entrenched and complex culture in Hamilton. Given the level of emotion hooning engenders, this view may be somewhat unpopular. However, the questions remain - *what is it that compels young people to express their identities through cars*? *How is youth car culture shaped by and shaping Hamilton’s cultural landscape*? These two questions are the focus of this thesis.

Thesis Outline

Using a combination of a key informant interview, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and critical readings of key mass media texts, I explore Hamilton’s youth car culture with the intention of providing a more nuanced account than what is currently present in mainstream media sources. The intention is to tease out how and why young people shape their identities in and through cars and how cars feed back into

young people's embodied and social experiences. In chapter 2 I review theoretical debates relating to youth and the identities of young people. I then further this review by focusing on issues relating specifically to gender, youth cultures and difference. The importance of geographic scales as mechanisms of social control is then discussed to illustrate the role spaces and places play in the identity politics of youth car culture enthusiasts.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological considerations that have informed and shaped this thesis. After a brief discussion on the part autoethnographic methodology played in this thesis, I explain how participants were accessed, why they were sought and how they were involved. I then move on to explaining the use and shifting priority of participant observation in this project.

Through discussing historical and contemporary spatialities of youth car culture, chapter 4 focuses on geographic factors that have been shaped by, and shape Hamilton's youth car culture scene. Particular attention is paid to issues relating to Hamilton's location, surveillance, technologies and youth car culture places. The focus shifts in chapter 5 on to identities and embodiment. I first introduce the role cars play in the "identity project", and then discuss how mobility, historical changes, belonging, gender and symbology contribute to the identities of youth car culture. The last section of chapter 5 highlights issues relating to ethnicity and the hierarchy of authenticity that exists within youth car culture.

Drawing on wider debates relating to representation and materiality, in chapter 6 I discuss the construction of youth car culture within national and global discourses. In particular I examine the role the mass media play in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic understandings of youth car culture. Prior to concluding I explore the embodied experience of automotivity and the driver/car relationship. This is vitally important in understanding youth car culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

Youth car culture permeates many social spheres and can be examined at a range of geographic scales. Even a cursory examination of television and newspaper reports and letters to the editor suggest almost all communities and towns in New Zealand are touched by the social practices of young people and their cars. Excessive speed, street racing, burnouts, noise from exhausts and sound systems, and congregation practices all prompt communities to feel anxious. Individuals or groups who engage in any or all of these behaviours are often referred to as “boy racers”.

As a signifier, the term “boy racer” is highly problematic. Its use tends to erase difference within and across complex social spectrums. The most obvious example of this is that not all people who engage in the aforementioned behaviours are boys. Data collected during my research shows many youth car culture participants are women (up to 25 percent) or are over the age of 25 (10 percent).[3] This is further complicated by the fact that not all boy racers are youth car culture enthusiasts. This begs the question, what is a youth car culture enthusiast? Drawing on poststructuralist and feminist theory, I address this question and situate it within broader debates relating to youth, identity, embodiment and the moral contestation of space.

The Construction of "Youth" and Youth Identities

Contemporary media discourses often draw on the categories of "youth", "teenager" and "adolescent" when referring to the effects of young people and their driving behaviours. These terms have their own "cultural baggage" and their use is rarely problematised in media debates, if at all. This absence is reflected in almost all debates relating to young people. It is important to understand to whom these categories actually refer as they have been implicated in the construction and maintenance of unequal power relations.

Critical feminist research on the construction of youth and adolescence (for example, see Aitken 2001, Holloway and Valentine 2000, Massey 1998, Nayak 2003, Skelton and Valentine 1998, and Valentine 1996) has revealed a plethora of "youth" voices that up until very recently have been largely ignored in academic discourses. It is through these debates that new understandings have emerged that problematise the ways in which young people are constructed. These debates have opened up new understandings of youth identities, young people's use of spaces and places, and the moral landscapes they negotiate.

Historically, the notion of childhood in Western societies is a fairly recent construct. As the historian Aries (1962 cited in Valentine *et al*. 1998) notes, "children" were absent from medieval iconography. This was because beyond infant dependency, children were treated as "miniature adults", rather than as being discursively different from adults. It was not until the fifteenth century that "children" began to be represented as

separate from the adult world with needs distinct from adults. Through the introduction of mass schooling,[4] a universal understanding of “childhood” emerged that was personified by notions of innocence and freedom from the responsibilities of adults. Thus, the age of physical bodies became part of what defines us, and informed interpretations of our identities and actions (Valentine *et al*. 1998 2-3).

The concepts of adolescence and teenager (or youth) have been uncovered in much the same way childhood was. From the early eighteenth century the distance between youth and adulthood widened. Aries (1962 cited in Valentine *et al*. 1998) argues this was a result of the emergence of industrial capitalism. Middle class parents felt the need to extend the length of their children’s education to better prepare them for the demands of the new economic environment. This period became known as a time of maturation, through which young people would become adults. The length of this “quarantine” period continued to grow into the nineteenth century and was intertwined with the anxieties of the ruling elite and the middle class over the need to control the unruly nature of the working class and their offspring (Valentine *et al*. 1998 4).

It is in this process that we find the origins of moral panics that continue to resonate through debates relating to young people. Here, youth (and in particular, working class youth), are constructed as undisciplined and in need of control. By the 1950s, an almost counter discourse of young people emerged as a result of the relative affluence people in many Western societies were afforded. Through a shift to an emphasis on

consumer culture, imaginings of young people (as a market niche) changed to that of “youth as fun”. These competing discourses intersected in complex ways (Valentine *et al*. 1998 4), and still are prevalent in contemporary debates.

It is important to understand the history of how understandings of youth have come about as it exposes “youth” as a hegemonic construction, thereby problematising its existence and use. This “crisis of representation” (Aitken 2001 5) is particularly relevant to this research as the discursive origins of “youth” continue to resonate through and shape the spatial practices, identities and dominant imaginings of youth car culture. Sibley (1995) offers a useful inroad or point of departure by arguing adolescence is a liminal stage which positions people ambiguously between childhood and adulthood. Depending on who is doing the categorising, adolescence can be mobilised in multiple ways that can liberate, subjugate, or both at the same time. Adolescents simultaneously are denied access to the adult world whilst often maintaining links with childhood. Through attempting to distance themselves from childhood, adolescents threaten adulthood by destabilising the child/adult binary, positioning them as out of place in “adult” spaces (Sibley 1995 34-35).

Sibley’s (1995) point relating to adult space introduces a pivotal theme that underlies the foundations of this research. Aitken (2001), Holloway and Valentine (2000), Sibley (1995), Skelton and Valentine (1998) and Valentine (1996) expose the ways in which public space is produced and

maintained as adult space. Dominant constructions of youth position young people as incomplete adults who are in the process of becoming adults (Valentine *et al*. 1998). Public space can be understood as adult space as young people are allowed to access public space only after they have been socialised into appropriate "adult" ways of being (Holloway and Valentine 2000).

This regime of spatial control is part of the process that creates "youth" as a category. Discourses informing the rules of spatial ordering are bound up in assumptions relating to identity and socially appropriate youth identities. A perplexing array of age related distinctions are imposed on people under the age of 18. In New Zealand, a person can be charged with murder but cannot buy fireworks or be home alone until the age of 14. At 14, person is recognised as a young person (rather than as a child). At 15, one is permitted to begin driving a car. The age of sexual consent is 16. Further, parents are no longer held legally responsible for their children's actions once their children have turned 16. You can go to prison or die serving your country in the armed forces from the age of 17 but are not allowed to consume alcohol, enter a premise licensed to serve alcohol, gamble, smoke cigarettes or vote until the age of 18 (Napier Youth Council 2006). Drawing these age lines and the subsequent spatial control explicit and implicit in these distinctions plays a major role in the production of an "age group", the social category of youth and what is deemed acceptable behaviours for that group (Massey 1998 127).

As researchers, it is important to avoid essentialising the concept of youth. As Wyn and White (1997: 25) aptly put it, ‘young people do share in common their age, but the social, economic and cultural significance of this physical reality are far from common.’ From this point of view, concepts such as adolescence and teenage years can misleadingly suggest a homogeneous social and cultural experience that hardly corresponds to the richness and range of real-life diversity of young people.

These discourses about young people appear to be embedded in implicit themes of the moral ordering of space and the maintenance of dominant socio-economic paradigms where the child is made and remade to reduce them to being a threat to order. The assertion of these discourses establishes and maintains adult authority and control (Valentine 1996; 2000). These mechanisms of control are not one-way, and as discussed in the next section, young people are not passive agents in these power relations (Panelli *et al*. 2002).

The maintenance of public space as adult space is particularly relevant to this research as youth car culture manifests almost exclusively in the public domain. Whilst private events, interactions in cyberspace, television shows and other related media all reside within the rubric of youth car culture, I argue it is the activities played out in the public sphere that have solely informed the discursive construction of the “boy racer”. Often public spaces, and in particular the space of the street, are the only place young people are able to act autonomously (Valentine 1996a 213).

The claim to spaces such as Te Rapa Straight,[5] or T' Straight as it is sometimes known, apparently confirms the public/adult space narrative by demonstrating the lengths that young people will go to to carve out a niche for themselves as far from the surveillant gaze of adults as possible. Further, their presence is also considered a polluting presence and a threat to the moral order. As such, regulatory interventions informed by notions of safety of the public and the youths themselves, are often imposed (Valentine *et al*. 1998 7). There is no doubt that illegal behaviours manifest in the T' Straight area. However, the participant observation conducted for this thesis goes some way towards demonstrating that the response from the public constitutes a degree of moral panic.

Whilst control of public spaces such as T' Straight is exerted through police and security surveillance, it is important to recognise the maintenance of control is embedded in complex social relations. Drawing on the social control systems classifications of Davis and Anderson (1983 cited in Sibley 1995 81), Sibley provides a useful metric to understand the mechanics of the aforementioned processes of social control through space. Here, control is asserted either externally, through hierarchical authoritative mechanisms or internally, where individuals accept and conform to social norms. The latter became evident when discussing perceptions of certain behaviours with youth car culture enthusiasts at T' Straight. At least two of the formal car clubs have a code of ethics that members are expected to adhere to. Although not mutually exclusive, conceptualising social control as external, internal or both assists the process of unpacking the origins of attitudinal factors responsible for the

present restrictions and exclusionary practices young people are forced to negotiate.

So how do the discursive constructions of young people and adult space influence the production and maintenance of youth identities? Malone (2002) argues that the street plays a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of youth culture and the identities of young people. Teather (1999 3) argues there is an essential connection between our stages of development – in the case of young people becoming (adults) – and the locales where this becoming takes place. As the term stages suggests, there are various levels that development occurs across. Whilst these levels are far from discrete there are factors, such as sexual identity, that are more prevalent in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood. Geographical spaces and places can also be understood at different levels. Like developmental stages, distinctions between spatial levels, or scales, are unstable and have different impacts on the formation and maintenance of identities. The importance of these geographic scales is discussed in the last section of this chapter. For now though, I continue with issues relating to identity and shift the focus towards gender and how it relates to youth car culture in Hamilton. By discussing gender and age separately, I do not wish to imply they are discrete. Gender and age (like all social and spatial categories) interact in complex and often contradictory ways. As mentioned earlier, the term “boy racer” is a useful nexus to highlight this. Whilst issues relating to gender resonate through a number of locations in this research, of primary interest is the notion of gender performance in and through youth car culture in Hamilton.

Gendered Identities and the Problematic Study of Youth Cultures

Not long after the birth of the discursive constructs of “adolescent” and “teenager”, youth studies emerged as a discipline that among other things, marked an attempt to make sense of these “new” categories. During the mid 1970s, a distinct contribution to youth sub-culture theory emerged from within the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Criticisms of the CCCS have been well rehearsed elsewhere (Baldwin et al. 1999, Valentine et al. 1998). What is important to note here is that discourses relating to youth culture established through the CCCS continue to permeate debates today (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002 185). In particular, the CCCS tended to focus on the deviant behaviours of male subjects and imposed findings on all youth (Valentine *et al.* 1998 16-17).

Within the context of this research the terms youth car culture and “boy racer” are used strategically to highlight the hegemonic nature of discourses relating to young people and their cars. Aitken (2001 7) makes a point of drawing on the fluidity of terms used to describe young people to reflect ‘their shifting identities’. As Valentine *et al*. (1998) states, whilst it is a slippery term, the only boundaries that define the teenage years are boundaries of exclusion. This becomes particularly useful when considering the range of people whose age puts them outside the dominant understanding of “boy racer”. Informed by Panelli *et al*. (2002 111) and Valentine (1996), this research treats young people as competent social actors whilst at the same time acknowledging that their worlds are constrained by institutions and adult expectations.

Cultures of automotive mobility are highly regimented around gender. Cars in this instance can both reinforce and problematise hegemonic constructions of gender and gender relations. For example, gendered roles are reinforced through mothers and/or wives who most often end up driving second hand cars whilst the male “heads of family” have the newest and most expensive models (Urry 2003 8). Women also tend to be responsible for the domestic automobility needs of the family (Sheller 2004). To help unpack issues of gender within youth car culture, I draw on Butler (1999) as a useful departure point. Here, gender is understood as performative rather than a biological given or a naturalised social category (Butler 1999 177). Performative, in this sense, refers to the actions of an agent that is both intentional and bound within the desire for cultural survival. The gender performance of an individual is therefore an “act”, a social drama that requires repetition and that is ‘effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame’ (Butler 1999 178-179). Gender, as a stylised repetition of acts, is produced through the stylisation of the body and must be understood as the way in which bodily gestures, styles and movements contribute to the ‘illusion of the abiding gendered self’ (Butler 1999 179). These acts are variable and are temporally and spatially contingent.

There are a number of issues that have required careful consideration when approaching gender within the context of this research. For instance, caution must be taken when engaging notions of masculinity, particularly in relation to car cultures. There is a tendency in the literature to masculinise the car and car culture to the point of essentialism (Miller

2001 11). This is a somewhat ironic oversight given the propensity in critical literature to displace gendered stereotypes. This is problematic as a dominant reading of what constitutes masculinity – strong, violent, and powerful - is mobilised. Yet as Berg and Longhurst (2003 352) argue, masculinity is a highly unstable term. Moreover, there is no singular masculinity, but rather a multiplicity of masculinities that overlap and often contradict each other. Further, masculinity is not isolated to men. As I argue later, people who engage in youth car culture can be seen as simultaneously conforming to and resisting dominant hegemonic constructions of masculinity in New Zealand.

The geographies of youth car culture whilst in some cases may reinforce gendered divisions of automobility, may also serve to destabilise them. From the outside looking in, first appearances suggest female youth car culture enthusiasts could be argued to be performing highly masculinised identities. They certainly engage in similar driving practices that can be read as “male” such as risky acceleration and over-taking manoeuvres. Again, we must ask which masculinities they are performing. However, female enthusiasts tend to place less import on what is “under the hood” and are more interested in the presentation of the car. This does not erase the fact that gender impacts on a person’s socio-spatial identities. It is acknowledged that experiences of place are dependant on factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and class, and that boundaries and exclusion are essential characteristics of place formation (McDowell 1997 2).

There is always diversity of opinions and interests amongst any social grouping and youth are no exception. To imply homogeneity, explicitly or implicitly, is to commit an injustice to the agency of individuals within a group (Williams 1998). As I found out, assumptions relating to sameness based on identification with a social grouping can also hinder research process. I had assumed that when approaching members from the same car club that the “similarities” they shared would assist the focus group process. However, the diversity of opinions and identities rendered this untenable (see chapter 3 for further discussion). It is also important to not reproduce youth geographies and knowledges into discrete academic enclosures, perpetuating a marginal status. Instead, through treating them as an integral part of all areas of “mainstream” geography the importance of the geographies of young people is acknowledged (Valentine *et al*. 1998 7).

Difference

Whilst difference is valorised in feminist research, it is unfortunately outside the scope of this project to address multiple spheres of difference. Although conscious of class, ethnicity, sexuality and corporeal (non)ability during the research process, age and gender were by far the dominant themes that emerged. Rather than being a weakness, focusing discussions on age and gender has allowed much richer insights into particular parts of the lives of the youth car culture enthusiasts in Hamilton, insights that may not have been achievable had I attempted to analyse many different aspects of subjectivity.

Feminist poststructuralist theories have been instrumental in highlighting the importance of including difference as part of the research agenda. Ennew (1994) argues that previous work by feminist researchers that demonstrates the heterogeneity of women has become increasingly important to the literature on childhood. Actively departing from simplifying a given cultural grouping also paves the way for novel knowledges to emerge. Feminist poststructuralism has provided the tools necessary to better understand the 'contradictions and ambiguities of young people as both agent and dependent, as both included and excluded, and as both compliant and resistant to current forms of social "order"' (Freeman and Nairn 2000 cited in Panelli *et al*. 2002 109). It is at this point where the notion of young people as passive agents in socio-spatial control mechanisms becomes untenable.

The Importance of Scale

There has been much written in contemporary human geography relating to the theoretical underpinnings of space. Feminism has been credited with opening up geographic debate on what constitutes space and place (Valentine 2001 8). Geography has been dominated by research focused on spaces such the city and the nation. However, as feminist research specifically positions difference to the fore, more nuanced metrics are required to express a greater spectrum of socio-spatial relations.

Valentine (2001) provides a useful and appropriately problematised discussion on scale in geographic research. Expanding on the sequence

of body, home, community, urban, region, nation, and global forwarded by Smith (1993 101), Valentine (2001) also includes institutions, the street, the city and rural as useful frameworks from which to approach geographic research. As Massey (1998 124) states, often these scales are either explicitly or implicitly nested into a hierarchy, and are most often discussed in order from the body to the global.

Whilst it is clear these scales can be simultaneously expanded and contracted, the important thing to remember is that they interact in complex ways. However, through this hierarchical ordering, I believe an overall impression is created that the body is small and global is big, even when expressed as a (problematic) continuum. When conceptualising scale, it is useful to consider not only physical space, but the relative space any one scalar occupies. For instance, the relative size of a person's body that has been injured in a car accident arguably would eclipse the global. Further, as with the *Tardis* in *Doctor Who*, the spatial limits or boundaries of a given phenomenon, however fluid those boundaries may be, can contain far greater spatiality than is immediately apparent (see Figure 2).

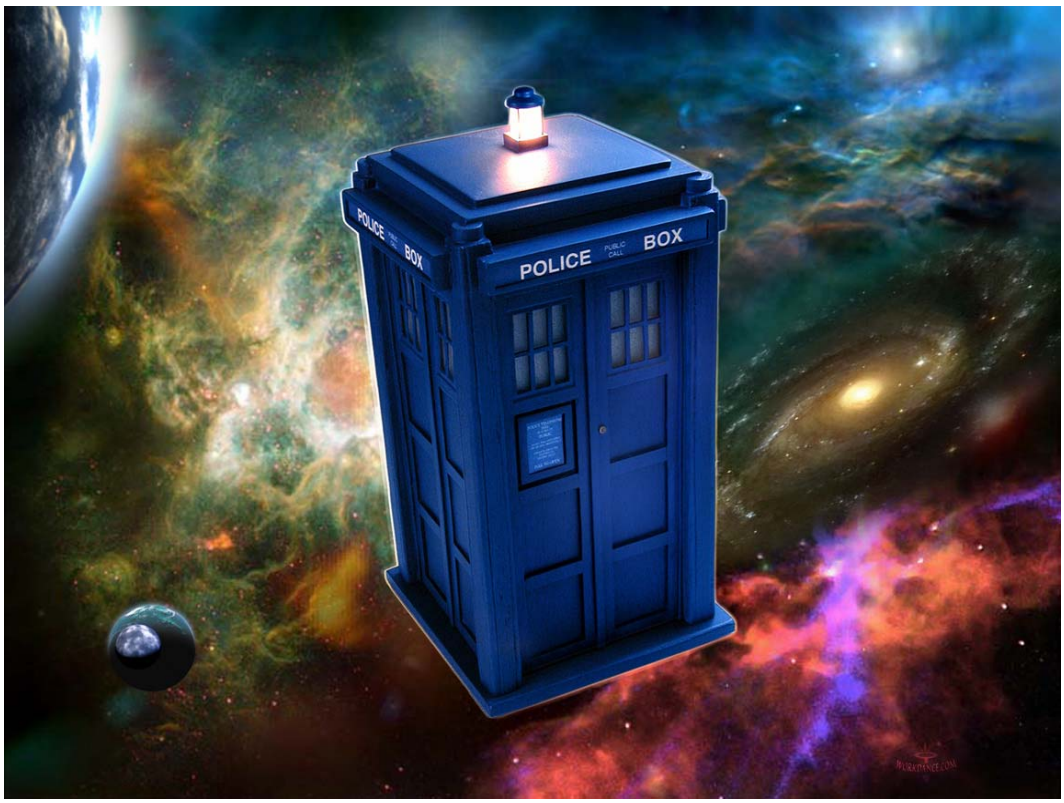

Figure 2: Relative Scale Relationships. The Police Box, or Tardis, is a time travel device used by the Doctor in the television series *Doctor Who*. Its internal dimensions are greater than its exterior. Image source: http://www.workdance.com/Downloads/tardis_model/tardis800x600.html

Scales therefore are best thought of as complex nets of interrelations where social relations occur as 'constellations of temporary coherence' (Massey 1998 124-125), rather than as hierarchical. Drawing on the example of Western influences on Mexican youth in the Yucatan, Massey (1998) argues localised youth cultures are far from closed and are affected by (and perhaps affect) influences from multiple scales.

So, why and how is scale important to researching youth car culture? Although scales are dynamic and slippery, there are common themes that run through all levels of spatiality – control and contestation. Levels of spatial organisation can be understood as mechanisms for maintaining

power relations. The fencing off of spatial scales is part of a number of wider strategies employed by social groups to dominate, control and even define others (Massey 1998 127). Through the scaling of spaces young people's bodies are in turn compartmentalised, 'broken, tortured and abused in a myriad of ways that reflect adult sensibilities and psychoses' (Aitken 2001 23). In this way, scale is not merely socially produced but it is also socially producing (Herod 1991 cited in Aitken 2001).

It is here that Smith's (1993) concept of scale jumping is useful, particularly given the role cars play in the ways young people access places and spaces. Certain social settings become available through the car. The mobility a car provides facilitates greater access to more spaces and places (see Gough and Franch 2005). In general, the teen years are a pivotal period in which much of our identities are formed. This occurs as a result of an increased self-awareness. At the same time, we begin to gain increased (and often contested) access to the public domain. The car allows us to break free from the tyranny of scale, particularly the scale of the home.[6] In the case of social identities, Massey (1998 123-124) argues youth cultures are highly mobile across multiple realms and 'leap geographic scales in the search for influences and references to tap into …'

Whilst it is clear young people are controlled through positioning and ordering of public space as adult space, care must be taken to not treat young people as passive agents at the mercy of the adult word. Valentine (1996) began a dialogue that repositioned children and young people as

“competent agents”. Through their driving practices, the TWOCers (taking cars without owners consent) forge a space for themselves that adults avoid (Massey 1998). In the same way, the presence and actions of youth car culture enthusiasts at T’ Straight on Friday and Saturday nights often compel adult drivers to avoid that part of town. The agency exhibited in these two examples is evidence of how young people erase adult space and inscribe themselves on the landscape. Doing so is an act of transgression in adult public space that upsets the notion that young people should be “seen and not heard” (Valentine 1996a).

Summary

The way young people’s spatial and social practices are constructed and reproduced is, in part, responsible for the “problems” now faced by communities in Hamilton. It is important to understand the effects of the way childhood and youth are constructed and maintained as public opinion, and arguably policy, draw heavily on these narratives. Further, these narratives are often strategically mobilised in debates as the “truth”, a mechanism used to help justify control over youth car culture enthusiasts. I argue this tends to partially displace the responsibility of who actually owns the problem.

It is extremely concerning that many young people engage in activities involving automobiles which place the public and themselves at risk. However, by focusing on the youths themselves, a discursive smokescreen is created that erases a pivotal question - why in a society

with a relatively stable government and economy that affords citizens many democratic freedoms do young people make the choice to engage in youth car culture? What part do the societal constructs young people have to negotiate play in influencing youth car culture behaviours? How much of the responsibility for the youth car culture phenomenon sits with the communities and cultures in which young people live? To answer these questions, it is necessary to gain deep insights into how people feel about youth car culture from multiple sources, both historical and contemporary. As such, I have chosen a qualitative methodological research framework that incorporates a key informant interview, in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation and critical readings of mass media texts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This thesis examines the complexities of youth identities and how these identities are shaped and maintained through car culture. To gain insights into the worlds of young people and their automotive experiences, I employed multiple research techniques. The use of a single method could have produced data to answer the research questions. However, mobilising more than one method served to broaden the search parameters for potential sources of data. This decision was partly driven by the fact that although my background has been somewhat useful in informing the research, it has been nearly 20 years since I was actively engaged in youth car culture. The other main factor driving the decision to use multiple methods was the benefits of being able to “triangulate” the data.

Triangulation is the use of two or more sources of information, theories, techniques and methods to examine research question from multiple angles (Davidson and Tolich 1999 34). As a method, triangulation was first developed to assist in dealing with problems of validity within qualitative research (Walkerdine *et al.* 2002 189). For instance, if a number of similar themes emerge across multiple sources of data, there can be greater confidence in the validity of research findings (Davidson and Tolich 1999 34). Due to my lack of knowledge relating to contemporary youth car culture, I chose *methodological triangulation* as it provides opportunities for richer data than if only one method had been used (Polit and Hungler 1995).

Autoethnography

As stated in chapter 1, the reason I chose to study youth car culture in Hamilton was my increasing unease at the way youth car culture enthusiasts were being represented in the mass media. As an ex-enthusiast, I felt well positioned to research this topic. As I intend to draw extensively on my own experiences, I chose to employ autoethnography as a methodology. Etherington (2004 139) defines autoethnography as a blending of ethnography and autobiographical writing; a form of self-narrative where the author is positioned within a particular social context. Rather than an exploration of the interaction between culture and self, autoethnography requires the researcher to write about themselves (Etherington 2004 140). The use of autoethnography as a method has been criticised as being too introspective, individualised and lacking in social context (Wall 2006 8). However, the researcher's use of self can be understood as more authentic as conclusions are more likely to be told than inferred (Wall 2006 9).

Informed by the work of Malbon (1999), my own experiences as a youth car culture enthusiast have been fundamental to establishing a rapport with the people I approached throughout the research process. Malbon (1999) used his own experiences of night clubbing to inform his research on night club culture. My positionality also assisted me in appearing as someone who was sympathetic and genuinely interested in their experiences, 'rather than merely someone who just happened to be "doing a project" … as his "job".' (Malbon 1999 32). Further, in the case of participant observation, Laurier (2003 135) argues, '… the best participant

observation is generally done by those who have been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things that they are observing.' Drawing on my subjectivity in this way has been inspired by prior feminist research such as Valentine (1998).

Feminism underpins many of the decisions made regarding the methodology used in this thesis. It is important to note that the term feminism has a multiplicity of meanings, both temporally and spatially. A number of feminist researchers have argued there are central themes that resonate through feminist research and it is these themes that form the methodological definition of feminism within the context of this research - that feminism represents a rejection of objectivism and "truth" seeking as all knowledge is acquired within particular social contexts; that the often marginalised experiences and perceptions of women be made visible; that power relations, particularly between the researcher and the researched be addressed; that there is no distinct feminist methodology and the mobilisation of a method or combination of methods be assessed on how appropriately it aligns to the research question and data; and that feminist research should have a political agenda serving to empower and emancipate the communities it serves (Alice 1999, Holloway 1997 69, Jones *et al*. 1997, Kwan 2002 646). These distinctions are highly problematic and must be considered carefully when conducting feminist research. This is reflected by Butler (1999) and Holloway (1997) who argue that feminism is best understood as a collection of multiple feminisms, with sometimes competing and conflicting debates.

With the aforementioned distinctions in mind, I decided the best approach for engaging with the research question was to situate both myself as researcher, and the researched, within specific socio-spatial and temporal contexts (Holloway 1997 70, Reinharz 1992 7, and Vine 1992 211-231). This decision was informed by the need to engage research subjects on a personal level to enable deeper insights into their experiences. Feminist researchers such as Bondi (2003), Taylor (1998) and Haynes (2006) argue that the relationship between the researcher and the researched ought to be based on empathy and sensitivity. This approach helps to minimise unequal power relations within the research project and to empower participants. It also recognises the emotional and mutual dependence factor in human experience. Creating empathetic relationships between the researcher and the researched not only inserts the researcher's personal feelings and experience into the "project', but it opens up new possibilities for academic enquiry (Neuman 1994 72-73). As Harvey (1996 cited in Teather 1999 3) puts it, "Learning to see the world from multiple positions - if such a thing is possible - then becomes a means to better understand how the world as a totality works'. However, as Bondi (2003 65) states, empathy refers to the capacity to understand the subjectivities of the research participant without losing awareness of one's own. Remaining mindful of one's own position is important to consider as a research relationship based on empathy may not be possible in all situations. In some instances, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2005 93-97) warn that it may not even be possible or desirable to establish empathy with research participants.

By incorporating my own personal experiences, I hoped to avoid, where possible, the hierarchical nature of the researcher/researched relationship. Through positioning myself on a level as equal as possible to the research subject, I wanted to subvert the perception that I was an authority and facilitate an environment that accommodated entirely new subjectivities and ways of understanding (Holloway 1997 69). It could be argued that this approach lends itself to bias. However, all researchers occupy a social framework that serves to inform their understandings of that which they perceive. In this context, objectivity is not possible. It was never my intention to provide a disembodied narrative of youth car culture. Indeed, by drawing on the emancipatory goals that run through all feminist research, I hoped to address the marginalisation and injustice that many youth car culture enthusiasts are subjected to.

Given contemporary media discourses, it is difficult to imagine how youth car culture enthusiasts could be understood as marginalised because they are constructed as a group that marginalises the rest of society. Yet it is clear that youth car culture enthusiasts are subjected to spatial and social practices that often unfairly disadvantage them and the decision to frame them as a marginalised group was done so under careful consideration. All too often, critical analysis of how distinctions of marginalisation are defined remain absent from academic texts. Crewe (1997) argues that discourses relating to marginalised groups tend to be reflections of how social meanings are mediated and constructed and little thought is given to the impact constructing a group as marginal can have on that group (see also Sibley 1995). Given the concerns of Crewe (1997), it was

essential to ensure the social group at the centre of this research (youth car culture enthusiasts) constituted a marginalised group, and to address how this group is marginalised. However, as youth car culture enthusiasts occupy multiple subject positions, the ways in which marginalisation occurs is contingent and fluid.

Drawing on Williams (1998), I argue the youth car culture enthusiasts involved in this research project constitute a marginalised group in certain socio-spatial environments. Williams (1998 21-23) offers a useful framework to establish just what constitutes a marginalised group; first, patterns of social and political inequality are structured along the lines of group membership; second, *generally*, membership in them is not experienced as voluntary; third, *generally*, membership in them is not experienced as mutable; and fourth, *generally*, there are negative meanings assigned to group identity by the broader society or the dominant culture. Whilst participation is voluntary and mutable, as chapters 4, 5 and 6 argue, patterns of inequality and negative stereotypes are assigned to those who identify as youth car culture enthusiasts.

Without being an “ex-hoon”, I believe it would have been extremely difficult to gain the trust of the participants, particularly whilst conducting participant observation. My background also served to help position myself as close to an “equal relationship” with interviewees as possible and to minimise the presence of the “academic”. For this reason, as much import was given to my corporeal appearance as to how I approached people and what I said. As Cook (2005 177) argues, many aspects of a

researcher's identity including their appearance, body language, feelings and politics invariably have to be negotiated and renegotiated in various contexts throughout the course of a given project.

However, unlike Malbon (1999), who was still actively engaged in night clubbing, I no longer knew anyone actively engaged in youth car culture. Further, I knew little of the changes that have occurred in relation to the technology used and the places youth car culture enthusiasts occupied in Hamilton. As such, I felt it important to build in as much flexibility into the research framework as possible. At this juncture it was clear a qualitative approach was the most appropriate rubric from which to explore my research questions. As Davidson and Tolich (1999 97) and Valentine (2005) note, qualitative research is a less formalised and more flexible data collection strategy that is based on the researcher as a research instrument.

To minimise overlooking potential sources of information, three main approaches were planned - a semi-structured interview with a police official or city council representative, a focus group comprised of youth car culture enthusiasts and discourse analysis of newspaper articles that specifically relate to youth car culture in Hamilton. Throughout the research process I also remained attentive to other relevant media discourses and to landscapes occupied by modified car drivers. However, as discussed below, it was immediately apparent from the very early stages of the project that the chosen methodological approach would need to be refined. In the first instance, discourse analysis of newspaper articles

was dropped. In order to provide a discursive benchmark from which to work, discourse analysis was intended to be used to establish a “formal” definition of the term “boy racer”. Further, by analysing mass media texts, dominant discourses could be brought to light to enrich the project. Through discussions with friends, being attentive to news items, and drawing on my own experiences, it was possible to achieve the aforementioned goals without conducting discourse analysis of newspaper articles.

For the same reasons that the rest of the methodological framework was kept as flexible as possible, so too was the geographical scope of the research. The study area had its nucleus in Hamilton as the intention was to focus on the identity practices of Hamilton youth car culture and the mutually constitutive relationships between the young people and Hamilton’s cultural landscape. However, to ensure the project was as representative of the people involved as was feasible, questions specific to the spatial extent of their experiences were asked. It was this process that determined the extent of the area under research. As the spatial practices of youth car culture participants were expected to transcend political boundaries, it was felt defining a study boundary based on political definitions (Hamilton City’s boundary) would unduly impoverish the research.

Recruiting Participants

To help understand youth car culture from as many sources as possible, an interview with a law enforcement official was sought. Inspector Leo Tooman is currently the head of highway patrol for the Waikato region, which includes Hamilton. He has been a traffic management professional for 41 years in the Ministry of Transport, Traffic Safety Service and NZ Police. He was deemed the most appropriate person to approach as his experience would not only help to shed light on contemporary issues, but also he would serve to provide historical insights into changes that have occurred. As the geographic scope of the project was based primarily in Hamilton, sourcing his expertise was deemed necessary. Initial contact was made via telephone and an interview time was arranged. An information sheet that included a list of potential questions was emailed two weeks prior to the interview. If he had not agreed, another police officer and/or a city council official would have been sought.

Access to youth car culture enthusiasts was initially made through the internet via a car club website. Approaching a car club to source participants served two main purposes. First, it provided a relatively safe and reliable method of contact compared with approaching people in the street as congregation times for youth car culture enthusiasts usually occur at night. Second, it was hoped members of a club would share commonalities that would serve the focus group process (Longhurst 2003 124). I felt it was best to meet with potential participants prior to the focus group to help build a rapport. Further, as youth car culture enthusiasts are almost always subjected to negative representation, it was hoped that

meeting in person would help to establish that my intentions were to produce a much more nuanced narrative. Communicating this via the internet and/or telephone conversations may have been far more problematic.

Tash Lawrence, the president of Rotor Dynamic, was contacted and I was invited to attend a social gathering at the Hamilton Lake where approximately 30 club members were due to meet. Tash notified club members of my intentions and introduced me to attendees who were from Hamilton. This made approaching people much easier and assisted in helping me identify who fitted the criteria that I had established for selecting participants - that they own their own car; are currently licensed to drive; actively participate or have participated in street car culture in Hamilton; and are 18 years old or over.

Licensed drivers with cars were the central focus for two reasons – to mitigate against the implications of researching illegal activities (unlicensed drivers),[7] and to refine the research question, namely, to discover how and why young people express themselves through their cars. A focus that allowed passengers to participate on an equal footing with owners of cars may have overly diluted the primary research intentions. While it was tempting to cap the age range for this research, as discussed in the literature review, youth is a highly problematic term. A minimum age of 18 was settled on, again to minimise the risk to people I spoke with at participant observation sites.

New Zealand has a graduated driver licensing system which takes a minimum of two years to complete. One of the conditions of holding a non-full drivers license is the hours of driving are restricted to between 5.00am and 10pm. It was unclear whether many drivers at the sites that were to be visited would have achieved a full license prior to turning 18 as LTSA statistics show that only 10% of drivers under the age of 18 have gained a full license. As the participant observation was going to take place after 10.00pm, and parental consent would have been required to talk to anyone under 18, the potential risk to participants being exposed for breaching their license conditions was too great.

For the aforementioned reasons, the demographic make-up of the participants was largely determined by the initial contact people, and those that were present at the sites where participant observation was undertaken. However, every effort was made to access a gender balance in participants that reflects that approximately 25 percent of all youth car culture enthusiasts are women.[8] Although questions were designed to determine issues of difference, it is outside the scope of this project to guarantee gender, ethnic, class, age and sexuality balance from the pool of interviewees. However, as Valentine (2005 111) argues, achieving a demographic balance is not necessarily a central concern when conducting in-depth qualitative research as the focus is on understanding how people 'experience and make sense of their own lives', and not to be representative of a population as a whole.

Meeting the members of the Rotor Dynamic Car Club “face to face” had an unexpected benefit that resulted in the realisation it was necessary to change the shape of the research methodology. Through talking to a number of potential interviewees, it became clear that a focus group was not the most appropriate method to engage the participants in. This was due to the fact that there was an air of open antagonism across multiple spheres of difference within the car club membership. Older members were highly critical of the actions of younger members. Younger members felt the older ones were overly critical. There was also animosity towards other clubs and drivers of certain car types.

Some of the people who showed interest held strong opinions and had a lot to say. Others appeared less confident and were less politicised in their views. Although differences of this nature can often produce interesting results in a group environment, it was clear discussions would be dominated by one or two participants. This may have unduly compromised the ability to get “deep” narratives from all participants. Further, interviewees that had agreed to participate lived many kilometres apart and worked or studied full time. For these reasons, the focus group option was dropped in favour of telephone interviews.

Interviews

For practical reasons, Leo Tooman was interviewed prior to talking with the youth car culture enthusiasts. Initially this decision was made to best serve the timeframe of the research project as organising a one to one

interview is relatively simple compared to coordinating a focus group meeting time. Doing so gave me work to continue with whilst I reconsidered how I was going to approach the youth car culture participants. This time was a period of defocusing, a step Neuman (1997 350) suggests is useful, as it provides a space in which one can step back from the project to review factors such as methodology and theoretical underpinnings. Doing so helps to fuse elements of the project free from the pressure of actually "doing the research". The timeline and interview process for this thesis is outlined in Figure 3.

<table>
<tr><th>METHOD</th><th>WITH</th><th>WHEN</th><th>WHERE</th></tr>
<tr><td>Key Informant Interview</td><td>Inspector Leo Tooman Head of Highway Patrol (Waikato Region</td><td>25th May 2006</td><td>Highway Patrol Regional Office, Hamilton</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Telephone Interviews</td><td>Darryl</td><td>31st May 2006</td><td rowspan="3">Their/my homes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tim</td><td>1st June 2006</td></tr>
<tr><td>Carl</td><td>3rd June 2006</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Participant Observation</td><td rowspan="3">People congregating at T' Straight between 10pm and 2am</td><td>9th June 2006</td><td rowspan="3">Te Rapa Straight</td></tr>
<tr><td>17th June 2006</td></tr>
<tr><td>23rd June 2006</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 3: Interview Research Matrix

I decided to use a semi-structured interview format with Leo Tooman because I wanted to provide scope for a conversational forum. As Valentine (2005 111) puts it, the advantage of a semi-structured interview is that they are people orientated. This allows interviewees to construct their own experiences in their own words. It also provides an environment where the researcher and the interviewee's conversation can freely diverge into wide-ranging topics. Within this framework, questions can be explained thoroughly, researchers can review previous questions and responses and interviewees have the opportunity to explain the full spectrum of their experiences, in all their complexity. As my intended interviewee had over 40 years experience in his field, it was clear that a semi-structured approach was most appropriate technique to employ.

The interview was approached with four main themes in mind - surveillance and the law, youth identity, spaces and places, and historical changes. Whilst it is acknowledged that these categories are far from discrete, they provide useful concepts to keep in mind while following up on topics as they emerged during the interview. Particular attention was paid to how these themes manifest across multiple socio-spatial scales. These four aforementioned conceptual threads were chosen because they are recurrent themes in critical contemporary geographic literature and in particular, dominate discussions in research relating to young people's use of public spaces.

Dawes (2002), in particular, mobilises all four in his research on young people's use of cars and congregation trends in central city spaces. As a

contingency, 10 questions were prepared to act as a prompt (see Appendix 1). During the 45 minute interview that was conducted in his office, Inspector Leo Tooman offered to take me on patrol to T' Straight. It was Inspector Tooman that first alerted me to the fact that T' Straight is the main congregation spot for youth car culture enthusiasts in Hamilton. Careful consideration was given to utilising this potential source of data. However, it could have compromised my position as a researcher to conduct participant observation at the site. If I had been associated with the police in that context, participants may have been reluctant to talk to me.

Of the five youth car culture enthusiasts that I spoke to during my initial scoping exercise, three people agreed to participate. When I first spoke to them I informed them that I intended to conduct a focus group and what that involved. All were happy to shift to telephone interviews. Interviewees were informed of their rights as participants over the phone and agreed to having the approximately 45 minute telephone conversation tape recorded. A device bought from a local electronics store allowed me to plug a conventional telephone into a tape recorder. One of the issues faced with this method of data collection is the richness of perceivable factors such as body language was absent during the interviews. Conducting interviews in person would perhaps have helped to explore question threads further, but at this stage of the project I intended on recruiting up to five more interviewees. To personally visit all of them would perhaps have compromised the project timeline. The four main themes that formed the basis of the interview with Leo Tooman -

surveillance and the law, youth identity, spaces and places, and historical changes - were also employed during the telephone interviews. Due to the “disembodied” nature of the telephone interviews, a greater number of prompt questions were compiled to ensure the interviews were as comprehensive as possible (see Appendix 2).

Analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted using what Crang (2005) refers to as “open coding”. Initially, I read through the transcripts to familiarise myself with any dominant and recurring themes. These were then tentatively bracketed into the four main themes - surveillance and the law, youth identity, spaces and places, and historical changes - and coded accordingly. These coded passages were then further broken down into the geographic scales of the body, the community, and the nation. Following the suggestions of Crang (2005 223), often passages of text were given more than one code and were assigned to more than one geographic scale. Subsequent readings of the texts were then conducted to identify contradiction, comparisons and any unexpected findings.

Prior to transcribing the youth car culture enthusiast interviews, it was clear the depth of information I had hoped to obtain was decidedly absent. In particular, there was little response to the questions that related to how people actually felt about their relationship to their cars. This might have been due to my inexperience in interviewing and/or lack of self-reflexivity on the part of the participants. Either way, I thought better of pursuing further telephone interviews in favour of conducting participant observation at T’ Straight.

Participant Observation

When the research methodology was first designed, a participant observation element was built in as a means to provide support to the interview data. However, participant observation shifted to being a more significant and rich source of data than had originally been intended. Within the context of this research, I drew on Cook's (2005) three-stage definition of the process of participant observation to assist in investigating youth car culture in Hamilton.

Cook (2005 168) suggests thought must be given to researchers' (in)ability to gain access to the community they wish to study. Second, researchers' must consider the role they play whilst engaging the community they are studying in order to conduct the research. Third, it is important to consider the types of information that can be constructed and used from this method of data collection. Whilst these guidelines provide a useful departure point, it is important to note that there are no hard rules on how to do participant observation. Rather, as Laurier (2003 134) argues, it is the stages that arise out of the phenomena and settings that are being investigated that determine the process of participant observation.

All of the interviewees referred to T' Straight, the section of Te Rapa Road between Garnett Avenue and Bryant Road, as the place that has become the main congregation site for youth car culture enthusiasts. Other sites were mentioned, such as O'Regan Road, but these were in poorly lit rural areas, far from the public gaze, and visited primarily for the purposes of

engaging in illegal street racing. For safety reasons it was deemed inappropriate to visit these sites and T' Straight became the primary focus.

One initial visit to T' Straight was made on the 9th June 2006 as a scoping exercise to enable an assessment of how to proceed with the participant observation. The number of people that were congregated and the spatial extent of their occupation was unexpected and somewhat overwhelming. There were approximately 150-170 cars parked in clusters of between three and twenty cars. In addition to the stationary cars, there were approximately 30 modified cars driving up and down between Garnett Avenue and Bryant Road (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: South-bound (left) and Merging North-Bound (right) "Lap" Traffic.

Familiarising myself with the area proved useful and informed my decision to return with a still camera. This initial visit was followed up by two subsequent visits on the 17th and 23rd June 2006. The fact that the site would have to be visited from 10.00pm until approximately 1.00am, and would be conducted during winter, influenced the decision to make a

maximum of three visits. Whilst perhaps a larger number of visits would have provided a richer source of data, it was important to keep the project manageable. Further, as Cook (2005 169) argues, participant observation can legitimately involve anything from a single visit to a given landscape to several months of fieldwork.

The main intention was to gain an insight into the nuances of the culture that congregated at T' Straight on Friday and Saturday nights, to observe the behaviours and driving habits of the youth car culture enthusiasts, and to gain further insight into why cars are so important in these people's lives. I was particularly attentive to discourses that confirmed or contrasted dominant understandings of youth car culture.

To maintain continuity across the multiple data sources accessed for this project, my observations were conducted with the four themes of surveillance and the law, youth identity, spaces and places, and historical changes in mind. No other formal preconceived threads were decided on as I had no idea what to expect. As Cook (2005 174) states, when conducting participant observation one must 'not expect things to proceed according to any pre-planned schedule' and he stresses the importance of being flexible. To assist in making contact with people I took a still camera. I hoped the act of asking to take photographs of cars would act as an ice-breaker and help to initiate further conversation.

On my first visit to T' Straight, contact was made with a group that not only provided valuable background information relating to the culture of T'

Straight (such as when the busiest times were, which groups parked where and the names of various car clubs), but they also agreed to talk to me when I returned. The people I made contact with initially introduced me to other groups which helped establish the authenticity of my intentions. Approximately 50 percent of the people with whom I spoke were contacted using this snowball technique.

Note-taking was kept to a minimum at the site. This was to minimise the presence of the “academic”. The atmosphere was very much a social one and I felt taking detailed field notes at the site would have disrupted the “authenticity” of the experience. Notes were taken upon arriving home. These were elaborated on the following day and were coded in the same way as the telephone interviews.

Critical Readings of Media Texts

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I intend on drawing on a number of media texts to compare my findings with wider discursive theoretical debates relating to youth car culture. By drawing on media texts I hope to substantiate the experiences of the research participants and to highlight the ways in which youth car culture is discursively maintained as a threat to the moral ordering of Hamilton. I draw on Norman Fairclough (1989) to inform my approach to textual analysis. Thus, the key focus when selecting and reading texts revolved around the experiential, relation and expressive values within each text.

Experiential values relate to the ways in which the text producer's experience of the world is reproduced. Here, particular attention is paid to the experiential values that are inherent to grammatical structures such as passive and active voice and subject/verb/object ordering (Fairclough 1989 120-128). The relational values in a given text relates to the social relationships enacted via the text. When considering the relational values in a text, one must consider how the choice of wording constitutes and is constituted by the social relations of the participants involved (Fairclough 1989 118-119). The expressive values in a text relates to the producer's evaluation of the part of "reality" that is being discussed (Fairclough 1989 112). The focus when deconstructing expressive values is to examine the existence of options such as possibility, permission, certainty and/or obligation and how they relate to the topic of discussion (Fairclough 1989 129-138). These factors are important to this thesis as they help to understand the language of moral panics (discussed in chapter 6).

Texts were selected on an "as needed" basis. For example, if a given reading or source presented an issue that needed further explanation, relevant media representations were sought. In most cases, media texts were used to support my own observations, the experiences of participants, or the arguments of key academic writers. By example, after reviewing the literature on embodied and emotive driving experiences (Dant 2004, Sheller 2004, and Urry 2003), I was immediately reminded of the Mazda car commercial that screened in New Zealand in 2006 (see page 131). A mix of television programmes and advertisements, newspaper reports and film were sought in an attempt to cover as much of

the main mass media channels as possible. Further analysis included readings of motor sport fixtures in New Zealand. However, whilst being attentive to media discourses, certain articles such as *Hamilton This Week* (9th November 2006) emerged that inspired additional material to be included. In most cases I attempted to source information that related specifically to Hamilton or New Zealand.

Primarily, nine newspaper articles were drawn on. Four of these related directly to contemporary issues in Hamilton's youth car culture scene. All were selected as they encompassed a broad spectrum of debates that demonise youth car culture enthusiasts. Further, these newspaper reports reflected experiences I had encountered during interviews and participant observation. Of less significance, but of no less importance, were the Mazda car commercial, the two reality television shows, and the film *The Fast and the Furious.* These sources were selected after reading particular academic articles and were used to reflect on particular issues raised in the literature. My own interest in the gendered landscapes of motor sport influenced my decision to include motor sport events as text to deconstruct. Whilst this approach is highly subjective, it is not my intention to produce a representative analysis of youth car culture. Instead, I drew on my own positionality within an autoethnographic framework to inform my choices. This approach is compatible with the in-depth, qualitative approach informing this project.

Summary

Using a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and critical readings of mass media texts I compared and contrasted historical and contemporary issues relating to youth car culture in Hamilton. Feminist theory informed the entire research process. A qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was used to gain deep, rather than representative insights. My own autoethnographic accounts are also drawn on to enrich the findings. The following discussions of the research findings have been tentatively grouped into geographic scales of the city, bodies and the nation. I use the word "tentatively" here to draw attention to the instability of these scales. They were chosen as a framework to discuss the findings within as they represent spheres of social control and contestation that recur in the narratives of the people spoken to during the research process. These theoretical distinctions do not exclude discussions relating to the influence of other scales such as the home, the street and the global.

4. SITUATING HAMILTON'S YOUTH CAR CULUTRE

As mentioned in chapter 2, I became increasingly uneasy about the way scale was "packaged" in the literature. By default, it seems geographic scales tend to be discussed in order from smallest to largest. Whilst it is acknowledged that scales themselves are appropriately problematised, the effects of discussing them in order are not. When conceptualising how the analysis chapters would take shape for this thesis, I decided a disruption of the smallest to largest approach was appropriate. Following then is a discussion on youth car culture spaces at the scale of the city. First, I review historical changes that have occurred in the last 20 years. I then discuss the significance of Hamilton's geographic location and how this is relates to youth car culture. The focus then shifts towards specific issues and places within the city and how scale is important in understanding these places.

Augmenting the findings from the interviews and participant observation, I draw heavily on my own observations as a long serving Hamiltonian and car culture enthusiast. By employing autoethnography, the intention is to combine my own experiences with contemporary debates on the use of public spaces by young people. Whilst it is important to embed this research in an historical context, the intention here is not to provide an exhaustive account of youth car culture in Hamilton. Instead, drawing on my own experiences and those of the research participants, I outline a more situated history.

Hamilton's Youth Car Culture in the 1980s

My first introduction into youth car culture in Hamilton was in 1988. I was 16 years old and did not own a car. Only two people in my social network were what could be considered car enthusiasts. Most Friday and Saturday nights my friend would pick me up in his car and we would do laps that revolved around Victoria Street, Hamilton's main street. At the end of Victoria street was (and still is) a 24 hour petrol station where we used to congregate. Up to 30 cars would be parked in the adjacent shopping complex car park and on the roadside directly across the road from the petrol station whilst anywhere from 20 to 30 cars would be doing laps. The buildings in the shopping complex were at the time untenanted (see Figure 5).

The Levenes car park and the Dallas Motors car lot, also on Victoria Street and 200 and 500 hundred metres south of the petrol station respectively, were also popular spots for people to congregate. The popularity of these sites was mainly due to the fact that they allowed a number of cars to park in a group suitable for socialising, they were well lit and were close to the "action". As I elaborate later, high visibility and being in a vantage point close to where people are doing laps are important factors in determining whether a site is suitable for congregating. On average about 10 cars would be parked up at any one time on a Friday or Saturday night at each of these sites and around 20 people would be gathered around the cars (see Figure 5).

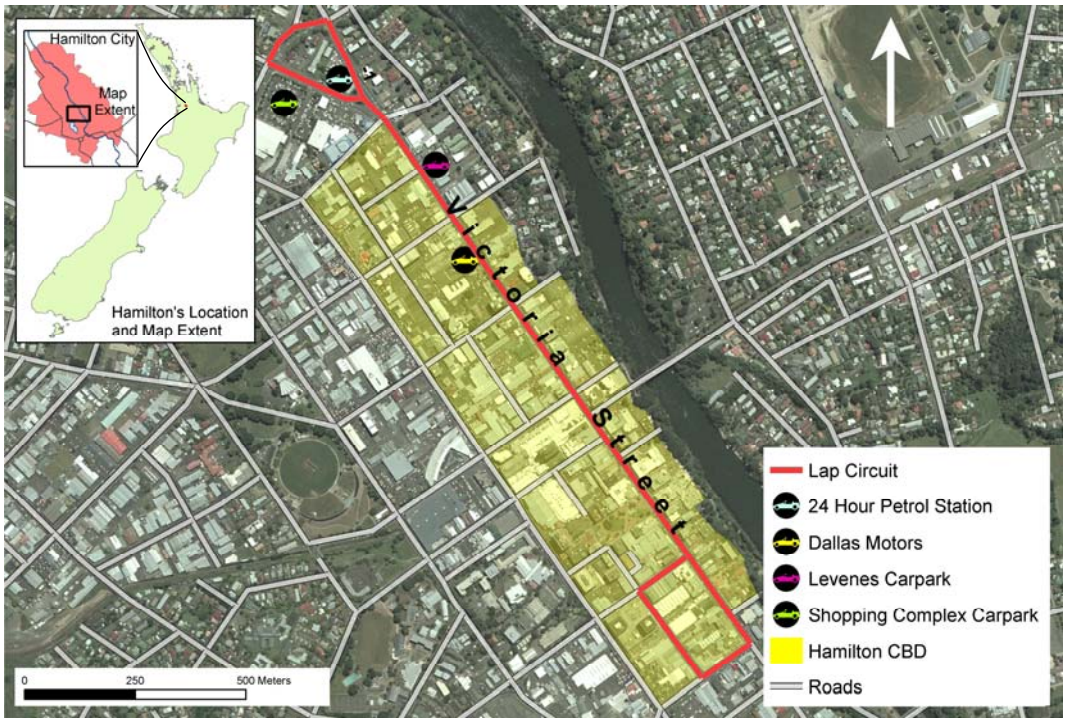

Figure 5: Hamilton's Lap Circuit 1988

Although there was no police monitored surveillance camera in the area at the time, police patrols and the "gaze" of the public and petrol station workers maintained an air of surveillance. Often we were moved on by police and no reason was ever given other than 'Sorry, you're not allowed to park here.' Asking police officers why we had to move was almost always treated as insubordination and often resulted in overly zealous scrutiny of cars and/or the people who were in the vicinity. For this reason, people congregated at the north end of Victoria Street rarely challenged police authority and would reluctantly move on. Policing of this area was only partially effective as a new group would occupy the recently vacated area within minutes.

Other sites were frequented by the youth car culture community but not for the purposes of congregating. Ulster Street, just to the north of Victoria Street, was often used as a space for enthusiasts to demonstrate the performance aspects of their cars. The speed limit for this stretch of road was 50 kilometres per hour around the time I frequented these sites and this limit was often exceeded. On occasion, I observed and was in cars where speeds of up to 120 kilometres per hour were reached. Speeding of this nature always occurred after 2am when the least number of road users were present.

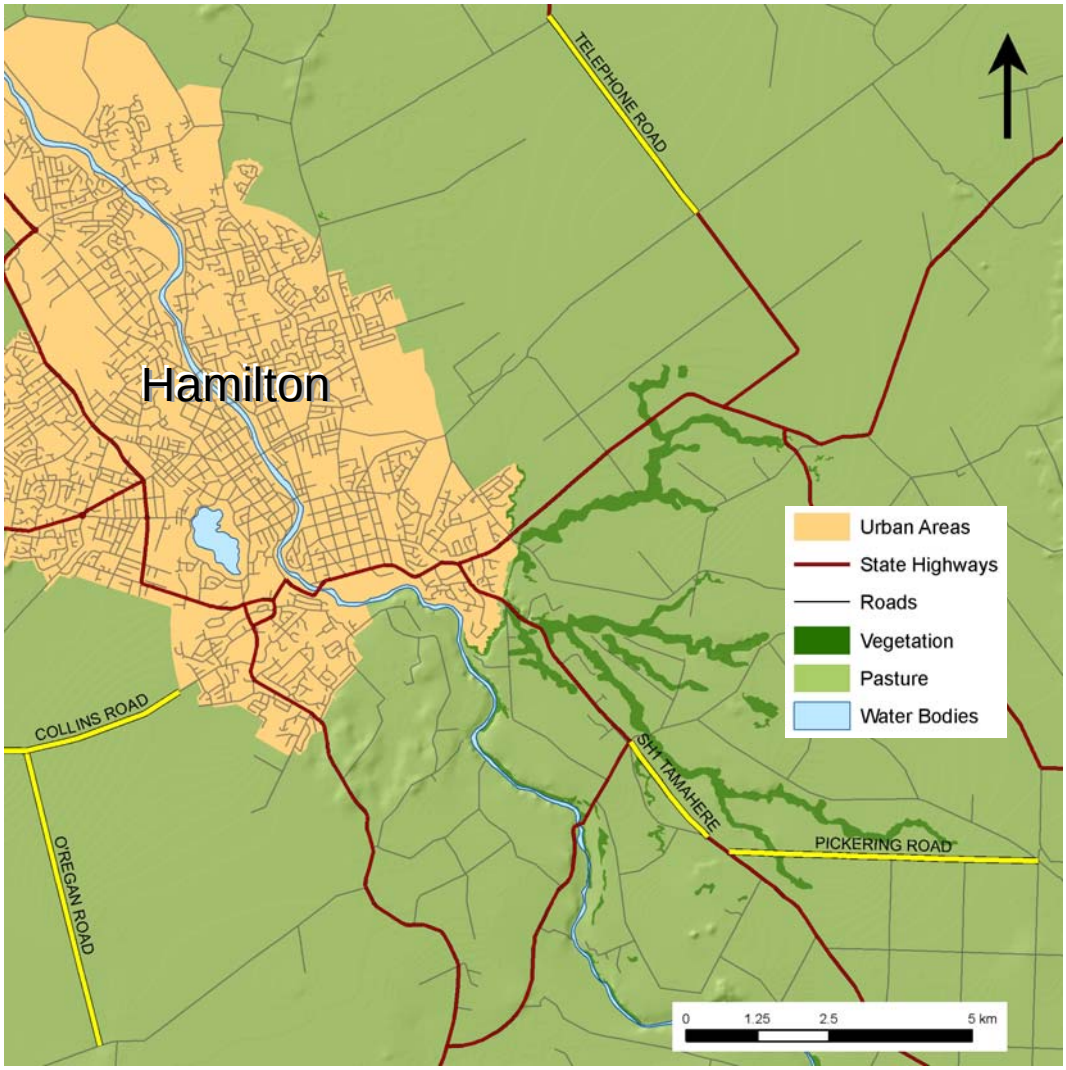

Figure 6: Rural Youth Car Culture Spaces.

Areas on the outskirts of Hamilton's urban boundary were also visited for the purposes of speeding. Roads to the southwest such as Collins Road and Telephone Road to the east were particularly desirable as they were away from residential zones and had long, straight sections (see Figure 6). Often cars would travel in convoy to these sites but street racing was not engaged in as the roads were single lane and the phenomenon of street racing was virtually unheard of.

Hamilton's Satellite Towns

It is also important to consider the relationships between T' Straight and Hamilton, and Hamilton's position in relation to its geographic location and physical landscape. Hamilton is New Zealand's largest inland city and is the hub of the surrounding rural area and associated dairy industry. Importantly for this thesis is the fact that Hamilton has four main satellite towns within 26 kilometres - Ngaruawahia, Morrinsville, Te Awamutu and Cambridge (see Figure 7). The combined population of these four towns in 2006 was 37,086 (Statistics NZ 2006).

Two of the telephone interviewees and at least three people spoken to at T' Straight mentioned that they lived in these satellite towns. Hamilton is also within one and half hours drive of New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. Groups regularly make the trip from Auckland to socialise in Hamilton. Due to the smaller size of the satellite towns, the public gaze was much more difficult to avoid.

One participant said in relation to living in a small town:

> *I mean I come from _____ , you're not going to find security cameras here, but, there's, it's a bit like if you do something in town you deserve to get a kick up the bum so I mean I use, like I say I usually just cruise along when I'm in town.*

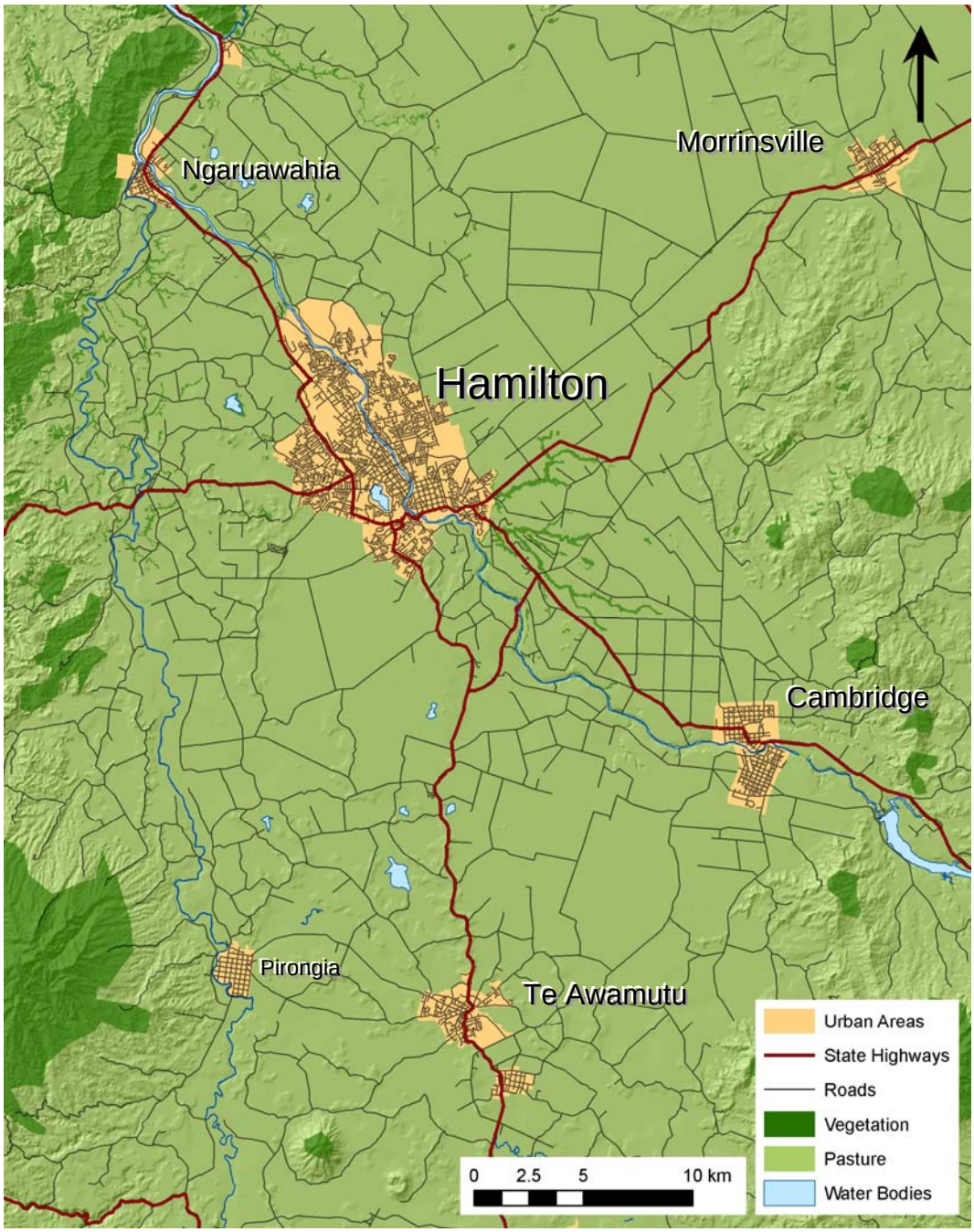

Figure 7: Hamilton's Satellite Towns

The appeal of the relative anonymity Hamilton provides makes it a more desirable place to congregate. Combined with the desire for rural youths to seek opportunities beyond the relative social deserts that small towns and rural areas represent for some young people (Valentine and Holloway 2001 387), this positions Hamilton as an attractive option as a place to socialise. There also appears to be an element of scale jumping here in that due to its close proximity, young people with cars are able to step outside their everyday sphere of experience without compromising issues such as curfews. However there is an ironic element to the draw of Hamilton in that popular imaginings at a national level tend to construct Hamilton as a provincial “backwater”.

Surveillance and the “Threat” of Youth

Although our driving behaviours in the rural areas shown in Figure 6 presented a far greater risk of harm to ourselves and the public, it was our congregation habits in urban spaces that attracted the greatest attention from the police. Whilst it could be argued policing such a large rural area requires far greater resources than an urban CBD, the question remains as to why it was so important to monitor and remove our presence from the north end of Victoria Street?

I believe it is here that authors such as Aitkin (2001), Dawes (2002), Holloway and Valentine (2000), Massey (1998), Sibley (1995) and Valentine (1996, 1996a) are useful in understanding the processes that led to the spatial enforcement regime we as youth car culture enthusiasts

were subjected to. Judging by the feedback received from participants in this research, it appears little has changed in the last two decades in relation to how young people and their cars are treated. However, prior to a critical engagement of the historical and contemporary spatial practices, surveillance and policing of youth car culture in Hamilton, I briefly discuss the legislative and subsequent spatial changes that emerged in response to our congregation practices.

The presence of youth car enthusiasts on Friday and Saturday nights in the areas highlighted in Figure 5 was a source of anxiety for the public and other “stakeholders” such as shop owners. Complaints to police and the Hamilton City Council led to a number of initiatives that sought to curb young people occupying this area in the weekend. These initiatives coincided with an increased interest in retail activity in the north end of Victoria Street. Indeed, increased anxiety over the decay of retail activity in the northern CBD area was one of the main factors influencing the drive to force youth car culture enthusiasts away (Gilson 2003 67-68). Facing numerous empty shops and a decline in foot traffic and retail activity, the North End Business District Association looked at ways to improve the image of the North End.

Undoubtedly, the threat youth car culture enthusiasts presented to the safety and image of the North End was considered. Subsequently, both Levenes and Dallas Motors fenced off their car parks to stop people congregating there. Further, Dallas Motors employed a private security firm to monitor their premises after hours with the intention of ensuring no

one congregated there. Carl,[9] a 35+ year old male, reflected on his experience of surveillance during a telephone interview:

Paul: *Back in the day and perhaps now, how often did you ever encounter police or security surveillance?*

Carl: *Very rarely. And nowadays it's just everywhere, which is good. You know, back, we're going back, oh, 10 to 15 years; cops were few and far apart. I mean, we were travelling up and down the main street for a couple hours and only see one or two cop cars, and that was it. And security guards weren't really, 'cause Dallas motors used to be a good spot to go and now there's no parking there.*

Paul: *On the side of the road? So they, so they changed it?*

Carl: *Yeah, they used to pull into the driveway there. And then, you know, they sort of thought about it and then they started putting security guards there and just telling them to move on. But now there's just cops everywhere.*

Private security was also employed in the newly developed retail complex adjacent to the petrol station at the north end of Victoria Street and any "undesirable" elements were promptly moved on. These strategies have continued to be employed today by businesses on T' Straight. Westpac Bank has closed off after hours access to its car park. Fairview Motors employs security personnel to move youth car culture enthusiasts from the entrance to its premise after hours. In 1998, as part of a broader strategy for improving the safety of Hamilton's CBD, a police monitored surveillance camera was installed in the north end (Gilson 1998 29). However, it appears the presence of this camera had very little effect on the congregation practices of young people. This is reflected in comments during telephone interviews. Darryl, a 30 year old IT worker, and Tim, a 21

year old student, both said the surveillance cameras in Hamilton did not influence their driving practices.

There are significant parallels between youth car culture landscapes in Hamilton of 20 years ago and those of the present day. Whilst some of the actual places frequented have shifted geographically, and new social behaviours have emerged, many of the social practices and attributes of the spaces themselves appear very similar. For instance, congregating spots today still have high visibility so enthusiasts can “see, and be seen”. Further, when outside their cars, enthusiasts still appear to “cluster” around one particular car. The position that youth car culture occupies within discourses of the moral ordering of space seems consistent across both time periods that this research focuses on. Young people are often forced out of places other segments of the population are allowed to occupy. Often young people, who usually lack political voice, lose out on the places that are important to them. They are often forced away from street spaces as they are viewed as “bad for business” (Lees 2003 630-634). The following discussion will unravel the continuities and discontinuities encountered during this research project in a way that acknowledges that while:

> young people have to contend with practices and attitudes that exclude them, a spatial and social politics of “community” is more complex than an experience of exclusion. Our results show that young people recognize a range of ways they feel included in the spatial and social expressions of “community”. Moreover, even when facing exclusion, some young people are able to creatively protest or construct alternative senses of “community” for themselves (Panelli *et al.* 2002 108).

The Role of Technology in Youth Car Culture

Arguably, the most significant change in the geographies of youth car culture has been the occupation and utilisation of new technologies, most notably the Internet and mobile phones. As the Internet did not emerge until 1991, its subsequent adoption has profoundly affected the shape and nature of youth car culture in New Zealand since I was actively engaged in the scene. Within the Hamilton context, and in conjunction with mobile phones, the Internet has become part of the scene at multiple levels. These technologies have connected people to other groups and clubs around the country; they facilitate the organisation of events and gatherings; they are used to exchange information about various aspects of car modification; they allow relatively easy sharing of still and moving images that demonstrate car performance and driving ability; and they help in the purchase of cars and car parts which are often arranged online.

The Internet in varying degrees constitutes part of the youth car culture scene for all of the participants spoken to, including Inspector Leo Tooman. Inspector Tooman spoke of how the police gather intelligence from certain sites and forums relating to any activities - illegal or otherwise - that may impact on road safety. By example, information relating to a planned visit from an Auckland car club was intercepted and used to set up a road block to ensure cars en route to Hamilton were road worthy. The police also monitor youth car culture forums as part of a broader strategy to combat the sale of stolen cars and car parts.[10] Mobile phones are also implicated in organised illegal activity as they are the main medium for sharing information relating to unauthorised street racing events.

For the enthusiasts, online forums and chat rooms were used mainly to keep in touch with friends in other parts of the country and to find out information on upcoming events and car modification techniques. A number of participants used the online forums to draw attention to the effects of indiscreet displays of illegal driving behaviour. In this sense it was not the fact that individuals were engaging in illegal activity per se, but that the impacts on other members of the public were not being considered. Of utmost concern in this context was the impact such behaviour had on the respective car club and on youth car culture in general.

Codes of Conduct

These debates feed into the code of ethics charters that all five of the car clubs encountered adhere to and are usually espoused by car club members over the age of 30.[11] Further, it is these same older members that take great care in promoting the positive aspects of youth car culture, work that can often be undone by the actions of one or two individuals. It is important to note here that acceptance of burnouts and speeding varied across the people spoken to during the course of this research, from zero tolerance to “conditional acceptance”.

There exists a spatial coding within the aforementioned debate that marks certain spaces and places as appropriate for certain behaviours. There is also a temporal element to what marks a given behaviour appropriate or not. For instance, spinning one’s tyres in a populated area was in almost

every case considered unacceptable. So too was performing a burnout during what could loosely be described as working hours in an industrial area. The presence of other road users as opposed to the risk of getting caught was the determining factor in why burnouts were inappropriate in industrial areas. By contrast, temporality rarely influenced driving behaviour in rural areas. So whilst it is clear that a minority of youth car culture enthusiasts choose to engage in behaviours that perpetuate the negative stereotype of the “boy racer”, the negotiation of the moral ordering of Hamilton’s urban landscape is far from straightforward.

As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, originally participant observation was only going to be employed to enrich information gathered from the interviews. However, engaging with youth car culture enthusiasts at a congregation site proved to be an invaluable experience to help understand the ways in which youth car culture manifests and shapes Hamilton’s cultural landscape.

T’ Straight

T’ Straight was chosen for participant observation as it was mentioned by all the participants as the main place where youth car culture enthusiasts gather (see Figure 8). The first thing that became apparent was the increase in the number of people congregating in the contemporary scene from 20 years ago. This in part can be explained by the larger area available for parking and congregating compared to the north end of Victoria Street. However, many other factors have contributed to the size

and composition of the phenomenon that is T' Straight. These factors can be understood as both external (such as the police, Hamilton City Council and the public) and internal (the agency of the youth car culture enthusiasts themselves) and overlap in complex and often contradictory ways.

Figure 8: T' Straight and Surrounding Area

First and foremost of these factors is the comparative absence of the public gaze. T' Straight is surrounded by an industrial estate, although there are a small number of houses close to the south end of the area that is frequented by youth car culture enthusiasts. Unlike the north end of Victoria Street, the number of "stakeholders" affected by the presence of young people parking up with their cars is relatively minimal. As Inspector Leo Tooman puts it: 'The other thing there is that it's nonresidential, totally nonresidential so they're not getting complaints from neighbours like they

were on Victoria Street and at the Lake and all those sort of areas, so they're pretty much left to their own devices.'

It is perhaps the same pressure that drove the youth car culture presence out of Victoria Street that has inadvertently contributed to the apparent expansion of the core congregation group of youth car culture enthusiasts. The alternative site that was found facilitated a larger number of people to gather. Again, Inspector Tooman states the ample spaces to park allows many more people to congregate there than the Victoria Street site. It is feasible that T' Straight would have evolved independently, but it appears that the CBD interventions accelerated its emergence.

Interestingly, the notion that the presence of enthusiasts represents a threat appears to have shifted from concerns over personal safety and loss of economic productivity (as they were when Victoria Street was the main congregation site), to issues of noise and mess. In fact, complaints over rubbish left by youth car enthusiasts by nearby residence prompted a police swoop that resulted in a number of prosecutions, none of which were for littering (*Waikato Times* 4 November 2006). As rubbish, and broken glass in particular, was one of the recurring concerns in newspaper articles and letters to the *Waikato Times* (for example, *Waikato Times* 31 October 2006) I noted the levels of rubbish during the participant observation conducted.

On all four nights I was there, I observed no more (or less) rubbish and/or broken glass than in urban places and spaces that are used for the

purposes of socialising in the evening, such as the areas surrounding the CBD of Hamilton, the CBD itself and Rotoroa (Hamilton Lake). The difference here is that the Hamilton City Council provides rubbish bins, and employs cleaners to remove rubbish from the streets in the CBD. There are no such provisions made for the people who socialise at T' Straight. Also, regular visitors that were spoken to generally park in the same area and had a sense of ownership in the area they occupied. As perpetuating the scene is of utmost importance to them, these people take care to leave their particular area clean before they go. Instead, perhaps we can look to Sibley (1995) and conclude it is not so much the litter that residents are objecting to per se, but the "human garbage", the abject other that the youth car culture enthusiasts represent.

It is the dimly lit, liminal areas such as the large vacant lot beside Bunnings Warehouse that attracts the most litter. "Genuine" modified car enthusiasts never parked in these areas. Litter did appear in other areas but again, this was usually associated with cars that were not modified. It appears that almost all of the rubbish left at T' Straight was a result of "non-genuine" car enthusiasts. The largest number of smashed and whole glass bottles observed on any of the nights I conducted participant observation was 23 over the one kilometre stretch. Whilst the number of youth car culture enthusiasts at T' Straight when I was there was far from peak,[12] it is arguable whether the level of mess constitutes a problem requiring police intervention. It is also questionable whether providing city council maintained rubbish bins would completely remove the problem. However, whenever the topic of rubbish came up in conversation,

participants always drew attention to the absence of rubbish bins. I imagine when the district plan was drafted and the Te Rapa industrial estate was zoned, planners would not have conceived that it would become an extensive hub of social activity for young people. As such, no provisions would have been made to cater to them. However, rarely are the needs of young people catered for in urban areas and as such, this situation does not represent a particular departure from the experiences of young people (Corrigan 2003, Holloway and Valentine 2000 12).

A sense of ownership also resonated through other aspects of the T' Straight scene. There was an air of pride in how resistant the scene had been to police and community intervention. There appears to be parallels between the experiences of the young people at T' Straight and the TWOCers in Massey's (1998) study (see page 27). This was certainly not a reactionary pride based solely within anti-establishment ideals but one that tended to focus on the legitimacy of (youth) car culture as a form of cultural expression. Most of the pride revolved around the fact that youth car culture was flourishing in spite of the negative associations attached to it; that they weren't breaking the law and the culture was one that was generally well behaved. This is confirmed by Inspector Leo Tooman's comment 'most of them, believe it or not, are reasonably well behaved as long as there is police presence. Once police presence disappears then all hell can break loose, they'll let their hair down.'

The 20 people with whom I spoke at T' Straight were in favour of some level of police surveillance (due to "out of towners" and other elements that

act recklessly) but felt they were unfairly targeted and subjected to unequal levels of scrutiny compared to the rest of the driving population. Dawes' (2002) work also demonstrated that young people felt the level of attention directed at them was unwarranted. In some cases the young people who congregated at the Strand in Townsville, Australia had witnessed older and younger drivers speeding and only the younger driver was pulled over. Responses from all three telephone interviewees and almost all of the people with whom I spoke at T' Straight paralleled those of the Townsville youths when asked if this was similar to the situation in New Zealand. Whilst Inspector Leo Tooman said youth car culture enthusiasts represent a small number of the total infringements issued he also stated in a media interview that police will continue to target boy racers (*Waikato Times* 6 November 2006).

My central concern with this targeting in combination with the use of the term "boy racer" is that it serves to represent all of the youth car culture enthusiasts at T' Straight as trouble makers. Whilst this process of enforcement fosters animosity towards the police in a general sense, all 20 people with whom I spoke felt that it was only when they were doing nothing other than parking up or acting within the law that scrutiny was unjustified. This is not to say that the spatial regime of control the youth culture enthusiasts endure is unidirectional. One car club, tired of being asked to move on, gained written consent from a proprietor of a business allowing them to park in and around their premises. Each member of the club had a copy of the consent letter and kept it in their car to avoid being asked to move. This is reflected in comments by Panelli *et al.* (2002 106)

and Skelton and Valentine (1998) that refute young people as passive agents at the mercy of societal bounds, but as active participants in constructing and maintaining their identities and spatial actions.

Another element shaping the suitability of T' Straight as a congregation site that is intertwined with the relative absence of the public gaze is the issues faced by young people attempting to gain spatial and social autonomy. As Gough and Franch (2005 150) and Valentine (1996a 213) note, the street is the only place where young people can act autonomously. T' Straight also represents a liminal space in that its design was never intended to facilitate socialising. However, children (and young people) experience the built environment differently from adults. Liminal spaces such as wastelands and vacant lots are read differently by young people. An industrial area therefore represents a field of opportunity for social interaction (Holloway and Valentine 2000 12). Whilst not all of the people who congregate out at T' Straight could be described as youths, because of their interests and corporeal identities they become constructed as youths and could be argued to be subjected to the same spatial regimes of control that young people have to negotiate.

The experiences of the young people in Dawes' (2002) study echo those of the youth car culture enthusiasts in Hamilton in relation to why certain places are suited to "hanging out". Proximity to amenities, visibility and ability to "do laps" were all cited as features that make a space desirable for congregating in (Dawes 2002). Aside from the distance it is from a direct public gaze, T' Straight provides high visibility, it is well lit, has an

adjacent road suitable for laps, and is close to amenities such as petrol stations and a 24 hour car wash. My first impression when conducting participant observation was that the T' Straight area did not provide sufficient visibility for enthusiasts to see and be seen. This was especially true for the service lane as a planted traffic island that in some places had four metre high trees separated the lane from the main road. However, these are not the only reasons people congregate at T' Straight and as I will argue in the following chapter, the relationships between visibility, spectating and being seen are not straightforward.

What ties all of these aforementioned issues together is the notion that T' Straight, a public road, is reproduced as a recreational space that serves to exclude those who are not part of the scene. The issue here is that *all* drivers are expected to adhere to the road rules and any transgressions of acceptable driving behaviour can be understood as a threat. As Inspector Leo Tooman points out, most of the youth car culture enthusiasts are operating within the law. The question then arises as to why the use of T' Straight represents a challenge to the adult construction of space? Clearly the orderly fashion that is expected in adult space is being disrupted in a number of ways. First, roads are designed for transportation (Hoyle and Knowles 1992) and not for "playing on". Second, the manner in which cars travel in convoy and continually travel back and forth around the same circuit departs from "normal" (read adult) road usage. Third, the types of cars, the noise they make and the corporeality of the drivers (attire, slouched driving position) challenges respectable driving behaviours. It is

little wonder then that this creates tension between those who wish to use T' Straight as a transport route and those who are there recreationally.

Travelling along T' Straight on Friday and Saturday nights is not without its challenges. Driving as an observer along T' Straight when I was conducting participant observation was somewhat unnerving. The average speed was around 70 kilometres per hour, 10 kilometres per hour over the speed limit. However, this is arguably the experience for most road users across urban and rural areas for the entire country as 'New Zealand has a long history of speed creep'[13] and the 'New Zealand Police apply an enforcement tolerance which in recent years has been 10km/h over the speed limit' (Povey *et al.* 2003 5). Therefore, these speeding trends appear to reflect "accepted" societal norms. The most unsettling part of driving on T' Straight on the Friday and Saturday nights was the lane changing drivers engaged in to keep up with the people they were following. Again, this weaving was no more extreme than my experiences of driving on the Auckland motorway during equivalent traffic density. Therefore I suggest that it is the disruption to adult space that presents the greatest source of anxiety for those who object to the way youth car culture has manifest at T' Straight and Hamilton.

The second major factor contributing to the T' Straight phenomenon is the monitoring and surveillance position taken by the police. Given media discourses that highlight problems associated with young people congregating at T' Straight, together with the number of complaints police

are obliged to investigate, surely this would provide enough justification for a complete ban of congregation in T' Straight area?

The police are caught in a somewhat interesting position in relation to monitoring youth car culture and the associated law enforcement that arises. On one hand, the needs and rights of the public must be considered in unison with road safety and the safety of young people (underage drinking, the potential for assaults). However, as is the case with other youth cultures (Muggleton 2000 146-153), car culture has proven to be a pervasive force that is very resistant to societal interventions (Dawes 2002). This is particularly relevant considering that T' Straight is a "street space" and any understanding of young people's behaviour in the street must be embedded in issues of spatial exclusion, social control and resistance (Sibley 1995). If young people are moved on from a given space, or the level of police control of a given space is excessive, the youth car culture enthusiasts tend to find new spaces to occupy.

These new spaces are almost always further from the public gaze and as a result, more difficult to police. Whilst the presence of youth car culture enthusiasts does present some problems, Inspector Leo Tooman stated 'I'm of the opinion that if you're on Te Rapa Road at least we know where they are. What we find though is when we put pressure on, they disappear and they're very difficult to keep track of …' This appears to both confirm and disrupt the dominant discourse that posits youth car culture enthusiasts as a threat to the moral order. On one hand there is a

permissive side to enforcement that can be read as an acknowledgement that T' Straight is an acceptable alternative. On the other hand it is acknowledged that some form of policing is necessary to ensure the safety of the public and the youth car culture enthusiasts.

At this point I feel it is important to reiterate that my observations were conducted in a specific area. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that the ways youth car culture enthusiasts occupy T' Straight are constructed in dominant discourses is often spurious, my observations occurred in an area that is embedded in broader spatial scales. By example, although young people at T' Straight are generally "well behaved", they negotiate other places and spaces to get there. The experiences of residents that live on the arterial routes and roads that lead to T' Straight do inform contemporary understandings of youth car culture. Without engaging debates relating to utilitarianism, questions are raised as to the realistic nature of the residents that live on arterial routes. While citizens living in an urban space have the right to be protected from excessive noise, it is questionable as to how far these rights extend if someone is living on a main road.

One other significant change to the spaces and places that youth car culture enthusiasts occupy in Hamilton is related to the proliferation of car clubs. Two decades ago it was unheard of to congregate in a public space during the day or have the infrastructure to organise around 50 people to meet up for a social event. Now barbeques at public parks and other similar events are commonplace within the youth car culture community.

As mentioned in chapter 3, my first scoping exercise involved attending a barbeque organised by the Rotor Dynamic Car Club. Members from other parts of the country were also in attendance. Charity events to raise funds have also extended the types of places that youth car culture occupies (see also page 87). For instance, during participant observation I was told of one event organised to raise funds for a Hamilton charity that involved driving to Mount Ruapehu, a major ski resort in the central North Island of New Zealand. The distance from Hamilton to Mount Ruapehu is just over 250 kilometres one way. Twenty years ago, the furthest equivalent event any of my peers drove to from Hamilton was approximately 130 kilometres.

Whilst perhaps not an intentional outcome, the occupation of these new spaces not only disrupts dominant discourses relating to youth car culture but also challenges scale-based regimes of spatial control. In the case of the car club barbeque, council permission was sort to ensure they would not be moved on. Other events such as car club gymkhanas have also destabilised spatial controls at the scales of the community and the city. This is evident in Carl's response to whether he had noticed any changes to youth car culture in the last 20 years:

> *People have got a lot more mature. A lot of guys are starting to get into car clubs who actually put on events for people who are looking to do gymkhanas, burn out competitions where they can sort of go along to things like that and actually meet people and act like responsible people instead of going out on the streets and doing it. All controlled, so the boys can, so you can run round be an idiot and not get into trouble for it.*

Although they were still subject to local and central government laws, by gaining consent I argue car clubs shift their position from “boy racers” to “legitimate citizens”.

“Out of Towners”

In relation to the sense of ownership the “regulars” had, there was a perception that many of the problems that occurred at T’ Straight were a result of people from Auckland and outlying areas coming in and acting inappropriately. This was also brought up by Inspector Tooman:

Paul: *I guess that's the same with the ones that turn up in the old Toyota Corollas? They’re not all necessarily going to be engaging in illegal activity?*

Leo Tooman: *What you find is those guys are farm boys who come to town and play up for a night, and she's all over.*

A group of people spoken to at T’ Straight mentioned the nature of car culture enthusiasts who travel from Auckland to Hamilton for the weekend to socialise. The opinion was that because surveillance and enforcement is more active towards youth car culture enthusiasts in Auckland,[14] it is more difficult to find areas suitable for driving and congregating. The group also noted the fact that because they do not have a sense of ownership vested in T’ Straight or Hamilton, the people who come from outside the area tend to act and drive in ways that give the Hamilton scene a bad name. Comments often drew attention to the fact that although the Auckland based enthusiasts tended to have more powerful cars, they did

not have the driving skills to fully exploit that power. The Hamilton drivers, in spite of having less powerful cars, tended to out perform the Auckland drivers. Without diminishing the validity of these opinions, they tended to occur within a wider discursive rivalry between Hamilton and Auckland.

Summary

Whilst the actual sites within which youth car culture is constituted in Hamilton have changed from two decades ago, the factors that make a place suitable for congregating have not. New spaces have emerged, such as the Internet and car club events, which now constitute a major part of youth car culture in Hamilton and have contributed to an increase in the number of people who engage in youth car culture. Increases in part can also be attributed to the fact that high profile areas where enthusiasts now congregate are able to facilitate more people. Further, policing measures that balance law enforcement whilst ensuring spatial regimes of control that do not disperse the youth car culture community to sites that are more difficult to monitor also has had a significant impact on the size of the T' Straight phenomenon.

As with other youth cultures, car enthusiasts in Hamilton have proved to be active agents in the construction of their respective communities and have resisted regimes of control in complex and meaningful ways. This resistance represents an ability to (partially) transcend scale-based mechanisms of control. The threat that youth car culture enthusiasts represent appears to be embedded in broader discourses that construct

young people has human “becomings” (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Whilst the impacts of legal transgressions such as speeding and illegal activity have very real negative impacts on Hamilton’s population, the level of attention youth car culture enthusiasts are subjected to appears disproportionate.

This chapter has focused specifically on spatial aspects of Hamilton’s youth car culture scene, both in an historical and contemporary context. Whilst each factor has been discussed in isolation, each is embedded in wider and complex socio-spatial relationships that overlap in multiple ways. In the following section, I will attempt to unravel some of the ways in which these complexities occur through exploring youth car culture at the scale of the embodied identities of youth car culture enthusiasts. In particular I will be examining the mutually constitutive processes at work between the youth car culture enthusiasts and the places they occupy.

5. IDENTITY AND YOUTH CAR CULTURE IN HAMILTON

My intention during this research has been to provide an alternative discourse to inform debates around youth car culture. Through this approach it is hoped a more nuanced understanding of youth car culture will emerge that does not automatically position all young car enthusiasts as “boy-racers”. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the term “boy-racer” is an inaccurate descriptor applied inappropriately to what is a varied and diverse culture. I take this one step further in chapter 6 and discuss how the strategic use of the term “boy-racers” and how “boy-racers” as a discursive construction are made and remade through the media.

For now though, I turn my attention to the role cars play in the identities of young people and youth car culture enthusiasts at the scale of the body. First, I discuss literature relating to the role cars play in socio-spatial identity politics. Second, I examine issues of mobility across scales and spaces. Particular attention is paid to how car use allows the regimes of spatial control articulated through geographic scales to be contested. Historical changes are then offered to allow comparisons to be made. The recurring themes of social and spatial “belonging” that emerged during the research are then discussed. I then move to issues relating to gender, symbology, ethnicity and the notion of authenticity within youth car culture. As I will argue, all of these aforementioned themes are the most overlooked aspects within discourses relating to youth car culture.

The Car and the Identity Project

Carrabine and Longhurst (2002), Dant (2004), Sheller (2004), Spinney (2006) and Urry (2003) have all argued that the social worlds of individuals are heavily mediated by and through movement, mobility and automotive culture. Carrabine and Longhurst (2002) argue driving offers many people a feeling of liberation, empowerment, and social inclusion, while inability to drive may lead to feelings of social exclusion and disempowerment in cultures of automobility. A study of young suburban drivers in Britain suggests that the car is part of patterns of sociability and the anticipation of new possibilities for such sociability generates 'an extraordinary and exciting moment of consumption for young drivers' (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002 192-193). In a large-scale study examining the expressive aspects of car use among English drivers, Stradling found that such feelings vary by age, class, and gender:

> The young (17 – 20 years) and, amongst the over twenties, the relatively poor were the two groups obtaining the greatest sense of personal identity – projection, pride, power and self-expression – from driving in their car, while older drivers (> 40 years) and, amongst these, female drivers, scored highest on the independence factor (Stradling 2002 11, Stradling *et al*. 2001 cited in Sheller 2004).

Thus, Stradling argues, 'different kinds of persons obtain different kinds of psychological benefit from car use. Driving a car is particularly attractive to the young and the poor because of the sense of displayed personal identity it conveys' (Stradling 2002: 11 cited in Sheller 2004).

Adding an explicitly geographical perspective to this debate, Spinney (2006) positions mobility as central to the shaping and maintenance of identity and argues that meanings are constructed through and within the practice of mobility. Spinney (2006 713) states that as places are rarely experienced from a static point of view, movement and its implied spatiality are central to the creation of meaning in human experience. Mobility and movement always occur through and across cultural landscapes and therefore are best understood as socialised movement. Because of the ongoing dialectic between bodies and places, movement and mobility can be seen as constitutive of the meaning and character of a place. Cultures of mobility and ways of being mobile thus become constitutive of identity and belonging (Spinney 2006 713).

According to Dant (2004), the role cars play as a component of social being and social action has largely been ignored. Instead, most texts have tended to focus on the car as an object that either exemplifies the development of production in industrial capitalism or as a commodity of desire (Dant 2004 61). His concerns are echoed by Sheller (2004) and Urry (2003) who state the car is most often engaged in normative terms that ignore the ways in which a variety of mobilities move across and through urban and rural space, mobilities that are significant “vehicles” for the formation and maintenance of identity. When they are taken into account, ‘it is to lament the effects of the car on the city or to argue that a culture of speed replaces older cultures of the “urban”’ (Urry 2003 2).

Identity and Mobility

The notion of personal freedom (Carrabine and Longhurst (2002), of displayed personal identity and the benefits of car use vary across social categories (Stradling 2002 cited in Sheller 2004). The centrality of mobility in identity maintenance (Spinney 2006) resonated through all the conversations I had during this research - the three telephone interviews and the twenty people I spoke to at T' Straight. Central was the feeling of freedom that car use afforded.

The mobility car ownership provides for all the car enthusiasts spoken to during the course of this research carries with it the ability to access areas that would otherwise be temporally, spatially and socially inaccessible. For instance, the car provides a kind of sanctuary to retreat to and affords a sense of security, particularly for the youngest of drivers and female youth car culture enthusiasts. As Carrabine and Longhurst (2002 190) state, the safety of the car provides a "shield" that helps to manage the risks of going out in the city. The young people in the Carrabine and Longhurst (2002) study valued the role cars played in their ability to socialise.

Although I did not directly engage research participants on this topic, security that the car afforded was a big part of my own experiences as a youth car culture enthusiast. From my observations, I believe this is still the case at T' Straight today. As alcohol was and still is a factor at congregation sites, the risks of being involved in a drunken confrontation were very real. When I was 18, there was at least three occasions when the car I was associated with was forced to make a hasty retreat to avoid

physical violence. Even as an adult in a research capacity I felt intimidated on two occasions when walking past groups of 10 of more youths who were drinking and acting boisterously. I did not feel the same threat when inside my car.

The relative security a car affords appears to provide young people with the ability to contest the socially producing effects of the scaling of space (Herod 1991 cited in Aitken 2001). For the young people who congregate at T' Straight, a car allows spaces to be accessed and negotiated that, due to factors such as personal concerns over safety, would otherwise be inaccessible. The car then becomes a "vehicle" that facilitates the ability to transcend the scale of the home. This is particularly relevant for the identities of "teenagers", as they gain increased spatial autonomy. In this way, young people can begin to escape the confinement of protective spaces such as the home that are controlled by adults (Ennew 1994). Not only does this mobility represent a challenge to the way spatial scales dominate and define young people (Massey 127), but it also contributes to the constitutive meaning and character of places such as T' Straight (Spinney 2006 713).

There seems to be a paradoxical sense of freedom here. The car allows young people still under guardianship from their parents or caregiver to "scale jump" from the domestic sphere to the public domain in ways that would otherwise not be possible. Whilst the car facilitates socialising experiences that would otherwise be deemed too risky, young people are simultaneously bound to the car - the personal safety it provides and the

need to keep it safe from others in the vicinity. Further, T' Straight is under constant surveillance from police patrols.

During the three telephone interviews I conducted with members of a car club and the approximately twenty conversations I had at T' Straight I was attentive to narratives around the relationships people had with their cars. When questioned about the importance of cars in relation to their identities, responses varied. For instance, when asked whether their cars assisted in attracting, or were used to attract potential friends, Darryl said:

Darryl: *Oh, not at all. Not for me at all. One thing I could say, people have said to me is I don't seem to care too much for what other people think ... I'd never buy something just so I could attract other people to be my friends, if anything people have done stuff to try and impress me.*

Tim's comments were very similar to Darryl's:

Tim: *Not really, I mean I drive my car because I like to and I like to find like-minded people, so yeah. I guess it has been used to find like-minded people, so I guess to say I have used it to find friends but you know it's not really to find friends, it's more to find people with the same interests.*

Carl and five other people I spoke to at T' Straight said that cars had played a part in gaining friends:

Paul: *Did you use your car to attract potential friends?*

Carl: *Pick up chicks*

Paul: *Pick up chicks?*

Carl: *Yeah, mainly pick up chicks and see what else was out there, and meet people and that*.

This discussion goes some way to explaining the importance of car ownership amongst the young people who congregate at T' Straight. In all instances cars were more than a means of transportation. Ownership of a car provides a mechanism to express and shape identity in ways that are utterly unique to driving mobility. This mobility facilitates the ability to move beyond the scale of the home. The ways in which cars have been mobilised to create and maintain identities and the mobile identities of youth car culture enthusiasts have in some cases departed from the norms of 20 years ago. However, evidence suggests a number of continuities have also been perpetuated.

Youth Car Culture, Identity and History

Although driving behaviours spurred by the allure of high performance cars has changed little, the people now participating in youth car culture and their motivations for doing so have seen some noteworthy changes. The most pronounced change is the number of women who now own modified cars. When I was actively engaged in youth car culture, I only met or saw two women who had their own modified cars. However, other male dominated pursuits such as extreme sports (wake boarding, BMX, skateboarding, rock climbing, snowboarding) have also seen an increase in female participation (McMillan 2003, Robinson 2002). It is then perhaps part of a general trend where more opportunities to participate are possible for women interested in male dominated youth culture pursuits.

A broader spectrum of attitudes is now evident in youth car culture. When asked about changes in attitudes, responses were as follows-

Carl: *More maturity.*

Paul: *More maturity now?*

Carl: *Yeah. More, well more, it's more of a social event, more than just 'okay, who's gonna drop the diesel?'*

The most significant change that I encountered that constitutes a radical departure from my experiences as a youth car culture enthusiast was the proliferation of car clubs and the activities they engaged in (see also page 76). Of utmost interest was the fact that all five of the clubs I encountered - Ruff Rhydaz, Kronik Performance, The Brothers, The Chosen Few and Rotor Dynamic - engaged in charity events. Clubs members would organise to travel in convoy to a given location and pay a fee to participate. The money would then be donated to charities such as the IHC, Heart Foundation, Women's Refuge, the Salvation Army and the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami Relief Fund. In part, this trend has emerged in youth car culture as part of a larger discourse related to belonging and kinship.

Identity and Belonging

One the strongest themes that resonated through the T' Straight scene was the notion of belonging. In the previous chapter I drew attention to the sense of belonging to place, and in particular, T' Straight and microcosms of occupation within T' Straight. About 15 of the 20 people I spoke to at T'

Straight were members of or were affiliated to a car club. The three people I conducted telephone interviews were all members of the same club. Whilst the following discussion focuses on the social rather than spatial aspects of belonging and the way it manifests within identity formation and maintenance within youth car culture, I must reiterate that the relationship between belonging to “place” and belonging to a social group are mutually constitutive and the two interact in complex ways. I have chosen to examine this sense of belonging because I believe it was one of the most significant findings during the research and the point at which the “boy racer” myth is at its most unstable.

My first contact at T’ Straight was with a group of five people who were affiliated to or members of the Brothers, a Hamilton car club. They engaged with me as I walked past the site where they were parked - the store-front of Te Rapa Road Super Liquor. They were initially impressed by the fact that I had brought my then 11 year old son with me. If my son had not been with me, I would have just been another pedestrian walking by. Careful thought and planning informed my decision to take my son with me and the perceived risks I had anticipated were unfounded. Indeed, it was sense of kinship within the ranks of the Brothers (and other car clubs) that caused them to engage with me in the first instance. As we continued talking I mentioned my reasons for being at T’ Straight which engaged their interest further.

Figure 9: Members of the Brothers Car Club and Their Cars at T' Straight, 23rd June 2006 00:30am.

Kinship/whanau plays an important part in car club membership and the congregation practices of the Brothers Car Club members. 'We're like a family out here, these guys', said Raz, a long time "Brother". Raz explained that the Brothers Car Club had been parking in the same spot for "years" (see Figure 9). This had led to strong ties being forged amongst not only other Brothers but also with members of other clubs. 'It's a real family thing here. We get to catch up with friends and there's real family thing going out here.' Asked if the friendships could have been forged in the absence of Hamilton's car culture and the ability to park at T' Straight one person said 'Nah, not really aye. The cops keep hassling us and moving us on but this [being able to congregate at T' Straight] is, like, real important.'

These sentiments were shared by other youth car culture enthusiasts that frequented T' Straight. Members from the Hamilton chapter of the car club The Chosen Few also referred to friendship ties that otherwise would be difficult to maintain. 'There's not really anywhere else to go. The younger guys can't go to the pub and we have to work during the week. Yeah, so it's the only time we get to hang out [with friends].' Although the notion of family was not mentioned outright, when I mentioned the perspectives around family that I had previously encountered, a Chosen Few member said 'Yeah, I 'spose, in a way.'

The sense of family not only extended to other car culture enthusiasts, but to their families as well. On the two nights I spent talking to the Brothers and the other car clubs that parked next to them - Kronik Performance and the Ruff Rhydaz - I was surprised at the number of children that were present. One three and a half year old and a child of about five were playing in and around the legs of the adults that were parked in the vicinity (see Figure 10). An infant of approximately six months old was asleep in the rear of one of the cars. Providing a "family friendly" environment was important because a number of members from the aforementioned clubs had children.

On the first night I went out as a scoping exercise I observed three cars where children not yet old enough to drive were being escorted in a car by an older person. In two cases, it appeared the driver was a parent of at least one of the young people in the car. One of these cars was a Datsun 1600 SSS, from the mid 1970s. The other was a 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air.

Both of these cars, for various reasons, have “collector” appeal. I make mention of the models here because in both cases it appeared their presence constituted a social family outing.

Figure 10: Father and Son (three and a half years old) at T’ Straight, 23rd June 2006 22.35pm.

Another thread in which issues relating to family emerged was that of why individuals chose to participate in youth car culture and where their initial interest in car culture emerged. The topic of what sparked initial interest in (youth) car culture arose in the three telephone interviews I conducted and 15 of the 20 conversations I had at T’ Straight. As Carrabine and Longhurst’s (2002 190) research shows, family relationships play a significant role in the automobility and sociability of young people’s lives. Fifteen participants revealed that their interest was inspired by a close

relative - their father, an older brother or an uncle. Two people said it was a neighbour or friend that sparked their initial interest and one person (Carl), did not mention family as an influence. However, like the other 17 people who mentioned what initially got them interested in youth car culture, Carl's interest began at an early age:

Paul: *When do you first remember being interested in wanting to have a performance car?*

Carl: *Probably after I had my first remote control car.*

Paul: *Oh yeah. So before, before you got your licence?*

Carl: *Yeah. Living on the main road, seeing lots of loud noise cars driving past.*

Darryl became interested at an early age and expressed how family had an effect on his interest:

Paul: *What originally sparked your interest in car culture?*

Darryl: *I'd have to say originally probably motor sport.*

Paul: *Yeah, on television and such, or?*

Darryl: *Yeah, my dad had a couple of, I mean my dad wasn't like a real petrol head or anything, but he didn't mind nice cars, you know. He had a few V8s out there and stuff when he lived in Aussie and had a couple of nice cars, and being a truck driver too, like right into trucks. Then moving down into the Waikato from Auckland I got right into the motocross. I mean the whole wheels and motor thing was there. Yeah, just sort of always, you know, liked cars and manuals of cars.*

Paul: *So even before you had your license?*

Darryl: *Yep. Mainly because a friend I met who was a couple of years younger than me from down the road, his family were right into cars and real petrol heads and the guys two doors round from them had what, even to today's standards I would consider an extremely nice Mazda RX3 Coupe, and it was*

probably six or seven years after I first saw it, probably the best and tidiest one I'd seen in New Zealand. Yeah and I fell in love with it, and, the look, the sound and since then and was just a really full on rotary enthusiast, yeah, and I would've been 14 at the time when I first saw that.

Tim also reflected on the influence family had on his interest in car culture:

Tim: *I've loved cars since I was pretty much five or so 'cause of my dad and my brother. And then I got really into actually playing around with them once I got my licence.*

Paul: *What originally sparked your interest in youth car culture?*

Tim: *Well, my old man had an RX3 as a kid but I saw this one car, which is called 'devious 3' and it's the most awesome car ever in my opinion and I said to my brother, 'I want a car just like that'. It turned out the 808 we owned is easily transformable into that car which I want to have so it was just luck really. And, from there it's just grown.*

From these responses it is clear that family connections and experiences play a significant part in the shaping of attitudes relating to car culture. It is also clear that the respondents' interest in youth car culture and car culture in general started at a young age. Therefore, the importance of car culture for these participants cannot be dismissed as an "adolescent phase", but is better understood as a life-long influence.

Youth Car Culture, Identity and Gender

It is the notion of displayed personal identity (Stradling 2002 cited in Sheller 2004) that draws me to the work of Butler (1999). The view that gender is performative exposes that which we take to be an internal essence of gender as a manufactured set of performed acts, sustained

through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it shows that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalised gestures (Butler 1999 xv). Observations I have made at T’ Straight during this research and at other times prior to and after the project appear to fit Butler’s (1999) theory. Moreover, physical markers inscribed on the bodies, and mapped out through the actions of the male and female youth car culture enthusiasts at T’ Straight tend to suggest a hypergendered performance.

Hypergender differs from gender as a theoretical framework as it is a construct that was developed to examine the ways in which gender roles maintained male dominance rather than exploring gender differences (Kreiger and Dumka 2006 778). By drawing on the concept of hypergender, I specifically refer to “exaggerated” stereotypical gendered performances. Here, hypermasculinised men are characterised as violent and that this is “natural” for men; as believing that dangerous activities are desirable; and as having boorish sexual attitudes towards women. Further, the suppression of sadness and fear - deemed to be a sign of weakness - are also synonymous with this stereotype. The domination of others has also been ascribed to the hypermasculine male (Kreiger and Dumka 2006 778). Attributes synonymous with hyperfeminine women within the context of this research reflect those who measure personal success with maintaining sexual relationships with men;[15] who view their sexuality as a key resource in developing and maintaining these relationships; and who expect their partners to adhere to stereotypical masculinised roles.

Hyperfeminine women have also been characterised as being manipulative and seductive (Kreiger and Dumka 2006 779).

It is acknowledged that these aforementioned distinctions reflect stereotypical and highly generalised discursive constructs. Further, they are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. I also acknowledge that applying them within this research context is highly problematic and doing so is completely reliant on my subjective positionality. However, as this thesis is embedded in an autoethnographic framework, I argue there is critical merit in employing hypergender within my participant observation methodology as a theory to explain gender politics within youth car culture. Whilst problematic, I argue that behaviours observed within the youth car culture that I encountered fit into at least some of the characteristics compiled by Kreiger and Dumka (2006).

Of the approximately 600-700 people I observed that were congregated at T' Straight over the three nights of participant observation, around 75-80 were female. Even though the temperature was never above 8^{o} C, about 50 percent were wearing short-cropped, fitting singlets that left their lower torsos exposed. This may explain why I only observed 15 women who were not driving their own car standing outside. More importantly though, it appears the apparent impractical nature of most of the women's attire reflects characteristics of hyperfemininity - placing sexual desirability ahead of personal comfort. On two occasions I witnessed males wearing T-shirts but in every other case, either a sweatshirt, a hooded sweatshirt and/or a jacket was worn. This does not represent a departure from

dominant clothing choices of young people in Hamilton in a general sense. When the weather conditions and location of T' Straight are considered however, by choosing to wear revealing clothing I argue most women at T' Straight appear to be adhering to hypergendered roles. Further, some women seated in cars who were not the driver of that car had expressions of disinterest or boredom. I suggest this reflects the hypergendered nature of youth car culture as women were positioned in a role passive to a male counterpart.

On three separate occasions I had the opportunity to speak to the partners or "girlfriends" of enthusiasts. All three women were aged between 17 and 20. As with around 90 percent of the women I observed who were associated with or owned parked up cars, considerable effort had gone into their appearance as all three had styled hair and full facial makeup. In each instance they complained about how much time and money their partners spent on their cars. However, they simultaneously enjoyed the benefits of being associated with a quality modified car. On all three occasions the women with whom I spoke would prefer to spend less time socialising at T' Straight and more time in places such as clubs or bars. Their boyfriends appeared to fit typical hypermasculine roles - they wore clothing from manufacturers such as *Independent* whose marketing reflects hypermasculine roles, they had slouching, casual postures and monotonous, disaffected speech. All three conversations were conducted within hearing distance of their respective boyfriends. As such, responses tended to be either guarded or parodied tensions within the relationship in a flippant manner.

I had the opportunity to speak to two women on separate occasions who owned their own modified cars. Both had at least one other female passenger and were between 20-22 years of age. In both cases the cars were parked separately from any other cars and my presence was treated with suspicion. Even after I had explained why I was at T' Straight both women were reluctant to talk to me, although one was happy for me to photograph her car. Although disappointing, it provided a useful insight for future research methods as I believe in both cases the women would have been happy to talk to me if I had been accompanied by a woman.

Of the approximately 65 modified cars driven by women that I observed at T' Straight, only three did not have passengers. Only one of the modified cars that were driven by women had a male passenger and he was in the back seat. This appears to confirm the hypermasculinised trait of asserting dominance as being passenger to a woman could be read as subservience to the 'weaker' gender, thereby undermining the man's masculinity. By contrast, from my observations I noted that approximately 30-40 percent of modified cars driven by men had women as passengers. The women passengers were often the only other occupant apart from the (male) driver as men tended to drive their own cars.

Another factor that I encountered that sheds light on the hypergendered nature of youth car culture is the phenomenon of "beauty pageants" at organised youth car culture events. As well as the scantily clad "pit lane girls"[16] and product representatives that are at every major youth car culture event, swimsuit competitions are often organised by event

promoters and entered by the girlfriends of modified car owners. Competitions organised for male event attendees are focused around the power and performance of their cars. The dichotomous nature of these competitions, where the corporeal beauty pageants are distinctly feminised and technology remains the domain of men, again tends to point to culture of hypergendered performance. While there are exceptions to this, as some women do enter in car performance competitions, this is rare. There are clear links between the heteronormative, hypergendered and sexualised nature of youth car culture and that of automotive culture at a national and global scale. These links are explored in the following chapter.

Whilst my observations in almost every case appeared to confirm youth car culture is hypergendered, the gendered identities of participants were far from simplistic or monolithic. In many cases, hegemonic understandings of masculinity were simultaneously affirmed and disrupted. For instance, while aggressive driving behaviours were observed and enjoyed, traditional markers of hegemonic New Zealand maleness and masculinities such as rugby were not (see Phillips 1984). I made a point of asking participants at T' Straight and the telephone interviews about their interests and rugby did not feature highly in their cultural sphere. The degree of hypergender performance also varied in different contexts and was less obvious at the car club meeting I attended at the beginning of this research. Age seemed to play a significant role in how gender was performed. Bravado, machismo and aggressive driving behaviours were

significantly absent from those over 30 and rare in those between 25-30 years old.

Symbology and Youth Car Culture

A striking feature of approximately 60-70 percent of the modified cars owned by women was the presence of the Playboy Bunny logo. Employment of the logo ranged from a single decal on the rear window to appearing on almost every surface in the car. In most cases the car seat covers had the Playboy Bunny logo on them (see Figure 11). None of the modified cars driven by males had the logo. Representative of a highly sexualised hyperfemininity, the employment of the Playboy logo again tends to point to the hypergendered nature of youth car culture.

Levy (2005) argues that the use of the Playboy Bunny logo is part of a wider “raunch culture” that is being embraced by women. Contemporary adoption of the Playboy Bunny logo is often framed by women as a symbol of empowerment and liberation. However, Levy (2005) argues this process is best understood as a masculinising of female sexualities, where women gain some sort of “power” and become honorary men. The problem with this belief is that it positions womanhood as something to escape from. “Raunch culture”, rather than being empowering, is instead a hypergendered, chauvinistic expression of sexuality (Levy 2005).

Figure 11: Example of Playboy Bunny Motif in Modified Car (owned by a 20 year old woman), 17th June 2006 02.20am.

It appears that for women to participate in the hypermasculinised modified car scene it is necessary to inscribe visual markers of the “hyperfem”. On the one hand, this may represent a deliberate attempt to avoid becoming masculinised through the pursuit of a stereotypically masculinised culture. On the other hand, employing a symbol that has arguably come to represent the most extreme forms of heteronormative gender roles can be read as serving to reproduce the masculinised nature of youth car culture.

Figure 12: Car Club Logos.

Apart from five people that I spoke to, all were members of a youth car club. Affiliation to a car club proved to be an important part of youth car culture for these people. The sense of belonging and how this interrelated with the identities of the people I spoke to was the source of the other most dominant symbols employed by car culture enthusiasts - the logos of their respective clubs. A number of reasons such as they “look cool” were given but in most cases the employment of logos on their vehicles represented a collective identity and sense of belonging (see Figure 12).

In three of the examples in Figure 12, Germanic or English gothic-type fonts have been used. Not only do these logos represent a local connection to a social grouping, but also a global one. These fonts and their use emanate from North American Chicano lowrider culture which began in the 1950s (*New York Times* 19 February 2000). This cultural hybridity, where social practices are adopted and transformed, demonstrates one of the ways in which youth car culture in New Zealand jumps geographic scales to construct and reproduce their own culture identities (Massey 1998 123).

As a researcher of youth (car) culture, it is important to remain cautious when interpreting symbols in this manner. In the absence of the narratives of the modified car owners themselves, it is all too easy to replicate problems that emerged through the CCCS's employment of semiotics in understanding youth cultures. Here, young people were never consulted in relation to the significance of the recurring symbols that they used. Unfounded and erroneous conclusions were reported as a result (see Baldwin *et al*. 1999). Criticisms aside, an interesting questions arises here as to the motivation of women youth car culture enthusiasts and the employment of the Playboy Bunny logo, one that warrants further enquiry.

Ethnicity and Authenticity

There is no doubt that a strong connection exists between kinship ties and interest in youth car culture. Parents, brothers and uncles rarely were interested in modified Japanese imported cars, which reflect historical

norms present at the time. This is somewhat ironic given that most of the young people with whom I spoke felt having children constituted the end of their youth car culture participation. Tim and a person spoken to at T' Straight mentioned their parents were car culture enthusiasts and owned Japanese cars. This may reflect the fact that Tim and the other person I spoke to were 20 years old or younger and their parents were most likely to have been younger themselves. In the absence of further data, it is only an assumption that a) their parents were younger, and b) being younger meant they were less affected by ethnicised historical discourses that have informed car culture in New Zealand. In the other 16 cases, people who represented the source of inspiration to engage in youth car culture owned what can loosely be described as "muscle cars".

According to Carl, prior to the mid 1990s youth car culture had not adopted Japanese imports as a preferred option. With the exception of the Mazda rotary engine cars, British, Australian and American branded cars dominated the youth car culture scene, even though pre-owned Japanese cars had been imported for at least a decade. Ethnicised perceptions relating to Japanese cars played a significant part in maintaining this situation. "Jap crap", "jappers" or "rice rockets" were not considered to be real cars as they were smaller and were often imitations of existing non-Japanese brands. Further, residual xenophobic sentiment from World War II also affected attitudes towards Japanese cars. Carl's experience sums up the attitudes at the time:

Paul: *Did it [your car] ever attract, apart from the police, did it ever attract unwanted attention?*

Carl: *Yep. They were always, they always were stared at.*

Paul: *Yep. So, from other people driving cars, or from the [pedestrian] public?*

Carl: *Ah, public?*

Paul: *Moving you on and all that sort of thing?*

Carl: *Well, yeah, you know, giving you shit about what car you drive. Just, basically saying you drive a "japper", that sort of thing.*

As such, Japanese cars were not considered to be "real" cars compared to the larger Australian and American branded muscle cars that were powered by either a V6 or V8 engine. Makes such as Holden and Ford were the most prevalent. Again I am drawn into the hypergendered discourses when considering these often masculinised muscle cars. The power, sound and size certainly encapsulate traits of discursive male power and domination. However, these distinctions are problematic.

As Miller (2001 11) cautions, notions of the masculinised cars emanating from 1950s' American car culture have been essentialised in contemporary debates. The existence of a multiplicity of masculinities further complicates this issue and therefore must be treated with caution. This issue is now further complicated by the ways in which a significant percentage of modified cars owned by women are emblazoned with the Playboy Bunny symbol, and that up to 25 percent of youth car culture enthusiasts are women. Further, I argue cars not traditionally constructed as masculine, such as Japanese cars can be read now as

hypermasculinised as is the case with modified imports. One further ironic point worth noting is muscle cars are often desired as they represent power through their engine size and the size of the car. However, many of the discursively inferior modified Japanese cars or “rice rockets” have more horsepower than their V6 or V8 counterparts.

Whilst there were clubs that were family orientated, my encounters with some clubs by contrast had a noticeable absence of children. This in part was due to the night hours in which I conducted my research. Further, most of the people I spoke to were in the 18-25 year old age bracket and therefore were less likely to have children. After speaking to them, however, I was left with the distinct impression that for a number of young people, youth car culture and children were mutually exclusive entities and engendered debates around authenticity.

Increased availability of finance options in the last 10 years, together with access to relatively cheap high performance Japanese imports, means that it is now much easier for young people to purchase modified cars than when I was an active youth car culture enthusiast 20 years ago.

Darryl: *So that’s [the cars] changed more so than the people. I mean the whole finance thing and all that and used imports has probably brought a lot more people into the scene because it’s a lot more accessible because it’s a matter of hand over money, bolt on parts, go cruising type thing. Whereas, back in my day, you had to spend a little bit more money. You had to do a bit more work to customise things so, it sort of weeded out those who aren’t really that into it in my eyes.*

These sentiments were shared by 10 of the 20 people I spoke to at T' Straight. One person at T' Straight said 'These young fullas, they borrow the money, or get it from mummy and daddy. They're not real enthusiasts, they're into it because it's fashionable. Once they get old, they sell up and get a family car.' The enthusiasts over the age of 25 and in particular, those who were in the scene twenty or more years ago felt that unless you had built the car yourself, you were not a "true" enthusiast. Three people younger than 25 with whom I spoke that had done most of the modifications themselves also shared these sentiments. It appears then that a hierarchy of authenticity is inherent within youth car culture. The identities of youth car culture enthusiasts and their status within the scene is therefore heavily contingent on how much work and energy an individual has invested in their modified car.

Although it was outside the scope of this project to investigate deeply issues relating to ethnicity, car-brand was not the only place in which ethnicity emerged. When asked about interaction between various car club and ethnic groups, Inspector Leo Tooman responded that many tend to stick to their own groups:

Paul: *What about ethnic groups? We've had changes with the Somali and Asian communities in Hamilton. Is there a change in ethnicity relating to youth car culture over the years?*

Leo: *Yes, but they seem to stick with in their own groups. We don't notice it so much around Hamilton and the Waikato here. It's very prominent in the Auckland area, particularly South Auckland. Talking to my colleagues in South Auckland, they'll have their own gang shall we say, for want of a better word. The Asian group will be driving the Mitsi*

brand and Honda brand. They pretty much stick to themselves and don't really get integrated totally in the bigger boy racing scene. Indians too I notice. They [my Auckland colleagues] tell me in Auckland, are becoming quite prominent in this area too. We hadn't really seen them before. The last couple of years they've started to pop out.

Summary

Without facilities that cater to their needs, youth car culture enthusiasts seek out spaces like T' Straight. Spaces like T' Straight afford young people the ability to etch out a degree of spatial autonomy in an otherwise adult controlled public sphere. It is in marginal spaces like T' Straight that family and friendship ties are forged and remade. Mobility and access to a car plays a significant role in the sense of self, identity and personal freedom for young people. Here, the ability to move across spatial scales is of utmost significance.

Historically, the demographics of youth car culture participants has stayed relatively constant, although many more women and people over 30 could be consider as youth car culture enthusiasts. Although illegal driving practices still exist, the scene has matured and is more "socially advanced" than it was 20 years ago. This is evident in formal car club structures and the types of events, such as charity runs, that members are now engaged in. The gender performances within youth car culture although not exclusively, can be understood as hypergendered.

Family links play a significant role in initial interest in youth car culture. Belonging to a group or the scene in general forms a large part of the identities of youth car culture enthusiasts. This sense of belonging manifests as a sense of family or kinship. This sense of belonging occurs within an informal hierarchy of authenticity which is contingent on how much work an individual has done on their own car. Whilst youth car culture in other centres in New Zealand tends to be divided along ethnic lines, Hamilton has a more culturally delineated scene.

Thus far I have focused on the factors that shape and are shaped by youth car culture at the scales of the body and the city. Whilst insightful, it is important to acknowledge that no cultural phenomenon exists within a vacuum. Many other influences at various spatial scales contribute to understandings of youth car culture. The following chapter examines how broader discourses of automotivity at national and global scales interact with youth car culture in Hamilton.

6. YOUTH CAR CULTURE, DISCOURSE AND MATERIALITY

My encounters with contemporary youth car culture in Hamilton have uncovered a diverse and complex range of social practices. To achieve this depth of information, I have kept the scope of my research relatively narrow. However, no socio-spatial phenomena occur independently of other cultural influences. I have touched briefly on broader influences such as Chicano lowrider culture, historical changes and differences between Hamilton's youth car culture and those in other main New Zealand cities. Through embedding Hamilton's youth car culture within national and global discourses of automotivity and identity, I hope to add further insights into dominant understandings and the pervasive nature of (youth) car culture and why cars and car culture are so important to some young people. To do this I engage with critical debate that relates to representation and materiality. First, I examine the role mass media plays in representing, producing and influencing youth car culture. I then shift my attention to the materiality of the car and the ways in which emotions and embodiment affect our "driven" experiences.

"Boy Racers" and the News Mass Media

The role the mass media plays in the construction and maintenance of youth car culture is complex.[17] As discussed in chapter 4, the internet plays an increasingly important role in shaping the identities of youth car culture enthusiasts. Thompson (1995 256) states that the global (mass) media provides a new discourse forum. Channels such as the internet can

provide access to information and knowledge that individuals would not otherwise have access to. Such interactions have the power to stimulate an expansion of private horizons beyond an individual's immediate temporal and geographical locale. Online experiences of youth car culture enthusiasts discussed in chapter 4 tend to support this theory. However, these channels of sharing information to ever increasing audiences also have the power to disrupt and distort. It is here that I draw on critical debates that position mass media and the use of statistics not as only reflective but also as constitutive of social realities.

Muncie (2004) provides an extensive discussion on the construction of youth as discursively deviant. Arguing mass media has the ability to define reality, Muncie (2004 3) draws on examples in the UK to illustrate the ways in which news reporting is implicated in creating and maintaining negative youth stereotypes. Through the use of "official" statistics, news reporting has institutionalised certain discursive notions and images of youth and youth crime as objective "truth". Jewkes (2004 77) argues that this process is often responsible for "causing" crime or fears about crime. Embedded in an historical sequence of moral panics about "deviant youth", it is clear the medium of news reporting has manufactured notions of youth crime that draw far more gravity than is warranted.

For example, in Britain personal violent crime accounts for approximately six percent of all recorded crime, yet British newspapers devote 64.5 percent of their crime reporting to this type of crime (Muncie 2003 11). Whilst no empirical research exists for crime relating to youth car culture,

participants in this research feel road accidents involving youth car culture enthusiasts in New Zealand are over-represented in the news:

Paul: *I just remembered that you said something earlier about how much, as a whole, boy racers contribute to problems or accidents on the road. I remember on the news a police officer was quoted as saying boy racers cause five percent of injuries, whether that's fatal or otherwise. He went on to say they attract a disproportionate amount of news attention. Is that the case here?*

Leo: *Well, I think that of course because the community doesn't like them.*

Darryl had this to say about news reporting:

Paul: *What are your experiences of what you've seen in the media about hooning?*

Darryl: *The general media go out on Friday nights and find the dickheads who are drunk, the biggest losers they can, that are misbehaving and then get them on camera and talk to them, because it helps their argument that people are glorifying the situation. We've seen it happen on numerous occasions in the last year; idiots getting on TV, instead of doing like, your approach and actually seeking out the legitimate car club members who are the proper side of the, well not the proper side but the respectable side*.

It is the way in which youth crime is defined that exacerbates the situation. Youth crime is defined within discourses espoused by politicians and law agencies. The official standing these institutions occupy adds credence to claims and whilst open to contestation, journalistic practice tends to seek out and promote the views of those in authority (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994 cited in Muncie 2003 11). When I asked Darryl how he felt about media representations of youth car culture he replied:

> *Definitely very negative. It doesn't seem to matter what it is, if it involves something with wheels it's not news unless it's negative. The problems are certainly blown out of proportion. The risks of some of the things are blown out of proportion. The risks themselves are blown out of proportion.*

Legislative interventions such as the Act 2003, and mass media reports on its introduction and application are useful examples to illustrate the ways in which definitions of crime reinforce youth car culture enthusiasts as "deviant". Although its full title is the Land Transport Unauthorised Street and Illegal Drag Racing Amendment Act 2003, it is most often referred to as the "Boy Racer Act" or "boy racer legislation". Regardless of the status of the driver, the term "boy racer" is employed as a matter of course. This was most obvious in the case of John Rae, a 51 year old male. Rae, the chairman of the Taranaki Chamber of Commerce, was convicted under the "boy racer legislation" (*Waikato Times* 4 November 2006 7) yet his lawyer argued Rae was 'neither a boy, nor on this occasion was he racing.' Regardless of these issues, and contrary to police statements, statistics show that the Act 2003 has not achieved its goal of reducing negative driving behaviours in young people (*Sunday Star Times* 12th September 2004).

Further, crime events are most often constructed in dichotomous terms, where a (good) victim is positioned in opposition to an (evil) offender (Muncie 2004 11). Labelling such offences in this way produces a stereotype, which is often used to impose sanctions on whole groups (Jewkes 2004 69-73). This is certainly the case for youth car culture enthusiasts, where the actions of a minority (who may not even be

enthusiasts) are mobilised to justify sanctions on the whole. Young (1974 229-259) notes that through the process of selective news reporting, atypical youth crime events (such as street racing) become stereotypical events. These in turn are contrasted against the hegemonic, “normal” adult world, further constructing young people as the “deviant other”.

Theorists such as Baudrillard (1981) have argued the mass media are endemically part of the entertainment industry. Behind the selectivity of news reporting is the fact that crime news is a commodity. The market value of crime and its ability to increase marketability has marginalised other news-making criteria such as accuracy and relevance (McQuail 1993 253). Crime news that is commodified and popularised is driven less by public interest than by the relationship between journalistic and law enforcement agencies. The police have an agenda to promote certain issues to assist their enforcement initiatives. Journalists require “newsworthy” stories to maintain market share and attract advertising. Popular news is produced from information given to the mass media that reflects the political agendas of law enforcement agencies, which in the case of youth crime, is rarely representative (Muncie 2004 12). Moreover, other apparently similar, but unrelated incidents are drawn on to prolong an event’s “newsworthiness” (Hall 1978 cited in Muncie 2004 11), a central process within the production of moral panics. By example, an article in the *New Zealand Herald* (28th November 2006) reports on a police “boy-racer blitz” to recover unpaid fines. During the blitz, police were disappointed ‘to see that drink-drivers featured so highly again in boy-racer operations.’ No mention was made as to the status of the 14 people

that were caught with excess breath alcohol. The article is worded in such a way that suggests all 14 were “boy racers”. In this way, the mass media do not simply reflect reality, but they are actively engaged in defining it.

Dawes’ (2002) study of young people in Townsville, Australia provides an excellent example of the contentious and contradictory ways in which young people are (mis)represented in the mass media. For the young people who congregated at the Strand in Townsville, it was not only the negative and inaccurate ways they were represented in the mass media, but also the fact that there are few channels for them to respond to complaints made against them. The participants in Dawes’ (2002) research spoke of the frustration young people feel as a result of information about their lives being either misleading or completely incorrect. One of the interviewees stated:

> In the paper a few months ago Jack Wilson says one fella came by and stuck a fine notice onto his back windscreen. But he got it wrong it was not actually happening down on the Strand, that was at the auto spectacular and this guy had this huge stereo and they weren’t all his fines he just put them in the back window. Then Wilson came along and said we were all proud of it like a badge of honour. You know $240 is not actually a good badge of honour (Dawes 2002 5).

As reports on youth car culture in New Zealand rarely depart from traditional “boy racer” narratives, I was interested to determine how accurately youth car culture enthusiasts felt they were represented in the mass media. As suggested earlier, youth car culture in New Zealand is far more complex than media representations suggest. This is not a

groundbreaking revelation as the news media have no mandate to provide a balanced account of youth culture. Whilst conducting literature searches for this thesis, I found only one news article that alluded to a more nuanced report on *difference* within youth car culture (*New Zealand Herald*, 27th August 2006 18-19). Almost every other newspaper or television news article I accessed that specifically mentioned "boy racers" referred to a particular accident event or "the growing problem". I am by no means suggesting that the news media ignore the sometimes destructive consequences of young people who engage in dangerous driving practices. It is important that the negative impacts of youth car culture are reported. Again, it is the manner in which the reporting manifests that positions young people as "deviant" that is of concern.

In 13 of the 20 conversations I conducted at T' Straight and in all three telephone interviews, the topic of media representation was discussed. In every case, people believed there was an unfair bias that conflated otherwise law-abiding citizens with those that fit the "boy racer" stereotype. Darryl was particularly critical of reporting of youth car culture and often responded to topical news items by writing letters to local newspapers:

Darryl: *Everyone that drives a modified car seems to be labelled. I mean there's definitely idiots out there and I'm a pretty big advocate on the* [internet] *forums and that, for pointing out to the people that do that kind of behaviour that they are wrecking it for everybody. It's not that I necessarily disagree with what some of the stuff they're doing, it's some of the perceived dangers that I don't particularly agree with.*

Darryl's sentiments around perceived danger emerged in a number of conversations. Every youth car culture enthusiast spoken to during this research acknowledged that there was an element of risk associated within their own and/or other youth car culture enthusiasts' driving practices. None of the enthusiasts that I spoke to that were over the age of 25 engaged in street racing. Due to the code of ethics some club members are bound to, exceeding the speed limit in a car with the club motif on it is also avoided. Age did not seem to play a factor in the way youth car culture enthusiasts drove their cars at T' Straight. A degree of speeding was deemed acceptable. It depended on traffic volume and how "calculated" the risk was. Calculated in this sense generally reflected how well a driver allowed for deceleration and therefore their top speed. These sentiments were also reflected in an appeal to the judge presiding over the John Rae case. Rae's lawyer told the judge his client's actions 'did not create a material risk to road safety.' (*Waikato Times* 4 November 2006 7).

Those that operated outside this hierarchy of acceptable risk attracted scorn as they were perceived as a threat to the ability to sustain social activities at T' Straight. As the offenders appeared in every case to be under the age of 25, issues around authenticity and youth also emerged. Everyone I spoke to was quick to distance themselves from the "boy racer" stereotype and in doing so, the often fatal repercussions of activities such as street racing.

“Boy Racers”, Mass Media and Statistics

Statistics are often mobilised by law enforcement agencies and the mass media to add weight to arguments relating to youth car culture. In New Zealand, crime statistics are derived from two main sources - crimes recorded by the police and the biennial New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey.[18] There are serious issues associated with the use of these two sources of data in determining the “truth” about youth offending. The problem arises because all quantitative data rely on subjective interpretation of which behaviours are perceived and defined as a crime. Perceptions may vary greatly from individual to individual. Further, results derived from quantitative data are contingent upon the validity of the various statistical measures employed and ‘on the range of *interpretations* that can legitimately be made of any figures, no matter how they are produced’ (Muncie 2004 14 emphasis in original). Although crime statistics and the methods used to gather them are embedded in policy priority and shifts in public tolerance and perceptions of crime, they are not to be dismissed outright. They do provide valuable insights into public and institutional definitions of what constitutes crime and the priorities of the justice system (Muncie 2004 15).

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine factors that influence public perceptions and police enforcement priorities, I do however draw on statistical examples to show how youth car culture and youth crime can be misrepresented. There is no doubt that young people are over represented in both fatal and non-fatal accidents. In 2006, drivers aged between 15-24 years represented 15.66 percent of the total driving

population (Figure 13) but accounted for 30 percent of all road fatalities and injuries (*Hamilton This Week* 9th November 2006). (See also Appendix 3 for detailed driving conviction statistics). Yet the majority of all road accidents are caused by those over 25 years of age (see Figure 14).

Figure 13: Percentage of Drivers Aged 15-24 Years. Source LTSA

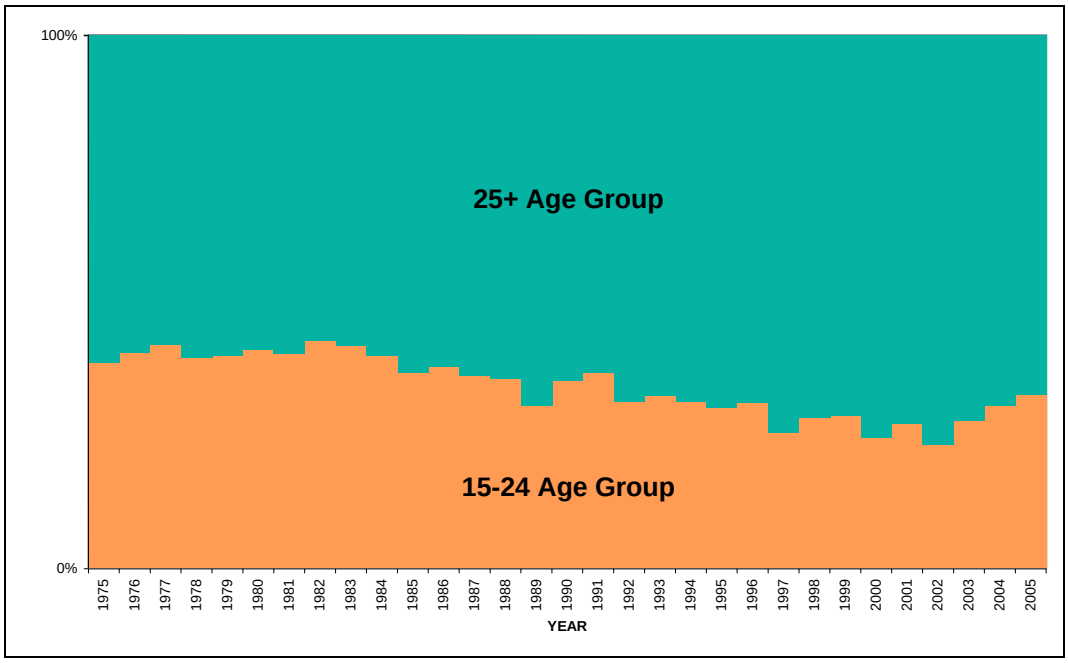

Figure 14: Fatal Car Crashes by Age of Driver in New Zealand 1975-2005. Source: Ministry of Transport.

Terms such as speeder or reckless driver are often used in media reports to describe those over the age of 25 who cause accidents. Regardless of the identities and cars of those drivers under the age of 25, the term “boy racer” is usually either directly referred to or it appears as other “boy racer” statistics are drawn on. No equivalent term exists for those over 25. When asked about his opinion on media representations of youth car culture, Tim said:

> *Well, for one, if I was 24 or under - which I am - and I ran a red light and killed a kid I’d be a boy racer but if I was 25 or over I’d just be some person that ran a red light and killed a kid.*

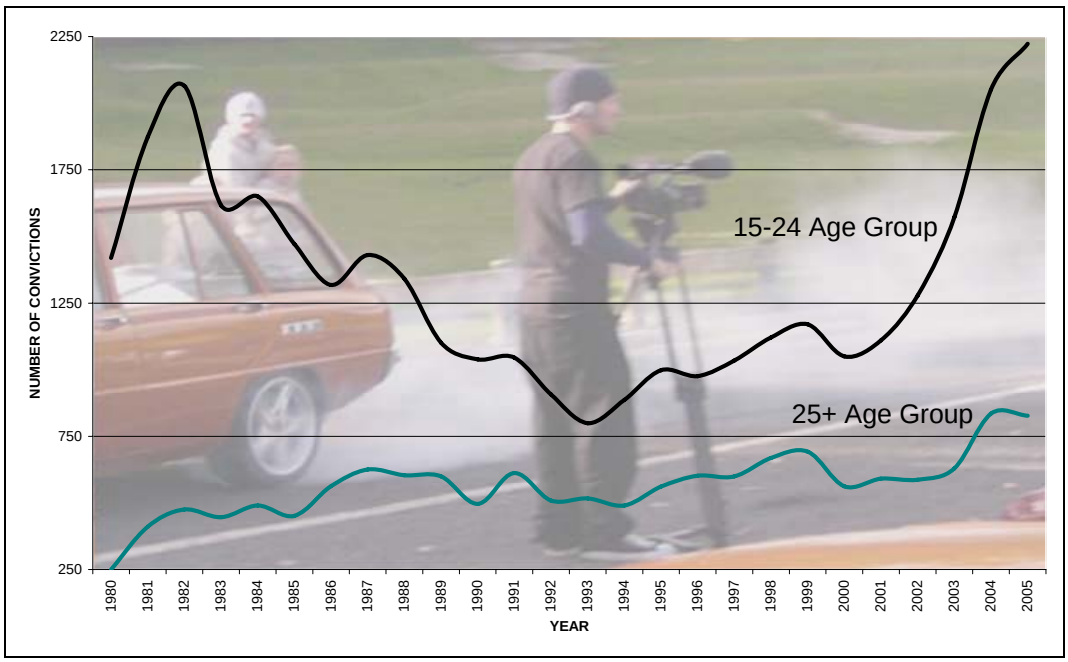

Figure 15: Reckless/Dangerous Driving Convictions for New Zealand by Age, 1980-2005. Source: Statistics New Zealand, 2007.

At first glance, Figure 15 shows an alarming increase in reckless or dangerous driving that corresponds to the growth of youth car culture.

However, since 2001,[19] there has been a 24.9 percent increase in the number of licensed drivers under the age of 25. While this increase goes some way to accounting for the just over 100 percent increase in reckless/driving convictions for people under the age of 25 for the same period, I argue changes in law enforcement strategies account greatly for this increase.

According to Inspector Leo Tooman, there has been an increase in focus on combating illegal driving behaviours in young people within the last five years that has targeted “boy racers”. Within this period, the Act 2003 gave police increased powers to target young people, which may have also contributed to this increase. This is confirmed by a Ministry of Justice report that states that ‘part of the increase in recent years may be related to the introduction of offences related to unauthorised street or drag racing in May 2003 by the Land Transport (Unauthorised Street and Drag Racing) Amendment Act 2003’ (Soboleva *et at*. 2006 17). Another important factor to consider when interpreting these statistics is that not all people under the age of 25 could be considered to be youth car culture enthusiasts.

It is also of interest to note the number of drink driving convictions recorded in New Zealand. People 25 years old and over dominate the drink driving statistics, averaging at 62 percent of all driving whilst drunk convictions in the last 25 years. Again, the percentage of drivers under the age of 25 must be considered when interpreting these statistics. However, as with the reckless/dangerous driving statistics, other factors contribute to

these figures. The increase from 1999 in Figure 16 again corresponds to shifts in police policy and priorities for the same period. Further, the legal alcohol limit for drivers under the age of 20 is 30 milligrams per 100 millilitres of blood. This is effectively a “zero limit” (Land Transport NZ 2006) and affects 42 percent of drivers under the age of 25 (Statistics New Zealand 2007).[20]

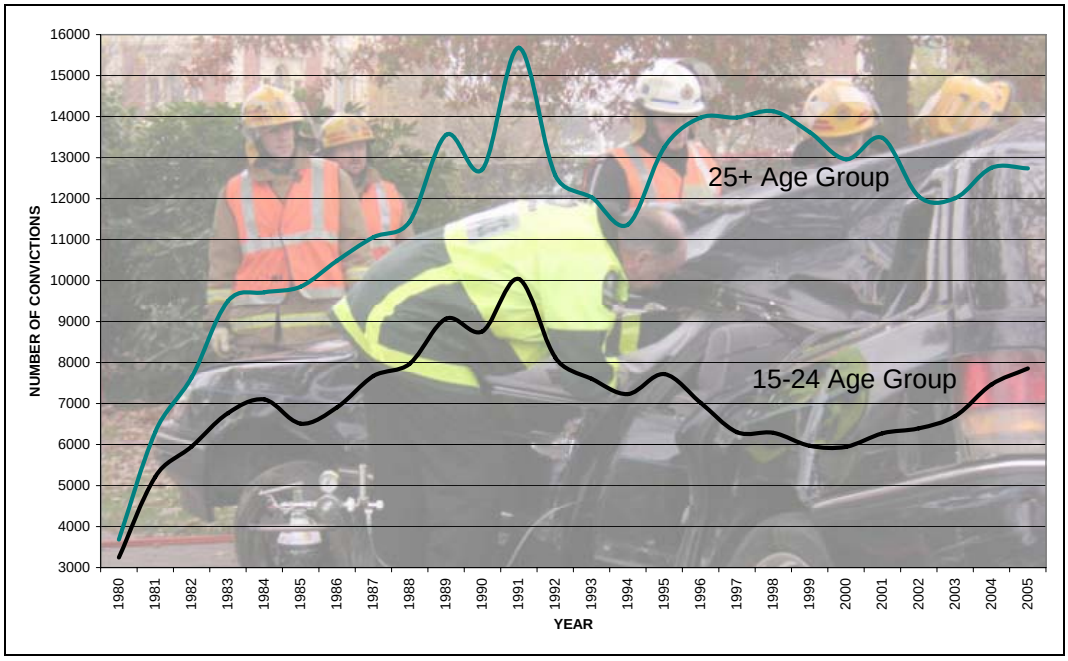

Figure 16: Convictions for Excess Breath Alcohol in New Zealand, 1980-2005.

A recent study on the psychology of young drivers supports assertions that young people are a liability on the road. Findings from research conducted in New Zealand have shown that the ability of drivers under the age of 25 to adequately assess and respond to risk is linked to the immaturity of their brains (*Hamilton This Week*, 9th November 2006). Drivers under the age of 25 had slower response times to tests. This was linked to the “fact” that the frontal lobe of the brain does not fully develop until 25 years of

age. No mention is made of the fact that the previous life experiences of those 25 years and older may have contributed to their faster risk assessment times. Mass media use of scientific discourse in this manner is particularly worrying as it carries with it the weight of expert knowledge.

Mass Media, Youth Car Culture and Consumerism

Youth culture is inextricably linked to consumerism and capitalist flows of goods. Indeed, Hebdige (1988) suggests that youth culture as an ideological construct came into being as a result of the relative affluence and the resulting emphasis on consumption that occurred after World War II. This linkage often acts in competing and contradictory ways. Young people tend to engage consumerism actively and with a sophisticated, critical eye. Trends, market styles and the cultural meanings consumer goods are imbued with are transformed and appropriated in a myriad of ways. Often the ways in which commodities are adopted by young people actively challenges the normative marketing categories of the producers (Willis 1990 85). Sometimes youth culture responses to market trends manifest as a “ritual of resistance”, where the excesses of consumerism are rejected (Nayak 2003 16). This is important as cars play a significant part in consumerism (Gilroy 2001 89).

If youth culture can be understood as heavily embedded in consumerism, it stands then that advertising arguably plays an important role in creating and maintaining youth car culture. Cars are an integral part of consumer culture, in part due the sensuous pleasures of speed, mobility and power

they can provide (although this perspective has been critiqued, see Dant 2004). Further, cars play a significant role in the privatisation, individualisation and emotionalisation of consumer society (Gilroy 2001 89). Through advertising, cars become “mediatised” and made ‘to function as differential elements - as markers of identity and difference - organised into meaningful relationships through their location within cultural and ideological codes’ (Hebdige 1988 86-87). However, the ways in which the agency of young people plays out in the adoption of consumer trends is complex. For instance, evidence of direct causal relationships between cinema and the behaviours of young people are often mobilised within moral panics to confirm the existence of problems. Incidents resulting in the death of a 78 year old man and excessive speeding were linked to the release of the film *The Fast and the Furious*. In both cases, reports noted the drivers had just seen the movie (*San Francisco Chronicle* June 11 2003). No mention is made as to whether these individuals had previously been caught driving dangerously. The fact that the young people involved managed to “resist” the urge to commit murder, wield guns, fight and steal cars - themes depicted in *The Fast and the Furious* - was also omitted. This overly simplistic view ignores the complex relationships young people have with the mass media.

Positioning films such as *The Fast and the Furious* as contributing to illegal driving behaviours in young people is a compelling argument. However, I argue there are many other media discourses that are equally responsible. Car commercials and the promotion of motor sport are a case in point. Power, performance and the sexual desirability that is attached to

these traits are an endemic part of selling cars (Urry 2003 7). The V8 supercars series,[21] the WRC Rally[22] and more recently, the A1GP,[23] all occupy a significant part of automotive culture in New Zealand. This is important to note as the exhilaration of speed is noted as one of the factors that contributes to illegal street racing (Peak and Glensor 2004 8).

Whilst *The Fast and the Furious* came with an M classification (suitable for mature audiences 16 years of age and over), no such restrictions apply to motor sport and car advertisements. Hypergendered roles are often reinforced through motor sport and car advertising. The “pit lane girls” at motor sport events such as the A1GP are positioned as passive objects of desire that do not contribute to the racing and maintenance of the cars. Their highly disciplined and scantily clad bodies are juxtaposed against the active male driver and the (mostly) male pit crews. The influences of motor sport are far from simplistic as in the case of the Hamilton V8 Supercars street race. Seeking to distance themselves from the “boy racer plague”, the Hamilton City Council called upon the opinion of Keith Petrie, professor of health psychology at Auckland University, ‘to rebut submissions that the event - touted as likely to become the biggest annual event in the country - would exacerbate social difficulties with boy racers’ (*Waikato Times* 7th November 2006 1). However, due to the hegemonic and normalised nature of motor sport and advertising, I still believe that these media have a greater impact on influencing undesirable and “deviant” driving behaviours in young people than cinematic influences.

While certainly playing a part in influencing, shaping and maintaining hegemonic understandings of youth car culture, the mass media does not operate in isolation from other cultural factors. As discussed earlier, ethnicity, gender, class and age also contribute in various ways to the identities within and understandings of youth car culture. This list is far from exhaustive and further inquiry would undoubtedly uncover many other contributing factors. However, it is not my intention to provide an exhaustive account, rather a counter discourse to contemporary hegemonic debates. These issues of representation play a major role in the construction and continuation of hegemonic understandings of youth car culture. However, it is important to not overlook the significance of materiality when considering (youth) car culture. I now turn my attention towards the ways in which emotions and embodied identities interact with the materiality of the car.

The Embodied Car

As mentioned in chapter 2, there has been a recent shift away from normative understandings of the role cars play in social and personal experiences. Authors such as Dant (2004), Sheller (2004) and Urry (2003) now position the car as an active entity that shapes our emotional identities, our kinship ties and our relationship to place. This new conceptualisation of the influence of the car has forced a rethink of the sites that car culture occupies. It is now acknowledged that identities are shaped at every spatial scale. Simplistic notions that seek to understand causal relationships between people, cars and the environment have been

dispensed with in favour of an embodied theorisation of the driver/car relationship. This approach has shed light on why, for instance, it is so difficult to change driving behaviours.

Approaches to researching automotive culture often ignore the embodied experience of driving and the relationship between material culture and embodied culture. This serves to impoverish understandings of the “driven experience” which Sheller (2004) argues distorts how people come to know geographically and socially etched patterns of mobility. This becomes exacerbated when examining youth car culture due to the highly problematic, fluid and culturally specific notions of youth, young people and adolescence. Through moving beyond the normative dominant approach that has dominated the exploration of socio-spatial practices of automotive cultures, the intention is to embed this research in a broader literature that posits the complexities and contradictions inherent in the relationship between young people and cars to the fore.

The experience of the car is a *becoming*, where the corporeality of the driver’s body is blurred in a kinaesthetic symbiosis. The driver feels the vibration of the road through the foot pedals, the pull of the engine, detects even the subtlest changes in road surfaces and with the windows down, the rush of wind. When parallel parking, very few visual cues are needed to manoeuvre the car into position. The driver ‘“feels” the very extension of himself [sic] through the car as the car becomes a symbiotic extension of his [sic] own embodiedness’ (Ihde 1974 272). It is here where I am drawn

to Haraway's (1991) work on the cyborg as a means to assist in understanding the relationship between the driver and the car.

The Driver/Car

Dant's (2004) work positions the driver/car relationship as an assemblage of human and machine but stops short of considering the relationship a cybernetic one. Here, the term cyborg is "properly" understood as 'the feedback systems incorporated into the body that can be used to replace or enhance body parts' (Dant 2004 62). Whilst correct in their dictionary definition, I am left feeling that Dant's (2004 62) assertions relating to cyborg bodies limit the theoretical possibilities opened by this avenue of enquiry. As Haraway (1991 153) states 'the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us.' This instability is embedded in the notion that the cyborg is ethereal, quintessential and far more fluid than human bodies (Haraway 1991). Further, Dant's (2004) belief that the relationship between the driver and their car does not constitute a cybernetic organism is predicated on the notion the "body" stops at the physical extent or epidermis. In doing so, Dant (2004) has stumbled, perhaps inadvertently, into debates about what actually constitutes the body.

Although Dant (2004) acknowledges the body is situated and fluid across multiple contexts, there are a number of works that have problematised

how and when the body stops. To illustrate, some cultures believe the shadow is part of the body. Synott (1993) argues that in certain contexts, it is plausible to consider excretions such as faeces and salvia as part of the body even after the have ceased to be physically connected. In this instance, does the car stop being part of the body in the absence of corporeal connection? Longhurst (2001) also demonstrates how fluid the body is, destabilising the belief that the body is discrete. I suspect it is not as easy as Dant (2004) suggests to dismiss the cyborg driver/car.

Youth car culture enthusiasts conduct their lives around automotivity. Their preoccupation with their “pride and joy” belies a conscious and emotional connection that continues beyond what Dant (2004) frames as the driver-car. As Inspector Leo Tooman observed, many of the youth car culture enthusiasts he encounters have jobs in the automotive industry. One of the participants in this research had undertaken an engineering degree with a significant emphasis on performance cars. Even when not driving their cars, many youth car culture enthusiasts engage in vocational work that extends their knowledge of cars. Advertising currently screening on New Zealand television for the Boating Industry Training Organisation (BITO) capitalises on this. The young male in the commercial states that the skills he has acquired during his apprenticeship have equipped him with the ability to work on his car.

The apparent all-consuming lust and desire for youth car culture enthusiasts to occupy their car arguably maintains a tangible link unbroken

by spatial separation. This becomes increasingly evident when considering the consequences of the separation of driver and car via either the need for maintenance, if the car is stolen, or if the car is confiscated due to a legal transgression. Anxiety, loss of freedom, and perhaps dignity, may be associated with the temporal separation from the car. This is exemplified in the case of the male youth car enthusiasts on the reality television shows *Money Matters* (TV3, 9th August 2006) and the *World's Worst Drivers* (TV2 27th January 2007) being forced to sell their cars. In both cases the men involved cried when faced with the prospect of being forced to sell their cars.

The drivers observed at T' Straight never left the proximity of their cars. This in part was due to security reasons, to ensure nothing happened to the car. However, it was more important for them to be associated with their car, the presentation of which reflected on their own corporeal identities. Further, none of the drivers spoken to were prepared to let anyone else drive their car. One person at T' Straight stated that in the event of being too intoxicated to drive home, he would rather catch a cab than let anyone drive him home.

There is perhaps a gendered element to the driver/car cyborg. In this section I have drawn on examples of men and their relationships to their cars as I did not get the opportunity to have any in-depth conversations with women during this research. However, Dant (2004 76) notes that through an examination of the variations in mobility capital across different

social strata, it is possible to examine among other things, the gendered forms of the driver/car. Women's experiences of automotivity and mobility certainly differ from those of men (see O'Dell 2001, Sheller 2004). There are kinaesthetic and emotive elements of automobility that exist regardless of gender. Nevertheless, further research exploring the degree to which the kinaesthetic and emotive elements of automobility (inherent to the cyborg driver/car experience) are gendered would provide valuable insights.

The relationship between the car and the driver is certainly not one way. In fact the car impacts directly on the corporeality of the driver. This is particularly evident in youth car culture. A person driving a modified Japanese car becomes automatically marked as a young person and inscribed with the "boy racer" stereotype, regardless of their age. Again I am drawn to the comment made by Tim referred to earlier, where young people involved in traffic offences are arbitrarily assigned the "boy racer" moniker in news reports. If they are not directly labelled a "boy racer", reports almost always will refer to the "boy racer problem" in broader terms. In this way, embodied driving experiences reproduce relationships unique to youth car culture.

The intense connection to the car is not isolated to car enthusiasts but is also apparent in wider global discourses of car culture. The driver/car relationship permeates the deepest reaches of the psyche. The ways in which cars are sexualised is an extension of the driver's own fantasies and

desires. Car bodies become an extension of the human body, creating unique social bodies that are simultaneously powerful and vulnerable. Biological metaphors such as “muscle cars” reinforce and perpetuate this as muscles are a symbol of power but like cars, are also subject to injury. Intense emotions that would otherwise be socially unacceptable, such as road rage, are released through the driver/car experience (Urry 2003 7).

Discourses within car advertising also contribute to the driver/car as a cyborg relationship. Sarah Franklin (1998 cited in Sheller 2004) draws attention to the way the car manufacturer BMW in their advertising used the human genome as a metaphor to align the “good breeding” of their Series 3 model with the genealogy of the driver. Mazda has also employed a biological metaphor in its New Zealand advertising, embedding the Mazda logo within a DNA helix. In both cases, the unstable boundary between biology and technology is exploited to reinforce the deep connection between the driver and the car. It is for the aforementioned reasons I argue that the relationship between the driver and car constitutes a cyborg body. Due to the elevated importance of the car in the lives of youth car culture enthusiasts, I believe the driver/car cyborg is even more evident in the lives of young people than in the wider national New Zealand automotive culture.

Summary

Dominant imaginings of youth car culture have been shaped by the processes of moral panic through the news media. Not only has the news media and mass media in general perpetuated negative youth car culture stereotypes, but also they are implicated in setting the agenda for what constitutes youth crime. In conjunction with the shifting enforcement priorities of the police, youth crime is recreated and maintained as "popular". Drawing on official statistics, surveys, academic research, and often unrelated current events, not only has the moral panic associated with youth car culture been maintained, but it has also become a commodity. This process has sidelined accuracy and relevance of events in favour of their market value.

Popular culture surrounding such things as motor sport and car advertising tend to reflect, and perhaps create, wider attitudes towards cars in New Zealand. The valorisation of power, speed, sexual desirability and gender performance in national discourse of automotivity manifest within youth car culture and appear to have influenced young people's attitudes to driving and car culture. Unlike cinema, the hypergendered performances and notions of speed that are intrinsically intertwined with national motor sport are accessible to very young children. I argue that the source of many of the issues relating to young people and driving are established at an early age and can be found in the socially "acceptable" and hegemonic ways in which motor sport and cars are promoted and mapped out.

Being attentive to the materiality of the relationship between drivers and their cars is important as the car is an active entity that among other things, shapes our emotional identities, our kinship ties and our relationship to place. This considered, it is useful to understand youth car culture within a cyborg framework as it helps to illuminate why cars are so important to young people. It also goes some to explaining why, despite numerous law enforcement and political interventions, that youth car culture continues to flourish. During a general discussion on youth car culture enthusiasts and law enforcement, Inspector Leo Tooman said:

> *One thing they hate is having the car impounded for the offences of racing, unnecessary exhibition of speed which is basically the racing and sustained loss of traction. That's an impound [offence] and of course they [the cars] get impounded for 28 days and you might as well chop their legs off.*

Further, conceptualising the driver/car as a cyborg provides new ways to understand why people are so passionate about cars and why driving behaviours are so difficult to change.

7. CONCLUSION

By examining the way young people's spatial and social automotive practices are constructed and reproduced, I have argued there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of youth car culture. Through addressing how youth car culture is shaping and is shaped by Hamilton's cultural landscape and the role youth car culture plays in the identities of young people, I have shown there are a number of factors that are responsible for the "boy racer problem" now faced by communities in Hamilton. This represents a shift from over-simplified mass media narratives that construct *all* young drivers as a threat to the moral ordering of Hamilton. Discursive understandings of childhood and youth that tend to position young people as "other" and "lacking" not only feed into media debates, but also law enforcement policy. Constructions of youth are often strategically mobilised in debates as the "truth", a mechanism used to help justify control over youth car culture enthusiasts. I argue this process tends to shift all ownership of the problem onto young people.

The first question I sought to address in this thesis was *what compels young people to express their identities through cars*? My findings suggest it is the socialising opportunities the car makes possible, the personal freedom, and the displayed personal identity conveyed through car ownership that inspires young people to participate in youth car culture. These factors are embedded in family/kinship influences and notions of belonging to places and social groups. The second question was *how is youth car culture shaped by and shaping Hamilton's cultural landscape*?

Through seeking out places and spaces to socialise, youth car culture enthusiasts have subverted and recreated certain public spaces that were not intended to be recreational. In doing so, spaces like T' Straight have become highly contested and have attracted scrutiny from the public and law enforcement agencies. Factors such as Hamilton's proximity to other smaller towns and the large Te Rapa industrial estate have shaped Hamilton's youth car culture scene in ways that both parallel experiences in other cities in New Zealand and that are unique to Hamilton.

Youth car culture in Hamilton occurs across multiple geographic scales. Using scales as the framework to discuss the research findings is particularly relevant to this thesis. This is because not only are scales mechanisms for spatial control, but the cars and the mobility they give to young people assists in the process of expanding their sphere of experience, or to "jump scales" (Smith 1993). For instance, through the car the ability to move beyond the scale of the home and into the street is fostered, and this represents a significant factor in the identity politics of young people. This automobility plays a significant role in the sense of self, identity and personal freedom for young people.

Historical changes to the sites where youth car culture manifests in Hamilton demonstrates a number of continuities and also some notable discontinuities. I estimate there are now at least five times more female youth car culture enthusiasts than there were to 20 years ago. Whilst less easy to gauge, my experiences suggest there are also far more people over 30 that could be consider to be youth car culture enthusiasts. It is at

this juncture that the “boy racer” label becomes tentative and highlights one of the ways in which the term is implicated in the stereotyping of people who do not warrant its negative connotations. Whilst other social variables such as ethnicity were not the primary focus, it did emerge that Hamilton’s youth car culture scene is relatively unique as it is more culturally delineated than those in other centres. The findings of this thesis would be greatly enriched by a more comprehensive focus on demographic variables such as ethnicity and class.

The street still represents the most important space in youth car culture as it is the only public space in which young people are able to etch some sort of public spatial autonomy in an otherwise adult realm (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Sites that are close to a road; that allow a circuit or lap to be driven; that are close to car-orientated amenities; and that allow participants to see and be seen are still central to whether a site is suitable for congregating.

Public opinion and law enforcement priorities have played a significant role in the shift of the main congregation site from Hamilton’s CBD to T’ Straight. I argue it is the public manifestation of youth car culture that has solely influenced dominant hegemonic understandings of youth car culture. Here, legal transgressions such as speeding become the focus of debates. Whilst the illegal activities of a minority affect Hamilton’s cultural landscape in a negative way, the level of attention *all* youth car culture enthusiasts are subjected to as a result is disproportionate to the impacts.

The liminal space of the street arguably facilitates the ability for young people to assert far greater agency than at any other scales. The “claiming” of spaces like T’ Straight has provided a space where complex social relations are made and remade. However, T’ Straight is the subject of a surveillant gaze, and public and law enforcement scrutiny impacts greatly on the spatial practices of the young people who congregate there. The negotiation of surveillance and law enforcement measures manifests simultaneously as acceptance and contestation and attempts to remove youth car culture enthusiasts from T’ Straight have been successfully resisted. Indeed, forcing young people out of the CBD seems to have allowed the size of congregations to increase as T’ Straight can accommodate a far greater number of people and cars than the central Victoria Street site.

Advances in technologies have contributed to some of the greatest changes in youth car culture over the last 20 years and to the contemporary scene. The Internet and mobile phones, completely absent two decades ago, now constitutes a major part of youth car culture in Hamilton. Greater access to information relating to car modification, events and clubs, and the Internet has contributed to an increase in the number of people who engage in youth car culture.

As youth car culture enthusiasts are almost always treated as a problem, rarely has the importance that cars play in their lives been explored. In the absence of counter-discourse, the “boy racer” narrative has dominated debates relating to young drivers. This situation has served to erase

dynamic and important social strata in the lives of some young people in Hamilton. Taking the approach that youth car culture is a valid form of cultural expression, this thesis has drawn attention to a number of factors that have remained hidden to those who do not participate in youth car culture.

Of these, family/kinship and friendship ties, and the ways in which they are forged and remade at T' Straight and through youth car culture was perhaps the most striking counter-discourse that I encountered. Embedded in this notion of family/kinship was a sense of belonging. This was either to a group or the scene in general terms, or to certain places and spaces. Belonging appears to be important when considering the identities of youth car culture enthusiasts. Family/kinship also featured as a catalyst for many people becoming interested in youth car culture. Attitudes informed by a sense of belonging at T' Straight tended to mediate negative driving behaviours. It was perceived that driving irresponsibly could jeopardise the continuation of the scene. Although illegal driving practices still exist, my observations and those of some of my participants suggest that the scene has matured and become more "socially advanced". Formal car club structures, commercial events, and gatherings such as charity runs, seem to confirm this notion of maturation.

Gender politics within youth car culture were almost entirely within the rubric of hypergendered performance. This was apparent in the socialising practices at T' Straight, in the clothing worn by those congregated at T' Straight, and in the "beauty pageant" competitions and presence of "pit

lane girls" at organised events. The different ways in which men and women modified their cars also appears to occur along hypergendered lines. The most obvious sign of this was the way female youth car culture enthusiasts almost always incorporated the Playboy Bunny logo into their car design. When Levy's (2005) comments relating to "raunch culture" are considered, it appears feminine identities within youth car culture can participate, but only within hypermasculinised understandings of sexuality. However, I am cautious in drawing conclusions on this subject as I did not discuss this matter with any of the participants. Further, I did not get the chance to speak to many women during the research. This was in part due to my corporeality. Conducting participant observation with a woman associate would have improved the likelihood of accessing female participants. Further research on this matter would provide a valuable contribution to understanding the gendered politics young people negotiate.

There exists within youth car culture an informal hierarchy of authenticity. One's standing in the community is significantly based on how much of the car modification they have done themselves. Those that have paid to have someone do all of the work on their car tend to be thought of as inauthentic and this is usually linked with age. There is a perception that many younger people under the age of 25 buy a modified car because it is fashionable to do so. Once they "grow up" the car is sold. It appears that the inauthentic enthusiasts are perceived by the people with whom I spoke as being responsible for the dominant negative stereotype associated with youth car culture.

The mass media actively contributes to the perpetuation of dominant imaginings of youth car culture. Not only has the mass media perpetuated negative youth car culture stereotypes, but in conjunction with law enforcement agencies, they also are implicated in setting the agenda for what constitutes youth crime. The shifting priorities of law enforcement agencies become the focus of journalists as they seek out the opinions of the dominant voice (Muncie 2004). By relying on information provided by the police, youth crime is recreated and maintained as “popular”. Moreover, other sources such as academic research, official statistics and often unrelated events are used to maintain the “newsworthiness” of a story. This is a major part in the production of moral panics (Hall 1978 cited in Muncie 2004 11) and this has been identified as a process that sidelines the accuracy and relevance of events in favour of their market value. I argue that not only does the representation of youth car culture represent and reinforce a moral panic, but also that youth car culture news has become a commodity.

Youth car culture does not exist within a vacuum. Other popular cultural factors such as motor sport and car advertising that reflect the dominant driver culture in New Zealand influence how young people engage with automotivity. The very same celebrations of power, speed, sexual desirability and gender performance that are apparent in national (and global) discourses of automotivity appear to exist within youth car culture. I argue that these national discourses begin to influence people’s relationships with cars well before they have reached the minimum driving age. It is easy to see then how the hypergendered performances and

notions of speed that are intrinsically intertwined with national motor sport become ingrained into the lives of young people. Future research into the how early these attitudes appear in children would help to highlight the ways in which society partially contributes to the “boy racer problem”. This would also go some way towards explaining why negative driving attitudes such as speeding, that are apparent in almost every section of New Zealand society, are so resistant to law enforcement strategies. However, I believe there are even more significant factors that shape our relationships with the car.

The car has been discussed as an active entity that among other things, shapes our emotional identities, our kinship ties and our relationship to place (Dant 2004, Sheller 2004, and Urry 2003). Due to the strong emotive experiences engendered by and through the car, combined with the fluid and dynamic nature of the body, I have argued that the relationship between the driver and the car can be understood as cybernetic. Conceptualising the driver/car relationship in this way illuminates why cars are so important to young people. In a way, youth car culture enthusiasts *become* their cars and their cars *become* them. This deep relationship is not isolated to young people and can be argued as evident in many social strata. It is here that I am reminded of the opening lyrics to the song *Cars*, by Gary Numan (see page 1). I argue the absence of this driver/car relationship from debates has left understandings of the “driver” impoverished and severely impacts on the efficacy of transport policy. Continued work focusing on the emotional geographies of the driver/car relationship would help to address these concerns.

The qualitative methodological framework used for this research proved to be suitable for exploring the research questions from multiple sites. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation provided rich and deep insights into the lives of youth car culture enthusiasts in Hamilton. Drawing on my own experiences, the perspective of a law enforcement official, and key media texts allowed informant data to be compared and contrasted across multiple positions. Doing so has contributed to the enrichment of understandings of the lives of youth car culture enthusiasts in Hamilton. This would not have been possible without employing a wide array of techniques.

This thesis has highlighted the importance of designing a flexible methodological approach when conducting research of this nature. By allowing research events and experiences to help guide the research, I believe a more accurate representation of youth car culture has been produced. The importance and value of conducting participant observation when researching young people cannot be over-stated. Future research of this nature would be best served with participant observation as its central methodological focus.

ENDNOTES

[1] Classic cars are generally older cars that hold historical significance and/or nostalgic meaning.

[2] *The Fast and the Furious* is a film released in 2001 that revolves around a group of Los Angeles street racers. Through subverting the title of this film in the title of this thesis, I draw attention to the moral panics that inform many of the debates relating to youth car culture.

[3] During a police check point designed to intercept a youth car club en route from Auckland to Hamilton, Leo Tooman from the Highway patrol noted that approximately one in four drivers were female. The figure of 10 percent for those over the age of 25 is a conservative estimate based on participant observation conducted during the research. This may not reflect national trends. The age of 25 was used as this is the benchmark that police statistics are measured at. Approximately 7 of the people with whom I spoke were at least 30 years old.

[4] The social structures and values that contributed to this process are discussed further elsewhere (see Holloway and Valentine 2000, Skelton and Valentine 1998)

[5] Te Rapa Straight, or T' Straight, is the main area where youth car culture enthusiasts congregate in Hamilton.

[6] This was evident whilst talking to a number of people out at T' Straight. The youngest of the drivers and those on restricted licenses who were living at home mentioned they would rather incur a legal penalty than go home before they "felt" like it.

[7] Although unlicensed drivers are represented in youth car culture, they were excluded for two main reasons. One, illegal activity is already the subject of numerous reports and media discourses. Without biasing my findings, my intentions from the outset were to explore the narratives of otherwise law abiding citizens who become constructed as criminals. Two, ethical issues relating to interviewing unlicensed drivers ran the risk of drawing away from the central research. The potential for having to disclose information in the result of a police inquiry, and thereby compromising confidentiality and anonymity was too great a risk.

[8] This estimate is based on field observations made by Inspector Leo Tooman.

[9] Participants were given the option to use a pseudonym. Carl was the only interviewee who chose to use a pseudonym.

[10] The issue of theft and its relationship to youth car culture is discussed in chapter 6.

[11] It is important to note that not all youth car culture enthusiasts are affiliated to a club and as such are not bound by a code of ethics. It is also likely that not all car club members adhere to the rules of their respective club. However, it is clear from talking to approximately 13 enthusiasts that membership is revoked promptly if the rules are not adhered to.

[12] Inspector Tooman mentioned on some nights the number of people congregating at T' Straight can be as high as 3,000.

[13] Speed creep is the term used to describe the tendency for traffic speeds to creep upwards (if unchecked) as cars become faster and more comfortable to drive (National Transport Safety Committee 2000).

[14] This may or may not reflect that the number of complaints is greater. Further, I suspect due to higher population density, there is greater competition for spaces that are suitable

for congregating. The premium on space in Auckland is arguably higher and anywhere with high visibility has most likely already been developed into private space.

[15] It is acknowledged that this perspective is problematic as it excludes same-sex relationships where hyperfeminine traits may be exhibited. However, it is outside the scope of this project to explore queer identities.

[16] At most motor sport fixtures, each team is assigned at least one female "model". The pit lane girl's primary role is to pose in "glamorous" and sometimes suggestive positions for photo opportunities.

[17] The term mass media is often used in academic texts reviewed in this thesis. Here, mass media is understood as channels of communication that reach a wide audience, either nationally or globally. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines mass media as '...the main means of mass communication, such as television, radio, and newspapers, considered collectively' (OED Online 2006).

[18] Crime surveys prior to 2006 were known as the New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims and were conducted in the 1996 and 2001 census years.

[19] Unfortunately, the Land Transport Safety Authority is not confident in the accuracy of driver number data prior to 2001. Therefore, data prior to this date were not supplied.

[20] It is acknowledged that there are many ways to analyse traffic statistics. For instance, the Ministry of Transport's (2006) report on young drivers compares the number of injury crashes per 100 million kilometres travelled. Again though, it is not the statistics themselves that are the issue per se, but the way they are used and what social and political factors define the parameters being analysed.

[21] Australasian competition raced between Holden and Ford V8 cars. The V8 supercars series is raced both on race tracks and street circuits.

[22] The World Rally Championship (WRC) is an international competition raced primarily off-road, or on unsealed roads.

[23] The A1GP is commonly understood as the world cup of motor sport. Currently, 23 countries are involved in the competition. The cars are very similar to Formula One cars but the A1GP cars are slightly less-powerful.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Prompt Questions for Interview with Inspector Leo Tooman

- What areas do you identity as congregation/cruising/hooning/illegal activity spots? Why do you feel these areas are perceived to be good for these activities?

- After analysing newspaper articles on the subject of youth car culture, these trends emerged (inform of trends) Describe what you think about these findings.

- What have been your experiences of changes to hooning spaces, demographics, and car modifications etc. over time? Any other changes you have observed?

- Which method or combination of methods is employed to monitor youth car culture in Hamilton? How have these worked in achieving the goals of the police?

- Some of your comments in the press suggest there are a minority spoiling it for the rest or that not all young car enthusiasts engage in illegal activity. Many complain they get lumped into the same box as the bad eggs. When enforcing the law, how much does location and appearance of the youths play in monitoring and surveillance?

- Is it possible to differentiate between the enthusiasts and the “boy racers” whilst on “the beat’? If so, what is it about a person and/or car that tags them/it for further investigation?

- What has your experience of the Land Transport Unauthorised Street and Drag Racing Amendment Act 2003 been in relation to stopping undesirable driving practices?

- What is the police’s current approach to enforcing the law? Are certain groups/areas targeted?

- Are particular groups more trouble than others? Are the trouble makers/non trouble makers identifiable by the groups (and/or club affiliation) they socialise with?

- Why do you think young people find it necessary to express themselves with expensive, loud and sometimes potentially dangerous cars?

Appendix 2: Prompt Questions for Telephone Interviews

- What areas do you identity as congregation/cruising/hooning/illegal activity spots? Why are these areas good for congregation/hooning/illegal activity?
- What areas do you use your car in? How often?
- How does the group people identify with affect where they cruise?
- Are there groups that only use one certain area? Why?
- Why are the modifications important? (Interior, engine, exterior, music, exhaust)
- After analysing newspaper articles on the subject of youth car culture, these trends emerged (inform of trends)? Describe how you feel about these findings.
- How often do you encounter police/security surveillance?
- Which spaces does this occur in?
- Are you aware of the surveillance cameras in Hamilton's CBD? Does the presence of surveillance cameras influence your driving/congregation practices?
- Has this surveillance affected how/when/where you drive? Explain.
- What originally sparked your interest in car culture? For how long?
- Have you noticed any changes to youth car culture over time? Explain.
- How much time/money/other do you invest in your car?
- There are a number of terms used such as hoons, petrol heads, boy racers and less commonly youth car enthusiasts? Do you have a particular definition of these terms?
- Describe the differences between various car culture groups?
- What do you think attracts people to different groups/activities?
- Are there turf wars? Are certain areas known as "belonging" to a certain group?
- What about at track meets and events? Is it segregated? How?

- What about the socialising aspect? Do you use it to attract potential friends (perhaps sexual conquests)? Does it attract unwanted attention?

- How many of the people in your club did you know prior to joining?

- What are the differences in and between groups in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, age?

- Do you think areas frequented by a given group are influenced by gender, age, ethnicity, class?

- What are the most important things about youth car culture (e.g. having the best looking car, socialising, driving)?

- Why do you think people such as yourselves get into youth car culture?

- Are you aware of the Land Transport Unauthorised Street and Drag Racing Amendment Act 2003? How has the Act 2003 affected your approach to cars and driving?

- Do you or your friends have any experiences of the Act 2003 being enforced?

- Where/what places has the Act 2003 been enforced?

- What are your feelings on the Act 2003?

- What about the reactions from the community? Motel owners etc.

- Do you feel the Act 2003 is unfairly applied (e.g. Young people targeted)?

- Have you experienced infringements against you (theft, accident caused by another person/people, assault as a result of congregation, driving practices, identifying with youth car culture? Did you report incidents to police and if so, how were your experiences in dealing with them?

Appendix 3: Driving Convictions by Age and Offence in New Zealand 1980-2005

Age group	Offence	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981	1980
10-16	Careless driving	198	196	203	219	200	203	284	313	329	313	308	284	286	289	308	280	290	463	683	627	654	608	607	627	529	382
17-19	Careless driving	1121	1122	1117	1326	1238	1322	1564	1791	1513	1775	1891	1737	1690	1852	2000	1972	2337	2478	2809	2495	2445	2555	2389	2497	2254	1547
20-24	Careless driving	1260	1286	1293	1426	1271	1428	1533	1727	1526	1870	2239	2050	2037	2331	2266	2258	2626	2662	2746	2546	2457	2460	2259	1976	1781	1137
25-29	Careless driving	603	641	605	718	696	806	863	914	932	1119	1189	1090	1130	1263	1366	1442	1559	1531	1420	1164	1104	1067	877	781	679	392
30-39	Careless driving	912	995	1001	1049	1065	1177	1214	1321	1241	1488	1577	1485	1522	1695	1690	1697	1942	1739	1564	1380	1264	1135	919	874	780	514
40+	Careless driving	1298	1217	1264	1313	1204	1320	1444	1620	1464	1639	1863	1835	1881	2253	2263	2293	2851	2536	2121	2458	1796	1583	1421	1211	1094	746
Unknown/ Corporation	Careless driving	19	10	9	6	61	1	13	9	6	4	6	4	11	20	11	26	38	37	27	33	34	55	57	47	72	53
TOTAL		5411	5467	5492	6057	5735	6257	6915	7695	7011	8208	9073	8485	8557	9703	9904	9968	11643	11446	11370	10703	9754	9463	8529	8013	7189	4771
10-16	Driving causing death or injury	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	3	2	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	5	9	10	7	7	9	11	6	8	5
17-19	Driving causing death or injury	179	188	191	172	142	161	191	200	190	163	212	193	186	174	200	206	210	179	238	224	184	197	168	196	153	139
20-24	Driving causing death or injury	269	243	206	212	207	210	226	243	204	263	262	238	293	298	289	263	298	302	286	279	267	258	246	239	208	146
25-29	Driving causing death or injury	115	112	121	87	106	144	135	153	136	151	189	164	157	153	172	172	178	165	153	148	118	116	84	106	113	57
30-39	Driving causing death or injury	198	189	194	168	175	193	183	209	192	204	183	192	202	185	187	190	164	178	157	160	123	131	107	106	84	78
40+	Driving causing death or injury	331	341	306	291	283	281	332	284	316	282	296	285	248	279	294	262	270	204	217	221	196	201	160	158	132	104
Unknown/ Corporation	Driving causing death or injury	8	3	2	5	17	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	3	2	0	3	3	4	7	3	2	4	5	6	11	0
TOTAL		1101	1077	1021	935	932	989	1069	1093	1040	1064	1144	1074	1091	1091	1143	1097	1128	1041	1068	1042	897	916	781	817	709	529
10-16	Driving while disqualified	3	4	1	3	1	1	2	4	2	4	2	4	8	3	6	6	53	43	34	35	24	28	42	41	51	30
17-19	Driving while disqualified	1015	923	978	809	807	797	1057	1199	1046	1108	1038	986	917	1070	1230	1238	1245	1047	897	874	820	863	979	1039	767	605
20-24	Driving while disqualified	1554	1413	1257	1233	1261	1309	1744	1958	1923	2119	2226	2357	2548	2869	3299	3099	2579	2068	1869	1598	1538	1560	1473	1394	1085	751
25-29	Driving while disqualified	866	839	793	769	990	1108	1533	1789	1695	1807	1673	1826	2001	2221	2381	2003	1681	1352	1040	861	821	774	709	561	403	278
30-39	Driving while disqualified	1251	1415	1193	1319	1474	1607	2117	2443	2180	2151	1928	1946	1995	2035	2039	1817	1485	1129	889	710	570	686	554	420	354	227
40+	Driving while disqualified	943	1037	883	878	905	920	1092	1212	1013	970	862	742	733	809	715	602	523	458	385	384	308	285	244	243	175	129
Unknown/ Corporation	Driving while disqualified	4	6	0	1	12	11	2	0	2	1	1	2	19	36	12	17	5	4	3	4	0	0	7	10	4	6
TOTAL		5636	5637	5105	5012	5450	5753	7547	8605	7861	8160	7730	7863	8221	9043	9682	8782	7571	6101	5117	4466	4081	4196	4008	3708	2839	2026

Age group	Offence	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981	1980
10-16	Driving with excess alcohol	13	18	15	19	14	18	11	12	12	4	5	13	15	10	17	17	41	45	38	39	16	17	16	14	26	13
17-19	Driving with excess alcohol	3914	3824	3518	3354	3126	2848	2717	2761	2546	2726	2913	2580	2547	2471	3232	2926	2991	2635	2484	2148	1834	2024	2017	1831	1755	1131
20-24	Driving with excess alcohol	3929	3621	3160	3025	3135	3079	3241	3516	3744	4289	4804	4638	5047	5650	6791	5819	6041	5294	5148	4720	4659	5060	4737	4106	3430	2099
25-29	Driving with excess alcohol	2605	2439	2283	2270	2698	2833	3167	3438	3667	3756	3937	3626	3783	4043	4911	4259	4487	3891	3611	2953	3002	2955	2946	2444	1890	1123
30-39	Driving with excess alcohol	4586	4721	4351	4644	5056	5053	5490	5720	5717	5689	5378	4623	4977	4862	6128	4860	5143	4220	4044	3448	3609	3540	3323	2668	2137	1288
40+	Driving with excess alcohol	5523	5555	5341	5106	5165	5027	4936	4967	4588	4513	3918	3107	3211	3560	4592	3567	3894	3304	3383	4060	3223	3173	3163	2479	2196	1235
Unknown/ Corporation	Driving with excess alcohol	23	35	35	34	562	46	27	7	8	16	14	10	64	107	47	31	35	30	21	26	19	45	72	47	80	39
TOTAL		20593	20213	18703	18452	19756	18904	19589	20421	20282	20993	20969	18597	19644	20703	25718	21479	22632	19419	18729	17394	16362	16814	16274	13589	11514	6928
10-16	Other traffic	225	227	206	188	181	200	84	59	71	65	43	55	39	69	122	263	1480	1588	359	172	203	239	474	953	3843	3865
17-19	Other traffic	1656	1705	1394	1307	1205	1434	896	448	402	521	480	486	515	678	904	1654	6193	4959	1459	950	892	1209	1917	3517	16458	17252
20-24	Other traffic	2028	2325	2099	1861	2142	2197	1310	803	785	895	1002	1022	1081	1442	1667	2940	9393	7183	2433	1687	1590	1941	3145	4880	20051	18724
25-29	Other traffic	1166	1540	1395	1386	1503	1449	969	621	683	734	798	854	958	1172	1321	2278	6323	4449	1884	1184	1148	1235	2035	2598	9548	9108
30-39	Other traffic	1601	2011	1866	1860	1865	1813	1374	1250	1168	1262	1283	1236	1370	1577	1577	2467	6798	4774	2262	1645	1681	1744	2474	3086	10480	10312
40+	Other traffic	1559	1826	1773	1526	1517	1420	1149	1306	1180	1139	1077	1156	1213	1328	1310	1745	4962	3540	2181	2205	1932	1789	2287	2801	9497	9067
Unknown/ Corporation	Other traffic	330	361	310	373	382	332	432	521	500	518	452	457	562	638	603	966	2153	2750	4636	2704	4427	4886	5392	11075	23981	14852
TOTAL		8565	9995	9043	8501	8795	8845	6214	5008	4789	5134	5135	5266	5738	6904	7504	12313	37302	29243	15214	10547	11873	13043	17724	28910	93858	83180
10-16	Reckless/dangerous driving	6	5	2	7	0	4	4	7	1	2	2	2	3	4	3	4	18	21	13	22	17	15	17	28	28	24
17-19	Reckless/dangerous driving	1235	1098	801	699	570	549	605	570	509	453	478	398	366	427	484	505	506	601	681	609	713	759	805	1039	978	752
20-24	Reckless/dangerous driving	982	948	769	573	540	497	561	544	524	521	518	487	430	476	558	530	577	719	736	687	741	876	795	998	868	643
25-29	Reckless/dangerous driving	337	332	265	222	227	239	277	270	239	234	252	202	220	235	269	261	309	300	337	269	238	278	228	268	221	133
30-39	Reckless/dangerous driving	312	346	222	220	229	211	274	262	253	255	208	208	194	174	248	163	210	215	213	160	157	157	137	140	133	79
40+	Reckless/dangerous driving	177	153	138	145	112	107	141	137	107	112	100	80	97	89	93	71	73	85	74	132	53	52	71	60	45	30
Unknown/ Corporation	Reckless/dangerous driving	1	4	5	0	23	5	0	0	0	1	1	0	6	11	2	1	7	4	1	2	3	3	10	7	12	8
TOTAL		3050	2886	2202	1866	1701	1612	1862	1790	1633	1578	1559	1377	1316	1416	1657	1535	1700	1945	2055	1881	1922	2140	2063	2540	2285	1669

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Image Sources:

Figure 2: http://www. workdance.com/Downloads/tardis_model/tardis800x600.html 14th July 2006

[1] Classic cars are generally older cars that hold historical significance and/or nostalgic meaning.

[2] *The Fast and the Furious* is a film released in 2001 that revolves around a group of Los Angeles street racers. Through subverting the title of this film in the title of this thesis, I draw attention to the moral panics that inform many of the debates relating to youth car culture.

[3] During a police check point designed to intercept a youth car club en route from Auckland to Hamilton, Leo Tooman from the Highway patrol noted that approximately one in four drivers were female. The figure of 10 percent for those over the age of 25 is a

conservative estimate based on participant observation conducted during the research. This may not reflect national trends. The age of 25 was used as this is the benchmark that police statistics are measured at. Approximately 7 of the people with whom I spoke were at least 30 years old.

[4] The social structures and values that contributed to this process are discussed further elsewhere (see Holloway and Valentine 2000, Skelton and Valentine 1998)

[5] Te Rapa Straight, or T' Straight, is the main area where youth car culture enthusiasts congregate in Hamilton.

[6] This was evident whilst talking to a number of people out at T' Straight. The youngest of the drivers and those on restricted licenses who were living at home mentioned they would rather incur a legal penalty than go home before they "felt" like it.

[7] Although unlicensed drivers are represented in youth car culture, they were excluded for two main reasons. One, illegal activity is already the subject of numerous reports and media discourses. Without biasing my findings, my intentions from the outset were to explore the narratives of otherwise law abiding citizens who become constructed as criminals. Two, ethical issues relating to interviewing unlicensed drivers ran the risk of drawing away from the central research. The potential for having to disclose information in the result of a police inquiry, and thereby compromising confidentiality and anonymity was too great a risk.

[8] This estimate is based on field observations made by Inspector Leo Tooman.

[9] Participants were given the option to use a pseudonym. Carl was the only interviewee who chose to use a pseudonym.

[10] The issue of theft and its relationship to youth car culture is discussed in chapter 6.

[11] It is important to note that not all youth car culture enthusiasts are affiliated to a club and as such are not bound by a code of ethics. It is also likely that not all car club members adhere to the rules of their respective club. However, it is clear from talking to approximately 13 enthusiasts that membership is revoked promptly if the rules are not adhered to.

[12] Inspector Tooman mentioned on some nights the number of people congregating at T' Straight can be as high as 3,000.

[13] Speed creep is the term used to describe the tendency for traffic speeds to creep upwards (if unchecked) as cars become faster and more comfortable to drive (National Transport Safety Committee 2000).

[14] This may or may not reflect that the number of complaints is greater. Further, I suspect due to higher population density, there is greater competition for spaces that are suitable for congregating. The premium on space in Auckland is arguably higher and anywhere with high visibility has most likely already been developed into private space.

[15] It is acknowledged that this perspective is problematic as it excludes same-sex relationships where hyperfeminine traits may be exhibited. However, it is outside the scope of this project to explore queer identities.

[16] At most motor sport fixtures, each team is assigned at least one female "model". The pit lane girl's primary role is to pose in "glamorous" and sometimes suggestive positions for photo opportunities.

[17] The term mass media is often used in academic texts reviewed in this thesis. Here, mass media is understood as channels of communication that reach a wide audience,

either nationally or globally. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines mass media as '...the main means of mass communication, such as television, radio, and newspapers, considered collectively' (OED Online 2006).

[18] Crime surveys prior to 2006 were known as the New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims and were conducted in the 1996 and 2001 census years.

[19] Unfortunately, the Land Transport Safety Authority is not confident in the accuracy of driver number data prior to 2001. Therefore, data prior to this date were not supplied.

[20] It is acknowledged that there are many ways to analyse traffic statistics. For instance, the Ministry of Transport's (2006) report on young drivers compares the number of injury crashes per 100 million kilometres travelled. Again though, it is not the statistics themselves that are the issue per se, but the way they are used and what social and political factors define the parameters being analysed.

[21] Australasian competition raced between Holden and Ford V8 cars. The V8 supercars series is raced both on race tracks and street circuits.

[22] The World Rally Championship (WRC) is an international competition raced primarily off-road, or on unsealed roads.

[23] The A1GP is commonly understood as the world cup of motor sport. Currently, 23 countries are involved in the competition. The cars are very similar to Formula One cars but the A1GP cars are slightly less-powerful.