

# Youth, Media & Driving Messages



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We hope NRMA Motoring & Services will find our report helpful to their interests and to our shared concerns of reducing road trauma to young drivers.

## APPENDICES

Copies of appendices to the report including a detailed description of the focus groups, data analysis from the media use questionnaire and descriptions of the advertisements screened to focus group participants are available from:

<http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchcentres/ccr/drivingcultures/transformingdrivers>

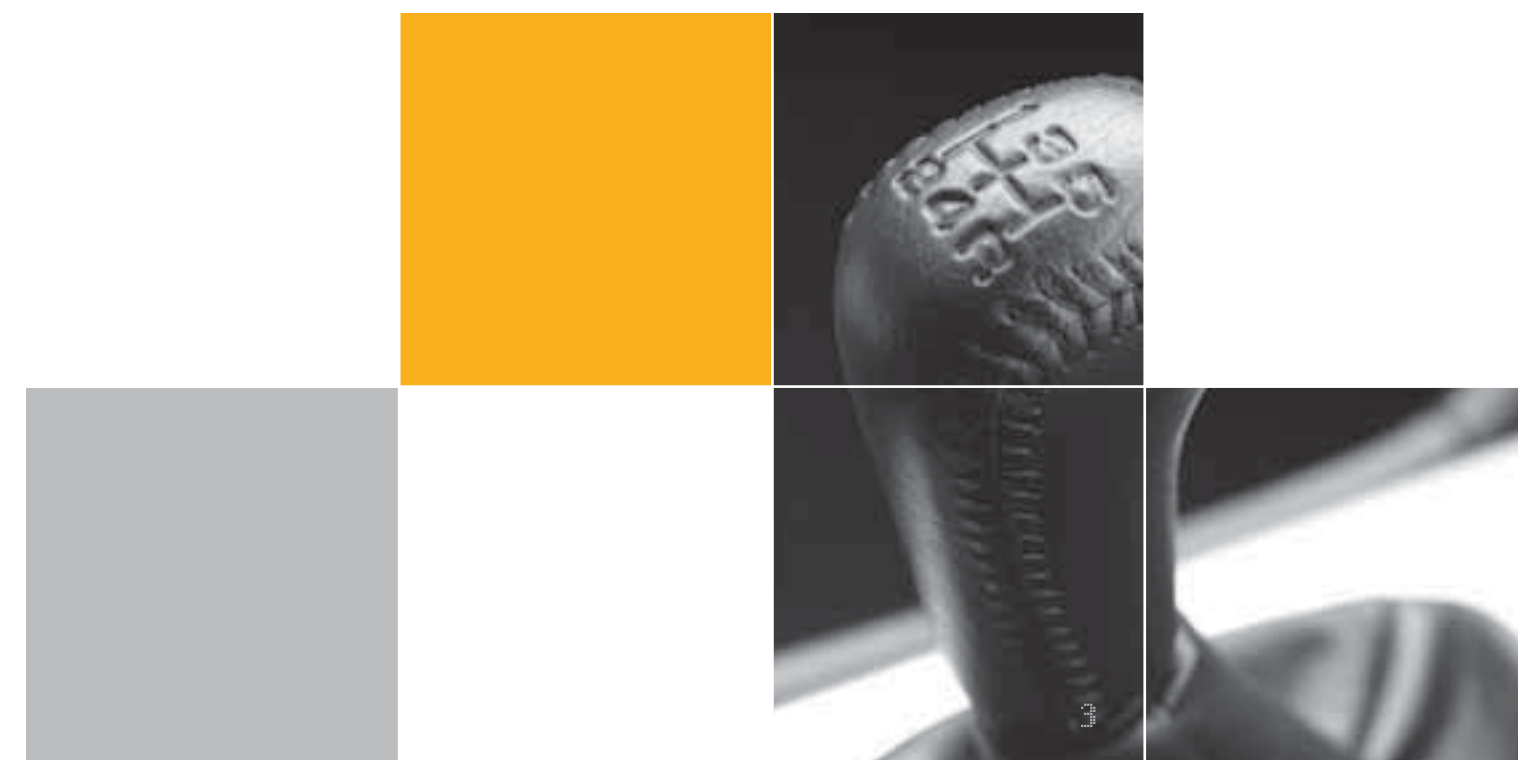
<http://www.mynrma.com.au>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study of young people's reception of car advertisements and driver safety campaigns. It aimed to situate this reception within a socio-cultural context, by linking participants' responses to broader driving practices, attitudes and cultural meanings.

Nine focus groups involving sixty young people were conducted in Western Sydney, Inner Sydney, and Western NSW. The groups invited wide-ranging discussion on television car and road safety advertisements. A media use questionnaire was completed by 80 young people. The questionnaire aimed to quantify television consumption compared to other media and test recall of car and safety ads from various media.

### The Cultural and Social Dimensions of Driving

Focus group discussions showed how young people are immersed in a broad driving culture that includes many images, messages, genres and media forms, as well as conversations and activities amongst friends, family and workmates. Many participants had extensive knowledge about cars, driving, road safety campaigns and car advertisements. Participants demonstrated familiarity with the language and techniques of driving and with the social values attached to cars such as notions of individuality, freedom and power.

Focus group participants demonstrated a well developed understanding of advertising within the broader culture of media and driving culture. Gender emerged as a central issue in relation to types of cars, styles of driving and safety messages, with young women more alert to gendered messages in advertising.

Participants' comments suggest that they are conscious, to varying degrees of insight, of many nuances in the social contexts of driving culture, including typification of the 'fit' between different kinds of drivers, driving styles, vehicles, and vehicle modifications. Consciousness of socio-economic and regional differences was a significant factor in how young drivers distinguished between different driving behaviours and attitudes.

Participants found representations of youth in advertising stereotyped and noticed that many apparently youth-oriented ads appealed to nostalgia for 'youthfulness' rather than to actual young drivers.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Responses to Car Advertising

Many focus group participants had a well developed awareness of advertising culture and a capacity for decoding its meaning and purpose, including the intentions of various selling techniques, such as targeting different audiences and appealing to aspirations.

The focus groups demonstrated how an already established set of values and meanings about vehicles selectively influences the quality of attention given to advertisements. Young people tuned in to those messages that had salience to their own lives, while tending to ignore the rest.

In evaluating advertisements, participants frequently compared fiction and reality, comparing for example, driving as presented in ads and real driving conditions; representations of cars and their actual performance features; and the idealised world of ads with their own circumstances. In general, young people recognised ads as fantasies but there were varying views about the consequences of these fantasies on driving in particular, whether it promoted careless or reckless driving.

The focus groups demonstrated that while young people had a sophisticated understanding of the techniques of advertising, they are not impervious to its messages, such as, pleasure and relaxation, but particularly those associated with speed. Young people appear to be vulnerable to the techniques advertising uses to evoke the sensations, emotions, desires and experiences afforded by cars and speeding.

### Responses to Road Safety Messages

Participants had good recall of safety campaign ads but ads about speed cameras and penalties commonly evoked responses of boredom or scepticism about a focus on revenue-raising rather than safety.

Ads portraying shocking crash scenarios were often hated because they provoked strong traumatic reactions and provoked feelings of responsibility for others, particularly amongst females. While crash scenario ads appeared to have a profound effect at the time, their impact on participants appeared to diminish over time, particularly after repeated viewings.

Respondents had a strong sense of good and bad driving, but identified bad driving in terms of lack of control rather than speed. While some participants admitted to risky driving, they usually see others as being the dangerous drivers.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Strategies

The report makes a number of recommendations about how the findings of this study could potentially inform road safety promotion. For example, the media use questionnaire found that while television was the most popular form of media; radio, the internet and magazines were well used and offered untapped opportunities for promotion of road safety.

The report recommends that promotion of road safety to young drivers better recognises and builds on their knowledge and experience of driving culture. In particular, messages need to address the feelings, experiences and social values that young people associate with driving including speed, risk, and fun.

Road safety messages tend to maintain a tight focus on the individual driver and the consequences of their driving. An alternative strategy suggested by the study is to promote the idea of passengers sharing responsibility for safety, or supporting young passengers in being assertive when their peers are driving dangerously.

The study also suggests that opportunities that allow young people to discuss their own and their friends' driving experience and practice in the context of broader social and cultural themes around driving and safety could be a valuable component of driver training programs.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 THE TRANSFORMING DRIVERS PROJECT

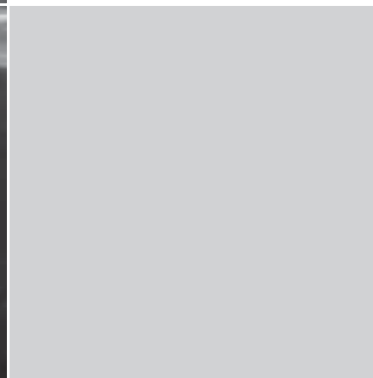
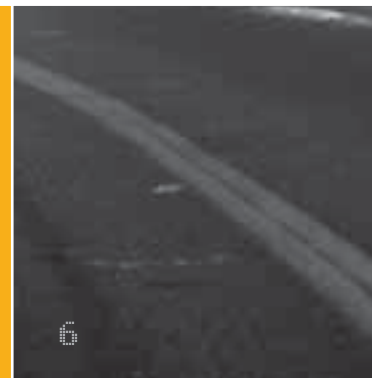
This report forms part of research conducted as part of the ARC Linkage Project Transforming Drivers: Driving as social, cultural and gendered practice, a partnership between NRMA Motoring & Services, the University of Western Sydney's Centre for Cultural Research, and the Australian Research Council. The project's overall goal is to contribute to the development of education and safety campaigns for young drivers.

The specific goal of the project is to explore driving as a social activity through expanding the range of disciplinary perspectives beyond psychological and technical concerns. The research seeks to understand cultural factors influencing young driver behaviour—including the meanings of cars, driving and safety, gender and ethnic identity, and youth car and driving cultures.

Since media are important sources of messages about cars, driving and safety in culture, the first phase of the project examined this through fieldwork and desktop study. This report, *Youth, Media and Driving Messages*, is on the fieldwork component, which involved a questionnaire probing consumption of a range of media and sources of messages about driving, and the conduct of focus groups, where young drivers were shown examples of car and road safety television advertisements and discussed these and their own driving practices.

A second report on the media phase, which takes a more critical and in-depth look at examples of car and safety advertisements and typical strategies—as well as ways audiences can resist them— is in preparation for release later this year.

The second phase of the project research, also involving focus groups, is concerned with experiences of driving, and in particular, themes of gender, identity and control. The findings of this phase will be the subject of a third report released at the conclusion of the project.





## 1.2 YOUTH, MEDIA AND DRIVING MESSAGES

The first phase of the Transforming Drivers project aimed to assess the relationship between media representations of cars and drivers and the driving practices and attitudes of young drivers. The focus of this part was on car advertisements and road safety campaigns as part of a broader 'driving culture' (Redshaw 2001).

This part of the project sought to explore how the messages in car and road safety advertising are reflected in young people's experiences and perceptions of cars and driving. This first phase also sought to identify how approaches to driver safety campaigns and programs could better take account of the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about cars and driving held by young people.

This part of the project was conceived at a time of public debate and expressions of concern by road safety stakeholders about car advertisements showing excessive speed and other risky driving practices, after which automobile advertisers adopted a self-regulatory vehicle advertising code.

Media and communication studies of car advertisements frequently identify a number of recurring images and themes focused around, for example, performance, speed, power and control, individuality, sexuality, freedom and excitement (Ferguson, Hardy and Williams, 2003; Bayley, 1986). Road safety stakeholders and advocates contend that these themes are emphasised at the expense of safety. The promotion of high-speed driving in particular is argued as having consequences for road safety campaigns.

Much research on young people's media use deals with children and families, but little is known specifically about the 17-25 year age group. The study therefore aimed to gain some understanding of the media use patterns of young people in this age group and assess young people's responses to current car advertising and road safety campaigns.

This part of the project involved two key components:

1. A media use questionnaire probing the different kinds of media used by young people, the frequency and times of use and the relative importance of each type of media. The questionnaire also asked participants to recall examples of messages about cars and driving from these media.
2. Focus groups of young people who discussed selected examples of television car advertising and road safety campaigns.

<sup>1</sup> A comparative media analysis of the advertisements collated by the team will examine meanings drawn on by the advertising and the ways in which both car advertising and road safety campaigns appeal to the consumer. This part of the study will be addressed in the second media study report.

## 1.3 MEDIA AS PART OF CULTURE

In our approach, media are seen as part of the fabric of culture and everyday life in contemporary society. Consequently, rather than assuming a direct relationship between media images and messages and the values and attitudes of (especially young) drivers, we acknowledge a more complex relationship between the media and consumers. For example research suggests that:

- consumers are quite capable of applying their own interpretations to media images (Hall, 1981; Ang, 1996)
- ads sell lifestyles, not just specific products (Wernick, 1991), so to take a proper account of the relationship between media and audiences means thinking more broadly about the culture in which images and commodities are consumed
- car advertising images are not isolated messages, but occur in context with other ads, TV shows, film and so on (see, for example, Eyerman and Lofgren, 1995) – again reminding us we need to look at a wider culture of consumption of such images.

These insights suggest we need to adopt a cultural approach to the analysis of driving culture, one that takes into account the meanings and values reflected in the practices of drivers (Redshaw, 2003a) and the ways these practices intersect with the desires and anxieties of drivers (Richards, 1994).

Within this framework, this study explores the contexts and meanings that structure the experiences of young drivers and their relationships with media representations of driving.



Since the focus groups were centred on televised car and safety advertising, it was important to gather data that could help put youth television consumption in context with a range of other media. The media use questionnaire aimed to quantify television consumption compared to other media. The questionnaire also asked participants to give examples of images and messages they remembered from television, radio and magazines. The views of participants on the role of computer games about cars and driving were also sought.

The questionnaire sample totalled 80 young people with 60 of the questionnaires being completed by focus group participants and the remainder by university undergraduates and young people identified by Council Road Safety Officers.

### 2.1 FINDINGS ON MEDIA USAGE

The key findings on media usage were:

1. Television was the most used medium, watched by 78% of respondents (mainly between 6 pm and midnight) followed by radio at 68% (where usage peaked at morning drive time, and again in the late afternoon.)
2. Forty-one percent of respondents consumed magazines, almost two thirds of which were car magazines, while billboards and the internet were noted by over 30% of respondents.
3. There was high recall of messages about cars and driving from a wide range of sources, though film examples cited were mainly those featuring car culture, chases and racing.
4. A high number of safety campaign advertisements were recalled though the wording of the questions may have biased this result.
5. While 90% of respondents had played car racing video, computer or arcade games in younger years, only 11% listed 'games' as part of their current media consumption.



### 2.2 FINDINGS ON RECALL OF CAR AND SAFETY ADVERTISING

The following summarises the key findings related to respondents' recall of car and safety advertising:

- Of television examples, participants recalled a total of 19 road safety examples as well as news reports, car advertisements and movies.
- Thirty of the respondents recalled radio messages about cars and driving were about road safety. Car advertising and traffic reports were also recalled from radio.
- Most of those who mentioned the magazines they read did not give an example of a message about cars and/or driving. Of those who did, their comments mainly related to speed.
- On computer games about cars and driving, there were varying views about whether playing games helped develop good driving skills or presented unrealistic images.

### 2.3 CONCLUSIONS

Though television is the most commonly accessed medium, radio is not far behind and is clearly a popular medium in the peak driving times between 6am and 9am and then 3pm and 6pm. These findings highlight an important advantage that radio safety advertising has over crash scenes and warnings viewed at home on television. Radio safety messages may be received in situ while driving and can be perceived as immediately relevant to the present activity and context. It suggests that for radio, severe warnings may not be necessary to provide a jolt of awareness sufficient to prompt an immediate change in driving behaviour. Driver safety or awareness messages presented on the radio when young people are in the car could well have significant value.

The internet is another medium gaining popularity and is not one currently used for systematic dissemination of road safety through sites young drivers might visit (including, for example, car sales sites).

The number of young people who reported reading motoring magazines is also significant, suggesting that this is an important medium of messages about driving, and potentially also about safety. It is interesting to note that a number of those who mentioned a particular message from the magazines mentioned speed: how fast a car goes. Future research could investigate the extent to which messages in motoring magazines are counter to safety, and more positively, better use could be made of the magazine medium for promoting well-designed, peer-oriented messages targeted to young car enthusiasts. This tactic could reach a significant portion of at-risk drivers without expensive television campaigns.

Finally, the driving-related games played prompted an interesting mixture of opinions about the contribution of such games to driving. This is another important area for further investigation.

### 3.1 AIMS AND STRUCTURE

The rest of this report presents findings from the focus group discussions conducted as part of the research. The focus groups had the principal aims of:

- uncovering some of the complexities in how meanings of driving and cars are produced in response to media, especially among youth audiences, and
- to test how viewing and commenting on television car and safety ads worked as a way of opening up discussion about the social values, cultural meanings, personal identities, risky practices and various experiences associated with cars and driving by under-twenty-fives.

Nine focus groups were conducted with young people in both rural and metropolitan areas to ensure a mix of participants with varied driver experiences. Focus group locations included Bankstown, Bathurst (2 groups), Fairfield, Mudgee, Blue Mountains, Redfern (two groups) and the University of Western Sydney. Each focus group contained six to eight young people, making a total of 60 participants.

A total of 28 advertisements, including a mix of car and road safety advertisements were discussed in the focus groups. A core list of 12 advertisements was regularly used to elicit discussion related to the meanings of the advertisements for the participants, and their responses to them.

### 3.2 OVERVIEW OF THEMES

As the study is focussed on the culture of driving as lived by young people, rather than on the individual psychology of drivers, we believe the results offer interesting insights into how young people talk about driving culture and meanings about cars, driving and advertising that circulate amongst them.

Several themes emerged in the initial analysis of the discussion transcripts from the focus groups. Some of these reflect the themes found in car advertising – performance, speed, power and control (Ferguson, Hardy and Williams, 2003). However, as illustrated in following sections, findings from the focus groups paint a more complex picture of the ways young people respond to advertising, to driver safety campaigns and to driving culture more generally. These touch on the ways ideas of driving, speed, performance and power are received and processed by young drivers, and how they shape their own practices. These findings may have implications for the development of driver safety campaigns.

Following sections summarise key findings from the focus groups:

- observations on the cultural and social dimensions of driving are (Section 4)
- responses to car advertisements (Section 5 and 6)
- responses to road safety messages (Section 7) and
- ideas about good and bad drivers (Section 8)

### 4.1 IMMERSION IN DRIVING CULTURE

The young people we interviewed had wide-ranging knowledge about car advertising and road safety campaigns, and about cars and driving. As one would expect of an age and a generation schooled in media culture, they generally were very familiar with the advertisements that were shown to them, could recall others quite easily, and sometimes made requests for certain ads.

One of the Bathurst focus groups, for example, listed about two dozen car and safety ads, often describing them in detail, identifying brands and specific cars, differentiating between ads for the same manufacturer, differentiating between print and TV ads, and identifying celebrities in the ads.

Focus group participants demonstrated a well developed awareness of media, culture and of the nature of advertising, resulting in their ability to situate advertisements as part of this wider culture and to read them quite critically. For example, participants drew comparisons between ads and images in films and videos games; and how cars were shown differently depending on the focus of the ad, such as how ‘control’ was more likely to be the focus on a tyre ad.

Two issues emerge from this. The first issue is that car advertisements and driver safety campaigns do not exist in isolation, but are small parts of a wider driving culture of images, messages and genres which intersect and impact upon one another, if only indirectly, and relate in complex ways to the driving practices of people. The second issue is that young people are able to express some understanding of advertising within this broader context of media and driving culture.

### 4.2 FAMILIARITY WITH THE LANGUAGE AND TECHNIQUES OF DRIVING

It is important to bear in mind that many young people, though only recently having begun to drive, may be quite familiar with the mechanics of cars and the language and techniques of driving. This familiarity may be gained through observations and interactions around cars and driving with parents, older siblings, friends and workmates.

While knowledge and skills may be unevenly distributed across groups, they still emerge as significant determinants of the discussions. Many of the participants (male and female) were, for example, familiar with the terms used to describe particular practices often associated with ‘hoons’. A young woman from one of the Bathurst groups happily talked about ‘doing doughnuts and burning out’ while another woman in the same group talked about ‘circle work’.





**Hoon tricks**

<b>Doughnuts/doughies</b>	Losing traction to create wheel spin, smoke and screeching of tyres
<b>Burnouts/circle work</b>	Accelerating in circles
<b>Blockies</b>	Circuiting the same block
<b>Drag racing</b>	Racing another car from a stationary start

In one of the Bathurst groups, two young men talked about how some aspects of the technical side of the engines, such as DOHC and VTEC, were used in the marketing of cars. Another young man from a Redfern group talked about attending car expos, reading car magazines, being interested in car modification and the future of car design. Also one of the Redfern groups had a detailed discussion about the 'market value' of cars, getting loans and the issue of depreciation of new cars.

**4.3 SOCIAL VALUES IN DRIVING**

The ability to decode some aspects of car and safety ads was accompanied by an ability to recognise some of the key social values attached to the car, such as notions of individuality, freedom and power. The characteristics attributed to the car featured in one ad were expressed by a participant in the Bankstown group in a way that echoes the key idea in Western culture of the self-sufficient, autonomous subject:

// *It seems a little bit safe. It seems that you can shut everyone out and you can focus. Safe... There's no anxiety...* //

Another young woman from the Bankstown group talked about a particular ad being about 'Freedom. There's no traffic and there's lots of freedom'. One young male from one of the Bathurst groups described some cars as having 'sex appeal'.

**4.4 CRITICAL REFLECTION**

It was clear that the participants did not always reflect upon their own driving as part of a social system of traffic, but 'bought into' the ideological representations of driving offered in car ads.

Some male participants from one of the Bathurst groups complained about people 'in some little mini car doing 80', or 'driving behind an L-plater gets aggravating'. These anecdotes point towards the idea of traffic as an obstacle to the individual's freedom, a theme carried in images of racing as gaming (Redshaw, 2004a). Other road users are experienced as obstacles to overcome, nuisances to avoid, also found in other studies (Redshaw, 2004a).

At the same time, however, these participants articulated the 'mobile sociality' of the car (Carabine and Longhurst, 2002). Many talked about the car not simply in terms of getting from A to B, but as a resource for enhancing their social lives.

A young man from one of the Redfern groups said that he liked 'Just driving around, being with friends'. A female participant from one of the Bathurst groups talked about her age group as people who 'like to ... go a bit nuts in the car'. One ad provoked discussions of singing in the car with friends.

**4.5 THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF DRIVING CULTURE**

The discussions frequently and effortlessly moved between comments about car advertisements, safety campaigns and driving generally. They regularly touched on issues that we may term the social contexts of driving culture: aspects of gender, age, socio-economic issues and geographical location, and how these are reflected in advertising and impact upon driving experience.

**Gender**

Gender frequently emerged as a central issue in itself in the focus groups, which consisted of both males and females, or as a kind of point of reference in discussing broader issues. Gender was mentioned in relation to types of cars and styles of driving. In some cases, cars were seen as being gender-specific:

// *Personally I think the Mirage is a chick's car. It's not a male car.* //

(Redfern, male)

On the one hand, this reflects the fact that car advertisements often target either males or females. Sometimes, however, this understanding is itself gendered. When asked to whom a particular ad appealed, one young man from one of the Bathurst groups said simply; 'Young drivers with lots of money' but he was quickly corrected by two of the young women in the group: 'Male drivers!', one pointed out, who 'want to win, and they want the girls!'. In other words, the young women saw the gendered nature of the advertisements better than the young man who possibly assumed without realising that 'driver' refers to males, particularly in relation to this vehicle, a ute.



Some participants, particularly the females, recognised that young men were also a feature of safety campaigns, largely because they were more likely to engage in dangerous driving:

// *I know that the statistics show that guys who drive hotted-up cars ... guys under 25 have more accidents than anyone else.* // (Mudgee, female)

Such an insight echoes the research which shows that young men are more likely to be over-represented in motor vehicle fatalities and injuries (Walker et al 2000, Harré et al. 1996, De Joy 1992), but it also parallels the socio-cultural processes whereby we attribute certain behaviours and attitudes to particular genders, and where our perceptions of such behaviours are shaped by things like gender.

#### Age

Given the groups were clearly addressing issues around young people, it isn't surprising that age recurred as a key theme, either in relation to advertising or to driving generally. Some responses weren't prompted by direct questions but emerged from the conversations that evolved. Participants were asked at times what age group they thought the ad was aimed at:

// *I think it's aimed at younger guys ...it's to promote the car to guys because it looks good and it's fast...* // (Redfern, male)

Yet this targeting of young people was acknowledged as often involving simplistic representations of youth:

// *I don't know if it's realistic so much as stereotypical, and how people view youth.* // (Bathurst, female)

This observation is partly confirmed through the analysis of the ads themselves, which were originally selected for their likely appeal to youth, but were found more often to be appealing to ideas of, and desires for, 'youthfulness' rather than representing young drivers themselves.

Some participants recognised that ads often attempted to convey the thrill of driving and connotations of youthfulness noted in Redshaw (2003a), to (largely) older men (who, after all, have more spending power):

// *The people that that would appeal to would be either the young guys or the guys who are just coming to that age where they buy a Harley... that age where they are trying to be younger ...* // (Bathurst, female).

// *The Lancer's more of a sporty, youthful car...that might also aim at mid-life crisis men!* // (Blue Mountains, female)

#### Locale: geographical and socio-economic

Geographic and socio-economic contexts were significant in how young drivers perceived themselves and the advertisements. The two main geographical distinctions were between city and country, and between the western and the eastern/northern suburbs of Sydney. It was clear that these distinctions were used to describe not only different types of vehicles, but different behaviours and attitudes, sometimes reflecting the location of the participant. One participant registered the different needs of rural and urban drivers and the differences in the environments in which driving occurs:

// *It's more of a factor in the country, people feel like they can have a bigger car, whereas in the city you need a smaller car to get a parking spot and things like that.* // (Bathurst, male)

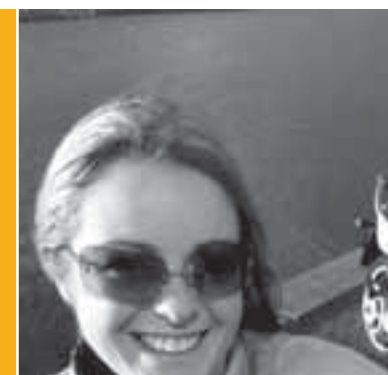
One young woman from the Mudgee group registered the different rationale for using 4-wheel drives in urban environments, where their practicality is not an issue:

// *In the city they drive 4-wheel drives because they feel safe.* //

Similarly, they were quite conscious of socio-economic differences. They were aware, for example, that many ads were 'aimed for the higher class' (Redfern, male). A key issue for young people was that car ads were rarely targeted at them because they didn't have the money to buy a new car:

M: *It doesn't really seem to be the cars that we are driving ...*

F: *...when I see a big 4WD, I just know that that's not the kind of car I can afford to buy, so why even bother watching it?* (Bathurst)



The interplay of geographic, socio-economic and gender distinctions in establishing the meanings of cars was evident in one discussion at the Fairfield (all male) group, where they explained how the vehicle's gender associations could vary with suburb and class:

M3: *A girl would buy it. ...Some young someone who doesn't know about cars would go and buy it.*

M4: *Yeah. A girl from the east*

M2: *A uni student who doesn't care about cars, he's going to become a dentist, he's going to buy a silver Merc when he's twenty-five*

M3: *An educated person would buy that car. A smart, intellectual person would buy that car.*

M1: *But we're stupid idiots*

M3: *Yeah, from the west!*

#### 4.6 SUMMARY

Focus group participants demonstrated a well developed understanding of advertising within the broader culture of media and driving culture. Participants were aware that ads were often targeted at one gender or age group or particular socio-economic groups. Participants demonstrated familiarity with the language and techniques of driving and with the social values attached to cars, sometimes buying into the ideological representations of driving offered in car ads.

Participants' comments suggest that they are conscious, to varying degrees of insight, of many nuances in the social contexts of driving culture, including typification of the 'fit' between different kinds of drivers, driving styles, vehicles, and vehicle modifications. This awareness becomes even more evident when we turn to their understandings of advertising in particular.



Four main characteristics of the way young drivers make meanings of advertising are discernable from this study:

- 1) Selective attention
- 2) Informed awareness
- 3) Realism
- 4) Experiential and emotional associations

This section deals with the first three of these characteristics while section 6 deals with the fourth characteristic.

#### 5.1 SELECTIVE ATTENTION

The flows of images and meanings in our media-saturated culture do not affect everyone equally, in part because people selectively tune in to those messages and contents that resonate with their own lives, while ignoring or downplaying the rest. People generally relate to and read advertising in different ways according to their social and cultural context and will draw meanings related to their perspectives. It is this diversity of meanings that we are concerned to reflect in this report.

Television commercials are just one of many sources of information and ideas about cars and driving for young people, who, as the questionnaire results indicate, also read car magazines (especially the men), seek out auto manufacturers' websites, play video games, and watch movies featuring cars.

Whilst most participants demonstrated an informed and often critical awareness of advertising tactics, they did not necessarily apply this awareness to all ads, nor generalise to a critique of advertising as such. We were intrigued by the fan-like enthusiasm some participants expressed for particular ads. In a few cases the enjoyment was based on the humorous narrative within the ad itself, but for some drivers, particularly males, ads were considered likeable or worthy of attention, not because of their style or messages, but because they were for cars the participants liked or aspired to drive or own:

// *Oh, finally! Integra! I like this one. That's a good commercial because it's got a car that has a bit of power.* //

(Fairfield, male)

Likewise, if the car was disliked, so was the ad:

// *Some of them [ads] don't appeal to me, because I don't like the car.* //

(Bathurst, male)





## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: ATTENTION, AWARENESS AND REALISM

### 5.2 INFORMED AWARENESS

Despite their selective attention, having grown up in a time of proliferating media and communication forms (including screen-based entertainments and games) young drivers have a well developed awareness of advertising and a capacity for decoding its meanings, purposes and thematic concerns. This means not just being aware of target audiences, but being able to identify features, meanings and forms of appeal deployed in advertising. Importantly, many participants had a well developed knowledge of advertising culture. One young woman in one of the Redfern groups, for example, talks about how in one particular ad, manufacturers were 'trying to broaden the demographic of people that actually use the car', from being 'mid-life cars' to 'the mid-twenties road trip car'.

#### Audiences

Participants regularly acknowledged that ads were directed at different audiences. Some registered the fact that certain types of car ads were directed at 'family people', which they could tell by the style and size of car, including the number and nature of seats in the back. Female participants from Bathurst recognised that ads used speed, money, sex and 'winning' to attract young men. Age and pleasure were frequently commented upon as key selling features:

// *It's got young people...young people having fun.* // (Bathurst, male)

// *They're also saying, if you buy our car you'll have fun like us.* //  
(Fairfield, male)

#### Aspirations

Many respondents noted what we might call the aspirational quality of ads. Apart from the appeal to nostalgia for youthfulness discussed earlier, ads also appealed to particular desires for sexual and social success, and to identifications (or failures of them) according to socio-geographic distinctions of city/country, western/northern and eastern suburbs.

One female participant from one of the Bathurst groups pointed out that the racing theme of ads was really directed towards 'the try-hard bloke who can't get any women' (laughter). In the same group, another young woman argued that the Falcon ute was an 'upper-class ute for people who want to be country wanna-be's'.



## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: ATTENTION, AWARENESS AND REALISM

### 5.3 REALISM

One of the fears motivating concerns with young driver/viewers' receptions of car advertising is that they will confuse fantasy with reality, and attempt to emulate the driving stunts seen in ads, which are highly edited and worked-over scenes filmed with professional drivers under controlled conditions, often with added special effects.

The focus group discussions demonstrate that while some participants did express a desire to 'try out' what was shown in some of the ads, young people frequently make comparisons between fiction and 'reality' in order to evaluate, critique, debunk or otherwise distance themselves from advertisements. In this context it is noted that participants' ideas of 'reality' are constructions which articulate their experience of broader social relations and thus this 'realism' has a significant role in fashioning their critical perspective on advertising.

Some frequently deployed comparisons are:

- People in ads compared to themselves
- Fantasies of ads versus realities of driving
- Virtual driving (games, or ads referencing games) versus actual driving
- Car performance in ads versus knowledge of their technical and performance features

#### People in ads / cars compared to themselves

The discussion of previous examples and quotes has demonstrated that young people articulate ways in which they feel excluded from the idealised worlds of ads. This may be through the simple un-affordability of the advertised cars or through more deliberate dis-identification with the people in the ads, on grounds of socio-economic status, locale and specific driving sub-culture.

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: ATTENTION, AWARENESS AND REALISM

### Fantasies of ads versus realities of driving

The prevalent theme of fun could be cynically compared to the more serious reality of driving:

*// They seem to be having too much fun to be actually driving. //*  
(Bankstown, female)

Participants could be quite critical of the fact that car manufacturers can get away with promoting unreal expectations. One young male objected to the fact that advertisers can show things you can do with a car that you could not legally do on the road while others saw the 'unreal' nature of advertising as simply humorous.

Generally participants believed that most people recognised ads as fantasies. The Mudjee group was particularly reflective in this regard. They compared the effects of car ads to the problem of violence on TV but took the view that it was only some people that were the problem:

*// There's also the argument about violent TV shows and that sort of thing. We can see a violent, R-rated movie....but we'd never go out and murder someone. //* (Mudjee, female)

### Virtual versus actual driving

The current generation of young drivers has grown up with extensive background in a variety of interactive driving simulations and games consoles such as Nintendo and PlayStation. The Media Use questionnaire indicated that most respondents had played video and computer driving games, often in their early teens. There were many references to driving games in discussions, many evoked in response to particular ads, and opinions varied as to the relationship between games and actual driving.

The participants held divergent opinions as to the consequences of the fantasy of the ads. According to one male participant from one of the Redfern groups:

*// ...the ad uses the imagery that evokes computer games, and to me it seemed like you know, buying this car means you get the thrills you get out of a driving game, where you can drive as recklessly as you want, but while still being in control, because you're just sort of sitting there playing the game. //*

Some participants who saw ads as unrealistic or as not comparable to their own driving environment thought ads couldn't promote poor driving:

*// ...it is showing off speed, but it's not, like, saying that, you know, just 'cos you've got this car you're allowed to drive fast... It's just to show what it's got. It's not saying 'go and do this'. It shows it like a game, so it shows you that it's not real life, it's a game. It's not supposed to be taken literally. //*  
(Redfern, male)

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: ATTENTION, AWARENESS AND REALISM

### Car performance in ads versus knowledge of their technical and performance features

The 'reality' of television was a theme that emerged many times, with participants discussing how well a car is represented, and how believable the advertising is. In one discussion about the technicalities of what is being claimed of the car a female participant notes that the car has the capacity for various kinds of activities but overall it is 'safe':

*// I know it does doughnuts and everything, but to be able to, if you actually believe the ad, but to be able to sort of play soccer with cars, the car must be pretty reliable, to turn quickly and sharply, and it doesn't roll or anything, so it's safe, and it looks cool.... //* (Mudjee, female)

Others made connections between the stunt capacities of the advertised vehicles with their own 'hoonish' experiences:

*// They do good burnouts, though, those ones. (Laughter) At school, we took my friend's car. He had a Pajero similar to that. We were doing burnouts in the park. //* (Redfern, male)

### 5.4 SUMMARY

Many focus group participants had a well developed awareness of advertising culture including the intentions of various selling techniques, such as targeting different audiences and appealing to aspirations. The focus groups also demonstrated how an already established set of values and meanings about vehicles selectively influences the quality of attention given to advertisements.

In general, young people recognised ads as fantasies but there were varying views about the consequences of these fantasies on driving. In some focus group discussions the participants spent considerable time discussing what was 'real' in advertising and on television, generally indicating that they were working out what constituted reality. The task of deciphering what is real was evident in these discussions.

Young people may distinguish between some fantastic aspects of advertising and their understanding of 'reality', but at the same time, that reality is predicated on experiences which are not so easily divorced from fantasies, desires and emotions. To these experiential dimensions we will now turn, in the following section.





## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Research into driving often takes the form of an 'attitudes survey'. Such a methodology is significant in road safety research because it is important to consider the values and opinions of drivers towards driving, safety and risk. Part of the focus group methodology is designed to capture the same aspects; however, 'attitudes' do not quite capture the entirety of our relationships with cars, driving and other road users (Redshaw 2001).

These relationships can be quite emotionally powerful, and emotions can often propel our responses to driving more than well-articulated attitudes, much in the same way that ads draw more on our emotional lives than our attitudes per se (Noble, 1999). Among focus group participants, significant responses occurred around the expression of annoyance or anger, a sense of fun or boredom, responses to questions of safety and recklessness and aggression and thrill. On this last issue there has been considerable research (as a recent example see Dahlen et al., 2005) but few exploratory studies of the meanings of these emotions for young people.

As indicated in the discussion so far of how young driver-viewers make sense of television car ads, they are by no means innocent 'blank slates' on whom each media message makes an indelible impression, but rather knowing subjects familiar with the repertoires of advertising and other media forms. Young people are also aware of the social and geographical gradients operating in driving culture. They are somewhat sceptical realists who make critical comparisons between the images and fantasies on TV and the knowledge they have of cars, driving, and the broader social world.

On the other hand, this critical knowingness does not mean they are impervious to some of the most powerful messages advertising conveys about cars and driving, which have to do with evocations and representations of the feelings, sensations, desires and embodied experiences afforded by cars themselves, especially the sensation of speeding. Contemporary advertising employs a dazzling panoply of editing tricks and special visual and audio effects, not only to attach meanings and values to cars as objects, but also to re-create or allude to the feelings associated with driving.

Ads emphasising the sensations of driving are of interest in the light of recent road safety research on young drivers suggesting that factors like 'sensation seeking, egocentric thinking and risk taking'; deliberately deviant traffic behaviour; and experiencing worries and emotions while in traffic, were stronger predictors of crash risk in young drivers than factors like driving skill (where optimistic overconfident self-estimation is more of a problem) (Dahlen et al. 2005; see also Gregersen 1996, Rundmo and Iversen 2003, Ulleberg and Rundmo 2003).

While ads showing speedy, sensation-oriented and risky driving have aroused community concern and attracted some critical responses from young drivers in our focus groups, it is important to consider two factors when assessing the likely effects of this behaviour.

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Firstly, sensations of speed, risk, fun and transgression in driving are evoked by ads rather than originated by them – that is, these sensations already exist as background experiences and desires that many young driver-viewers bring to their interpretations.

Secondly, censorship or regulation of such images would not diminish the 'built-in' technical capacities of cars to provide these sensations. People would not speed in cars if cars did not have the capacity for speed 'baked into' them. While we want to emphasise the complex interplays between the technical and the emotional/sensory dimensions, for the sake of clarity of our discussion, it is helpful to provisionally distinguish the following areas or topics of interest:

1. The 'buzz' of driving
2. Having fun
3. Driving thrills: speed, power, transgression
4. Technical qualities and capacities
5. Control and the human-car hybrid



## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.2 THE 'BUZZ' OF DRIVING

Car ads evoked a wide range of comments indicating that people are responding to both ads and driving at the level of affect and desire, not the well-considered opinions of the responsible citizen. The evocative nature of ads allows people to make connections with their personal driving memories simply on the basis of connotations and associations to a scene, as for the Bathurst male whose response to one ad was:

// *It gives me the image of a couple of blokes with a Bundy and Cola in each hand, going out to do a bit of circle work on the way home from the B&S!* //

Participants were quite aware of the power of ads to evoke the pleasurable feelings associated with driving itself, ranging across a spectrum from 'cruisy' through to 'excitement'.

While participants could be quite conscious of the forms of address and appeal deployed in ads, this doesn't mean they are immune to them. One young woman from one of the Bathurst groups was very blunt in her discussion of an ad which features cars in a video racing game:

// *I thought it was appealing, attractive. I'd go fast if I had a Monaro.* //

The capacity of ads to provide a 'buzz' that mimics the thrill of fast driving was articulated by one female driver from one of the Redfern groups who recounts, in discussing one ad:

// *When I first saw the ad, I definitely got a buzz. And you know ... that ad kind of has an influence on the way I drive now. I mean, I love going fast. As soon as I get on the freeway and I can go a hundred, oh!, I have like a lead foot. It's disgusting.* //

This is a clear moment of reflection, articulating the awareness of the ads and their techniques of persuasion, the recognition of the pleasures of speeding, and the moral self-judgement regarding this guilty pleasure.

A male in the same group expressed his liking for one ad because it showed 'cruisy shots' in which people were 'enjoying themselves while within the car'; what another young man defined as 'an after-beach sort of feeling'.

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.3 HAVING FUN

With the car a site and vehicle for 'mobile sociality' amongst youth (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002), and youth-oriented advertising often featuring scenarios of having fun, it is not surprising that the theme of fun—the enjoyment of free-flowing, unstructured and light-hearted pleasures in an informal social context—was found central in many ads. Participants were aware that ads had to be exciting, not 'boring', in order to sell their product. As one male participant from one of the Bathurst group commented in relation to the way one ad finishes:

// *They're probably just trying to make sure they don't end up with an image of the boring doctor as the final shot of the ad.* //

Participants were somewhat cynical about the way driving was represented as fun in ads and how this corresponded to the realities of driving. Several young women in the Bankstown group thought that the focus on fun in one ad encouraged drivers to be, as one said, 'careless', though the last speaker here was clearly familiar with the scenario:

- F1: *Because they weren't paying attention. They were too busy listening to their song and dancing and stuff.*
- F2: *Having fun.*
- F3: *They look like when you're going out on a weekend, or something.*
- F2: *Sounds like coming home on a Saturday night and you're the driver and everyone's in the car with the music blaring, arms and head out the window, just singing, bopping along...*



## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

For these participants fun was mostly associated with the social scenario within the car, sharing that cruisy 'after-beach sort of feeling'. For some of the young male drivers in particular, fun meant getting together with some friends and doing things with the car, like 'circle work', generally 'hooning' around and 'just being idiots' (Redfern, male).<sup>3</sup>

Fun is clearly equated with driving fast but was also seen as dangerous.

// *But driving fast is not fun, bro. It's fun, but it's scary too, you know.* //

(Fairfield, male)

Ads which explicitly evoke 'the thrill of speed' drew criticism from some participants for encouraging speed and recklessness:

// *It's just showing you can be reckless in it, and swerve around corners and do doughies.* //

(Redfern, female)

// *You get the impression that driving wild is fun!* //

(Blue Mountains, male)

### 6.4 DRIVING THRILLS

The emotional buzz of driving is, of course, related directly to what several participants described as the 'thrill of speed'. Speed has been a key focus of surveys of young people and driving (for example Whissell and Bigelow, 2003) due to the involvement of speed in young driver crashes. It may not however, be speed per se that is the source of pleasure but the sensuous experience of acceleration:

// *It's more about the acceleration than actual top speed, because that's where the fun comes in ... you've got, sort of, an undulating sort of pick-up ... beefy acceleration.* //

(Redfern, male)

Speed also means little without control: together these represent power – technological, psychological and social:

// *You can go fast and still have control of that car ... you've got performance... you have the power.* //

(Redfern, male)

<sup>2</sup> It might be noted that while a close, slow-motion look at the ad in question reveals many of the scenes were shot in static vehicles, the fast paced editing intercuts these static shots with shots of moving vehicles, and the sound track unites all scenes with a driving rhythm, so that the difference between static and moving vehicles is effectively blurred for the casual viewer, giving the impression of people driving with their hands off the wheel, turning to look at the passengers, etc.

<sup>3</sup> In her submission to the New South Wales Staysafe Committee Inquiry on Car Surfing, Redshaw (2004c) found many examples where young drivers described highly risky driving practices as 'fun', and confused the risk to their lives with the risk of 'getting caught' by traffic police.

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

One young woman from the Bankstown group saw the appeal of one ad in terms of social power: she liked it because it had the car 'going past Porsches ... it's beating all these cars that have been known for, like, their fastness and luxury ...'

For some, power was largely a question of technical competence or skill used in controlling this technology: a prowess often associated with (working class) masculinity (Walker, 2003). One young man from one of the Redfern groups for example, defined the 'thrill of speed' in terms of 'weaving between traffic'.

Transgression is another thrill afforded by driving. For some drivers, the power of speed was primarily transgressive – about breaking the rules:

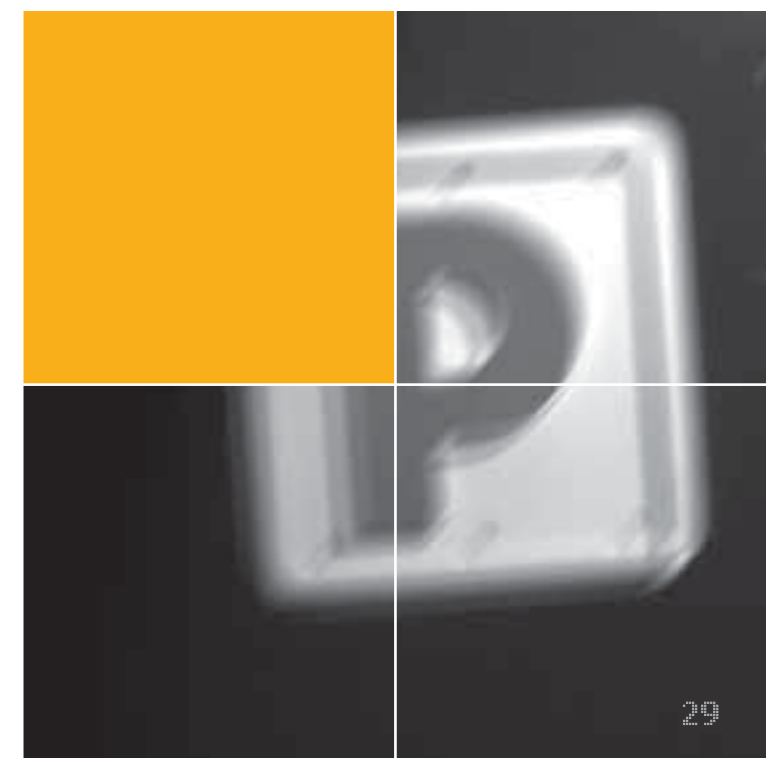
// *I'm fully aware of where the speed cameras are, but I think if they take one point off or two points, I'll lose some money, but, you know, I get a buzz out of it! ... And I love it!* //

(Redfern, female)

One young man from one of the Redfern groups described how the Integra ad evoked a sense of 'hooning':

// *It could appeal to someone who isn't necessarily a hoon, but they get that feeling of ...having the power... they still get the same thrill that a hoon would get, but without actually being a hoon, just by having the car.* //

The affective dimensions associated with speed correspond to the scenarios offered in a wide variety of car ads – escape, odyssey, conquests and cruising – which capture key social values of freedom, autonomy and control (Sofoulis, 2003a).





## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

But the speed theme receives additional reinforcement through its association with images representing or evoking car racing, the race track, and the technological expertise associated with racing Formula 1 vehicles (Redshaw 2003a, 2004a). Building associations between road vehicles and high-performance prototypes is part of the deliberate strategy of many car manufacturers to 'sex up' their mass produced models but it also has the potentially dangerous effect of encouraging people to imagine ordinary driving as akin to racing.

Some participants saw the racing theme as a problem:

// *I think it's trying to say how safe it is even if you go so fast and it's like a race car, it's pretty safe, but it is promoting driving as a game, driving is just fun and it's a sport sort of thing, when sometimes it shouldn't be looked on like that, because that's how accidents happen.* // (Mudgee, female)

### 6.5 TECHNICAL QUALITIES AND CAPACITIES

Although ads represent, allude to or evoke many of the emotional responses and sensations associated with driving, we remind ourselves that these pleasures and thrills are not merely the fabrications of ad agencies, but are afforded by the technology of the motor vehicle itself:

- **The 'fun' and flow of cruising around** is made possible by the comfort and convenience of closed cabins, climate controls, and the built-in sound systems of a conveyance designed to serve the aim of personal and private mobility;
- **The 'buzz' of driving and the 'thrill' of speed** are sensations provided by a vehicle with in-built powers to go much faster than speed limits allow;
- **Feelings of having power and control** are capable of being realised because the mechanics of the car and the car-driver interface are designed ergonomically to facilitate the experience of inhabiting a strong mobile 'second skin' (Morse 1998), whose operating parts respond to and amplify driver movements.



## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

While many television car ads are dominated by scenarios and sensations, almost all make some reference to technical and design features, and some—usually those emphasising the engineering expertise and experimental technologies of racing cars—may be more wholly devoted to the technical side.

Detailed knowledge of cars' technical capacities, usually acquired from other sources besides television commercials, is demonstrated by the young (often, though not exclusively, male) car enthusiasts.

The technological power of the car was captured in one of the Redfern groups when discussing a particular ad:

F1: *No matter what you drive through, you're not going to break it.*

M1: *You're not meant to take it literally, but anyway...*

M2: *It's really just focusing on the one thing: that it's really strong.*

M1: *Like you could run through a brick wall, and nothing happens.*

M2: *It is a tough vehicle, and I mean, people who have driven it know that it is.*

Note how this last speaker does not rely on the ad's humorously made claims about the vehicle's toughness, but instead appeals to the real-world knowledge shared by 'people who have driven it'. In the same Redfern group, one male participant even went so far as to claim that ads had little influence on them: 'like, word of mouth and just talking to people is far more important than an ad, because a car's such a big investment'.



## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.6 CAR/HUMAN RELATIONS: CONTROL AND IDENTITY

Driving is conventionally understood primarily as a domain of technical rationality, where drivers learn knowledge and road rules, practise skills, and acquire expertise that will enable them to predictably exercise control of their vehicles in a 'man over machine' scenario. But, as our second report on the media study will show, ads present the car as a magical hybrid that straddles both sides of the conventional oppositions between rationality and irrationality, thought and feeling, mind and body: it embodies 'the power' as well as 'the passion': 'Oh what a feeling!', as the Toyota slogan puts it.

The human-car relationship celebrated in advertising is not usually 'rational man over unemotional machine' but more often a hybrid union of a passionate human enjoying the convenience, and yielding to the temptations, of a powerful, comfortable and responsive pleasure-giving vehicle that affords sensations which can border on the orgasmic. So while the theme of 'control over' looms large in young people's discussions about safe and unsafe driving, the experiential aspects of driving entail complex entanglements between the technical, emotional, sensory, and social dimensions, as well as moments when the machine takes control.

Examples of the latter theme are seen in one ad where the driver blames his car for wanting to 'whoosh', and the model of 'incompetent human plus competent car' portrayed in another ad. In this latter ad the vehicle independently accomplishes all the negligent apprentice's tasks, leading one participant to jokingly observe that the car was represented as compensating for poor driving:

// *I think it shows that even if you're a pretty careless driver and you're just a bit stupid like, (laughter) you'll be alright with that car...* //

(Redfern, female)

The sense in which the greater reliability and safety of a car featured in one ad indulged bad driving was captured by another young woman from the same Redfern group:

// *That's too much control - it would get the guys thinking that they're speeding around...you'd probably see that most of the drivers do kind of speed anyway in that sort of car.* //

The comment that 'most of the drivers do kind of speed anyway in that sort of car' voices the more widespread and popular notion of car-human hybridity found across our sample, expressed in an understanding of the fit – sometimes quite precise – between different models of car, driving style, and driver (usually given an identity in terms of gender, age, and socio-economic or geographical locale). 'Bloody Volvo driver' is a well-known slogan that explicitly acknowledges this kind of fit.

## RESPONSES TO CAR ADVERTISING: EXPERIENTIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.7 SUMMARY

The focus groups demonstrated that while young people had a sophisticated understanding of the techniques of advertising, they are not impervious to its messages such as pleasure and relaxation, but particularly those associated with speed. Fast driving was associated with fun and a 'buzz'. Speed was also associated with control, power and transgression. Speed was also associated with certain types of cars and drivers.

While some participants found the concepts of speed and power appealing, others considered that ads which promoted these concepts did not represent the realities of driving and promoted careless and reckless behaviour.





The young people in our study were able to not only decode and critique car advertisements, they were also able to apply those skills to road safety ads. They had no trouble recognising and recalling the messages of road safety ads—viewing and discussion of one ad regularly led to discussion of others remembered— but they were often critical of them as ads per se, and as effective road safety strategies.

As with the findings on car advertising, it is useful to examine road safety messages under the following headings

1. Selective attention
2. Informed awareness
3. Realism
4. Experiential and emotional associations

### 7.1 SELECTIVE ATTENTION

Safety ads are usually placed within the flow of other television commercials for products and station promotions. They suffer the same risk as regular ads of being ignored by viewers who are more interested in the program, or who leave the room or switch channels whenever something they don't like comes on. Sometimes a collective groan would greet a road safety ad shown in focus groups, who would agree it was 'boring', or that they 'hated' it.

Boredom was a common response to ads about speed cameras and penalties, but even a slightly humorous ad pitched to a youth audience caused several participants in one group to agree: 'It's boring' (Bankstown, female). 'Boredom' suggests a kind of coolness that does not always indicate inattention through over-familiarity, but can be an index of an ad's failure to engage a younger audience, perhaps simply because it is an 'official message' - an instant turn-off for many.



Hatred was a response elicited by safety ads using shock tactics and crash scenarios. One road safety ad was found 'disturbing' by one participant who said 'I hate that ad! I've seen it before, and it's horrible,' explaining her response in terms of empathy with the driver: 'I hate watching people like that, it's so sad!' (University, female). Another participant responded similarly: 'I hate that one! That is awful,' and went on to compare it with unwanted scenes of diseased lungs in anti-smoking ads (Redfern, female).

From these responses, it is evident that 'hatred' does not necessarily mean avoidance of the ad but is more a measure of the intensity of traumatic ('horrible') feelings it provokes (which can include shock, horror, guilt, remorse, grief).

Many regarded certain ads as having had a profound impact on them:

// *Yeah, I never thought of driving fast or anything when I was that age and I saw that ad, but that ad made me think, hey, when I get my licence I'm going to drive really slow.* // (Bathurst, male)

This male goes on to say that when he started driving, it was a different matter.

Another participant thought that road safety ads don't work 'because I forget them when I'm driving! I forget them pretty quick after' (Redfern, male)

A number of participants thought that road safety ads only worked well for some people:

F2: *That's what the whole campaigns are now, like, shock tactics... You want to scare people into not doing it.*

ZS: *Do you think it works?*

F2: *Not really.*

F3: *On girls.*

F2: *Guys get all of that, 'I'm invincible, it will never happen to me,' but girls...* (University, females)

The duration of impact of road safety ads was questioned, particularly the impact of multiple viewing:

F4: *They sort of lose their appeal after you've seen them, like, three or four times. Sort of like, the first time you see it that's pretty nasty, and then you see it again and again and again and you sort of get to the stage where seeing it doesn't affect me anymore.* (Bathurst, female)

Overall, a 'hated' ad appears to be one that has had effects, though exactly what effects, whether they persist, and whether they are recalled in relevant situations, varies for different young drivers.

### 7.2 INFORMED AWARENESS

As indicated by the previous comment, young drivers can be quite aware of the kinds of tactics and messages intended in road safety ads. At one level, they readily affirmed some of them as worthwhile messages:

*// ... it's showing that you could be that driver one day. You could put your own life as well as others at risk for you to speed and be reckless. //*  
(Redfern, female)

At another level, however, many offered critical insights into the value of these strategies. Referring to an ad featuring speed cameras, one participant argued that:

*// I don't think it's really effective because it doesn't really show how speeding's bad because it leads to accidents... //* (Redfern, male)

This group debated at length the effectiveness of the ads compared to the use of penalties, and whether losing points was more of a disincentive than paying a fine. This group, along with other groups, expressed concerns that ad featuring speed cameras did not focus on safety but the 'hit on your wallet'.

*// Well it's sad that they emphasise the fact that you'll get fined rather than safety. //*

### 7.3 REALISM

The commitment to 'realism' evident in responses to car advertising was also demonstrated in relation to road safety ads. While participants could empathise with the drivers, survivors, witnesses and even police shown in a range of safety ads, one particular ad inspired the most affinity on account of it being a scenario that 'puts you in a situation that everyone's been in, that everyone can relate to, but for some reason it acts more on a person' (Blue Mountains, female).

When asked what road safety ads should involve, several participants responded that they should be realistic and emotional: one female said they should show 'real-life things', and suggested using a 're-enactment' of a crash which evokes a strong emotive response from the audience' (Redfern, female).

In the discussion of shock tactic ads, one female participant in the University group expressed a preference for actual accident reportage over realistic but fictional crash scenario safety ads, applying knowledge about audience reception gained from her communications studies course:

*// I think the only way it really works is when it's on the news. Like the real stories. I think that's the only way it really has an impact or an effect on anybody. In an ad, it's just fictional. Like, I mean, it has happened, but people aren't going to process that when they're just watching an advertisement because they're just skimming over it and will hardly take any notice. //*

Appeals to knowledge of actual vehicle performance or 'real' driving situations were also made in discussions of crash scenario ads. One male participant in one of the Redfern groups referred approvingly to the recent special effects safety ad 'where they slow down the cars and they show how five kilometres difference' affects impact damage, and suggested that safety ads emphasising technical details would appeal to young drivers (implicitly male like himself!):

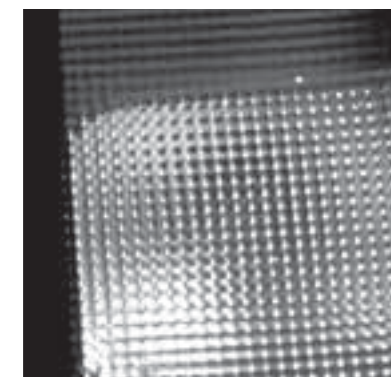
*// Like, show them how, what racing does and...how costly it can be. Like, make sure that it's sort of relevant, and sort of technical so that you can see exactly what's happening. //*

### 7.4 EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

As noted in the discussion of selective attention (above), participants did report strong emotions, especially in response to crash scenarios and their after-effects of horror, guilt, and remorse of the driver, and various effects on passengers, police, and families. Ads that showed a driver surviving a passenger he'd killed were particularly effective in making people think about their responsibilities for their passengers:

*// But the thing is, living after you've killed your brother. Living with 'I was the one driving, I was the one speeding, and I killed him. It should have been me.' //* (Blue Mountains, male)

*// I think it's good that they made it that the passenger was the one that was dead, because it relates more to the driver not wanting to kill someone else. ... It doesn't seem to have that much effect when you just kill yourself in ads, because I think we just all think we're not going to kill ourselves! //* (Redfern, female)



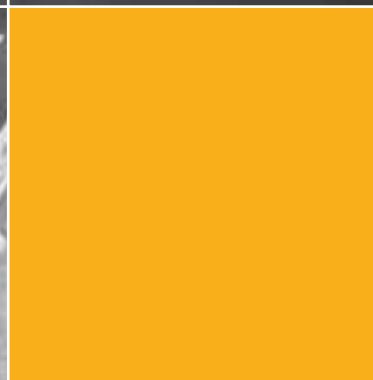
Ads about speed cameras and increased penalties tended to generate emotions linked not so much to the ad itself, but their experiences and criticisms of the policing and enforcement strategies referred to. Anger was expressed in connection with a range of driving issues, with speed cameras a significant example of the kinds of things that generated annoyance amongst participants. For some this was framed in terms of the camera as an obstacle or restraint that produced an antagonistic response:

// *When you're on the M5 or whatever, you know where the speed camera is, you just speed up afterwards, anyway. It just annoys you! It's like, sucked in you can't get me now.* // (Bankstown, female)

### 7.5 SUMMARY

Ads about speed cameras and penalties commonly evoked responses of boredom or scepticism about a focus on revenue-raising rather than safety. Ads portraying shocking crash scenarios were often hated because they provoked strong traumatic reactions. Some participants thought road safety ads should be realistic, show 'real' driving situations or should involve actual accident footage. An ad that showed a driver surviving a passenger he'd killed was seen as particularly effective.

While crash scenario ads therefore appear to have a profound effect at the time, there is a question as to their lasting impact, particularly after repeated viewings.



### 8.1 DEFINITIONS OF GOOD AND BAD DRIVING

In the course of discussions of car and safety ads, various attributes of good and bad drivers and driving were identified. It is significant that while the dangers of speed, and worries over ads that associated some cars with reckless and fast driving were commented on by a number of participants, many young drivers identified bad or risky driving not so much in terms of speed but lack of control or predictability. One participant gave this definition of risky driving:

// *...the only time that I think that I would see, like, an example of driving and see it as being dangerous or risky or anything is if it was erratic driving. Like, if they were all over the road and I couldn't tell what they were going to do next.* // (Bathurst, female)

Some participants thought particular types of drivers were more susceptible to risky driving:

F3: *They kind of figure if you spend that much money on your car and you like driving and you drive it a lot, so you have more experience, therefore maybe, you know you're more aware. Not that I've tried it myself, but...*

M1: *They think that they're more aware, then they may take more risks...*

F2: *Because they think that they're a superb driver, and risk it.*  
(Mudgee group)

As we saw with the Mudgee group, it was only 'some people' who were the problem. Even though young drivers might recognise that they themselves engage in sometimes risky driving for pleasure, they usually see others as being the really dangerous drivers:

// *There's a type of person that comes right at the back of you and is really aggressive. Is in a hurry and, like, all this energy and can't wait at the petrol station for you to hurry up and fill up, or someone sort of aggressive energetic, doesn't want to wait, instead of, you know, 'I'll go around instead of waiting for the person to turn right.' You know? Someone like that, sort of. I don't like 4WDS, people who drive them.* //

(Bankstown, female)





Two young men from one of the Redfern groups agreed that someone cutting in on you when they were at 'normal speed' was annoying, and licensed aggressive behaviour by them in response: 'That pisses me off a lot. It's really irritating. I overtake and I stick the finger (laughing)'.

Some of the women identified, sometimes jokingly, young men as the key problem on the roads. As we saw in the discussion of the social contexts of driving, gender played a central role in the perceptions of driving: what one male saw as 'Fast. Aggressive', a young woman saw as 'Reckless', another as 'Speeding'. A young woman from one of the Bathurst groups offers this insight in the context of safety campaigns:

*// Like it's just males... they blame the car. They won't take the blame for it. //*

Such an insight captures the ways young men are not only less likely to accept responsibility for dangerous behaviour, but also more amenable to sharing responsibility (or abandonment of it) with their vehicles, whose mechanical powers and capacities tempt them into risky driving.

## 8.2 SUMMARY

Respondents had a strong sense of good and bad driving, but identified bad driving in terms of lack of control rather than speed. While some participants admitted to risky driving, they usually see others as being the dangerous drivers.

Not only do young people often see others as problem or bad drivers, they also view bad driving by others as justification for aggressive behaviour by themselves in response. Some participants thought particular types of drivers including young, and especially male, drivers were more susceptible to risky driving.



## 9.1 YOUNG PEOPLE AS KNOWLEDGEABLE PARTICIPANTS IN DRIVING CULTURE

The research presented here is intended to contribute to a detailed understanding of driving and risk for young drivers. While training and road safety programs often address young drivers as novices, our study suggests that they are knowledgeable and experienced participants in driving culture.

Young drivers are highly 'literate' in a variety of cultural forms and meanings associated with driving. They understand a range of media forms and are sensitive to the social values attached to cars. They have practical knowledge of cars and driving, and embodied experiences and strong emotions involving driving.

The immersion of young people in driving culture and knowledge of cars, driving, and their social values results, however, in a paradox. Alongside this critical and often reflective stance towards advertising, safety campaigns and driving practices, young people are also immersed in the very kinds of social values of which they may be critical. For example, as evident in the study, young drivers make quite precise distinctions between different cars and drivers based on their understanding of the social contexts of driving.

Similarly, young people's developed and often critical understandings of advertising themes and techniques notwithstanding, young drivers make strong associations between ads and their own feelings, experiences and social values associated with driving including speed, risk, and fun. The car is important as a means and site of 'mobile sociality' - a place to share fun and music with friends, and as a focus and means (especially for some young men) of particular rituals and activities involving driving.

As recent cultural research has demonstrated, car culture is central to the construction of masculinity, especially amongst working class youth (Walker, 2003), and important to males and females both as a means of achieving practical purposes (like getting to work or training) as well as maintaining social networks with peers.

Our own study suggests that although young women might be less likely to anchor their identity around their cars, and more aware of gender biases in advertising and young driver crash statistics than their male peers, they are not themselves immune to either the social values or cultural fantasies attached to cars. Like their male peers, they are also susceptible to the seductive 'buzz' of driving, the 'thrill' of speed, and the empowering control of a machine that offers independent mobility.

In relation to road safety messages, young drivers deploy a variety of tactics to avoid, resist or cynically debunk advertisements emphasising enforcement, penalties and consequences. A focus on speed, its prevention, and its consequences does not directly challenge young drivers' beliefs about their own abilities to control vehicles, nor their definition of 'safe' driving as 'predictable' driving by others.

Additionally, although young drivers themselves draw precise correlations between different types of cars, driving styles, and the gender, age and socio-economic status of drivers, these and other social dimensions of driving (including behaviour in traffic, social life inside the car) are overlooked in safety campaign messages that address an abstract or 'generic' citizen driver (typically a youngish white male).

## 9.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR ROAD SAFETY MESSAGES

The findings of this study suggest that in any campaigns about safe and unsafe driving with young people, the experiential aspects of driving (technical, emotional, sensory and social) must be taken into account.

For example, for young car enthusiasts knowledgeable about the technical and performance features of cars no mere television image can counteract the practical, technical and embodied knowledge and experiences afforded by the vehicles themselves.

Likewise, efforts to regulate car ads to limit representations of speed are unlikely to be a useful strategy for 10 to 16 year olds who can spend hours absorbed in high-speed and reckless car, bike, or kart races on computer screens and game consoles; who sit with family members watching televised Formula 1 or stock car races; or who overhear older siblings bragging about their latest 'circle work'.

The complexity of driving culture implies that efforts to transform it will need to be similarly diverse in medium, form and modality to be effective.

## 9.3 STRATEGIES FOR ROAD SAFETY MESSAGES

### *Formulating the right messages*

Promotion of road safety to young drivers needs to recognise and build on their knowledge and experience of driving culture. In particular messages need to address the feelings, experiences and social values that young people associate with driving including speed, risk, and fun. Road safety campaigns addressed to young people also need to recognise the kinds of distinctions made by young people between different types of cars, driving styles, the gender, age and socio-economic status of drivers.

### *Use of media forms*

The study found that more use could potentially be made by media forms other than television in getting across road safety messages. Radio was used by a high proportion of questionnaire respondents, particularly during driving peak periods. Driving awareness messages on the radio during these times could well have significant value. The internet could also be better used than at present to disseminate road safety messages through sites young drivers might visit (including, for example, car sales sites).

Another significant source of knowledge for young people is motoring magazines, where responsible journalism could be considered an issue given the emphasis on speed (Redshaw 2005), and where opportunities for promoting specially targeted road safety messages are currently unexploited.

### *Alternative modes of delivery*

While ads which showed crash scenarios were found to have a strong impact, there was a question as to their long term effectiveness. Similarly, there may be a question about the ethics of exposing young viewers —or indeed any viewers — to the 'awful' trauma of witnessing realistic crash scenarios, and the possibility of inuring them to this visual violence to the point of 'boredom' and inattention through repeated exposure. As will be canvassed in the second media study report, animated, unrealistic, surrealistic or mysterious ads, or ads with mixed modalities, could be alternative modes of delivery for safety messages that stand up to repeated viewings.

### *Promotion of peer responsibility*

Young male drivers' egoism, territoriality, risk-taking and exhibitionism are factors linked to dangerous driving that do not go unremarked by their female peers—nor indeed, by numerous road safety researchers. But a 'cone of silence' seems to protect these issues from direct address or challenge by official road safety campaigns, which could indicate they are tacitly accepted by authorities as a normal part of driving culture.

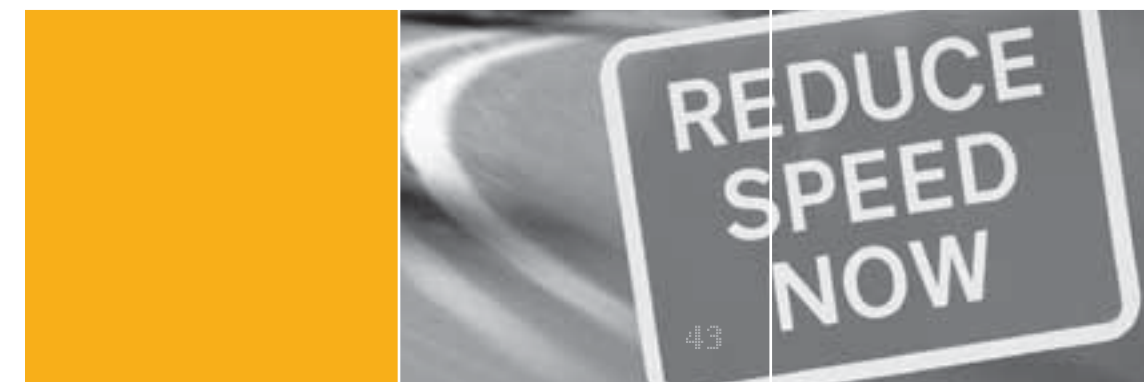
Despite widespread societal awareness of the importance of cars in young people's social lives, road safety messages tend to maintain a tight focus on the individual driver and the consequences of their driving. An alternative strategy suggested by our study is to promote the idea of passengers sharing responsibility for safety, or supporting young passengers in being assertive when their peers are driving dangerously.

### *Enhancements to driver training*

Irrespective of exactly how much direct influence car advertising has on young people's feelings and practices around driving, the focus group discussion method did demonstrate that for most young people, showing car and road safety ads was a good way to open up discussion about a wide range of driving experiences, meanings, judgements and emotions.

Aspects of driving & safety to do with shared social life and broader cultural meetings are neglected in current driver training, which emphasises technical and legal knowledge. Opportunities for young people to discuss their friends' driving experience and practice within broader social and cultural contexts could be a valuable component of driver training programs.

Specific recommendations reflecting the above themes are set out in section 10 following.





The findings from this part of the media study suggest various recommendations of relevance to road safety stakeholders concerned with promoting safety messages to young drivers.

**Recommendation 1:** In general, driver training and safety awareness programs should give more acknowledgement to the cultural meanings, social identities and rituals of young people as well as the media consumption patterns that are formative contexts for their driving practices.

**Recommendation 2:** Opportunities for peer-based discussion of the social and cultural dimensions of driving need to be provided to young drivers as part of driver training and safety awareness. These might include the social identities associated with different cars and driving styles, especially around gender, and the contradictory messages in car advertising and safety campaigns.

**Recommendation 3:** The strong and emotive imagery of speed, power, and aggression in car advertising needs to be drawn out and challenged more in public debate, not for censorship purposes, but to help develop a more readily available vocabulary for discussing these psychosocial and cultural dimensions of driving practices.

**Recommendation 4:** Other media besides television need to be explored as avenues for promoting safety messages targeting young drivers or specific driving sub-cultures; in particular, attention might be paid to the following:

- **Recommendation 4.1:** Radio — listened to by youth mainly in morning and afternoon drive time periods — is a potentially powerful medium that could be better used for promoting safety awareness messages that are immediately relevant and applicable in context.
- **Recommendation 4.2:** Magazines — motoring magazines represent an opportunity for targeting youth specifically interested in cars, performance and speed; issues of responsible journalism might be investigated here, and more specially designed safety messages placed within motoring magazines.
- **Recommendation 4.3:** Internet — this is a medium whose use is growing amongst young people, and provides opportunities that could be used a lot more for promoting safety messages on sites of specific interest to young people, motoring enthusiasts, car buyers and sellers.
- **Recommendation 4.4:** Driving games — the actual and perceived influence or connection between driving games and on-road driving experience needs to be further investigated, and consideration given to targeting specific messages to mid-teens showing the differences between virtual and actual driving.



**Recommendation 5:** As young people appear to have high resistance to enforcement messages from authorities, they may respond better to friendlier, peer-based campaigns with specific tips and illustrations of what to do in particular situations, rather than general anti-speeding or enforcement messages.

**Recommendation 6:** Instead of shocking crash scenarios, safety messages could show peers helping each other (especially young men) tone down their driving, and could demonstrate how to negotiate difficult psychosocial issues, such as passenger numbers, drunk passengers, loud music, conflicting directions, and how to express disapproval of dangerous driving and assert one's own desire for safety.



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# APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

## 1. DESCRIPTION

The questionnaire sample totalled 80 young people - 29 males, 37 females and 14 gender unknown. Sixty of the questionnaires were completed by participants in the focus groups while the remainder were completed by undergraduates from the University of Western Sydney and young people contacted by Road Safety Officers from Newcastle and Goulburn.

Researchers did not prevent participants helping each other recall names or details of examples whilst completing the form, as this kind of shared memory work is part of the driving culture being researched. Not all questions on the questionnaire were completed by each participant.

The questionnaire produced a combination of quantitative and qualitative data through its use of some closed-answer questions (e.g. how many hours of television watched per week), many open-answer questions (for driving message examples) and some tick-box questions that allowed for several answers (e.g. times of media consumption, range of media used).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. KEY FINDINGS ON MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Television was the most used medium, watched by 78% of respondents, mainly between 6 pm and midnight, followed by radio at 68%, where usage peaked at morning drive time and again in the late afternoon. Forty-one percent consumed magazines, almost two thirds of which were car magazines, while billboards and internet were each noted by over 30% of respondents.

There was high recall of messages about cars and driving from a wide range of media and modalities (still, moving, real, fictional, virtual), though film examples cited were mainly those featuring car culture, chases, and racing (e.g. Fast and Furious). A high number of road safety campaign advertisements were recalled, though the wording of the questions may have biased this result.

Although only 11% listed 'games' as part of their media consumption, 90% recorded having played them in their pre- or early teen years, including driving and racing games. Responses to a question on whether such games helped with driving revealed a wide range of views, indicating the question of the role of games and simulations in developing skills for driving is a complex one that needs further research.

We did not ask about mobile phone use, either in relation to use while driving, or as a medium of driving messages, though focus group participants mentioned using mobile phone information services to find out current locations of random breath testing stations or speed traps.

Our findings confirm those of Sternberg's (1998) study of declining news consumption by young people, whom he found more likely to watch The Simpsons than news programs. Similarly, for our sample this cartoon sitcom was the single most popular TV program, listed by just over a quarter (24 people) while only one-tenth (9 people) mentioned the news. Other favourites included Sex in the City, Friends, South Park, sports and Video Hits.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents could tick more than one box



## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

### 3. RANGE OF MEDIA USED

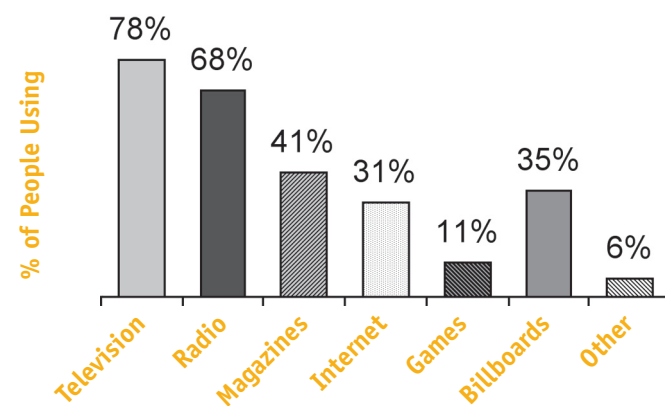
The first question asked which media respondents used or paid attention to. They could tick any number of items in the list of television, radio, magazines, internet, games, billboards and other. As Chart 1 indicates, television and radio were used by 78% and 68% of respondents respectively, with magazines coming in third at 41%, internet and billboards fairly close to each other at over 30% and games a low 11%.

Respondents were also asked to rank their preferences for different media and these results mirrored those in the Chart 1.

Looking closely at a sub-sample of 18 respondents (about one-fifth) revealed some interesting patterns. Television was the first preference for 13 respondents and the second preference for 3 out of the 18. The only person who ranked television fifth listed internet as their first preference.

Second preferences were distributed across the range of categories with internet slightly ahead, while third preferences clustered strongly around radio (third choice for 50% of the sub-sample). Games were the least popular, with no first preferences, 3 second preferences and a decisive 7 last preferences—suggesting that game-playing does not simply cease but is rejected, perhaps as an outgrown stage.

**CHART 1:  
RANGE OF MEDIA USED**



### 4. TIMES OF MEDIA USE

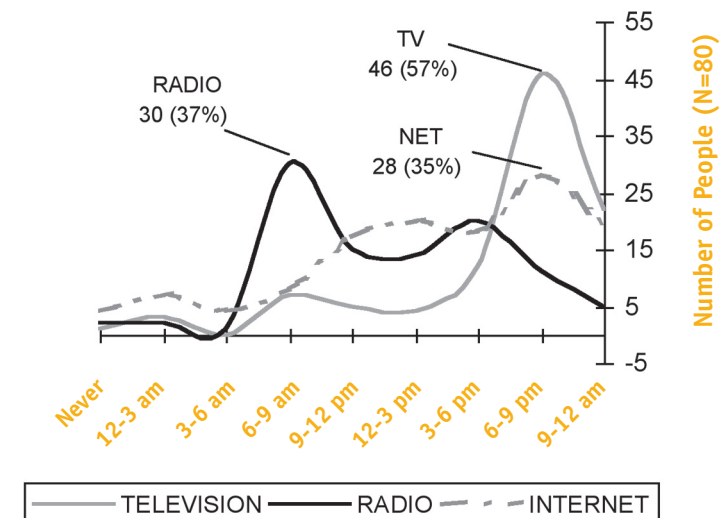
The questionnaire asked about when people watched television, listened to radio, or used the internet. Respondents could tick more than one box covering eight three-hour periods through the day. The most popular times for television were 6pm-9pm (57% of respondents) and 9pm-12pm (22% of respondents). Only 1% stated they never watched television.

For radio, the morning drive time period of 6-9am was most popular (37%) followed by the afternoon drive time of 3-6pm (20%). Internet use peaked at the 6-9pm slot.

These results are shown in Chart 2.

## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

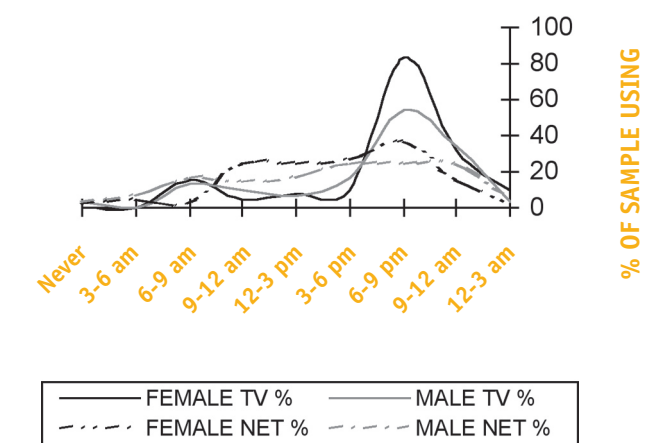
**CHART 2:  
TIMES OF TV, RADIO, INTERNET USE**



Looking at differences in media use times by gender, it was apparent that the spike in watching TV in prime time (6-9pm) was largely attributable to young women, twice as many of whom watched television at that time compared to young men. Radio use was very similar for both genders across all time slots, with women ahead of men in the 9am-12am slot, when more men were on the internet but hardly any women were. Women appear to use the internet consistently between 9am and 9pm, with a peak at each end.

These gender differences between respondents is shown in Chart 3.

**CHART 3:  
TIMES OF TV AND INTERNET USE BY GENDER**





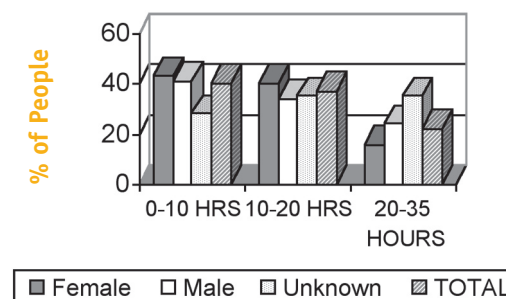
## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

### 5. HOURS SPENT WATCHING TV, LISTENING TO THE RADIO, SURFING THE NET

#### Television

The questionnaire asked how much time was spent watching television, listening to the radio and surfing the net. As shown in Chart 4a, around 40% of respondents watched up to 10 hours of television per week and about the same percentage (with slightly fewer men) watched 10-20 hours per week. Sixteen per cent of the female respondents compared to a quarter of the male respondents watched over 20 hours of television a week.

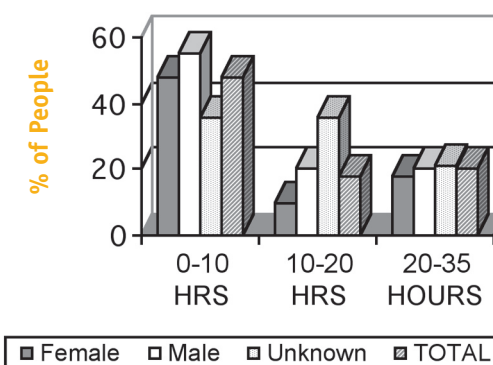
**CHART 4a:  
TV HOURS PER WEEK**



#### Radio

As shown in Chart 4b, around 40% of respondents listened to up to ten hours of radio per week while around 20% listened to between 10 and 20 hours per week. Another 20% listened to more than 20 hours per week. Fewer respondents listened to radio for more than 20 hours per week than watched television for more than 20 hours per week. Overall, there were few differences between males and females in their listening habits.

**CHART 4b:  
RADIO HOURS PER WEEK**



## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

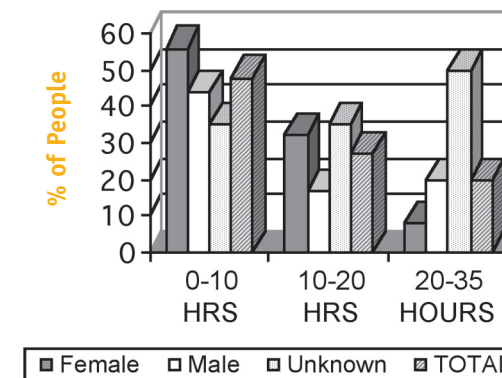
#### Internet

About half of respondents (39 out of 80) reported spending up to ten hours per week on the internet. 56% of women compared to 44% of men used the internet for less than 5 hours a week while almost twice as many women as men (32% compared to 17%) used the internet for between 10 and 20 hours a week.

About one fifth of the male respondents and only 8% of female respondents were heavy internet users (20 or more hours a week). In other words, while more women than men have low internet use and proportionately more women than men are moderate users (10-20 hours per week) there are proportionately more men who are heavy users.

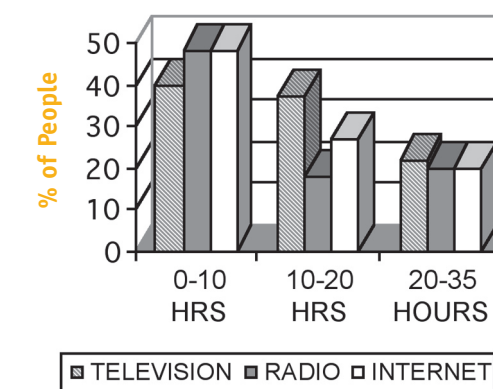
These results are shown in Chart 4c.

**CHART 4c:  
INTERNET HOURS PER WEEK**



In Chart 4d, which presents combined figures for hours of media consumption, it can be seen that television appears highest in the 10-20 hours per week slot. Slightly fewer respondents reported watching television for up to 10 hours than reported listening to the radio or using the internet for this amount of time.

**CHART 4d:  
TV, RADIO, NET HOURS PER WEEK**



## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

### 6. TELEVISION EXAMPLES

Respondents were asked to provide examples of images, scenes, meanings and messages about cars and driving they remembered from television and to provide some comment on why they remembered, liked or disliked the message or image. There was space for four examples from television. Among the first examples given, 19 were road safety advertisements. Others included news reports, car advertisements and movies.

**Road safety** examples included:

*Stop Revive Survive ad. Couple in van driving and then hit side of truck RTA – speeding. Teenager drives his brother around, speeds, I assume kills his little brother. Shock value: killing someone you love. I find this confronting. It's a good ad.*

*'Go to bed, Jessica!'. Father comes home upset after killing a small girl while he was drink driving. Yells and daughter and wife. Shows damaging effect that driver goes through. The line 'Go to bed, Jessica!' got stuck in my head, everybody was saying it.*

*Ad Father whose face is beaten up due to his son not wearing a seat belt and his head smashing into his father's.*

*Kombi van: stop, revive, survive. An ad about fatigue where a Kombi van smashed into the side of a truck on a straight piece of road. Made a large impact.*

**Car advertising** and news examples included:

*Holden ute ad. Ute doing circle work creating storm, hurricane.*

*Mario Kart. Cartoon Character racing in go-karts. Aimed at young people. Kart speeds do not exceed 60 - 70 km per hour.*

*News. Car burnt out by a tree, reporter says family all deceased. Shocking scene, family i.e. children dead.*

Examples from **drama and film** included:

*2 Fast 2 Furious. The theme of the movie is drag racing so there are plenty of scenes of racing fast sports cars. The drivers (actors) are in their 20s, reflecting the behaviour of the youth in particular on the roads.*

*Home and Away. Hayley crashed her pink VW beetle into a tree and is badly injured*

*McLeod's Daughters, Blue Heelers. Show utes as being the country man's car. Add to the image that 'real Aussie men drive utes'. Gives the ute a rugged charm. I think it is highly unlikely that everybody in the country drives tough and rugged old utes! How do you fit the family in?!*

## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

### 7. RADIO EXAMPLES

Many recalled examples of radio messages related to cars and driving were from road safety campaigns. By asking 'Are there any stations or programs with messages about cars or driving that you recall?' we may have biased this response since sometimes the word 'message' is used to distinguish a public service announcement ('a safety message') from, for example, a regular 'ad' or 'commercial'. By contrast, the TV examples asked for 'images, scenes, meanings and messages'. A revised version could expand radio options to cover messages or commercials, songs, sounds, stories, comments, information.

Thirty of the examples of radio messages about cars and driving were about road safety:

*Police sirens in background and they talk about the double demerit points on the long weekend. Because it's an important message to remember.*

*8 out of 10 accidents on country roads occur on bends. Effective.*

*Sound of car crash including screeching of brakes and the impact. Effective and shocks listener.*

*The 'how fast are you going now?' ad, makes you think, step back into reality and look at the speed.*

Other campaigns mentioned were motorcycle awareness, messages about drink driving, country road fatality ads, 'Stop, Revive, Survive', and Dr Karl microsleep ads.

Car advertising and traffic reports were also recalled:

*People around town giving examples of the specific places they have been booked within our town. It's people I know and places I drive around. It's specific to me. This makes it realistic.*

*Used modified cars to cope with outback conditions and that many people speed on the roads without reprimand. Because of its contrast to city cars and rules.*

### 8. MAGAZINES

Magazines are generally a very popular medium in Australia. Motoring magazines themselves have recently become more popular and are cumulatively estimated to reach up to 38% of the Australian male population aged 16-34 years. Magazines were media used by 37% of respondents (33 people). Respondents had two opportunities to mention motoring magazine — one in answer to a general question about which magazines were read and another asking specifically whether they read motoring magazines. A total of 28 people (or 31%) including 6 females, reported reading motoring magazines - 16 people mentioning them in the general question and a further 12 in the specific motoring magazine question.

## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

Motoring magazines mentioned included *Fast Fours*, *Hot 4s*, *Wheels*, *Motor* and *Open Road*. The first two of these are more oriented to younger motorists interested in factory or work-shop modified cars, and each have about half the circulation of the more mainstream magazines *Wheels* and *Motor* and less than 2% of the circulation of the NRMA's *The Open Road*. Other magazines mentioned included *Cosmo*, *Women's Weekly*, *In Style*, *Inside Sport*, *Rolling Stone*, *Personal Computer*, *Australian Mountain* and *That's Life*.

Most of those who mentioned the magazines they read did not give an example of a message about cars and/or driving. Those who did gave comments related in the main to speed:

*Fast driving, power (Fast 4s)*

*Talking about how fast this V8 walkinshaw (Holden) went over the quartermile and the modifications that have been done. They said, 'It's really hard to not speed in this beast.' (Street Machine)*

*Constantly rants about speed limits being too low, write reviews and road tests based on race track performance rather than real life road situations. (Wheels)*

*That it matters how fast your car goes, how well it handles and stops. (Motor)*

Others not related to speed included comments about cars and women/sex as well as safety:

*Advertisement re Hyundai Getz, shows women in a picture, 'green with envy' (Cosmopolitan)*

*Sexy women are attached to nice cars (Ralph)*

*There are often articles about road and car safety (The Open Road)*

A supplementary study undertaken as part of this project gathered a one-year sample of six popular car magazines. While these have not been fully analysed, one finding so far is that all but *The Open Road* are virtually devoid of messages about road safety, and there is no systematic campaign placing appropriately designed road safety messages in this medium. There is clearly an to specifically target young male (and a small number of female) drivers who are keen on cars, performance, speed and risk-taking.

### 9. Games

The data relating to games emerged as worthy of further study. Respondents were asked if they had played electronic games and were asked to tick boxes next to video games, computer games, arcade games and simulations. Of the 80 respondents who filled out the questionnaire, only 17 (around 20%) had not played

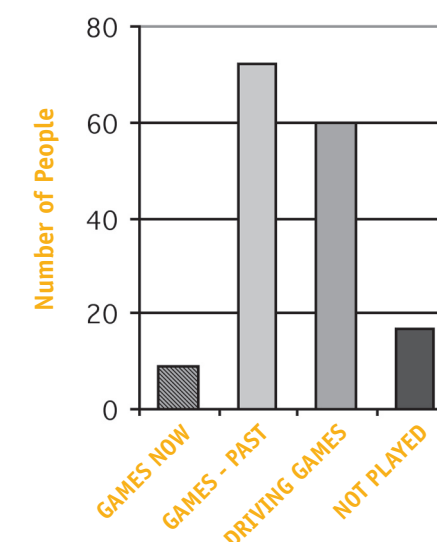
<sup>1</sup> ('Huge gains for automotive titles', 16 May, 2003; bandt.com.au/articles/4a/0c01614a.asp)

## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

video or computer games, though even some of these had played arcade games. And whereas only 11% of respondents reported games as a medium they paid attention to now, a total of 72 (90%) had played or did play video and/or computer games, including a high proportion of females. These results are shown in Chart 5.

Three quarters of the sample (60 people) mentioned having played games related to racing with cars, bikes and/or karts, and titles mentioned included *Mario Brothers*, *Need for Speed*, *Rally Championship*, *Gran Turismo* and *Daytona*.

CHART 5:  
GAMES USE PRESENT & PAST (N=80)



The question on when games had been played was an open-ended one, making it difficult to map responses, but scrutiny of the results indicates that, aside from some who persisted until they were about 20 years old, and a few who continued now, most seem to have lost interest in games by the age of 16. For many the peak period was 9-12 years. One issue here may be that driving and racing games played in this age period establishes expectations about driving which are carried forward into later teens, even if practical experience in many cases later reveals deficiencies in these expectations.

Images and experiences recalled from driving games included varying degrees of reckless and lawless driving:

*Race your friends around a track and try to finish the quickest. Good feeling when you beat your friends in a race.*

*Stealing cars, running people over, very violent, loud music. Totally irresponsible driving is condoned and encouraged.*

*It's cool to break the rules 'cause you get chased by cops and drive all over town knocking people and things over. Speed, burnouts and slaloms are cool.*

*There was a vibrating control which simulated the car when it crashed or toppled over. Made me get into the experience, made it fun.*



## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

One message participants seemed to get from these games was the cluster of associations between speed, skill, control and safety, associations well recognised in the literature on young, optimistic, risk-taking (especially male) drivers:

*Need skill to drive fast. Knowing that you had to slow down around corners. Handling of cars.*

*Speeding through suburban streets; however, warns that it is only a game and promotes safe driving techniques.*

Asked why they remembered, liked or disliked this image, meaning or experience, more respondents referred to fun:

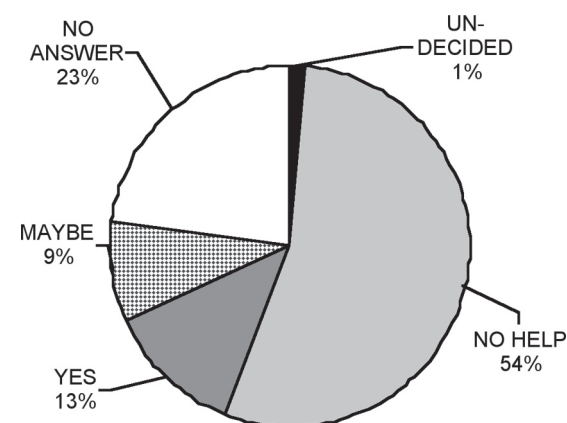
*It was a very exciting and fun game to play although it was very unrealistic. Playing is fun; however, it shows that you have to be cautious.*

*It gives you confidence about driving but then once behind the wheel it is a different thing. Makes you think it's a lot easier to drive.*

*Fun, unrealistic so escape from reality, when younger feel in control.*

When asked 'Do you think playing games helps with your driving? If so, how? If not, why not?', 10 responded that yes, they thought it did help and 43 said no they did not think it helped. One said they were undecided and seven were in the 'maybe' category. Eighteen did not respond to the question, about the same number who said they had never played games. These results are shown as percentages in Chart 6.

**CHART 6:  
DRIVING GAMES - DO THEY HELP?**



## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

Some people answered that games help with navigating obstacles, steering manoeuvres, reaction time and hand/eye coordination. Favourable responses tended to associate speed, skill and safety with the theme of control:

*Yes, it can, by increasing reflexes and co-ordination.*

*Yes, car racing games assist you in terms of handling, driving and gear changing.*

*The game is helpful as it makes you concentrate on how fast you are going, keep an eye on other cars, especially when going around corners/sharp bends - have to balance acceleration with braking, steering, etc.*

*Yes. The more you want to win, the more you concentrate not to falter on the driving.*

Those who said 'no' gave a variety of reasons:

*Unrealistic- it doesn't matter if you crash.*

*Not realistic enough yet*

*Teaches bad driving*

*Creates a false sense of reality*

*The experience of driving in real life involves numerous unpredictable influences from the external environment. A computer game has a degree of control and pre-determined activities.*

*It is completely different to driving in real life*

Some showed concern for how games could influence people in their ideas of driving:

*Makes it worse I think, makes you think you can take a corner at 100 km/h and drop the handbrake, ending up fine. In real life you'd most likely crash.*

*I don't think so. Virtual reality driving (strengthened) would be more effective. Computer games perhaps increase reckless driving.*

For others, the response was mixed. In the following quote the comment is made in the last sentence that it took some time to distinguish the game and reality:

*No, since there is an element of 'shock' when driving real cars as opposed to virtual cars. The fact that your crashes are real, with real consequences, creates panic...it did for me, at least. It took a while to accept that I was no longer playing a game.*

## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

For this person, some skills are transferable while others are not:

*It may in a slight way help with your observation skills but definitely not with your handling of a vehicle.*

In this comment there is some debate as to the possibilities of making the game more realistic:

*No, unless a steering wheel is used possibly, but otherwise no, even the steering wheel is iffy as it's not exactly the same.*

The manuals attached to the games were given some credibility:

*Not playing them but GT2 has a small manual which teaches you how to drive a race car, rally/drift, etc.*

How often the game is played was also seen as a factor in whether it helps with driving:

*No - because I don't do it often enough and because you don't have to worry about the real dangers/hazards of driving.*

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

### 1. FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Nine focus groups were conducted with young people in both rural and metropolitan areas to ensure a mix of participants with varied driver experiences. These areas were: Western Sydney (Fairfield, Bankstown and the University of Western Sydney), Inner City Sydney (Redfern 1 and 2), and central western New South Wales (Blue Mountains, Mudgee, and Bathurst 1 and 2 groups). Each focus group contained six to eight young people, making a total of 60 participants. Of the total, 30 were male and 30 were female. Ages ranged from 16 to 25 with the average age being 19.75 years. Eight participants were in the 16-17 year age range; 30 were 18-19 years and 22 were in the 20-25 year age range.

Focus group participants were from a range of backgrounds- nine had completed tertiary qualifications and 19 were currently engaged in study, while 31 were currently employed (four were both working and studying). Three participants stated that they were unemployed and three gave no response.

Twelve participants had a learner driving licence, 25 had provisional licences and 16 had full licences. One participant had been disqualified from driving and one had an HR licence. Six participants' licence status was not stated.

Thirty six participants gave their ethnicity as Australian and the remaining 15 gave a different ethnicity. Ethnicities reported included Chinese, Croatian, Iraqi, Italian, Jewish, Greek, Latin American, Maltese, Maori, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Turkish and Vietnamese. Nine participants did not comment on their ethnicity.

### 2. ADVERTISEMENTS

A total of 28 advertisements, including a mix of car and road safety advertisements were discussed in the focus groups. A core list of 12 advertisements was regularly used to elicit discussion related to the meanings of the advertisements for the participants and their responses to them.

The advertisements shown are described in section 6 and table 1 lists the advertisements shown in each focus group. The number and type of ads shown in each group depended on the level of discussion, the rest in particular ads and the location (country or city). The first Redfern group, for example, spent a great deal of time discussing various themes in advertising and only viewed five advertisements. The comments in the Bankstown group tended to be brief and so 14 advertisements were viewed in that group.

### 3. FORMAT

Focus groups were based on a discussion format in which participants were shown an advertisement and then invited to comment on the content and meanings of the advertisements, their appeal and various aspects of the ads, such as the styles of driving suggested and the people involved. The complete list of questions is given in section 4.



## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

An important factor to note is that the focus group format provided an opportunity for thoughtful consideration of the advertisements shown. This may not be a normal feature of everyday conversation although the ideas expressed are generally part of everyday conversation relating to cars and driving. As was noted by participants:

*Male: ... the amount we're thinking about it now doesn't go through your head when you watch the ad. It just doesn't click. You just don't think. You don't care.*

*Female: We're on to the next ad in two seconds, anyway!*

*Male: I'm off making a feed or something. I'm not looking at the TV.*

The focus group method was adopted in order to encourage thoughtful discussion amongst participants. Madriz (2000) emphasises the collectivistic as opposed to individualistic method of focus groups as able to encapsulate the 'multivocality' of participant's attitudes, experiences and beliefs. Focus groups are able to draw on the social contexts within which decisions are made and ideas formed (Kitzinger 1994) in encouraging interaction between participants where agreement, disagreement and elaboration of ideas and beliefs are fostered. As well as expressing collective views, focus groups facilitate the expression of individual differences (Wellings, Branigan and Mitchell 2000).

### 4. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions were posed to focus group participants:

1. What does this ad say about the car it advertises?
2. What ways of driving does this ad promote?
3. What meanings does it have for you?
4. Do you identify with particular people, things or styles of driving in the ad? Which ones? In what ways? If not, why not?
5. Does this ad appeal to you? In what ways?
6. Do you like this ad? What is it about it that you like?
7. What do you think the intended meaning of the ad is supposed to be?

### 5. ANALYSIS

A first-level analysis of focus group transcripts was undertaken using the software NVIVO, looking for recurring themes. This formed the basis for the extended analysis of significant issues, meanings and contradictions in the comments of the participants.

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

Using NVIVO, coding was made using the following categories:

### **General Characteristics**

1) Gender 2) Country/City 3) Age 4) Value

### **Attitude**

1) Annoyed 2) Caution 3) Fun 4) Safety 5) Boring 6) Reckless  
7) Aggression/Thrill

### **Driving**

1) Control 2) Burnouts 3) Driving 4) Racing 5) Risk 6) Speed  
7) Performance

### **Advertising**

1) Game 2) Real 3) Social issues

### 6. ADS SHOWN TO FOCUS GROUPS

Descriptions of the 12 main advertisements shown in the focus groups are as follows:

#### 1. Mitsubishi

Opens with shot of finger tapping to beat of the song 'Dreamer's Disease' which continues playing while inter-cut shots various cars shown, with different groups of passengers. A group of three young women and a man are in Magna, Pajeros are shown with a young black and white man, a family, a father and young adult and a male and female couple are in the Lancer. Everyone is shown singing or tapping along to the music. Scenes include city, country, freeway tunnel, and a mix of foreign and local cars. Slogan: 'Driving your world.'

#### 2. Police Reverse

Opens with long shot of car upside down on country road, then cut to close up of a male driver hanging upside down in the cabin, crying in horror on realising his woman passenger is dead. The crash scene is then played in reverse, shot from both inside and outside the vehicle, and an alternate ending presented of the car pulled over and a policeman issuing a speeding ticket, while the driver apologises to the woman and blames his car for wanting to go "whoosh [gesture]". Voice over explains more speed cameras and radars are around and ends with 'Speed and you'll probably be stopped, not dead.'

#### 3. Honda CRV Louts

Woman driving along. Car next to hers shown as older model full of young long haired males listening to heavy metal music and bashing their heads in time with music. She puts up her electronic window to shut them out. "Insulated from road noise." All new CRV Smarter 4WD.

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

### 4. RTA Slomo Speed

Shows two cars speeding towards a truck. Both hit, one with more damage than the other. Special effects (used in The Matrix films) allow a person to be shown in real time while the cars are in slow motion as he explains technical details. The difference between doing 60kph versus 65 kph shows up at the point of impact because ‘In the last 5 metres of braking you wipe off half your speed. So this car is still doing 32ks when it hits. This one also hits but only at 5ks. So no matter how good a driver you are, 5ks difference up there makes 27ks difference down here.’

### 5. Holden Monaro Game

This begins like a videogame, with players selecting from various colour, interior, and engine options, then it becomes a car racing game which includes real footage of city streets and surrounds overlain with visual effects to make it more game-like. The Monaro starts last but passes other more prestigious luxury sports cars in the race. Audio includes mechanical noises, video game sounds, roar of engines. The final voiceover and captions say ‘The Monaro is back. Game Over.’

### 6. Toyota Hilux Buggy

A young man is asked to take his boss’s ute to get hardware materials. He forgets the handbrake and the ute runs off. He and the dog cling to the back while it smashes through a brick fence, a garden, a bus stop, through the building site and knocks over the portable toilet where the boss has just finished. In this way it gathers the needed materials. The dog lands in the toilet and, says ‘Buggy!’

### 7. Ford V6 Escape Soccer

Cars racing around beach hitting large soccer ball. Last scene shows ball hit out to sea, cuts to male driver peering out through windscreen astounded as if ball went out into space.

### 8. Nissan Xtrail Xtreme

While slow, loose brass band music plays, a daggy man in a bowling hat hits a croquet ball; a glasses-wearing older man fumbles with a shuttlecock inside a community hall; a pale younger man slowly hits a ball on a piece of elastic outside a Recreation Centre. “There are sports... and there are extreme sports.” Music changes to fast rock beat, and images of extreme skiing/ski jumping, ayaking down a waterfall, a boy twirling upside down on a skateboard, someone stacking it on a mountain bike. Cut to two young men in vehicle, driving over hills, off-road, throwing bikes into the back of car, driving across a muddy creek, red dusty desert, then through water and clear white spray. End shot: black screen with Nissan logo.

### 9. Speed Cameras - Road Safety Council, WA Police

Cars on various streets with speed camera taking photos. If you thought you were safe in the back streets, if you thought you were safe speeding on the highway, if you thought you were safe speeding on the open road, if you thought you were safe speeding anywhere think again. Because there’s no such thing as safe speeding and now, there’s nowhere you won’t get caught.

### 10. NRMA Rev

A young male driver with wrap-around mirrored sunglasses and gelled hair, pulls up at traffic lights. With loud music playing, he lowers the window, looking through at the car and driver next to him, challenging them. Taking off without looking ahead, he hits a pedestrian.

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

### 11. RTA Seat belt

Shows licence being chewed up in seat belt holder as stern, deep male voice announces double demerits for seat belts this Easter. Slogan: No belt, no brains.

### 12. RTA - country roads

Two guys in a ute are talking about some deal they’d made, with shots of driver and passenger looking at each other, inter-cut with images of speedo needle at 110, then 115kph. They see a school bus around a bend and panic. The passenger covers his head, the driver swerves and hits a tree. Inside the bus, the driver stops and tells students to ‘stay there’, but they all go to look out the back window anyway. We see the bus driver run over to the ute/tree and stand back, shoulders slumped, after seeing the damage. Cut to black screen and sound of idling bus and country sounds, with tag line in white: “8 out of 10 speeding deaths on country roads occur on bends”.

### Other ads screened

Alfa Jet Thrust, Barina Circles, Integra Type R, Falcon Ute being Followed, Myhome UK, Camry Engine, Falcon Enough, Julie and Son UK, Laser SR2, Seat Belt, Fatigue, Country Road Toll Northern NSW, Brothers in Laser, Holden Ute Crop Circles, Current Affair Thunderstruck, Car Ad Impact, ASB Ford Ute, Peugeot 206.

Table 1: Car and road safety advertisements shown to focus groups

Bankstown	Bathurst 1	Bathurst 2	Fairfield	Mudgee
Alfa Jet Thrust	RTA Speed Country	RTA Speed Country	Alfa Jet Thrust	RTA Speed Country
Alfa Quads	Police Reverse	RTA Slomo	Camry Engine	Police Reverse
Barina	Hilux Buggy	Integra Type R	Julie and Son	CRV Louts
Falcon Enough	Escape Soccer	Monaro Game	Laser SR2 Hot	Speed Cameras
RTA Speed Country	ABS Ford Ute	Hilux Buggy	RTA Slomo	Monaro Game
Police Reverse	BMW Woman	Falcon Ute being followed	Seat Belts	Hilux Buggy
RTA Slomo	Mitsubishi	Holden Ute Crop Circles	CRV Louts	Escape Soccer
CRV Louts		Current Affairs Thunderstruck	Monaro Game	NRMA Rev
Speed Cameras		Car Ad Impact	Mitsubishi	Mitsubishi
Monaro Game		Mitsubishi		

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

Blue Mountains	Redfern 1	Redfern 2	University
RTA Speed Country	RTA Speed Country	RTA Speed Country	RTA Speed Country
Police Reverse	Police Reverse	Police Reverse	CRV Louts
CRV Louts	Speed Cameras	Seat Belts	Speed Cameras
Speed Cameras	Escape Soccer	CRV Louts	Monaro Game
Monaro Game	BMW Woman	Speed Cameras	Hilux Buzzer
Hilux Buzzer		Country Road Toll	Escape Soccer
Escape Soccer		Brothers in Laser	BMW Woman
Current Affairs Thunderstruck		Monaro Game	NRMA Rev
NRMA Rev		Hilux Buzzer	
Xtrail Xtreme		BMW Woman	
		NRMA Rev	
		Xtrail Xtreme	