

INTRODUCTION

The motor car is arguably the most criminogenic device yet invented (Bottomley and Pease, 1986:12)

Since the symbolic value and use of the automobile is central to American adolescent lifestyles, it seems surprising that juvenile use of cars has not received more sociological attention. (Higgins and Albrecht, 1982:39)

Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1985) note that general theories of delinquency have little to say about vehicle violations, yet disobeying traffic codes may be the most common offence among older adolescents. As the quotes illustrate the car has been identified both as criminogenic and central to the lifestyles of American youth. Yet the crimes generated by, for and with the car remain rarely studied despite the centrality of adolescent lifestyles to criminology. In the UK, Light et al are able to point out the “relative scarcity of significant work on the subject [car crime]” (1993:1). One reason that the car and crime has not been studied critically before may be that the car is too close to the everyday experience of researchers and therefore not worthy of the study that more distant and exotic subjects are seen to merit. Closeness raises the issue of objectivity. It is the argument of this thesis, that for most researchers – including this one – the way forward is to accept the impossibility of being objective about cars and to work with and on that subjectivity. As Naffine says:

My further concern is the deleterious effect on criminology of the conventional scientific goal of value-free research and, more particularly, how it has been interpreted (often tacitly, or unconsciously) by members of the discipline to mean that they need not consider the effects of their own identities on what they make of the work they do. (1997:26)

Car ownership, car use, the desire for a car and the pollution, disruption and loss of public transport are also not equally shared. They are skewed by class, ‘race’ and age. Cars continue to be owned and used disproportionately by white men over 17, and are only readily affordable by those older. As an industrial good the car is profoundly modern as are many of its problems. Indeed pollution, disruption and loss of public transport may be seen as threatening a return to the pre-modern. The car represents a ‘risk’ (Beck, 1992). Whilst the car is modernist its use today is iterated within the discourses of advertising and masculinity.

As a modernist discourse criminology has had difficulty in theorising the postmodern elements of the discourses around both cars and men. Both cars and criminology remain stalled within the modern but it is not enough to simply abandon modernism by the roadside and hitch a lift with postmodernism as cultural studies might suggest because as experience, and much criminology insists, the ‘reality’ of crime and

cars persists. Paradoxically therefore both modernist and postmodern concerns, theory and method have to be used to bring a critical gaze to bear on cars and crime.

The material, modern aspects of car culture combined with the developing postmodern discourses around it combined with both the modern reality of men's lives and the discourses of gender constitute a number of potential (often temporary and overlapping) car-related gendered positions such as: the joyrider; road rage assailant; anti-roads protester and, even the 'careful lady owner' beloved of car salesmen.

Joyriding is seen as related to aspects of both cars and masculinities which are both obscured in criminology and car culture. This study therefore initially concentrates on a specific crime committed against and with the car - 'joyriding' - but argues for a relationship to 'car culture' (hereafter to appear without scare quotes). It will be argued that such theorising as there has been about car theft has ignored both the specificity of joyriding and the wider issues of class, 'race', gender, environment and culture. Whilst many theories and findings about why joyriders 'joyride' are discussed the purpose here is less to set out an alternative proposition but to more fully understand joyriding as a practice which is deeply embedded in society with a history and meaning which cannot easily be separated from other crimes nor from legitimated activities. Like Ruggiero (1996) the 'aetiology of deficit' is challenged. Indeed what is presented here is a mundane criminology.

This study therefore investigates society, the car culture of that society, and the differing masculinities contending for dominance within society and car culture. Those masculinities, with their cross-cutting class, 'race' and sexuality aspects, make use of cars in 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' ways which tend to reproduce both dominant and subordinate masculinities. Joyriding is an example of ways in which subordinate masculinities (whether by reason of age, class and access to legitimate motoring opportunities) share dominant masculine assumptions. Joyriding also offers the dominant masculinity opportunities to dominate that subordinate masculinity – through both punishment and rehabilitation. Seen in this way joyriding and joyriders are the narrowest focus of the research.

In short this thesis is not about 'crime' as studied by positivist, administrative and correctionalist criminology. It is about the cultural practice of car use – legitimate and illegitimate – and the relations of masculinities which influences responses to illegal use. It is in part an 'outlaw' or 'border' text (Young, 1994:25). Joyriding too is a text. It is a text that can be read but it is written on the palimpsest of the streets. Its interpretation competing and combining with other texts written on the same streets, each seeking to erase each other – the joyrider, the drunk driver, the motorway madman, the Sunday driver, the travelling sales-rep. And, as anti-motorway protesters remind us, the very roads themselves are written on the land.

In order to fully understand joyriding, its history, the legal sanctions against joyriding, non-legal definitions of joyriding, its prevalence and seriousness and the methods used to combat it are set out in Chapter 1. Particular attention is drawn to motor projects and the programmes they run as they seek a remedy within car culture and predominant conceptions of masculinity. The chapter draws on a number of sources to establish that there is a problem of joyriding but that it is not a new problem. Chapter 2 reviews the literature – criminological, official and popular – on joyriding and car theft more generally and solutions proposed for dealing with it – particularly the motor projects introduced in Chapter 1. As considerable emphasis is placed upon what theories of masculinity might add to the understanding of crime some of the literature on masculinity and crime are initially set out here but these are examined more extensively in Chapter 7. This is necessary groundwork because a problematised masculinity is a useful concept in studying joyriding. At the same time it seeks to raise the significance of masculinities within criminology more generally. As Naffine says of ‘criminology proper is that though it is mainly about men, there is very little work done on men as men’ (1997:37).

The common themes and absences found in the literature on joyriding, motor projects and masculinities are set out in Chapter 3 with propositions for filling the lacunae identified and a critique of the methods used by researchers with a narrower focus. The methods used to investigate joyriding and car culture are set out in Chapter 4. The methods are necessarily wide and varied as it is intended to go beyond the common-sense, administrative, positivist and correctionalist theorisation of most of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. In particular the need to identify and develop an understanding of car culture requires a number of methods: observation; participant observation; driving-seat theorising and textual analysis.

The findings arising from the research are set out in Chapters 5 (Joyriding) and 6 (Motor Projects). As the formalised participant observation took place at the motor projects the fieldwork is mostly discussed in Chapter 6 but it has significance for both earlier and later chapters and informs the descriptions in Chapter 1. In part the separate findings in Chapters 5 – 7 overlap: considerations of masculinity cannot be avoided in Chapters 5 and 6 and joyriding and motor projects provide material for the discussions in Chapter 7. All of the elements are brought together in the final Chapter with car culture the overarching concept which enables both the ‘problem’ of joyriding and the ‘solution’ of the motor project to be understood. Inevitably this leads to policy conclusions and suggestions for further research which go beyond criminal justice, reaching towards a holistic understanding of both ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ which might be called ecological or Green. In short the question is not ‘what to do about joyriding within our culture?’; nor even ‘how can we understand joyriding within our car culture?’ but ‘how can we understand – and crucially – do something about our joyriding culture?’

A key component of car culture is TV, newspaper and cinema advertising and narratives about cars and motoring including official and oppositional ones. These are discussed in Chapter 8. In conclusion the solution to joyriding is a change in the centrality of the car to society and to the construction of a number of masculinities. As the methods used and theories espoused are transgressive and the psycho-cultural aspects of joyriding and car use more generally involve desire the extent to which 'queer theory' can contribute to criminology is also raised.

It should be clear that joyriding or car crime – however defined – are not the totality of car culture nor, even the limit of crimes that can be committed with and against the car. For instance, consideration of women and crime prevention offers another way to examine these issues. Thus increased car use leads to increased road building and more measures such as railings and underpasses to segregate motorists and pedestrians. These segregated spaces increase the fear of crime of the road and the speed of vehicles on the road. Women may increasingly see car ownership as a means to deal with both. This may be experienced as a liberation but just as joyriding may not be a resistance to car culture but a submission to it so women also may come, in time, to use cars in similar ways to men.