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At home on the road?

Can drivers' relationships with their cars be associated with territoriality?

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## **Abstract**

The current research explores the relationship between people and their cars within the framework of Altman's theory of human territoriality (Altman, 1975; Altman & Chemers, 1980; Altman & Haythorn, 1967; Brown & Altman, 1981; Oxley, Haggard, Werner & Altman, 1986). It further develops the research of Sandqvist (1997) by examining the descriptions given by people with differing ownership and uses of their cars and exploring the congruence between these and the characteristics used to describe human territories. Thirteen focus groups were held with young drivers between the ages of 18 and 25 years, drivers over the age of 25 who are parents of pre-license age children, drivers over the age of 25 who do not regularly transport children, and drivers of work vehicles. Analyses of discussions revealed that drivers' descriptions of the relationship with their car could be matched with Brown and Altman's (1981) descriptions of territory types. However, variations existed both between and within individuals as to the application of the labels 'primary', 'secondary' and 'public' territory to the car. Implications for the understanding of road user behaviour and the further development of theory on the car as a place or an object in terms of territoriality are discussed.

## **1. Introduction**

Understanding the relationships that people form with objects and places is important to understanding our relationship with both the physical environment and other people. The study of human territoriality, although generally only applied to the many places, provides insight into responses to objects. To date, territoriality research has tended to focus on relationships with the home (e.g., Harris & Brown, 1996; Omata, 1995), the workplace (e.g., Konar, Sundstrom, Brady, Mandel, & Rice, 1982; Wollman, Kelly, & Bordens, 1994) and public places such as shopping centres and videogame arcades (e.g., Ruback & Snow, 1993; Werner, Brown & Damron, 1981).

The notion of the car as a form of territory has been frequently posited (e.g., Diekstra & Kroon, 1997; Malmberg, 1980; Marsh & Collett, 1986; Urry, 1999), although it has rarely been the subject of systematic research. The current research aims to extend the study of territoriality by investigating its potential contribution to the understanding of relationships between people and their car. In 1997, Ruback and Juieng published a set of studies that examined the observed and self reported interactions of car drivers in shopping centre car parks. This research found that drivers leaving a parking space delayed pulling out if another driver was waiting for the space, especially if the other driver sounded his/her car's horn. The authors suggested that those waiting for the parking space were seen as intruders and that by delaying their departure, drivers reasserted control over what they considered to be their 'territory' (the parking space). The results of this research raise some interesting questions for the study of human territoriality. For instance, do drivers consider that the road-space surrounding their car is a form of territory and does this also apply to the car itself? The current research attempts to address the second of these questions – whether understanding of the way drivers perceive their car can be understood as a form of territory.

### *1.1. Territories and Territoriality*

Much of our understanding of territoriality has been led by the research and theory of Irwin Altman (Altman, 1975; Altman & Chemers, 1980; Altman & Haythorn, 1967; Brown & Altman, 1981; Oxley, Haggard, Werner, & Altman, 1986). For Altman, territories exist to meet both physical and social needs, while being temporarily or permanently owned, controlled, marked or personalised, and potentially defended by occupants or owners (Altman & Chemers, 1980). In turn, territoriality comprises a specific set of affective, cognitive and behavioural tendencies expressed towards the territory (Altman, 1975; Altman & Chemers, 1980).

One of Altman's major contributions to territoriality theory was his distinction between primary, secondary and public territories (Altman, 1975; Brown & Altman, 1981). Altman initially hypothesised that primary, secondary and public territories differ on two dimensions. The first dimension refers to the duration of time spent in and the permanence of ownership of a territory. The second dimension is the centrality of a territory, referring to the functional and psychological importance of a territory, incorporating the level of control that individuals have over access to the territory and the behaviours that occur there (Altman, 1975; Harris & McAndrew, 1986). Primary territories are the most central and enduring, while public territories are the least.

Three more dimensions were subsequently added by Brown and Altman (1981). These included marking intentions, which refer to the motivation for marking and what marking is presumed to achieve. Marking can fulfill a number of functions. For instance, while fences define the home boundary, the internal and external decoration of the home itself has more to do with the expression and communication of self. The fourth dimension, marking range, refers to where markers are displayed, as well as to the types of markers used. Marking range may provide information about the intended duration of occupancy and the centrality of the territory to its inhabitants. The fifth dimension, response to invasion, refers to both the

warning signals given to potential invaders and to the responses to actual incursions upon the territory. The five dimensions and the manner in which they vary across the three territory types are presented in Table 1.

Although Altman's (1975) classification scheme was based on thorough analysis of previous research and theory, the scheme itself has been subject to little research. In Altman's conceptualisation, the classification of a territory as primary, secondary or public is not a reflection of characteristics inherent in the place or object, but results from the way in which the place or object is perceived and treated. Nevertheless, most research has used particular places and objects to be representative of a certain type of territory, rather than exploring the perceptions that have led it to be defined that way (e.g., Ruback, Pape, & Doriot, 1989).

In one such study, Taylor and Stough (1978) demonstrated that the three territory types differed along the dimensions of centrality and duration. Twelve settings associated with the three types of territory were rated on a series of descriptors. Those places used to represent primary territory (e.g., bathroom) were significantly more central to all, followed by secondary (e.g., sidewalk in front of your house) and then public territories (e.g., neighbourhood store). Based on two descriptors related to duration of time spent in a place, Taylor and Stough also found that most time was spent in primary territories, followed by secondary and finally public territories. Other studies that address the validity of Altman's scheme are rare, but supportive of the notion that the territory types are meaningful and separate (e.g. Kinney, Parris-Stephens, & McNeer-Brockmann, 1987).

### *1.2. The Car as a Territory*

Many of the characteristics and outcomes that are associated with territoriality are also frequently discussed in literature pertaining to the relationship between humans and their cars (e.g., Sandqvist, 1997). It is not surprising that the car has often been labelled as a territory

(e.g., Diekstra & Kroon, 1997; Fried & DeFazio, 1974; Malmberg, 1980; Marsh & Collett, 1986; Stea, 1965; Urry, 1999; Whitlock, 1971).

Malmberg (1980) describes the car as a valuable mobile territory that marries the opposing human drives of exploration and homing. This reference to homing is extended in analyses that draw direct links between the car and the primary territory of the home (e.g., Berger, 1992; Black, 1966; Marsh & Collett, 1986; Sandqvist, 1997; Urry, 1999). These analyses speak of the car as a 'home away from home' or a mobile room that provides the features of home on the road. The car has also been likened to a mobile office, akin to a secondary territory, in which the daily activities of the office take place (Eost & Galer-Flyte, 1998), and to a public territory where individuals are open to interactions with others (Taylor & Ferguson, 1980). Many of these comparisons are nascent, insufficiently tested and are outside existing theoretical development on human territoriality. Therefore, while these comparisons may be intuitively appealing, a more thorough examination of the proposal that the car is a form of territory is necessary.

### *1.3. Research Aims and Objectives*

The aim of the current research was to investigate whether the car can be considered a form of territory. As a preliminary exploration of this issue, this research examined the terms that people use to describe their relationship with their car and explored whether there was congruence between these terms and those used in the literature to describe human territories. To broaden the base of findings, it explored whether different drivers have different relationships with the car, as affected by their age, trip purpose, car ownership, and also gender. Groups of drivers were recruited to the study for this purpose. One group of drivers is defined by youth (drivers aged 18-25 years), one group defined by trip purpose (parents of pre-license age children), and a third group defined by car ownership (drivers of work vehicles). A fourth group, drivers over the age of 25 who do not regularly transport children,

was included to enable comparisons. The reasoning behind group selections, primarily based on the literature, is presented below:

*1.3.1. Age (young driver group).* When young drivers first get their own vehicle the car is one of the few ‘territories’ that they own and control (Marsh & Collett, 1986), which appears to lead to high levels of attachment. Marsh and Collett posited that defence of the car, a behaviour more likely in young drivers, decreases later in life, as the individual gathers other important territories such as a home.

*1.3.2. Trip Purpose (parent group).* Different drivers may need to use their cars for many different purposes, with one purpose that stands out being to regularly transport children (reflected in the phrase “mum’s taxi”). Sandqvist (1997) noted that the driving experience and the very act of owning a car were very different for parents, who often require the car to conduct their daily routine of chauffeuring children, who are often unable to transport themselves, to school, leisure activities and friends’ houses. It may be, for instance, that the car is more an object than a territory for these drivers.

*1.3.3. Car Ownership (work vehicle driver group).* For drivers of vehicles provided for their use as part of work, the car may serve as a mobile office. Common tasks undertaken within the work vehicle include not only travelling to meetings or job sites, but making phone calls, doing paperwork, reading, and talking to colleagues and clients (Eost & Galer-Flyte, 1998). Drivers of work vehicles may therefore have different relationships to their cars based on who owns the car (their employer) and the purpose for using the car (work). A question of interest was the extent to which work vehicle drivers perceive personal ‘ownership’ of an object that is in fact owned by their employer.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Participants*

A total of 89 respondents participated in the study. Driver groups were young drivers between the ages of 18 and 25 years old (n = 12 males, n = 13 females), drivers over the age of 25 who were parents of pre-license aged children (n = 4 males, n = 11 females), drivers over the age of 25 who did not regularly transport pre-license aged children (n = 14 males, n = 13 females) and drivers of work vehicles (n = 14 males, n = 8 females). The fourth group was included to enable comparisons. Drivers over the age of 25, excluding drivers of work vehicles, are hereafter termed 'adult' male and female drivers.

Participants included community members who responded to a media release, first year university psychology students, who participated in order to obtain course credit, and drivers of work vehicles (including taxis, fleet vehicles and sales representative vehicles), who were recruited through a market research company and received a monetary incentive for participation. Table 2 displays details of participants by type of group.

## *2.2. Materials and Procedure*

A series of 13 focus groups was conducted, utilising the Altman and Rogoff (1987) framework of transactional psychology, which focuses on understanding the relationships formed between people and their environment over time. Transactional psychology is particularly suited to studying emergent areas such as the potential association between territoriality and driver behaviour. Prior to commencement of the focus groups, participants completed a questionnaire which measured demographic information, details about the car that participants drove most during a typical week and details about car use during a typical week.

Questions that drew on Brown and Altman's (1981) dimensions of territoriality formed the basis of the focus group protocol. Each territorial dimension was operationalised in a specific question or set of questions. Participants were therefore asked about any alterations they had made to their cars (marking), their responses to a hypothetical situation in



which their car was stolen and returned damaged, and their thoughts about and feelings toward their cars (centrality), as well as their common reactions to other drivers' behaviour (response to invasion). In addition, groups were asked to nominate other places and objects that they related to in the same manner as the car. This permitted a comparison of the car with territories described in the literature as primary, secondary and public. In the questionnaire prior to the focus group, participants were also asked about their car use over a typical week and the length of time they had driven their current car (duration).

Due to practical impossibility, the work vehicle driver group was not mutually exclusive from the other three groups (which were mutually exclusive from each other); however this group of drivers was asked to frame responses only in reference to their work driver role.

### **3. Results**

Analysis of the focus group data began with the development of a comprehensive coding scheme reflecting the themes which emerged from the discussion. The inter-rater reliability of the coding scheme was addressed through the independent coding of a random sample of 33% of the focus group data. All disagreements between the coders were discussed, and subsequent changes were made to the coding of one person and/or to the codebook.

Analysis of the coded focus group data focused on how the descriptions provided by drivers were comparable to the descriptors of territoriality presented by Brown and Altman (1981). Specifically, comparisons were drawn with the five dimensions of territoriality that distinguish between primary, secondary and public territories: duration, centrality, marking intention, marking range and response to invasion. Each of the following sections addresses a separate dimension of territoriality, outlining the major themes that emerged within the focus groups and how they varied across drivers.

### 3.1. Duration

3.1.1. *Duration of time spent in the car.* Table 3 provides a summary of participants' car use over a typical week. Notable differences were observed with respect to the amount of time spent in the car. Taxi drivers spent an average of 46.4 hours per week, sometimes for up to 16 hours at a time. This figure was well above the average of other groups. Gender differences within groups were investigated but did not emerge. Car travel represented an extremely high proportion of all travel, ranging from 79.5% for young drivers to 100% for fleet vehicle drivers.

3.1.2. *Duration and nature of association with the car.* Table 3 also provides information on the length of time that participants had driven their current car. Regarding the nature of association with the car, interest lay in whether cars were owned and controlled by their drivers. Amongst drivers of privately owned vehicles, 95.6% owned the car that they drove most during a typical week. For the majority of participants (73.1%), use of the car was also under their sole control, with others requiring their permission to use it. The cars driven by the three work vehicle driver groups were all owned by their nominated workplace. Each sales representative vehicle driver, however, was the 'user' of the vehicle and other people needed their permission if they wanted to drive the car. For taxi drivers, the vehicle was seen as shared by some drivers, and individually controlled for others. For the majority of fleet vehicle drivers, the car was a shared resource.

### 3.2. Centrality

3.2.1. *Qualities of the car.* Table 4 outlines the themes that arose in participants' descriptions of the car, including an example of their use by participants. Within each theme there was variation of opinion, so that, for example, the theme of freedom and independence incorporated comments on both the car's capacity to provide and to deny these qualities. The themes are sorted in both table and text to reflect those that support the notion of the car as a

primary territory, the car as a secondary or public territory, and of differences in perceptions between driver groups. Each theme is discussed in turn below.

Supportive of the car as a primary territory, the car was seen as an ‘intimate social environment’, being used for engaging in social interaction with friends. The car could also be a talking point, and was a way to initiate greater levels of intimacy in conversation with others. For taxi drivers, the car was also seen as a very social place; according to one taxi driver, “if you don’t like talking to people then you might as well not do it”.

The car was also considered a ‘safe haven’ with three elements contributing to this theme. First, the car provided a shell around the occupant that protected them from harm. Mentioned primarily by women, this related to the car’s capacity to avoid or withstand a crash. Second, young women drivers discussed the “security” that their car afforded them, by enabling them to overcome the fears they had about being out late at night. Third, the car was seen as a place where participants, particularly men, could find “solitude”, “peace without anyone else annoying me” or a “sanctuary” that provided a place for refuge and recuperation.

Some comments revealed that the car was a ‘repository of memories’ and an object of sentimentality: “I’ve had it with me since I was 19 so you know it’s something that’s been there for a long time... it sometimes reminds me of different girlfriends... memories from life you know, different times” (adult male).

Providing evidence for the car as a secondary or public territory in the perceptions of some drivers, ‘utility’ was discussed in two senses. The first was by participants, primarily parents and work vehicle drivers, who spoke of the car as being of little or no interest to them other than as a functional object. The second sense in which function was discussed was by participants who, although speaking of how important the car was in other ways, did not deny that the car was ultimately a utilitarian object.

The remainder of the themes reflected differences in perceptions between driver groups. The car could provide “freedom”, “independence”, and “control” over where and when travel occurred. Consequently, participants reported feeling “trapped” when the car was not available. However, the car could also deny freedom, with some drivers being “dependent” on the car. For young drivers, access to a car freed them from parental control over their movements, while for parents the car was an object they were dependent upon because of its necessity for shopping, work and transporting children. Drivers of work vehicles did not discuss this theme.

The car was also a ‘reflection of the driver’s self or role’, including personality characteristics and personal habits. For instance, the car could be “happy” or “practical”, to reflect that the drivers were happy or practical people. For the young drivers, their predominantly cheap, older cars reflected their low financial status and their age, while for many parents the car was referred to as “mum’s taxi”, reflecting their role as parents. For these drivers, the car as an extension of personal identity seemed to support the notion of the car as a primary territory. The theme was also discussed by drivers of work vehicles, but because the car was owned by their employer and was often marked as such, the car reflected much about them as an employee but little about them as a person. For drivers of work vehicles, the perception of their car as a reflection of their work role seemed to be more indicative of a secondary territory.

Emotions of ‘pride and love’ were particularly strong amongst, but not restricted to, members of car clubs and those who worked on the car as a hobby. Those who felt no sense of pride in the car also expressed negative emotions about the car, which were primarily associated with a lack of interest in the car or the car’s mechanical unreliability.

*3.2.2. Reactions to loss of car.* Focus group participants were asked about their response to a hypothetical situation in which their car was stolen and returned damaged.

When imagining that their car had been stolen, many participants reported that they would experience an initial phase of “shock”, with more than one participant equating the experience to “someone breaking into your house and stealing your possessions” (young male). Beyond this, there were three broad types of responses: negative, neutral and positive.

Negative reactions were short to medium term responses of grief or anger.

Participants who spoke of grief discussed feeling “distressed” and “devastated” as a result of losing “independence”, or “lifestyle”. For some, this grief would last only until a new car was obtained, but for others it was the car itself for which they would grieve. Annoyance and inconvenience were the most common negative responses, attributed to having to use public transport, wait on insurance firms to process forms, and cost implications.

Neutral responses were given by those, primarily drivers of work vehicles, who did not see a problem in their car being stolen. If their car were stolen these respondents would simply use another one the next time they needed to drive. Amongst the drivers of private vehicles, neutral reactions were sometimes coupled with feelings of annoyance. However, responses ultimately suggested that these drivers would not be extremely concerned, as they saw the car as a functional object which could be replaced.

Other participants would be “very happy ‘cos I could get the insurance and get a new one” (parent). These participants tended to own older cars, and many commented elsewhere that they were “not attached” to their current car.

Reactions to the return of the damaged car again ranged from positive to negative. Drivers of work vehicles would not be discomfited, again simply replacing the car. Drivers of private cars would generally be inconvenienced during the time it took them to replace the car, although a minority would be happy to see the car back because they could embark on a repairs project. However, for some drivers there would be an additional aspect to their grief,

labelled as “violation”, with damaging the car being compared to violating the privacy and sanctity of the home, a valued possession or even the self.

### *3.3. Marking Range*

*3.3.1. Marker type and placement.* Suggestive of the car as a primary territory, most drivers indicated that they marked the car in one or more of four ways. Drivers mentioned objects that they placed on or in the vehicle and which then became a part of the car. Used frequently by drivers of privately owned vehicles, this type of marker included bumper stickers, personalised number plates, seat covers, dash mats, children’s seats and tow bars. These attachments were generally prohibited for drivers of work owned vehicles.

Objects within the vehicle comprised markers placed inside the car, either on a permanent basis or coming and going with the user, such as books, clothes and towels. Common amongst taxi and sales drivers were mobile phones, audio cassettes and seat covers. Another type of marker was represented by alterations to the vehicle, including modifying or replacing parts of the car to return the vehicle to its original condition or to ‘improve’ its performance. The only marking of this type undertaken by drivers of work vehicles was the installation of cruise control by some of the sales drivers.

The final type of marking was mentioned only by fleet drivers. This was personalisation of settings, and entailed altering the mirrors, seat position and radio station to suit the driver’s safety, ergonomic needs and personal tastes. The settings were temporary, changing when the next driver used the car.

*3.3.2. Extent of use of markers.* There was much variation, particularly among drivers of privately owned vehicles, regarding the number of markers used and the combinations in which they were used. Parents in general did not use as many or as wide a range of markers as other drivers of privately owned vehicles, often citing the “cost factor”. Another subgroup of drivers did not use a great number of markers, primarily because they were “not

interested”. Drivers of work vehicles used few markers, these being almost exclusively inside the car.

### *3.4. Marking Intention*

In this section, the motivations for marking and what it was presumed to achieve are explored. Themes identified from the discussion are presented in Table 5. Themes have again been sorted in both table and text to reflect those that support the notion of the car as a primary or secondary territory.

*3.4.1. Self-expression.* Marking for self-expression involved indirect demonstration of interests through the use of personal aesthetics. Almost exclusively used by drivers of privately owned vehicles, markers such as flowers, racing stripes and dolls made the vehicle “an expression of my personality”. Alternatively, a lack of marking could also be a statement of self-expression. Some drivers did not mark as they did not think the car was worth the investment of energy or money. Others felt that marking was not creative and that it created a false sense of individuality.

*3.4.2. Communication.* While marking for self-expression indirectly conveyed one’s personality and likes to others through decorative means, marking for communication reflects an explicit desire to communicate a message to others, primarily via the use of text stickers (e.g. ‘Save the whales’ and ‘Baby on board’) and personalised plates, which directly engage the reader. Participants spoke of marking to express an opinion (political, religious or social), promote an image (e.g., ‘Bad Girl’ or ‘No Fear’), communicate likes and interests (e.g., sports, hobbies), share humour, or to attract the opposite sex. Markers were used to communicate a territorial claim in only a few instances. The steering wheel lock, although primarily a protective device, was valued for its ability to communicate to potential thieves that the car was ‘safe’. As motivations for marking behaviour, the themes of self-expression and communication indicate that for these drivers, the car may be a primary territory.

*3.4.3. Practicality.* For some participants, primarily parents and drivers of work vehicles, the most important motivation for marking was “for practical reasons” including sun protection, comfort, safety, work, preserving the quality of the car and saving money.

*3.4.4. Improving Performance.* Some marking was undertaken with the intention of improving performance or aesthetics. This motivation was often expressed by a subset of primarily male participants who worked on the car as a hobby. In contrast to the themes of self-expression and communication, marking for practicality and improved performance is suggestive of the car as a secondary territory.

### *3.5. Response to Invasion/Impeding*

Focus group participants were asked to discuss two scenarios in which another road user potentially affected their driving by invading their territory, a situation which should provoke a territorial response in those seeing the car and associated road space as a territory. These scenarios involved intrusion into their driving space in the form of tailgating (invasion from the rear) and cutting-in (invasion from the front). A third scenario involved the participant travelling behind another driver who was slowing them down.

*3.5.1. Tailgating and cutting-in.* When asked to explain the other driver’s behaviour, participants labelled it as “disrespectful”, “aggressive”, “impatient”, “ignorant” or “irresponsible”. For some, the other driver’s behaviour was a safety concern, as they were perceived to be “disobeying road rules” and “endangering others”. Other participants, men and young drivers in particular, suggested that the other driver was trying to control the road space or the participant’s driving. Connected to control was the interpretation of the other driver’s behaviour as “an invasion of personal space”.

Responses to being tailgated and cut-in upon fell into the following three broad categories: defensive, accession or prosocial behaviour, and no response. Defensive responses, suggestive of the car as a primary territory, arose from feelings of anger,



annoyance, fear or anxiety. Some drivers employed physical markers, using the car to frustrate or warn the other driver and re-establish control (e.g., by braking or positioning the car to block the other driver). Bodily markers included gesturing, shaking the head, facial expressions of displeasure or, on occasion, direct confrontation with the other driver. Use of auditory markers involved verbalising or sounding the car's horn to communicate one's irritation.

Suggestive of the car as a secondary or public territory, accession or prosocial responses involved the participant altering their driving to accommodate the other driver (e.g., by changing lanes, regulating speed, or pulling over). Often the emotion felt was something other than anger or frustration, or the anger was overridden by a desire for safety. Additionally, when tailgated, some participants would maintain their position and speed, letting the other driver initiate movement. As with prosocial behaviour, the emotions involved ranged from disinterest to anger, but there was also an acceptance that a defensive reaction would not be of any benefit.

*3.5.2. Slow driver.* The slow driver was also viewed as "arrogant", "rude" or "ignorant" for not taking into account the needs of other drivers. However, unlike drivers who tailgate and cut-in, the slow driver was commonly seen as acting non deliberately. In those cases where it was felt to be deliberate, participants, particularly men, believed that the other driver was trying to irritate them and impose restrictions upon their driving.

Responses to this scenario fell into two categories. The first involved use of many of the markers discussed previously, except that in this scenario the markers were primarily used as techniques of intrusion rather than defence. The flashing of headlights was a commonly used physical marker, while some participants engaged in tailgating or blocking of the other driver. Sounding the horn and swearing were again used as auditory markers, while the use of bodily markers was rarely mentioned.

The second category of response involved accession or prosocial behaviour. Although sometimes frustrated by the behaviour of the other driver, many of the participants slowed down and waited to overtake the other vehicle when the opportunity presented itself. Participants who responded in this manner were not as annoyed by the slow driver, seeing encountering slow drivers as part of the driving experience.

### *3.6. Comparison of the Car with Other Entities*

Table 6 outlines the themes discussed by participants when providing a comparison of the car with other places and objects. A number of participants compared the car to specific places, most often the “home” or the “house”, with the car providing the same sense of solitude, sanctuary and expression of personality. For young drivers, particularly females, the car was compared to their bedroom, rather than the house per se (many of them still lived in their parents’ house). These direct comparisons with the primary territories of home and bedroom suggest that the car may also be conceived of as a primary territory. This was not uniform, however, and suggestive of the car as a secondary or public territory, most drivers of work vehicles compared the car to functional objects such as a work tool or piece of machinery. In a similar vein, some of the parents compared the car to a “computer” or “kitchen appliance”, primarily because both objects performed essential practical functions.

An informative extension of the theme of car as object was the comparison of the car with clothing: “It's like your clothes; people tend to express themselves through their clothes” (parent). The car was a part of the driver’s wardrobe in the sense that getting in the car was like “putting a t-shirt on” (taxi driver), while for one parent the comfort and reliability of the car was similar to a workbag and shoes: “they’re comfortable, they fit, they’re good. I don’t look after them; they’re just there all the time”.

## 4. Discussion

Previous literature often described the car as a form of territory, partly due to its interior design and external markings, partly due to the variety of functions it fulfils (e.g., transport, self-expression, identity formation) and partly due to the manner in which drivers behave while in the car. This research has examined the application of territory in more depth by using the tenets of territoriality theory to understanding the human relationship with the car.

### 4.1. *The Car as a Territory*

The results of this study reveal that some drivers' explanations of their relationship with their car are similar to descriptions of territoriality identified by Brown and Altman (1981). For example, drivers used concepts such as safe haven, freedom and independence, utility and social facilitation. These are all terms associated with territoriality, in particular the degree to which people experience territories as central. Furthermore, the reasons provided for marking the car reflected notions of establishment, expression and communication of identity (Altman & Chemers, 1980), although the explicit purpose of marking to protect territorial boundaries was not common in this sample.

Consistencies were also observed in the way in which certain groups described the car, with descriptions bearing similarities to certain territory types. Professional drivers, for instance, spent regular periods in the car but saw it as a tool, did not mark the car to any great extent, and did not express strong levels of attachment to it. This needs further exploration and suggests that the car may be considered a secondary territory for these drivers. In comparison, certain young drivers spent long periods in and with the car, saw it as very central, engaged in a wide variety of marking to communicate their personality and saw some behaviours of other drivers as potentially invasive. The manner in which these drivers spoke of the car suggests that for them the car corresponded to a primary territory. This is supported

by comparisons drawn between the car and the home, in which these two places were seen to have similar qualities.

It is not the case, however, that the car can simply be conceived of as a purely primary, secondary or public territory. For some drivers and in some circumstances the car corresponded to notions of primary territory, while for the same drivers in different situations and for other drivers altogether, the car could be considered as a secondary territory, whilst for still others the territory concept may be inapplicable. Some participants who expressed that the car was a very central part of their lives did not use markers, particularly stickers, because they would damage the car's appearance. To conclude that the car was not important to these owners because there were no identifiable markers upon it would be a mistake. To also assume that the vehicle of a fleet driver is simply a public territory because of a lack of ownership and centrality ignores the fact that many of these drivers attempt to personalise the vehicle when they use it, and will respond to its invasion in ways more akin to responses to invasion of secondary or primary territories.

Given the above, it is not the case that the five dimensions of territoriality systematically interact to create a particular type of territory that applies across all people or all circumstances. However, some general conclusions can be made concerning the car as a form of territory. Results suggest that the car is not a public territory for any of the driver groups involved in this study. The professional drivers kept the car clean, showed some sense of pride in its condition, and were answerable to a person or organisation for its condition and use. Although they would simply replace a stolen car with a new one with little emotional distress, their other responses are not suggestive of it being considered public territory. Again this suggests that the dimensions of territoriality vary both across and within individual drivers. Given that Altman's original theoretical work on territoriality was not developed with the car in mind, it may be that this variability is unique to the car. Alternatively, it may

mean that further elaboration of territoriality theory is required, or that some associations with the car fall outside this paradigm.

#### *4.2. Contributions to the Understanding of Human Territoriality*

Although research on human territoriality was popular during the 1970s and 1980s, research which tests and extends human territoriality theory has been relatively uncommon. There has been only limited research since Taylor and Stough's (1978) comment that although Altman's classification scheme was based on an extensive body of previous research, the scheme itself had not been subject to rigorous testing.

The present research, by investigating the operation of territoriality in relation to the car, supports, but also extends, Altman's research and theory. Focus group participants' descriptions of their relationship to the car, while encompassing the five territorial dimensions identified by Brown and Altman (1981), did not directly conform to these dimensions. For instance, different drivers experienced the car in different ways, some as a form of primary territory, some as secondary. Further, individuals' descriptors moved between primary and secondary territory on different dimensions.

The results of the present research highlight the contextual nature of territoriality. That is, the qualities of a territory are not inherent in the place or object, but result from interactions between the person and that place or object. This finding indicates that before research is conducted into the operation of territoriality in a particular place, the type of territory it constitutes for the individuals involved should be established.

This research also indicates that there is scope to develop a better understanding of the affective components of territoriality. Most early work in the area focused upon the behavioural manifestations of territoriality, while cognitive and emotional aspects were given little coverage, and this situation has continued (Taylor, 1988). In the present study, affective descriptors such as love, pride, anger and anxiety were important ways that people explained

and understood their relationship with the car. While the current research is not in a position to further develop knowledge of affect in relation to territoriality, it does suggest that research could usefully map the emotional components of territoriality.

The role of control as it relates to territoriality must also be more clearly articulated. Control is one of the defining features of territoriality and is interwoven through each of Brown and Altman's (1981) territorial dimensions. It is uncertain how feelings of control over a territory affect the manifestation of territoriality, and especially how this relationship might operate differentially across the three territory types. Results from the present research reveal that control is a vital and complex aspect of territoriality, affecting the experience of all other dimensions. For example, control, as discussed in association with freedom and independence, was vital to the experience of centrality. Furthermore, drivers interpreted cutting-in and tailgating by other drivers as a sometimes deliberate attempt to control their own driving behaviour. Control was also associated with longer duration, more marking behaviour and stronger marking intention.

The results of the present research also support the supposition that the car is polyfunctional (Vlek, Hendrickx, & Steg, 1993; Vlek & Michon, 1992), and may fulfil both transport and non transport needs. The findings indicate that driver behaviour is motivated by a combination of functional, social and affective factors, some of which are territorial. For instance, responses to invasion amongst participants were triggered by more than merely functional concerns about mobility or safety.

#### *4.3. Limitations of the Research*

The largely exploratory nature of the present study, while a key strength, also limits the conclusions and the generalisations that can be made, suggesting the need for replication and extensions of this research. In particular, drivers over the age of 60 were not sampled in the study, limiting the conclusions reached regarding the relationship with the car to younger age

groups. Drivers over the age of 60 may have a relationship with the car that is of interest in its own right (Lindesay & Thompson, 1993; Westh, 2001), and knowledge of this would provide a more thorough understanding of changes in the relationship with the car across the lifespan. This research also did not attempt to investigate experiences of territoriality within the same people across different cars or the same car over different life phases. This limitation represents a failure to fully implement a transactional framework to the research, as full implementation would have required a comprehensive understanding of how the relationship with the car develops over time.

In terms of the questions asked of research participants, a further limitation may have been the operationalisation of territorial intrusion as another driver tailgating or cutting in, as this could have been confounded by a perceived safety threat. Future research may usefully attempt to remove the potential confound by disaggregating the concept of territorial intrusion from the issue of personal safety.

Focus group discussions, while a valuable methodology for exploratory research, may also be limited by group dynamics, as voicing of group norms may result in some individuals withholding differences of opinion (Kitzinger, 1995). However, group processes also enable people to explore and clarify their opinions by reacting to others, and are particularly useful for encouraging people to explore an issue in their own vocabulary (Kitzinger, 1995), an aim of central importance in the current research.

#### *4.4. Conclusion*

The results of this research provide some insight into the questions raised by the research of Ruback and Juieng (1997), in that it appears that our relationship with the car, including the manner in which we drive, is influenced by territorial mechanisms. Analysis of focus group discussions revealed that the descriptions used by respondents to express their relationship with the car correspond to the terms used in literature on territoriality. For

example, participants used marking as a form of communication on the road, and their driving was guided by informal rules that operated according to agreed use of space. Further, the research demonstrated that not all drivers experience the car in the same manner, with the relationship being akin to primary territory for some drivers, but more akin to secondary territory for others.



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Table 1

Dimensional variations between primary, secondary and public territories

Dimension	Type of territory		
	Primary	Secondary	Public
Duration	Long	Short, but regular usage common	Short
Centrality	Very central	Somewhat central	Not central
Marking intentions	Usually personalising or decorating	Often claiming territory	Intentionally claiming territory
Marking range	Heavy reliance on a wide range of markers and barriers. Bodily and verbal marking usually not necessary (ownership generally accepted)	Some reliance on physical markers. Bodily and verbal marking may be used	Few physical markers or barriers. Bodily and verbal marking common
Response to invasion	Cannot relocate easily, can use legal recourse, reestablishment of physical markers and barriers, as well as bodily and verbal markers	Can often relocate, use immediate bodily and verbal markers, as well as some reemphasis of physical markers	Can relocate or use immediate bodily and verbal markers
Examples	Home (Taylor & Stough, 1978); room in a university dormitory (Hansen & Altman, 1976)	Workplace (Taylor, 1988); neighbourhood blocks (Brown & Werner, 1985)	Beaches (Edney & Jordan- Edney, 1974); libraries (Taylor & Brooks, 1980)

*Note.* Adapted from Brown and Altman (1981, p. 60).

Table 2

## Focus group participant details

Driver group	Age		<i>n</i> (& gender) of participants	Recruitment method ( <i>n</i> groups)
	(in years)			
	<i>M</i>	Range		
Young males	20.2	18-25	12m	University subject pool (1)
Young females	20.3	18-24	13f	University subject pool (1)
Parents	39.9	29-55	15 (11f, 4m)	Community (1) University subject pool (1)
Non-parent males	35.8	27-50	14m	Community (1) University subject pool (1)
Non-parent females	43.8	29-56	13f	Community (1) University subject pool (1)
Taxi drivers	39.0	26-52	6 (1f, 5m)	Professionally recruited (1)
Fleet drivers	40.8	26-52	8 (5f, 3m)	Professionally recruited (1)
Sales drivers	34.9	26-50	8 (2f, 6m)	Professionally recruited (1)
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>18-56</b>	<b>89 (45f, 44m)</b>	

*Note.* y.o. = years old; *M* = Mean; f = female; m = male.

Table 3

Hours of car use during a typical week, and mean years driving current car

Driver Group ( <i>n</i> participants)	Car use during typical week					Mean years driving car
	Hours in car	Hours driving car	% of car travel as driver	% of all travel done by car	Work travel as % of all travel	
Young [18-25 years] (25)	11.7	9.3	79.7	79.5	n/a	1.7
Parent (15)	10.9	10.2	93.7	95.9	n/a	3.6
Non-parent (27)	11.5	10.6	93.3	84.0	n/a	7.0
Taxi (6)	46.4	46.4	100	98.0	89.9	2.9
Fleet (8)	10.7	8.0	74.4	100	39.4	*
Sales (8)	16.1	16.1	100	99.8	45.6	1.1

\*Not calculated



Table 4

Themes identified to represent the qualities of the car

Indicative of territory type	Theme	Example Quotation
Primary	Intimate social environment	<i>Mine (image of the car) would be related to friends, just driving everyone around</i> [young female]
	Safe haven	<i>I feel relaxed when I sit in my car. Sometimes, if I'm not going for a drive, I'll just go sit in it and put on the radio. And in a way I'm in my element a little bit yeah. No distractions</i> [young male]
	Repository of memories	<i>My dad gave it to me for my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and even though I should get rid of it because it's causing me a lot of mechanical problems, I don't want to get rid of it because of that sentimental value</i> [young female]
Secondary or public	Utility	<i>For me the purpose of the car is to get me from A to B so I'm not at all concerned with style but only the functionality</i> [parent]
Differences in perceptions between driver groups	Freedom and independence	<i>Yeah for me it's a link to the outside world. It's freedom. I can remember there's one time where I didn't have access to it ... and you really feel trapped</i> [adult male]
	Reflection of self or role	<i>As all the other guys have said, it's not really much a reflection on who you are, it's who you work for ...</i> [sales driver]
	Object of pride/love	<i>I actually love my car ... I just feel in love with it and...it makes me feel like I can do anything</i> [adult female]

Table 5

Themes identified to represent marking intentions

Indicative of territory type	Theme	Example Quotation
Primary	Self-expression	<i>My car's...dedicated to Mark Bolan. It's got T Rex number plates... His head is in the wheels, it's embroidered in the doors [adult female]</i>
	Communication	<i>I suppose (a sticker) it's a sort of way of communicating with the things that you disagree with. So it's a way of communicating but I suppose it's also a way expressing myself as well [young male]</i>
Secondary	Practicality	<i>When I was younger I used to drive a little sports car. And that car was everything to me and I really wanted to doll it up and do everything with it. But now I am in another stage and you know you can't doll up a wagon [female parent]</i>
	Improving performance	<i>I modified it and put a bull bar on it, spotlights, twin fuel tanks, five speed box in it...so I can go out and run around paddocks [adult male]</i>

Table 6

Themes identified to represent entities similar to the car

Theme	Example Quotation
Place	<i>The house (is) very much an expression of me and my personality and where I want to be and how I want to live...bit like the car [adult female]</i>
Object	<i>The work computers. If something goes wrong, you ring up someone else and 'hey something's wrong with this' ...it's not your problem so you treat it completely different than anything that was your own [fleet vehicle driver]</i>
Clothing	<i>I'm sure they're making judgements about my car...like what you're wearing. Are you properly dressed for the expectations of the people that are there [adult male]</i>
Unique entity	<i>Yeah it's like my major possession and it would be my favourite ... the only thing like it that I own. I get a lot of pleasure out of it and even when I'm not driving it, I enjoy the fact that I own it so there's not really anything else [young male]</i>
Animate being	<i>My dog - companion and friend. I develop my cars to have their own personalities, you know. Like you hear the heartbeat which is the motor [adult male]</i>