THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CAR DEPENDENCE

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LOOKING FOR CLEAN CARS
(le voiture propre)

" ..the clean car is a car that meets both <u>mobility</u> requirements and the need to control future energy and climate crises"

BUT

<u>Automobiles</u> promise not only mobility (access to distant destinations) but <u>autonomy</u> (feeling in control) (plus status, identity, spontaneity and speed: symbolic and affective subjective utility, not just instrumental benefits)

WILL TECHNOLOGY SAVE US? WILL THE MARKET PROVIDE?

Driving:

is a **skill-based, socially regulated, expressive** activity involving balancing capability and task difficulty to avoid loss of control, along with real time negotiation with co-present transient others with whom the driver is presently sharing the public highway to avoid intersecting trajectories, **while maintaining or enhancing the driver's mood and self-image**.

Skill-based: handling; task difficulty, control, mastery
Socially regulated: rules of the road
Expressive: what you drive and the manner in which you drive it

Spontaneity

The figures for Great Britain show the car being used for an average 60% of the average one hour daily travel time, suggesting that the average car is idle for over 23 hours out of 24, consuming parking space, and inexorably depreciating in value, but not actually moving.

It could thus be conveniently charged by trickle, fast or rapid charge.

But while stationary for over 95% of the day, the car while waiting in some convenient location embodies the potential for travel and for access to distant destinations – *'I could just jump in the car and go, if I wanted to'* – and this potential for spontaneous travel is one of the psychological attractions of the car.

And 6-8 hours on trickle charge, 4 hours on fast charge, or even 20 minutes on rapid charge, removes this possibility –'Access denied'.

Identity	Expressive activity: Transport into the adult realm.

"Instead of using public transport you get to use cars."

"Nice silver shiny car. It has to be shiny."

'Driving a car …'

"It's going to be purple and hopefully a Skyline but I don't have a lot of money."

- Is a way of projecting a particular image of myself
- Gives me a feeling of pride in myself
- Gives me the chance to express myself by driving the way I want to
- Gives me a feeling of power
- Gives me the feeling of being in control
- Gives me a feeling of self confidence
- Gives me a sense of personal safety

"Windows down, music blaring and just going up and down the street."

"It would just be great, just the total feeling of freedom."

Automobile = Autonomy + Mobility

"It gives me independence. Be able to go where I want when I want."

"You're just in control of so much speed"

"Not relying on your parents all the time"

'One of the reasons I like driving is because I'm in control'
  [*female; age group 36-45; drives 100+ miles per week*];

'The problem I have with public transport is that I don't feel in control'
[*female; age group 26-35; drives 100+ miles per week*];

'You don't feel in control at all on public transport and you're worried about connections all the time so you're having to be aware of what the time is every moment'
  [*female; age group 26-35; drives 10-50 miles per week*];

'Last year I came in by public transport for about two weeks. It was hell. Freezing to death on platforms waiting for trains that were late. You're not in control of your life – that's the only way I can describe it, you're just not in control. If you know the traffic jam's there then there are ways to get around it'
  [*female; age group 26-35; drives 100+ miles per week*].

A typology of UK drivers who differ in the extent to which:

- they exhibit attachment to the car
- they are willing to consider alternative modes
- they are already multi-modal
- they feel willing and able to reduce their car use
- they are aware of transport issues
- they believe in and identify with environmental problems

- DIE – HARD DRIVERS - 26% of Scottish drivers (20% of Scottish adults)

- COMPLACENT CAR USERS – 28% of drivers (21% of adults)

- MALCONTENTED MOTORISTS – 24% of drivers (18% of adults)

- ASPIRING ENVIRONMENTALISTS – 24% of drivers (18% of adults)

S.G.STRADLING & J.ANABLE (2008) Individual travel patterns. Chapter 11 in Knowles RD, Shaw J and Docherty I (Eds) Transport Geographies: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Die-Hard Drivers (**DHD**) like driving and would use the bus only if they had to. Few believe that higher motoring taxes should be introduced for the sake of the environment and there is overwhelming support for more road building to reduce congestion. There are slightly more males than females in this group.

Car Complacents (**CC**) are less attached to their cars but currently see no reason to change. They generally do not consider using transport modes other than the car and faced with a journey to make will commonly just reach for the car keys.

Malcontented Motorists (**MM**) find that current conditions on the road such as congestion and the behaviour of other drivers make driving stressful, would like to reduce their car use, but cannot see how. They say that being able to reduce their car use would make them feel good, but they feel there are no practical alternatives for the journeys they have to make. In Scotland they are slightly over-represented in accessible rural areas.

Aspiring Environmentalists (**AE**) are actively trying to reduce their car use, already use many other modes and are driven by an awareness of environmental issues and a sense of responsibility for their contribution to planetary degradation.

	DHD	CC	MM	AE
I like travelling in a car	98%	82%	82%	73%
I find car driving can be stressful sometimes	25%	28%	66%	67%
Reducing my car use would make me feel good	5%	21%	65%	78%
No of modes used ever (of 8)	4.0	4.5	4.4	5.2
No of modes used once a month or more often	2.9	3.3	3.3	3.9
Being environmentally responsible is important to me	61%	76%	85%	89%
Environmental threats such as global warming have been exaggerated	39%	19%	20%	9%
People should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it causes damage to the environment	48%	13%	19%	7%
For the sake of the environment, car users should pay higher taxes	4%	5%	17%	39%
I would be willing to pay higher taxes on car use if I knew the revenue would be used to support public transport	11%	9%	38%	46%
It is important to build more roads to reduce congestion	72%	23%	60%	30%

Hard-core car users (23%) outnumbered by drivers willing to cut back to save the environment (66%)

		All	Drivers
The current level of car use has a serious effect on climate change	**Agree**	80%	82%
For the sake of the environment everyone should reduce how much they use their cars	**Agree**	66%	66%
	Disagree	10%	11%
Anyone who thinks that reducing their own car use will help the environment is wrong – one person doesn't make any difference	**Disagree**	59%	62%
People should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it causes damage to the environment	**Agree**	23%	24%
	[Hi mileage drivers (> 10K pa)		35%]

S.G.STRADLING, J.ANABLE, T.ANDERSON & A.CRONBERG (2008) Car use and climate change: do we practise what we preach? Chapter 7 in British Social Attitudes: the 24th Report. London: Sage.

Cutting my car use …

	DHD	CC	MM	AE	Total
Not thinking about it	88	57	40	15	54
Thinking or doing something about it	12	43	60	85	**46%**

POWER TRAIN OR PATTERNS OF USE?

To move towards a sustainable transport system it is not enough just to reduce the oil dependency and GHG emissions from vehicles.

It is also important to look at issues of
➢ making transport pay for its total costs
➢ reducing congestion costs
➢ reducing deaths from accidents and pollution
➢ lessening of community severance
➢ improving public health through active travel
➢ reducing the impacts of transport on the natural environment
➢ evaluating its effects for social equity.

FEWER CAR KILOMETRES, please.

The psychological paradox:

People are a) very adaptable and b) resistant to change.