Abstract

Sweden is the first country in the world to have introduced the so-called Vision Zero (Nollvisionen): an ethical approach suggesting that road safety cannot be traded for mobility. Policy writings on traffic safety have so far been very limited in terms of explicitly addressing risk taking practices as mainly performed by men or as a way of performing masculinities. In this article I discuss how the gender-neutral language in traffic safety policy constructs adulthood as signifying maturity and good driving practices. In traffic safety policy, implicit adult men are contrasted against the young(er) drivers who are constructed as problematic to traffic safety. Rather than being about maturity or something that ‘just happens’ I suggest understanding (dangerous) driving as a repertoire for some men to perform masculinities linking it with power and entitlement.

Still, not only dangerous driving practices per se are problematic to road safety. I argue that automobility needs to be understood as much more thoroughly affecting everyday life than is acknowledged in traffic safety discourse. A way of acknowledging the multiplicity of experiences and effects from automobility is to view it as a ‘process of damaging’. This perspective takes into consideration how automobility simultaneously enables and disables ‘safe’ mobility along lines of gender, age and able-bodiedness. Despite the fact that these problematic effects to some extent are acknowledged in policy, automobility remains a privileged mode of transportation in contemporary Sweden.

Key words

Automobility, gender, masculinity, age, able-bodiedness, traffic safety, policy, Vision Zero/Nollvisionen, violation
Implicit men in traffic safety discourse: A life course perspective on (auto)mobility, violations and interventions

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What has been described as a race between two cars ended in a violent accident on Tuesday evening. At high speed one of the cars collided head on into a meeting family. Six persons suffered from the collision and were severely injured.¹(Svahn 2007)

To have access to a car is a central aspect of what characterises modern life in most western societies. Motoring has had huge impact on our lives, not least in increasing mobility. Besides transporting people from one place to another, motor vehicles involve socio-cultural aspects that could be interpreted as symbols and tools for constructing and expressing gender/age (and other) identities, power and status. Depending on one’s perspective, the excerpt above can be read as either another tragic road accident or as a story about the violent effects of men doing masculinity through car driving. Even though the violent effects caused by traffic are a major problem to health and safety, it is often viewed as a rather mundane and gender-neutral arena. However, automobility is not pain-free or gender-neutral.

In this article a central concern is to discuss gender in relation to traffic safety discourse, in particular how interventions for increased road safety are being represented. Sweden is the first country in the world to have introduced the so-called ‘Vision Zero’ (Nollvisionen), which can be described as an ethical approach to policy in which safety cannot be traded for mobility. The long-term goal is that nobody should be killed or seriously injured within the Swedish road transport system (Tingvall and Haworth 1999). No doubt this goal is of crucial importance; however, policy writings on traffic un-safety have so far been very limited in terms of explicitly addressing and problematising risk taking practices as performed mainly by men or as a way of performing masculinities (Balkmar 2005). Men are clearly overrepresented in most traffic offences such as speeding and drunk driving (Prop. 2003/04:160, 31). The Swedish Road Administration estimates that men are the offenders in over 90 percent of fatal traffic accidents (Underlagsrapport 2003, 17).
In recent years in Sweden there has been a particular interest in developing transport policy from a gender equity perspective that raises concerns on how to understand, address and integrate gender equality in the transportation system (Polk 2001; Res Jämt 2005). This growing interest is related to the Swedish policy area of transportation that since 2001 has the aim of implementing specific gender equity goals. It seems like the staging of gender equality in the realm of transportation may form a counter discourse to the hegemonic gender-absent traffic safety discourse that I scrutinize in this article (Balkmar 2005). Nevertheless, as I will argue, the implications of age shadow the significance of men and masculinities in writings on traffic safety.

Traffic safety is also interlinked with aspects of access or lack of access to automobility. The term automobility signifies the combination of autonomy and mobility; thus automobilities are modes of autonomous, self-directed movement (Featherstone 2004). Access to automobility simultaneously implies inclusion in, and exclusion from, the ‘freedom’ of automobility. As such, automobility also forms divisions between those able to enjoy ‘safer’ mobility as ‘protected’ car users, compared to the less safe ways of movement of the ‘unprotected’ road users. Drawing on a life course perspective, I address how personal (auto)mobility and safety can be understood as being unequally distributed along lines of gender, age and able-bodiedness in a Swedish context.

First, I will introduce the Vision Zero and discuss how Swedish traffic safety policy represents driver subjects along lines of age and gender. Here I aim to outline what gendered and aged subject positions are constructed as problematic or not, and how such constructions can be understood in relation to automobility, safety and life course. Secondly, I will expand on how (dangerous) driving can be understood as gendered. Third, I will put the issue of automobility and safety within a much broader perspective than is the case in traffic safety discourse. This part is followed by attention to ways that automobility may form social divisions. If viewed from a gender and life course perspective automobility both enables and disenables mobility, as it entails a risk of violating others sense of safety. Fourth, in the concluding part I address links between policy, gender and automobility as a privileged mode of transportation in contemporary Sweden.

Vision Zero – a vision of shared responsibilities

The Vision Zero states that safety cannot be traded for mobility. This is a shift in perspective that requires abandoning a more traditional economic model where road safety is provided at ‘reasonable cost’. The tolerance of violence against the human body is described as at the core of the Vision Zero. While it is accepted that crashes in the transport system occur due to human error, Vision Zero requires that "no foreseeable accident should be more severe than the tolerance of the human in order not to receive an injury
that causes long term health loss” (Tingvall and Haworth 1999, see also Prop. 2003/04:160). As I interpret Vision Zero, a three-fold strategy is used to increase traffic safety: firstly, strengthening legislation and police enforcement on specific car crimes such as speeding, drink driving and neglect of using seat belts; secondly, developing technological solutions to build safer roads and for improved car safety; and thirdly, convincing and informing drivers of the importance of following traffic regulations.

In taking a holistic view on road safety, the blame for fatalities is assigned to the failure of the road system rather than the road user alone (Whitelegg and Haq 2006, 7). If road users fail to obey these rules due to lack of knowledge, acceptance or ability, or if injuries occur, the system designers are required to take further necessary steps to counteract people being killed or seriously injured (Tingvall and Haworth 1999).

The Vision Zero explicitly states that the responsibility is shared by the system designers and the road user, but the road users are responsible for following traffic regulations (Tingvall and Haworth 1999). Thus, the prime focus is to reduce the outcomes of the negative effects of automobility, in particular to reduce the numbers killed and severely injured in traffic.

I now address how driver subjects are represented in policy writings in terms of age and gender. I primarily use examples from a Swedish Act (Prop. 2003/04:160) on road traffic safety, as these writings are guided by the principles of Vision Zero. How are subjects constructed in relation to automobility and safety from a life course perspective? In what ways are their performances of automobility represented as problematic and in need of regulation of some kind? What are the solutions offered?

**Children as ‘innocent victims’**

Children are represented as an exposed risk category, both as passengers in cars as well as being subjected to danger of motor vehicles due to unawareness of their dangerous effects. The number of traffic accidents involving children has decreased over the last decades, but at the cost of children’s possibility of mobility on their own: children have had their life space circumscribed and restricted due to safety concerns. The solution to the limitations automobility has on children’s space of movement is foremost reduced speed and separations of cars and pedestrians. It is also stated that children’s perspective as an influence on decision-making, and the level of knowledge about social factors leading to injuries, are to be addressed (Prop. 2003/04:160, 73–75). Other solutions involve traffic education of children in schools as a way of reducing their victimisation, but also as a way of teaching cautiousness and reducing the negative impacts of automobility.
**Ignorant ‘young people’ – both victims and perpetrators**

Young people as drivers of motor vehicles are positioned as both being violators and violated in traffic. Specific efforts are directed at changing young people’s attitudes to drunk-driving, speeding and other traffic offenses. This opens up a space for addressing socio-cultural aspects of why accidents and dangerous driving occurs (i.e. age-related factors such as life style, camaraderie and immaturity) (Prop. 2003/04:160, 82). To facilitate safer road practices among young people, a model of tutorship is suggested, this is “to pass on a considerate style of driving and [considerate] attitudes of risk behaviour”. The tutor is considered important to the Swedish driving education system, due to their greater driving experience. If speeding, not using seat belts and driving when impaired by alcohol or drugs stand for driving styles that cause or contribute to accidents, the tutor stands for a considerate driving style (Prop. 2003/04:160, 83). The solution to the problem of young people’s unsafe driving practices involves teaching and education of young road users to perform as safer drivers. I interpret this solution as a strategy of making them into ‘proper’ ‘safe’ road users.

**Implicit adult men**

The statistical relation between traffic unsafety and men’s dangerous road practices is, on the one hand, explicitly acknowledged and made clear in traffic safety policy. In the excerpt below, gender is clearly stated as an important aspect to consider in relation to unsafe traffic practices.

Men are to a greater extent caught violating traffic regulations compared to women. Out of suspected drunk drivers in the year 2002, approximately 90 percent were men. Out of those suspected of speeding and neglect of using seat belts the same year more than 80 percent were men. Studies on values and attitudes also prove there are differences between men and women. These studies have shown that women tend to value traffic safety issues more than men do. Women are also more willing to adopt new technology and new measures to increase road safety.² (Prop. 2003/04:160, 31)

Gender is made explicit, but, on the other hand, this acknowledgment only made in a specific section of the Act does not permeate hegemonic discourse. The effect is, as I interpret it, that the statistical over-representation noted for men is made implicit, even though fighting these crimes/problems is described as central to reaching the target of the Vision Zero.
I interpret the discourse on traffic safety as characterized by both a confronting and a consensus-driven approach. The greater enforcement on road safety traffic regulations implemented during recent years is a much more confronting strategy compared to before the Vision Zero. It has been described as rather “cheap” to violate traffic safety regulations in Sweden (Nilsson 2004, 19). Nevertheless, since 2006 the penalties as well as surveillance for speeding, drunk driving and reckless driving have been strengthened. By contrast, policy writings on traffic safety seem driven more by a consensus approach. Car crimes are described as being about lack of ‘knowledge, acceptance, or ability’ or simply ‘failing to obey’ the rules (Prop. 2003/04:160, 29; Tingvall and Haworth 1999). Such wordings are problematic since they place the emphasis on how effective the state is in persuading drivers to act in accordance with the law. The solution to traffic un-safety is based on seemingly equal and non-confrontational terms, as the Swedish Road Administration aims “to create an understanding of the risks of speeding and why it is important to obey traffic regulations” (Prop. 2003/04:160, 43). Any clear-cut division of responsibility between driver and the system administrators becomes blurred as hope is set for a mutual understanding of what are to be considered safe car practices. Sweden is one of the few European countries that allow use of mobile phones while driving (Vägverket 2003, 2005). Rather than being prohibited from such use while driving, Swedish motorists are informed about the risks this entails. On one hand, such practices are considered a clear safety risk; on the other, it is considered the responsibility of the individual driver to use a mobile phone with caution and decide when using it comprises a risk to traffic safety (Prop. 2003/04:160, 63). Both the mobile phone and the car can be said to constitute central artefacts in contemporary Swedish self-image. This image is reinforced by a social construction of dangerousness that seems to focus more on what the car and mobile phone entail in terms of freedom to users, rather than risk to others.

If implicit adult men form a normative standard, drunk drivers constitute its problematic counterpart. Within the discourse it is especially the addictive relapsing drunk or drugged drivers that form a particular problematic category. Compared to the young(er) ‘less mature’ road users, the (possibly dangerous) road practices of implicit adult men are not problematised as partly being a result of socio-cultural influences. Swedish policy on automobility implies ‘freedom through mobility’ – a project shared by the state and the individual driver – relying on the common sense of the gender-neutral unmarked road user. Usage of cars, as with cell phones while driving, seems to be problematic only in the hands of specific users – those threatening the implied ‘freedom through mobility’.
‘People of old age’ as victims – cautious though potentially dangerous

Drivers of older age are represented as more risk-averse and experienced road users, though still potentially less safe drivers for medical reasons or due to old age. People of old age encompass the ambivalent position as being both more vulnerable to traffic violence and suspected ‘bad’ drivers. This discussion seems to relate to a debate on whether older aged drivers imply traffic un-safety to others or not. The ability to remain mobile increases life quality; accordingly, the ability to continue driving is ensured for old age drivers, if they so choose. People of old age do not constitute a risk group to other road users per se, rather the elderly are described as compensating for possible risks by driving more carefully. Still, the Swedish Road Administration is commissioned to investigate how the public healthcare system may become more effective in reporting ‘inappropriate’ old age drivers (Prop. 2003/04:160, 85–86).

Interventions – implicit men, explicit age

Interventions taken for reaching the goal of Vision Zero vary greatly depending on the position in life course. The younger and older aged drivers form two key categories of potentially dangerous drivers. For the former this is constructed as due to immaturity and less experience, for the latter to cautiousness and vulnerability. Yet, ageing as a driver is also constructed as signifying increased self-awareness, maturity and safety. Ageing is represented as about becoming a mature driver, gaining respectability and representing stability and the norm for young(er) drivers. One could say that youth is defined as a liminal stage in the transition from child to an adult, where adulthood means settling down (Laegran 2003, 83). The young(er) drivers are therefore to be taught safe road practices by the ‘mature’ adult ‘safe’ drivers. This is a somewhat instrumental view that does not take into account how learning ‘safe’ driving practices would entail safety or safer driving practices. As gender is not explicitly constitutive of any of the risk group categories it thus does not form a ground for either problematisation of traffic un-safety or interventions.

A more complex elucidation could be to understand risk-taking car practices as a way of doing and negotiating both ‘age’ and ‘masculinity’. To break traffic regulations may for some feature a key element when constructing young aged masculinities moving from childhood to adulthood. This is something that cannot be reduced to be exclusively structured by young aged unawareness or lack of experience without also considering the implications of gender.

The gendered and aged aspects of automobility are evident when considering that more than 100 fatalities annually are caused by someone else than the perished. In four times out of five the offender is a man, and often a young man (Svensson Smith, Thorborg and Lind 2005, 23). As in the Act discussed, boys, young men and men of old age
form a category more often involved in traffic accidents. Young men aged 18–24 are both violated and violators to a greater extent than others (NTF 2006, 15). Nevertheless, this is not the full picture. To focus on categories at risk without problematising normativity tends to shadow more than it clarifies. The policy writings that construct young and old aged drivers as problematic risk categories tend to divert attention away from the problem of dangerous driving as also done by members of the majority group (implicit adult men). I interpret the position of the responsible adult driver to constitute ideal automobility, coinciding with the implied freedom symbolically attached to automobility. As Hearn and Collinson argue, both ‘men’ and ‘masculinity’ are constantly implicit but central/centred as known, referred to, implicated, and assumed as the subject of discourse (Hearn and Collinson 1994, 97). This is also the case in the traffic safety discourse scrutinized here. Traffic safety discourse entails a conflict between a vision of ‘freedom’ through mobility, as something everybody should be able to enjoy, and the right to safe mobility, as something predominantly men’s car practices are hindering. The implications of not discussing these problems as a problem predominantly caused by ‘men’ blur questions of men’s power in relation to automobility, entitlement and access to cars. As ageing represents progressive maturity, self-awareness and ‘better’ driving practices, the implications of gendered socio-cultural aspects of how driving is performed are not constructed as an issue for the implicit adult men, but rather for young(er) drivers. However, this needs to be put in relation to the lack of knowledge of how some men produce masculinities within the context of traffic and the relevance car-driving has for constructions of gender and masculinities.

From human ‘error’ to dangerous driving as gendered ‘edgework’

Discourse on traffic accidents has so far often focused on the lack of intention to violate or cause danger through driving. This has in turn underpinned the emerging car culture and legal arguments downgrading the perceived seriousness of road ‘crime’ and ‘accidents’ (Corbett 2003, 34). As a shared responsibility, Swedish traffic safety discourse refers to traffic violations as being about ‘failing to obey’ or a ‘lack of compliance’ when referring to an un-marked road user. Critics claim that the prime focus to reach Vision Zero has almost solely been directed to improving the safety of roads and vehicles, and at the same time neglecting the behaviour of drivers (Andersson 2003,34, Bingström 2007). It seems to me as discourses pointing out young aged (male) drivers as ‘intentionally’ dangerous drivers are not absent, but there is a lack of critical attention to how driving and producing ‘danger’ constructs gendered driver subjects, and in particular the gendered practices of the middle-aged men.

According to Forward and Lewin (2006), research perspectives on traffic violations have shifted from focusing on the limitations of drivers and what drivers can or cannot
do to what they intend to do. From this socio-psychological perspective, violations are understood as deliberate deviations from routines, which exist to protect the individual from danger. Violations, rather than errors or lapses, have been found to be the ‘root cause’ of accidents in this stream of research. However, as the main focus is on the individual driver and his/her intentions, personality, social deviances or motives, the link with societal relations of power is often missing. It is important to understand how the gendered and aged driver subject relates to and negotiates culturally discursive affordances on how to ‘be a young(er) man’ or ‘an old(er) man’ doing driving and how this links with power and entitlement. Driving in a dangerous way can be understood as the masculine self performing driving, albeit adapted to the situation and audience at hand; in so doing, he may assure himself and others he is perceived as a ‘proper’ man.

One perspective that bridges the intentions of the masculine self and the cultural discourses of how to perform driving and masculinities is the concept of ‘edgework’. This means relating to voluntary risk-taking as a way of exploring the boundaries of control, disorder and order (Miller 2005, 154). This concept is useful because it focuses on how performance is interrelated with context and gender stereotypes (Lois 2001). To perform masculinity as ‘edgework’ refers to how some men perform and desire gender-appropriate risk taking through dangerous driving. The affordances of performing dangerous driving practices are likely to change over a life course and in relation to context. Even though I am focusing primarily on men, this is not to say that women do not do edge-work or enjoy the thrills and excitement of such practices. But as automobility symbolises a masculine-coded environment, car driving on ‘the edge’ is liable to enable some men emotional confidence in performing ‘proper’ masculinity.

Performing car driving on the edge can lead to accidents as well as violations of other road users’ ontological security. Traffic as a political arena of interaction between the automobile and less protected road users needs recognition as having to do with power, negotiations and entitlements that play out along lines of gender, age and able-bodiedness. Deborah Lupton’s interview study with men who admitted dangerous driving points to how they represented themselves as ‘justified’ in behaving aggressively since they were reacting towards others ‘wrong’ doing (Lupton 2002, 287–289). These findings imply that cultural discourses about entitlement need to be viewed as interlinked in terms of the gendered aspects of car driving both as performing gender but also in its violent effects. As for the men in Lupton’s study claiming road violence as ‘justified’, power marks a pervasive aspect of men’s social relations, even though such actions and experiences are most often taken-for-granted (Hearn 2004, 51). If dangerous road practices are connected with assumptions about what it means to be a man, the prerogatives that are assumed to be associated with that status, including relations between men, would need further attention (Hearn and Whitehead 2006, 40). This also relates to the hegemony of the automobile and the state’s response to automobility and issues of traffic safety. Depending on
position in life course, car driving brings both ‘freedom’ as well as implying violations to others. The need to apply a much broader approach to traffic safety than is the case with Vision Zero and traffic safety discourse is therefore evident.

Automobility as enabling and violation

The tightly controlled mobility of machines is a phenomenon that, according to John Urry (2004), concerns trusting other car drivers to keep on one side of the road, within lanes, within certain speed, and following highly complex sign-systems. As Urry (2004) puts it, driving requires ‘publics’ based on, and enabled by, trust. This means that traffic is a place where mutual strangers are able to follow shared rules, communicate through common sets of visual and aural signals, and interact without eye contact. Besides preconditioning trust, automobility controls pedestrians, children, and others whose daily routines are ‘obstacles’ to the high-speed traffic cutting through pathways and residential areas (Urry 2004, 29). It is because certain subjects and objects are immobilized that others can travel. Put simply: mobility relies on immobility (Beckman 2004, 84).

Beckman suggests that the reason automobility still ‘works’ is because its drawbacks are hidden and a state of normality is constantly reproduced. This is made possible since traffic accidents are not seen as a normal social occurrence, but more as an aberration. Through dispatching the injured to hospitals and moving the car wreck for repair, the ‘normalcy’ of traffic flow is restored (Beckman 2004, cited by Featherstone 2004, 3). To think of automobility as in ‘need’ of an active restoration of normalcy is interesting. Normality simultaneously relies on ‘trust’ as well as ensuring ‘trust’ in the car system despite its disadvantages. Wishing a friend a safe journey and asking about traffic when meeting are everyday examples of anxiety about accidents and risk. For many parents, the worry of one’s child getting hurt relates to one’s own experiences of trust and mistrust, control and lack of control of automobility. This ambiguity of trust and mistrust is inherent in mobility and being in traffic (Beckman 2004).

The technology and built environment associated with the car is, according to John Whitelegg, inherently violent; he argues that the car supports aggression, violence and the ego (Whitelegg 1997, 24). Therefore, it is of interest to ask how far policy interventions go in terms of restrictions on cars and their users. The Swedish government is keen to renew the car fleet in order to lower car exhausts as well as reach the Vision Zero. But, as the technological potential for speeding is not constrained through policy interventions, this also raises the government’s hope that the car drivers’ will and can drive their fast cars safely within speed limits. What follows is that privilege is given to car drivers’ mobility rather than other less dangerous modes of transportation (Whitelegg 1997). I agree with Whitelegg that the privileged position ascribed to car driving is most important to problematise, especially in relation to a normalisation of its violent effects.
Automobility as a process of damaging

It is not sufficient to reduce the effects of automobility to numbers of killed and severely injured as in the Vision Zero. Rather there is a need to open up for acknowledging the multiplicity of experiences of traffic as violation. Drawing on Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin’s (2001, 18) broad, socially contextualised understanding of violence as violation, violence is defined as actions, structures, events and experiences that violate or cause violation or are considered as violating.

Dangerous driving is not only about exposing others to physical violence or potential risks when committing a traffic offence. What constitutes as ‘danger’ can encompass a whole range of experiences and emotional distress of automobility that might not be acknowledged as such in policy or traffic regulations. This means understanding violations as a processual concept indicating a process of damaging, as embodied, material and discursive (Hearn and Parkin 2001, 18). This process can be as dramatic as the crash followed from the car race referred to in the beginning of the article. The effects might be subtle, such as the psychological distress caused by avoiding dangerous roads, restricting the activities of children to remaining indoors, or the impact of traffic noise and health problems related to car exhausts (Whitelegg 1997, 148; NTF 2006). Survivors of road accidents might face long-term difficulties arising from whiplash and head injury. Other effects might be impaired cognitive functioning, psychological and psychiatric effects, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (Corbett 2003, 152, 153). As normalised and taken-for-granted, automobility as a process of damaging can be occasional or continuous, facilitative of exclusions and inclusions, reassertions of dominant powers, or means of maintaining power (Hearn 2003, 255). Following from this broad definition of automobility as a process of damaging, one might ask if there is anything in relation to automobility and car practices that cannot be considered as violations? In one sense this seems true, but I argue for the importance of acknowledging the range of experiences in a non-exclusionary way. Automobility as a process of damaging needs to be understood as involving both direct physical violence and the mundane, taken-for-granted ongoing damage.

As a process of damaging, automobility is simultaneously about affording mobility to some but also about causing danger and unsafety to others. The effects play out in different ways over a life course and in differing social locations. Automobility can affect one’s “ontological security” and ability to control one’s life and make sense of being (see Moran and Skeggs 2004, 147). As such the damaging process is not only material, but it is also reproduced by sets of associations, experiences of uncertainty, confusion, the unruly and the beyond control (Moran and Skeggs 2004, 147). This broad position differs vastly from a legal and policy point of view. From such positions traffic violation would need to be definable in terms of specific actions, what is to be considered intentional, accidental,
criminal or mundane. What is officially recognised as violation and how the use of the car body is understood as affecting of the bodies of others are varying and dependent on historical and cultural contexts (Hearn 1998, 15–17). Recognising automobility as a process of damaging would mean shifting perspective to processes of normalisation and to what enables some experiences of automobilities to be acknowledged as violations and others as mundane.

_Automobility as constructing social divisions_

Traffic can be understood as sites for automobilities that form places where social relations, interactions and processes meet. These are everyday arenas where political and cultural processes interact in ways that marginalise and stratify people’s everyday life (Ek and Hultman 2007, 19). Automobility is unequally distributed within and among social categories based on gender, age, class and able-bodiedness. To a pedestrian, traffic spaces and car-only areas can be perceived as a hostile, threatening and alien environment because of the incompatibility of car-bodies and human bodies. As built environment, roads are often configured according to dominant perspectives concerning the human body, how it moves and operates. The prevailing idea is often that of the ambulatory, hearing and seeing human body, thus also producing a ‘denial of place’ for non-able bodies that does not fit the normative framework (Drake 1999, 80). The symbolic gender coding of public spaces are also about a denial of safety in public. Women’s strategies of avoiding the possibility of men’s violence in public places after dark involve strategies of reducing such risks. Sometimes this is done through increasing a sense of control over the situation using the heavy trafficked road instead of small narrow roads advised for pedestrians (Andersson 2005, 77).

Public spaces, such as traffic, can be referred to as a political place where negotiations are forced upon, as well as changing, its users (Ek and Hultman 2007, 21–23). In this space, drivers negotiate how driving is done depending on when and where he or she is driving, and in relation to passengers in the car. Those outside cars negotiate risks of being violated if inappropriately interrupting the flow of traffic. Traffic forms complex social divisions along lines of inclusion and exclusion from automobility that change due to the position in life course. Children and older people are, due to greater vulnerability, less ‘fitting’ in these spaces, while drivers and those able bodied form a division of ‘fitting’. If accidents occur, drivers and vehicle occupants are likely to avoid serious injuries with the help of airbags, seatbelts and crumple zones.

The safety of pedestrians has so far only recently been a concern of car safety. An EU initiative for safety tests of new cars to reduce the risk of serious or fatal injuries to pedestrians was introduced in 2005 (http://ec.europa.eu/). Still, the injury risk from bumpers and bonnets cause the bulk of injuries in urban areas, injuring children and older people
in particular (Corbett 2003, 181). Viewed from this perspective, to be in a car is a safer position compared to being a pedestrian in urban areas, even though none of these positions are ever “safe” or easily separated.

**Redistributed power relations**

Automobility is simultaneously uncontrollable and controlled, informal and formal. As such it forms a social and cultural system that is co-constructed and negotiated by its everyday users. In line with the philosophy of the Vision Zero, the power relations and responsibility for safety have to some extent been redistributed between driver and pedestrian. In Sweden since 2000 a driver of a vehicle must give way to a pedestrian who is about to cross a zebra crossing. However, according to Thulin (2006), since then the number of zebra crossings has decreased by 15 percent. Local authorities claim to increase pedestrian safety this way, pinpointing a higher risk of pedestrians being hit and injured at zebra crossings than at comparable points. Following this there has been political resistance against the removals and against the one-sided motorists’ perspective on this matter. It is mostly families with children, older pedestrians and visually impaired groups who have disagreed with such removals (Thulin 2006, 9–12). Zebra crossings are an example of political places of interaction and negotiations where hierarchies in traffic become apparent. These places of interaction are examples of how mobility relies on immobility, how access or lack of access to automobility affects everyday mobility and safety along lines of able-bodiedness and position in life course. Drawing on Hearn (1998), it seems plausible that experiences of and exposure to violation form a social division that more or less coincides along the lines of automobility and its effects for others in terms of restricted mobility and safety.

**Concluding words**

In this article I have initially discussed how interventions for increased road safety are being represented in Swedish traffic safety policy. The gender-neutral language used constructs adult drivers as a signifier of maturity and good driving practices in contrast to the young(er) drivers who are constructed as problematic to traffic safety and in need of regulation(s). Rather than being about maturity or something that ‘just happens’, (dangerous) driving can be understood as a repertoire for some men to perform masculinity. Negotiating cultural discourses on how to ‘be a young(er) man’ or ‘an old(er) man’ in driving links with power and entitlement. Doing masculinity through dangerous driving enables the masculine subject the emotional confidence of ability and control where risk and safety are negotiated through the process of ‘edgework’. Besides discussing implicit men and possible implications of gender in the realm of traffic, automobility can be seen
as a process of damaging. This opens up the range of possible violations and experiences of danger that might follow from automobility. Thus, automobility simultaneously enables and disenables ‘safe’ mobility, especially in young(er) ages and old(er) ages, as ‘safety’ depends upon life course position and whether one is inside or outside vehicles.

I have argued that Swedish traffic safety discourse entails a conflict between a vision of ‘freedom’ through mobility, as something everybody should be able to enjoy, and the right to safe mobility, as something that predominantly men’s driving practices are hindering. One way of framing this implied ‘freedom’ and gender-neutrality is through the lens of individualism and collectivism. Considering that eight out of ten Swedes in the ages between 16 and 84 years claim having access to cars it would on the one hand be fair to say that drivers form a group whose automobility is ‘rightly’ prioritised by the state (SCB 2007). As such, it fits the dominant model of Swedish social collectivism, a model that has been described as solidaristic and based on the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Swedish solidaristic model also shapes the dominant form of Swedish individualism. Through this frame, car driving can be pursued as an individual “project”, a way of fulfilling one’s own ‘freedom’ through mobility. But the parameters of that “project” will be constrained by narrow social norms (Balkmar, Iovanni and Pringle 2005; Balkmar and Pringle 2005). The alternative is to be labelled ‘deviant’ through the social construction of dangerousness, as with the young, older and the relapsing drunk drivers. The picture gets more complicated when considering that men more often have access to and travel by car more than women, while women are more often passengers (Friberg 1998, 27). Car driving also varies by age, migration status and able-bodiedness. On one hand, it is encouraging to see that such gendered, aged and able-bodied biased aspects of (auto)mobility are beginning to be recognised in Swedish transport policy (Prop: 2005/06:160). On the other, it remains to be seen if and how automobility and the gendered practices of implicit men are considered problematic.

Within the discursive formation of traffic un-safety it is so far not possible to produce an explicit problematic subject position for the adult man. One could ask why men and masculinities have only to a very limited extent been a perspective in traffic safety discourse, even though statistics are quite clear on the matter? The relative absence of these discourses bears resemblances to other dominant discourses on men’s violences. Studies on how men’s violence against women is understood by professional social workers have shown that power, controlling behaviour and violence are constructed as something ‘deviant’ from what is considered normal and Swedish (Eriksson 2006, 189). Traffic safety discourse represents dangerous driving through discourses of ‘deviance’, rather than focusing on the implication of gendered social influences. There are parallels between the implicit naming of men as dangerous drivers in traffic safety discourse and the unwillingness to transform adult men from a universal normative “nothing” to addressing them as
potentially dangerous drivers (cf. Eriksson 2005). Changing views on traffic safety would mean problematising dangerous driving as both gendered and aged – but not solely about doing young age – and fully acknowledging automobility as producing limiting and controlling effects on the safety, mobility and sense of ontological security of other road users.

Notes

1 “Sex skadade vid frontalkrock. Vad som beskrivs som en kappkörning mellan två bilar slutade i en våldsam olycka på tisdagskvällen. I hög hastighet frontalkolliderade den ena bilen med en mötande familj. Sex personer klämde fast och skadades mycket svårt.”


3 In all age groups women have between 1–39 percent less access to cars, most equal in age group 35–44 years of old, and less equal in age group 75–84 years of old (SCB: http://www.scb.se/templates/tableOrChart_____49617.asp, May 25, 2007).

4 The proportion of foreign-born Swedes that possesses a driver’s licence and a vehicle is lower compared to Swedish-born; this is likely to limit the ability to travel by car among the former group. Out of the share of the population born outside Sweden 45 percent of newly arrived men had a driver’s licence that was permitted to be used in Sweden; the equivalent share of women were less than 20 percent in 2003 (Lewin, Gustavsson and Nyberg 2006).

5 More than 200,000 people with disabilities need facilities and assistance in order to transport themselves (NTF 2006).

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References


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