

The Birth of the Automotive Self

,Dr.Iulian Negru

University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

The problems raised by the excessive use of automobiles justify the effort to approach the automotive phenomenon from the perspective of the individual. Previous studies have not explored car use as a process of the social construction of the automotive self. I have defined automobilism as the individual's orientation toward the use and purchase of cars. This is an exploratory and descriptive study aiming to reveal the stages in which the factors that transform an individual into a driver emerge and operate. I use the concept of *social career* described by Erving Goffman (1961), later developed by David Matza (1969). I assume that the initiation process into a driving career begins in childhood through an exploratory exposure phase to the performative narrative of car culture and vehicles. This career develops along with the cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural growth of children and adolescents. I assume that this early process makes automobilism deeply embedded in the value system of most teenagers, being already formed before the age at which they can legally obtain a driver's license.

The research is conducted using a self-administered questionnaire distributed on Facebook. The questionnaire contains two sections: one addressed to parents and another addressed to their minor children aged between 8 and 17. I argue that the ineffectiveness of awareness programs targeting car overuse stems from their late intervention, as automobilism is already incorporated into the individual's value system. This explanatory approach may therefore have valuable practical implications.

Keywords: Automobilism, car culture, exploratory exposure, social career