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What is This?

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Abstract

The majority of deaths for contemporary young people are related to injuries sustained in motor vehicle accidents. Most prevention efforts targeted at addressing the issue are less than effective and do not address youth driving as a culture. This article presents findings from an ethnographic study that attempts to understand the ways in which youth driving culture is organized in regulatory texts and practices. A brief historical review of youth studies provides a context for how we have come to frame the problem through public health and psychology. The study is based on close observation of youth driving lessons, examination of curricular and policy documents, and public health literatures. Results show that prevention efforts are most often attempted by assigning individual blame to risky young people and provide paradoxical messages that simultaneously pathologize and normalize youth and driving. Theoretical and practical implications for young drivers and the sociological study of youth are discussed.

Keywords

youth culture, young drivers, driving culture

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Introduction

Youth driving culture has not been well examined despite the fact that deaths by motor vehicle injuries increase dramatically during adolescence (Irwin, 1993). In Canada in 2001, there were 20 million licensed drivers of whom 1,013,621 were in the 15 to 19 age range, making up 6.7% of the total Canadian population and accounting for 63% of the total traffic fatalities and serious injuries (Transport Canada, 2001). Motor vehicle crashes account for 35% of all deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds and 30% of deaths among those aged 20 to 24, making road crashes the leading cause of death among young people (Statistics Canada, 2003). Deaths and injuries to young drivers account for 25% of *all* driver deaths and serious injuries in Canada, but young drivers represent only 13% of all licensed drivers in Canada (TIRF, 2008). Evidence of the serious threat to young people from driving is constant regardless of whether one examines global (World Health Organization, 1999), national (Transport Canada, 2001), provincial (Ontario Ministry of Transportation, 2000), or local trends such as those in small northern communities (Northern Health Information Partnerships, 2003).

Cultural influences have been shown to influence these patterns. Higher income levels are associated with lower standardized mortality ratios (Krauss, Fife, Ramstein, Conroy, & Cox, 1986; Van Beek, Mackenbach, Loopman, & Kunst, 1991) and correlations have been found between increased traffic injury and urbanization (Erskine, 1996; Joly, Foggin, & Pless, 1991), over-crowding (Preston, 1972; Rivara & Barber, 1985) and the class composition of a community (Andersson, 1996) suggesting the influence of social inequality on traffic injury outcomes (Laflamme, 1998).

In many jurisdictions in North America, graduated licensing and driver's education have been implemented to address these issues. Graduated licensing systems impose restrictions on the new driver and have been shown to be effective in reducing deaths and injuries among young drivers (Mayhew, Simpson, des Groseilliers, & Williams, 2001; Mayhew, Simpson, Desmond, & Williams, 2003) by decreasing accident rates by 31% (Ontario Ministry of Transportation, 1998). However, driver education does not necessarily increase road safety in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Transportation, 1998), the Unites States, Sweden, or Australia (Mayhew & Simpson, 1996). A lack of standards in driver education and an ineffectual driver testing system can have negative effects on the driving skills of the young driver. The content, organization, and regulation of these elements of driving culture have yet to be examined. In fact, most research into this issue has been conducted by public health and psychology researchers inclined to trend analysis and/or

individualistic examinations (Tilleczek, 2004). Population health trends are necessary for understanding the scope of the problem but do little to illustrate why it continues to exist.

In this article, a synthesis of literatures on adolescent development and youth driving provide context for the trends and ethnographic evidence that are presented. The article provides an examination of youth driving culture which includes observation and analysis of graduated licensing and driver's education texts. The article presents a brief synthesis of the adolescent and youth literatures that have fed prevention efforts and offers an alternative to them. The symbolic and practical understandings of young people are illustrated in both the literature and current texts which govern youth driving. These cultural representations of youth show how we have "come to understand the theories, models, and other artifacts we use to think" about them (Olson, 1994, p. 195) and what they mean to practice. What are the representations of young people in youth and driving literatures and practices? What are their implications for addressing what Tilleczek (2004) sees as a critical contemporary *rite of passage*?

The Rearview Mirror

G. S. Hall's work at the beginning of the 20th century (cf. 1904) has been credited as the "invention of adolescence" and used to make the point that "adolescence was essentially a conception of behaviour imposed upon youth rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved" (Demos & Demos, 1969; Gillis, 1981; Kett, 1977; Sebald, 1992). "The architects of adolescence used biology and psychology (specifically Hall's metaphor of storm and stress) to justify the promotion of young people to norms of behaviour that were freighted with middle-class values" (Kett, 1977, p. 243). The unwanted conduct of youth in Hall's day was assessed according to three related norms: conformity, anti-intellectuality, and passivity. This is especially troubling as Hall's theoretical work spilled out "past the university walls" (Enright, Levy, Harris, & Lapsley, 1987, p. 554) to influence movements such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA . In the period from 1900 to 1920, the "collective coercion of bodies" approach as suggested by Foucault (1977) came to be a solution to the problematic and troubled nature of youth. Boys were thought to be "growing wild and slightly criminal" and secondary schools were encouraged to correct their behavior by providing "rifle practice and military maneuvers" (Hall, 1918, p. 306 cited in Enright et al., 1987). The historical evidence illustrates that child-like passivity was

enforced for youth during times of depression and adult-like activity during times of war (cf. Tilleczek, in press).

As I have argued elsewhere (Tilleczek, in press) this tension between active growth and passive conformity and that between continuity and discontinuity in development continues into contemporary literatures, public policy, and curricula. Current dominant representations of youth set them apart from children and adults, suggest homogeneity of experience, the inevitability of trouble, and the constant need for surveillance (Griffen, 1997; Kelly, 2000). For example, sexual education curriculum often knots danger and pleasure together through unclear messages that both normalize and pathologize intimate encounters (Alexander, 2008; Marecek, 2002). Such mixed messages are embodied paradoxes of young people as active/passive, good/bad, and capable/incapable with origins that are split between capitalistic and socialistic views of youth and of the coercion evidenced in Hall (Riegel, 1972). In reading this adolescent development literature, one has the impression that Margaret Mead's letters from Samoa remain unopened.

This lack of attention to cultural influences continues to limit research specific to youth driving. I have detailed elsewhere (Tilleczek, 2004) the argument stating that this research continues to offer individual and psychological explanations to the problem. Most often cited are the risk-taking propensity of youth and faulty adolescent cognition and inexperience. The literature portrays adolescence as a time of escalating risk-taking that results in injury and death (Irwin, 1993; Muus & Porton, 1998). However, attempts to explain links between risk-taking and injury have been sparse as compared with the wealth of research aimed at explaining the "causes" of risk-taking behavior.

These causes include a general cognitive incapability (unrealistic self-appraisal and cognitive egocentrism), the inability to perceive risks, thrill-seeking personality variables, and family structure (Arnett & Balle-Johnson, 1993). It is important to note however that Jelalian, Spirito, and Rasile (1997) have shown that risk-taking propensity accounts for only 4% of the variance in injury. Moreover, risk is not simply problematic (Tilleczek, 2004; Tilleczek & Hine, 2006) but plays an important part in the positive growth and development of young people. Risk is used as cultural "edgework" allowing negotiations between self and others in a culture (Lyng, 1993) and is both social and transformative, taking the place of childhood play for social growth (Lightfoot, 1997).

I have argued elsewhere that *youth* could be reconceptualized as a cultural tension between being and becoming (Tilleczek, in press). The word *youth* represents intriguing assumptions about processes of becoming human. Variable biological processes of puberty unfold within layers of social transitions

between childhood and adulthood in a process referred to as culturally nested transitions (Tilleczek, 2008) inspired by sociological and ecological theory (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Furlong & Cartmel, 2003). Learning to drive is seen as a culturally organized rite of passage that is fraught with the potential for both independence and danger. Culture influences action by shaping the tool kit of habits, skills, and styles from which young people construct their strategies for action (Swidler, 1986) while the treatment of young people shifts with sociopolitical realities such as economic and labor market demands and educational responses (James & Prout, 2001).

Keating and Hertzman (1999) describe the paradox of modern society as the contradiction of rapid expansions of wealth along with growing health transgressions for those marginalized by social class and age. Late modernity is further characterized by a weakening of social networks that traditionally supported young people (Beck, 1992) and transitions to adulthood can become increasingly multidimensional and complicated (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Tilleczek & Lewko, 2001). Lifestyles are individualized and problems are seen as outcomes of individual failings solved only through personal action. A key feature of modern society is the fallacy of individual control which hides the social relationships between people and institutions that govern them (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

The complex cultural nesting approach (Tillecek, in press) is not developmental in the traditional sense where young people move along easily determined linear pathways. Time and growth (physical, psychosocial, academic, cultural) do remain central aspects but transitions are conceived in nonlinear ways and are nested within complex cultures. This makes it necessary to determine how and why young people live out their complex narratives, become resilient, and make life changes (Pais, 2003). This approach opens the way for examining positive developmental health and recovery from troubling situations. Youth are characterized by any number of pathways which intersect along levels of influence in schools, communities, and societies. For example, schools do not stand alone but are nested in sociopolitical contexts of power and hold numerous contradictions (Bruner, 1996; Tilleczek, 2008). This approach allows us to avoid seeing all members of risk groups (e.g., youth learning to drive) as necessarily "at-risk" without also seeing *how* they are living in risk situations and their potential for resilience.

Examining Youth Driving Culture: Processes

Examining the cultural nests of youth driving culture is possible through the use of forms of critical ethnography such as institutional ethnography

(cf. Smith, 1984, 1987, 1990, 2002) which is "an inquiry intended to disclose how activities are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process" (Smith, 1987, p. 151). It is committed to the explication of how things are and how they work in practice. In exploring and mapping social relations, observation, interviewing, and textual analysis are interrelated and checked against daily practices (Kinsman, 2006). Examinations of ideologies and ruling relations are accomplished through interpretation of the logic by which culture is guided from locations in the everyday world (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

The ethnographic data presented here is taken from a larger provincial study of youth driving culture in which the Novice Driver's Survey (Tilleczek, 2004) was constructed from a host of valid and reliable measures to fill community-level gaps in provincial trends. Four provincial sites were selected for the larger study and this article reports on the findings arising from one site. In each site, the survey data were collected from each student within driving education classrooms. These classrooms then became the locations of the ethnographic work. The survey data in this study (reported elsewhere) was drawn from 88 young drivers who were present in the two driving education classrooms. The two classrooms were chosen to reflect possible variability in community-based and nationally-based driver's education curriculum and method. The survey data were used to guide the ongoing critical ethnographic process which uncovered the trends and inherent social relations evidenced in the survey results (see Tilleczek, 2004).

The critical ethnographic data presented in this article arose from 4 months of field work with four sources of data as follows: (a) Field notes arising from 40 hours of observation in the two driving education classrooms in which the researcher noted orientations to pedagogy, content of lessons, student reactions to the lessons, physical space, and ethos of the room. The young drivers were also engaged by the researcher in informal conversations as they arose organically (most often occurring while the group was taking a break). It is worth noting that ethnopoetic texts were also constructed by the researcher while in the field but are not reported here; (b) Informal interviews and/or email exchanges with six key informants who opened up the field for observations and further discussion. These informants were purposively chosen due to their in-depth knowledge of driving education and were identified through a snowballing method beginning in the two classrooms. They were either in-class driving instructors or provincial stakeholders. Approximately 12 email exchanges were used with four of the informants as a follow-up to conversations to exchange further information; (c) A selection of provincial laws and policies which were reported by the key informants to have particular impact on governing youth driving and graduated licensing. These policies provide the context
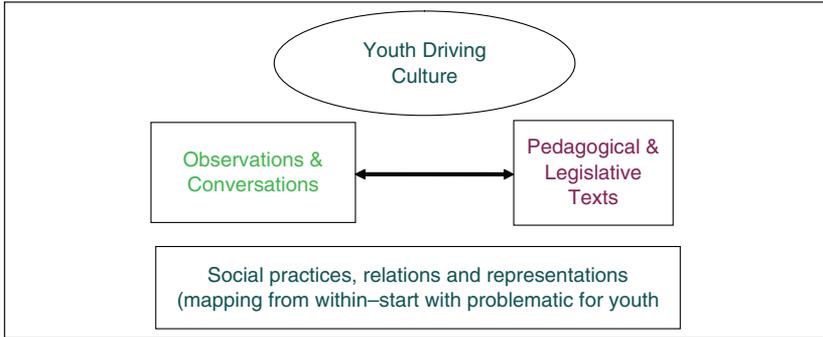
Figure 1. Critical ethnographic data and analysis
Note: Population health trends and youth literatures were examined for context.

of the financial and legal regulation of driving education and certification; and (d) Six curricular texts which were used in the classrooms and/or suggested by the key informants to be those which were most important. These pedagogical texts were as follows:

Health and Physical Education: The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 & 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001).
Ready for Ontario's Roads: A Newcomer's Guide to Graduated Licensing (Ontario Ministry of Transportation [MTO], 2001a).
Road Worthy: Becoming a Responsible Driver (MTO, 1985).
Beginner Driver's Education Curriculum Standards, MTO (Canadian Standards Association, 2007).
Driving School A (name protected; Curriculum Documents, 2001).
Driving School B (name protected; Student Work Books, 2001, 2002).

Figure 1 illustrates how this article focuses on four pieces of ethnographic data and its analysis for youth driving culture. This process allowed for an examination of the deeper social organization of youth driving trends (as evidenced in the Novice Driver's Survey and population health data) and for examination of the nonmaterial representations of young people inherent in these material pedagogical and legislative texts.

The analytical frame for the data was based on the following questions: How are youth, driving, and risk/safety organized and represented in the texts? How do these representations relate to the observed educational practices and on the literatures on young drivers? This analytical process proceeded from reading the manifest to latent content of social practices and relations

(Manning & White, 1994; Rothe, 2000). The researcher first read all transcriptions of interviews, emails, curricular texts, legislative texts, and field notes (arising from the observations and informal discussions). This allowed for the emergence of the analytical frame. Three additional readers were then asked to read the first 8 pages of each text until consensus was reached on the analytical frame. Thus, **practice** was a main thematic relationship about pedagogy, content, and ethos of schools; **driving** covered the institutional relationships and logic/regulation of driving costs, benefits and images of driving, **risk/safety** included images and discourse about problems and strategies on the road; and **youth** comprised ideas and practices relating to youth and their representations. Each was used to guide the observations from the data and to structure the writing of the ethnographic work.

Uncovering Youth Driving Culture: An Ethnographic View

The context of graduated licensing. In the national context, the field research uncovered that the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) annually estimates the numbers of youth in the "Canadian driver training market" which reflects the numbers of beginning drivers and the proportion of those being trained in a driving school. The TIRF (2000) reported that in Ontario there were 584,586 youth (aged 16 to 19 years) of whom 394,512 were driving. Of those, 304,000 were learning to drive and only 43% ($N = 130,000$) were being "trained" in a driving school. The national organization *Young Drivers of Canada* trained 27,600 (21%) of these learners, the rest were trained at various local driving schools. In comparison, the national rates were 619,494 new drivers, 44% (270,591) of whom enrolled in a driver training program. The majority of young people learning to drive are therefore not enrolled in driving education.

In the provincial context, youth driving was found to be well regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) with an internal logic that was traced through policies on road standards, licensing and regulatory efforts such as graduated licensing and driver education. Driving schools are also regulated (but less so) in ways that will be described below. The logic of graduated licensing is imparted through MTO with both close regulation *and* insistence on personal responsibility for transgressions. Driving is normalized as a regular part of modern and youth culture but simultaneously pathologized as highly dangerous and risky. The texts outline a number of ways in which the licensed driver (and the young driver in particular) is personally responsible for safety and danger on the road while still strongly encouraged to drive. For example,

Road safety is no accident—Driver errors cause 85% of collisions. Every year collisions kill 1,100 people and injure 90,000 more. Every 8 hours one person dies. Every 6 minutes someone is injured. Collisions cost Ontario $9 billion every year. The people of Ontario do not have to pay the high cost of collisions—most collisions can be prevented…. It also includes 800,000 hours of police time; 150,000 days of hospital care; 74,000 visits to emergency rooms; 38,000 ambulance calls; and 9,000 fire department responses. Licensed drivers in Ontario have responsibility to drive safely. You can stop a collision before it happens by having safe driving habits. Always remember that you share the road with other cars, trucks, cyclists, and pedestrians. Safe driving habits require practice. As a safe driver, you must keep a constant watch on your surroundings and be aware of people and vehicles around you at all times. (MTO, 2001a, pp. 2-3)

Similar contradictions are inherent in the logic and explanation for the implementation of the provincial system of graduated licensing as follows:

Why do we need graduated licensing? Too many people are being killed and injured on Ontario roads. New drivers of all ages are much more likely to get into crashes than experienced drivers; collisions are the leading killer of people between 16 and 24. Graduated licensing is one way of cutting down the risks new drivers face—a way to prevent collisions and save lives. …As of April 1, 1994, all new drivers applying for their first car or motorcycle license enter Ontario's Graduated Licensing System (GLS). Graduated licensing lets new drivers get driving experience and skills gradually. The two-step licensing process takes at least 20 months to complete. (MTO, 2001b, p. 1)

The dangerous nature of driving requires regulation by age, vision, graduated licensing, and legislation. MTO states that by the year 2007, 31 jurisdictions in Canada and the United States had some form of teenage passenger restrictions in effect. For example, new drivers must hold a G2 license for a minimum of 12 months before they can attempt the G2 road test and hold a full G license. They may then drive without an accompanying driver on all roads at any time of day. MTO lists ten ways in which new drivers can help make roads safer. In each case, the individual is imagined as the site of both safety and danger. For example, the following additional information was provided on their website:

Our Graduated Licensing System has been a resounding success in reducing death and injury among novice drivers. Ontario research shows that new teenage drivers are almost three times more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious collision when they are carrying teenage passengers. In fact, research shows the more teenage passengers, the higher the risk. To further protect youth on our roads, effective September 1, 2005: the number of young passengers that teen G2 drivers can carry will be limited from midnight to 5 a.m.

New drivers learn to drive under six regulatory conditions (including zero blood alcohol, accompaniment by fully licensed driver in the front seat, refrain from driving on 400 series highways and expressways, refrain from driving between midnight and 5 a.m.) and must hold a G1 license for a minimum of 12 months before attempting the G1 road test. This time can be reduced to 8 months with successful completion of an approved driver education course.

The illogical context of driver education. Driver education is described as an additional way to receive the training necessary to reduce driving accidents although it is not legally mandatory at provincial or national levels. Driver education is strongly recommended by MTO which oscillates between the use of "driver training" and "driver education" in its textual materials. By taking an MTO-approved beginner driver education course at a driving school, license holders may qualify for a 4-month reduction in the G1-licensing period and a potential reduction in insurance premiums. There is no driver education offered by the public education system as part of regular or mandatory curriculum.

The MTO (2001a) suggests that it is the responsibility of young people to "shop carefully" for a driver education course because only if "you pass a ministry-approved course can you shorten the time it takes to earn full license privileges and you may qualify for potential vehicle insurance discounts." They state that "… not all driving schools offer ministry-approved beginner driver education courses" and provide information and listings of those that do. A ministry-approved driver education course for automobile drivers is one that gives you a minimum of 25 hours of classroom and 10 hours of in-car instruction (12 hours for standard transmission). Along with providing both a baseline curriculum to be followed in its approved driving schools, the MTO sets out educational requirements for the certification of in-car and classroom driving instructors through the Ontario Safety League (OSL). The OSL, a non-partisan, public-interest organization that focuses on road safety, has the task of certifying driving and providing certification to youth who pass the course. The OSL was originally established as a nonprofit, charitable entity in 1913

with a mandate as stated on its website (retrieved May 2003) to "work for safety through education for all road users and all vehicle types."

The costs and description of each course offered to owner/operators of driving schools for their driving instructors ranged in 2003 from $1,895 for a 20-day "beginner course" to $665 for a 5-day "refresher advanced course." The MTO suggests that instructors should ideally have both in-car and classroom training, although in the field work for this study two of seven in-car instructors did not teach classroom lessons. Basic in-car driver instructors are to have 4 years of driving experience; proficiency in the English language; successful completion of all MTO requirements; Canada Safety Council 1-day defensive driving course; Highway Traffic Act Course; and a 16-hour certified first aid course. Basic classroom instructors are to have a driving instructor license, an MTO Approved Beginner Driver Education Course (25 hours in class) at an approved school and 2,000 hours' experience as a licensed in-car Driving Instructor.

The Driving School Association of Ontario (DSAO) further provides service to driving educators. Membership is not mandatory but comes with provision of a number of classroom materials, a car for use in driving tests, and a DSAO certification. All certified driving schools are listed on the website which also provides a checklist for novice drivers in choosing the proper driving school, including attention to student–teacher ratios, classroom facilities, school ethos, use of audiovisual equipment, checking instructor qualifications, experience and upgrading, and the number of years in business. In addition, the MTO provides a list of driving schools that are no longer certified.

In the field work discussions, the relationship between DSAO and the MTO was described as problematic because it was ill-defined to those involved in the delivery of driving education. A sense of mistrust of the MTO, OSL, and DSAO was evidenced through stories about inequity of treatment among driving schools within the certification process. For example, there were suggestions that regulatory practices could be unjust or inequitable to the extent that some driving schools could certify a novice driver in 2 days whereas the same process could take 3 weeks in other cases. In one key informant conversation, this political discussion was summed up as "MTO being seen to have a gun to the head of DSAO."

Cases were reported in discussions with informants in which providing driving certificates to owners of driving schools would be held up and/or backlogged for many months. Such cases were suggested as "favoritism" to particular schools. The backlog of certification caused problems for young

drivers in that insurance companies were unable to provide a discount before certification was registered. This backlog was addressed by MTO over the course of the field work, as was the backlog of driving road tests, with an effort toward privatization of the disbursement of certifications to driving schools and to license G2 road tests. In 2003, there were over 500,000 tests pending which has been interpreted to mean that "MTO dropped the ball" and then allowed thousands through the system prematurely by dropping their passing grades.

This issue of sketchy road testing standards was mentioned by informants suggesting that the pass rate is both relatively low and variable by region and time-of-year. The TIRF (2000) statistics corroborated that in 1994-95 the pass rate for a G1 road test was 70% whereas in 1999 to 2000 the pass rate was 60%. For example, in the community of Kirkland Lake, the pass rate was 92%, whereas in the Greater Toronto Area, the rate was 52% (Tilleczek, 2004). The first reading in the provincial House of Commons of "Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act" attempted to support a commitment to privatizing these services.

Informants spoke further about the illogic of driver education regulation vis-à-vis a 1998 report by the MTO that "disappeared" from circulation. This report suggested an *increase* in crash rates for those trained in driving schools versus those not so trained. It was suggested to the researcher that this raw data be found and carefully examined to be sure that those who had taken driver education courses (and the location of those courses) could be reliably identified in *crash data.* It was not presently possible to evaluate the effectiveness of various driving schools according to the informants as this data was not collected at the point of a collision.

The content, pedagogy, and practice of driver education. Teaching youth to drive was described in the field as both a money-making and politically regulated activity. Driver education is a for-profit business monitored by the provincial government and its regulatory associations. Cases were reported in which youth witnessed driving instructors "conducting other retail business," "slacking off" at donut shops, or telemarketing on cell phones while "teaching" in-car lessons. Some driving classes were reported to be taking place only in parking lots, with additional lessons (at a cost of $30 each) being required to learn to navigate the city streets before the driving test.

During the course of the field work, driving schools across Ontario were undergoing a standardization exercise conducted by MTO and DSAO. The MTO circulated a memo to driving schools under the title "*Ministry Approved Beginner Driving Education Program Information"* from the Licensing and Control Branch. It contained information concerning course content, an

inspection plan for schools, control and sanction information, information on an appeal process and an approved course-provider profile update. This was seen by some instructors as "extra work" and something with little perceived or proven benefit. By 2007, the MTO had invoked an updated and standardized curriculum to be fully implemented provincially by 2008 under the watch of the Canadian Safety Association.

The standard MTO driver education curriculum in 2003 was *Road Worthy: Becoming a Responsible Driver,* which was written in 1985. The text is 161 pages long with an additional 6-page index of terms. It is recommended for reading for every student in Ontario driver education and a copy was to be on hand for all students in driver-education classrooms. Of the nine chapters in *Road Worthy*, four are related to driving conditions and risks therein, three are related directly to the car itself, and the remaining two address personal responsibility for driving and reducing accidents. It is in these last chapters that "youth," "young drivers," and "teenagers" are referred to. These terms are exclusively individualized and pathologized in such a way that the young driver is seen to "cause accidents" even though the majority of the text up to this point speaks to the environmental risks of driving. The cause of death among teenagers (15 to 19 years of age) is presented as 41% from motor vehicle accidents, 35% other accidents and violent causes, 14% other causes, 7% cancer, 2% respiratory disease, and 1% heart disease (no source was cited in the text). The text reports further trends (again with no sources cited) on youth and motor vehicle accidents:

> If you look at the number of traffic accident victims by age group, people aged 15 to 24 accounts for 35% of all deaths and 40% of all injuries on Canadian roads. People aged 15 to 19 are more likely to be involved in car accidents than any other age group. An 18 year old driver is more than two times as likely to die in a crash as the average driver. There are 2 main reasons why young drivers are more likely to have accidents—*inexperience and immature attitude toward driving*. (MTO, 1985, p. 14)

These images of youth as "causing accidents" are in line with the data and literature presented in population health trends. But, the statement suggesting *immature attitudes* toward driving was not borne out for the majority of young people in the field work. Many of them relayed a self-reflective and safe attitude toward driving with meanings of driving relating to "necessity for work," "independence," and "helping out in the family". However, the group of boys aged 17 to 19 was the most interested in fast and powerful cars and taking risks

in driving a car. The survey data (Tilleczek, 2004) from this group showed that 35% of middle adolescents, 5% of early adolescents, and 6% of late adolescents reported doing so. Conversely, 65% of middle adolescents, 95% of early adolescents and 94% of late adolescents reported "never" taking risks in driving a car. The majority of these young people clearly saw the potential danger of driving and was taking driving education to overcome these dangers.

The curricular text by MTO did present the risks inherent in the highway system, the force and momentum of a motor vehicle, urban spaces, intersections, heavy traffic, night driving, slippery roads, and rural roadways. One is left with the overall impression from the text of potentially flawed youth in a potentially flawed system of traffic. How, then, can youth overcome this internal and external risk and increase road safety? The text suggests and describes five strategies: becoming a responsible driver, avoiding collisions, making quick decisions, wearing seat belts, and avoiding impairments while driving (drinking, fatigue, emotions).

These strategies are further explicated in various driver education curriculum and classroom practices. In general, the classes we small and cramped and the students easily become distracted and disengaged in lessons. Separate curricula were used in each of the classrooms and were seen as building and improving on the MTO curriculum. In both cases, the meaning and normalcy of driving in contemporary culture occupied a minority of the curricular discourse while the dangerous nature of driving occupied the majority of it. One course text covered 5 of 13 modules on topics related to driving on freeways, rules of the road, maintaining your car, and driver restraint systems. Another course spanned three of nine modules on such topics. In teaching the normalized aspects of driving, road signs, symbols, rules and laws were covered. The dangerous nature of driving was almost always discussed with the responsibility for this danger and risk placed with the driver, especially with the young and novice driver. The habits of being "collision free" and "economy driving" are examples of ways in which young drivers are taught to attend to psychological predispositions to having accidents and to overcome inexperience.

Topics such as becoming a "defensive driver," "traffic psychology," and "handling adverse conditions" colocate responsibility for safe driving with individual and contextual factors. In general, a habits-of-mind approach was taken in pedagogical practice around these issues: students were encouraged to "talk to themselves" and use "as if thinking" while driving to enhance awareness of the constant need for competent problem solving. This is the main strategy by which they remain aware of their psychological shortcomings, driving conditions, and the difficult tasks associated with driving.

Distractions such as cellular phones, the radio, and discussion with friends interfere with this self-talk and thus create unsafe conditions.

Public education approaches to young drivers?. An important potential source of information, discussion, and practice for young drivers is the public education system via its secondary schools. However, at present this is little more than a missed opportunity. The Ontario Ministry of Education's (EDU, 2001) *Health and Physical Education Curriculum for Grades 11 and 12* is the place where issues of "health and safety" are discussed but include only one small section on driving. Indeed, 65% of the young people who participated in the field work "would" have been exposed to this curriculum over the course of the study in their schools. However, none of the participants reported having studied driver safety. Only 8% reported taking a course on general health and safety. This raises questions as to the ways in which the material is covered in secondary school. Analysis of the curricular texts shows very general claims and a "personal responsibility" approach across the four "strands" into which the expectations for Grades 11 and 12 are organized. Cumulatively, these areas portray mainly individual and psychological aspects of adolescent developmental health.

For example, the goals of Grades 11 and 12 health curricula are to educate for the "promotion of active living and safety" to be accomplished by enhancing "cognitive skills" through the teaching of informed decision-making skills so as to overcome inherent risk taking. This strategy, it is argued, will in turn lead to personal safety and healthful living. The passage below illustrates the plan and expectations for the courses:

> The expectations outlined in this document concentrate on the development of personal fitness, competence, skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will help students deal with the variety of personal, social, and workplace demands in their lives. The primary focus of this curriculum is on helping students develop a positive attitude and commitment to lifelong healthy active living and the capacity to live satisfying, productive lives. (EDU, 2001, p. 1).

Safety is mentioned in 30 different locations of the 42-page text in one of the following two ways; applying appropriate guidelines and procedures for safe participation in physical activity or demonstrating behavior that minimizes risk to themselves and others. The second category accounted for the majority (17 of 24) of the references. The safety and risk awareness objectives were to describe different types of violence (e.g., relationship violence—physical, verbal, sexual, emotional); demonstrate an understanding

of the causes of relationship violence; analyze the leading causes of injury and injury-associated deaths among adolescents (e.g., unwise risk taking, alcohol and drug abuse, life stresses); demonstrate an ability to minimize the risks of injury for adolescents; and assess strategies for reducing injuries and injury-associated deaths among adolescents (e.g., personal and legal action, educational programs designed to reduce the risk of death from motor vehicle accidents). This specific reference to driving is the *only* one in the text, under the Healthy Living section of the Grade 12 Healthy Active Living Course.

Given that most young people begin to drive while in Grade 11 and demonstrate high rates of injury and death from doing so, the curriculum is lopsided in the wrong direction. Moreover, further details as to how this curriculum is delivered, the direction in which the lessons lead, and the range of answers and discussion generated by the students will be useful in understanding processes of youth awareness of road safety. Secondary schools are obviously poised to create an opportunity to have meaningful discussions about the place and practice of driving in the lives of young people. However, this is not happening at present.

Summary of findings: The findings outlined in the article show that learning to drive is a culturally nested process with varied meanings. In a larger sense, youth are transitioning toward adulthood within a newly defined set of uncertainties and risks in modernity whereas social organizations in the system of driving are operating in often undefined ways. The logic and regulation of youth driving culture described here helps to illustrate a situation in which youth and driving are imagined in limited and competing ways. For example, new drivers are placed at fault for driving incidents and driving is seen as both normal and highly dangerous. In the logic of driver education as a business, youth are seen as a point of capital not only as "clients in the market" but also as those who are responsible for danger on the road. On one hand, driving is a normal and safe activity to be engaged in as a regular rite of passage for youth. Youth, it is assumed, are competent enough to take on such a task. On the other hand, driving is highly dangerous and not to be undertaken by "risk-loving, troubled, teenagers."

Graduated licensing and driver education operate as *potential* sources of support for prevention of driving incidents. They occupy an integral location in the system whereby young drivers access content and curriculum (both hidden and explicit). However, driver education is fraught with inconsistencies for the proportion of young people who take it. Moreover, the public education setting provides few opportunities for discussion although the majority of young drivers can be found there. In driver education classrooms, youth are at times treated as competent and agenic in preparing to overcome

the inherent risks of driving. However, the texts and curriculum illustrate youth as an integral problem and cause of driving dangers. Graduated licensing is having success in offering the experience needed to overcome some of the difficulties in learning to drive. Driving education is more mixed. More than 50% of young people do not enroll in driver education courses and those who do have mixed success. Attempts are being made at the provincial level to monitor curriculum and guide the practice of driving education but further cultural understandings to these critical youth health issues need to be considered.

Adjusting the Rear View Mirror: Toward Youth Driving Culture

The study of culture shows that objectivism proceeds from the assumption that objects and processes have a natural existence before an act of discovery takes place (Gergen, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Olson, 1994). The view that a process such as *adolescence* or *youth* or *driving* have fixed natural forms is contradictory to generative understandings which suggest that we "treat the objects of psychological discourse not as things that were lying around waiting to be discovered but as the products of generative schemata" (Danziger, 1990, p. 335). The introduction of this article has provided a rear-view mirror on youth culture to show that generative models of youth have occurred. Indeed, they have practical purposes in youth driving culture for theorizing (Pribram, 1990), education (Berger, 1982) and making improvements to psychological explanations which have not adequately address continuing problems.

In addition, the article has suggested a cultural nesting approach and provided ethnographic evidence of the mixed messages, illogic and faulty representations of youth and driving. The study suggests an entrenched epistemological fallacy in youth driving culture which mirrors that in youth culture (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). As such, the "dangerous, individualized, youth risk-taker" is located as the heart of a real and large systemic and cultural battle. Risk and blame become overly attributed to individuals at the expense of understanding how institutions and regulatory bodies contribute to the problem. To move past this stalemate and redress the pressing problem of youth death by motor vehicles we must "organize a program of study by better studying institutional design" (Douglas, 1994). This is one step in that direction.

Studying the culture of youth driving provides an entrance into the ways in which tool kits and strategies have been constructed in an unsettled transitional space. The freedom with which youth access cars and licenses speaks to

the contemporary societal view of youth as competent enough to handle a machine of this size with few restrictions. The opposing images of the extreme danger of driving and its contradictory regulation are littered through the governing texts. One's mind is called to a scene from the popular U.S. teen television show *Malcolm in the Middle* in which the16-year-old character is learning to drive. On reluctantly handing the keys to his son, the father then quickly remarks "this is like giving a machine gun to a shark!" As this study attests, the machine gun, the social organization of its operation, and the holders of the keys require further cultural scrutiny.

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