



**A Submission to the
Inquiry into National Road Safety 2003
House of Representatives Standing Committee
Transport and Regional Services**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS

From the submissions:

DRIVING CULTURES:

Driving Messages:

Meanings and Counter-meanings

by Dr Zoë Sofoulis

DRIVING CULTURES:

Driving with a Difference

by Dr Sarah Redshaw

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Background & Acknowledgments

This submission to the Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services presents in summary form arguments and suggestions included in two other submissions to this Inquiry:

DRIVING CULTURES:

Driving Messages: Meanings and Counter-meanings

by Dr Zoë Sofoulis

DRIVING CULTURES:

Driving with a Difference

by Dr Sarah Redshaw.

Both submissions are related to various research projects and consultancies that have been conducted or are currently underway as part of the 'Driving Cultures' research program at the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. This work was initiated and has been mainly carried out by Dr Sarah Redshaw, building on her experience in innovative learning, training, and philosophy for children. Dr Zoë Sofoulis, who prepared this summary, is an academic with an established international reputation in the fields of cultural studies of gender, media, technology and digital arts, and has joined Dr Redshaw in some of this work, along with Dr Greg Noble, a researcher whose interests include youth and ethnicity in Western Sydney, and Glen Fuller, a postgraduate student who is researching modified car cultures, and is also a research assistant.

After an initial pilot of the media study component, *Driving Messages: Meanings and Counter Meanings* (funded by UWS), the team was successful in receiving an ARC Linkage Grant for 2003-2005 for *Transforming Drivers: Driving as Social, Cultural and Gendered Practice*, in partnership with the NRMA (Motoring and Services), with Dr Redshaw as the Postdoctoral Fellow and Principal Researcher, Dr Sofoulis as First Chief Investigator, Dr Noble as Co-Chief Investigator, and Ms Anne Morphet and Mr Alan Finlay from the NRMA (Motoring and Services) as Partner Investigators. This project aims at contributing to innovative policy initiatives and safety awareness programs in the field of mobility safety by conducting research into the cultural and social dimensions affecting young driver behaviour and attitudes.

Dr Redshaw has provided considerable input into ongoing development of the Driving Cultures program, and her research, talks and writings form a significant background to the submission by Zoë Sofoulis.

Some of the research that has formed the basis of this submission has been undertaken as part of the *Transforming Drivers* project, and the support from the ARC, the NRMA (Motoring and Services) and UWS is gratefully acknowledged. However, the views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the entire project team, nor are they representative of the NRMA (Motoring and Services), or any other organization.

DRIVING CULTURES

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

GENERAL CULTURE		
FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic is a social phenomenon and form of interaction that involves informal rules, personal, cultural and subcultural meanings, and historical socio-economic and technical choices for a way of life organised around principles of 'automobility'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches emphasising laws, penalties, engineering and perceptual and behavioural psychology are limited in their ability to bring further change in driving cultures because they do not deal with the social and cultural factors affecting driver behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhaul dominant legal and engineering paradigm to place more emphasis on traffic behaviour as not just a matter of knowledge and skills, but of background social norms, particular social contexts, and personal choices involving emotions and—especially for youth—the performance of identities in social space. • Address the social and cultural dimensions of traffic in approaches to driver training and licensing, transport and safety policies (not to mention car design).

CAR ADVERTISING		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite 40 years of critique and the development of better models of media effects on individuals and cultures, the 'strong effects' model is still employed in moral panics about media and youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many intellectual and cultural resources available for better understanding of media effects are being ignored by transport policy makers and researchers outside the field of media and cultural studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport and road safety stakeholders need to broaden their perspectives on road safety beyond law, engineering and perceptual or behavioural psychology. • Calls for regulation of driving messages in ads need to be treated cautiously and their implications properly evaluated in the light of contemporary theories of media effects and culture. • More research is needed about which kinds of media (including car magazines, computer games, the web, films and videos) young drivers pay most attention to or feel most influence their driving styles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of overt TV message content cannot control connotations or interpretations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than censor messages, can counter with other messages in the same or different media; or change meanings by changing audiences, producers, contexts, medium, modes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage development of critical media literacy through high schools (already happening) and driver and safety awareness programs for young that explicitly deal with representations of driving culture in a variety of media channels. • Instead of designing a regulatory code, articulate positive goals about driving culture and reward safety- and traffic-wise advertising.

CAR ADVERTISING (continued)

FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The taken for granted background imagery of the open road is more insidious and perhaps equally worrisome in car advertising (and official logos). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of other vehicles is a utopian denial of the reality of everyday driving as a necessity undertaken in the social field of traffic. Open road imagery insidiously encourages the background anti-social expectation of the road as 'my road' on which others shouldn't exist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The background expectation of the open road as factor affecting choices of driving behaviour can be productively verbalised, discussed and examined in young driver workshops that focus on traffic and the social and cultural dimensions of driving. Car ads can provide an excellent starting point for getting young people to air their ideals, and to compare the fantasy world of ads with their real-life experience.

ROAD SAFETY TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many Australian televised road safety messages are paternalistic and authoritarian, addressing their viewers as potentially disobedient citizens who need stern warnings and threats to force their compliance with road rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 'hypodermic' S→M→R (sender, message, receiver) is alive and well in Australian TV road safety campaigns in Australia. The 'juridical voice' is easily resisted by youth, for whom 'citizenship' is a weak axis of identification. Messages may be rejected simply <i>because</i> they come from authorities, and warnings may be taken as incitements by anti-authoritarian risk-taking young drivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaigns need to acknowledge and adapt to the 'mediascapes' in which they are received by members of a highly media literate generation. More research is needed into the different modalities of message that might work for young audiences (authoritative, realistic, overtly fictional or special effects, cartoon or animated, etc). Safety messages could be more effective and less resistible through more complex presentations within meaningful social scenarios. Instead of being addressed as 'citizens', young audiences need specific kinds of targeting and recognition of specific emotional and social preoccupations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crash scenarios often share with car ads the imagery of the drive along open road, only with an unexpected interruption and an horrific aftermath. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crash scenarios usually focus on speed or road hazards whereas the emotional and sensory distractions within the vehicle may be more salient risk factors for young vehicle occupants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young drivers and passengers need advice and opportunities to discuss ways of managing 'pre-crash' driving scenarios within and outside the car, including in the context of other risky behaviours (drugs, alcohol), and gender expectations about driving.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even when they concentrate on the psycho-social aftermath rather than gory details, crash scenarios try to work as aversion therapy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aversion therapy model of causing behaviour change through shock, trauma and guilt is likely ineffective on many optimistic youth, or those who refute, ignore or become desensitised to the ads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instead of threatening and traumatising viewer/drivers, overt expressions of care and concern amongst peers, and positive modelling of alternatives to bad traffic behaviour by young people, might help improve youth self esteem and promote less risky behaviour.

ROAD SAFETY TVCS (continued)		
FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some crashes are presented as avoidable through obedience of speed limits or police intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Such scenarios leave moral responsibility on the side of authority rather than drivers or passengers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for traffic safety has to be shared amongst the diverse community of drivers and vehicles. • Paying more attention to traffic as a social phenomenon and acknowledging the psycho-social, gendered and cultural dimensions of choices of traffic behaviour, could foster better appreciation of the road as a 'multi-user domain' that requires shared rules of civility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In contrast to countries like Britain which have national road safety campaign advertising, Australian TV road safety ads are mainly produced on a state by state rather than national basis (with some post-production sharing).. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small state safety advertising budgets plus authoritarian conventions inhibit development of campaigns targeted to specific kinds of viewers, and reduce the creative scope and production values available to communicate with media-literate youth. • Other media besides TV need to be used in safety campaigns for youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An innovative national youth safety television campaign could help shift the paradigm from enforcement to care. • Road Safety Officers and young drivers themselves have many good ideas which could be drawn upon. • Could some funding come from car advertisers? • Youth-targeted safety ads—especially those designed by young people themselves—could be shown in cinemas & other youth venues.

YOUTH SAFETY AWARENESS AND TRAINING		
(Points related to <i>Driving Cultures: Driving with a Difference</i> submission by Dr Sarah Redshaw)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many prevention programs are about rules, compliance, and punishments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance emphasis doesn't address the complex interpersonal, social, and cultural factors in driving behaviour, including the low self-esteem for which some young drivers try to compensate by risky behaviour in traffic. • Positive modelling and rewarding of good behaviour in traffic and management of pre-crash scenarios are alternatives to the emphasis on compliance and punishment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need a paradigm shift from the authoritarian concern with compliance to something akin to a health-based model of intervention and care, with more express attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the well-being and development of young people; • the enhancement of their self-esteem; • building the capacity of young drivers (and passengers) to make less risky choices on the roads and in their lives.

YOUTH SAFETY AWARENESS AND TRAINING (continued)

FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs emphasising advanced skills training deal with rare events and easily forgotten procedures, and foster dangerous over-confidence in young drivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Such programs reinforce the "allegiances to the race track" and focus on driving as a technical skill instead of a form of social interaction. • These programs ignore the research evidence that it is not skill, but emotional and sensory factors, that are most causative of dangerous behaviour in young drivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver and safety training needs to address the choices young people make in traffic, through discussion and reflection upon everyday driving experience. • Need to confront more directly the masculine gender norms which many youth sub-cultures share with aspects of dominant and official culture • Maybe provide some safe off-road arenas for the minority of hard core motor heads?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many programs employ a didactic approach to driver training that involves authoritative one-way delivery of information, and the use of shock tactics with equivocal effect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These approaches tend to encourage either passivity or anti-authoritarian resistance, while sending a message to young drivers that their opinions and experiences are not worth acknowledging, and that they must comply with the rules of a driving culture they are powerless to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing young drivers to share and reflect on knowledge and experience already gained in traffic is a better way to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the psycho-social and cultural factors in driving; • help establish a basis for life-long reflection and learning on and in the social field of traffic; • encourage individual contributions to changing driving cultures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better longer-term improvements in driver behaviour (for young drivers, adults, and offenders) are achieved from programs based on principles of interactive, peer-based group learning than from conventional didactic approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer group discussion is a better way of dealing with performances of identity and 'practical' consciousness in driving and traffic, the irrational and emotional factors in driving, and the background structural biases in driving culture all of which affect driver behaviour. • Whereas formal rules and the consequences of breaking them can be taught and explained, the socio-cultural and behavioural dimensions of driving cultures are inherently diverse and have to be worked through from different perspectives (rather than one authoritative one). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paradigm shift is called for in young driver and safety awareness training towards a more youth-centred and peer-based approach that acknowledges diversity and promotes positive changes in driving cultures. • Open-ended, interactive peer learning in a safe environment—as piloted in the <i>Driving with a Difference</i>[™] workshops— can make gendered and local subcultural driving norms explicit for discussion and critical scrutiny, and can address, verbalise and question less conscious fantasies, assumptions and behavioural choices in driving cultures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most effective safety and prevention campaigns entail a combination of levels of government, a range of institutions, and a variety of state, regional and local initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although there is arguably more room for national level research and policy addressing safety and youth issues, and to encourage innovations at state and local levels, there needs to be a continued diversity of initiatives at other levels and in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need combination of national, state, regional and local initiatives to effect general shift in driving cultures and also to acknowledge the experiences and knowledge of young people and the diversity of local practices and driving subcultures.