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Driven: Cultural Hegemony and Reasons for Driving in the United States

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Abstract

United States transportation rates have revealed a driving decline over the last decade. Media sources report that young Americans are less interested in obtaining driver's licenses than previous generations, citing technology, social media, and graduated driver's licensing procedures as reasons. Explanations such as expense, lack of time, and the other transportation options, shown in results of survey research, are neglected in media accounts. Interviews I conducted with white suburban drivers reveal that Millennials obtain their licenses to fulfill responsibilities, whereas Generation X, Baby Boomer, and Silent Generation interviewees express that driving was motivated by social expectation, freedom, and independence. I contend that for the second half of the twentieth century, driving became hegemonic, and in the twenty-first century, driving is becoming ideological. The effort of media sources to trivialize Millennials' motives reflects the broken hegemony of driving, and the ability to question driving in our culture presents potential for change.

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Thesis Title: Driven: Cultural Hegemony and Reasons for Driving in the United States

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

Driven: Cultural Hegemony and Reasons for Driving in the United States

by

Samantha Molinaro

April 15, 2014

The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in
the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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Krebs Provost and Dean of the Faculty

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Abstract

United States transportation rates have revealed a driving decline over the last decade. Media sources report that young Americans are less interested in obtaining driver's licenses than previous generations, citing technology, social media, and graduated driver's licensing procedures as reasons. Explanations such as expense, lack of time, and the other transportation options, shown in results of survey research, are neglected in media accounts. Interviews I conducted with white suburban drivers reveal that Millennials obtain their licenses to fulfill responsibilities, whereas Generation X, Baby Boomer, and Silent Generation interviewees express that driving was motivated by social expectation, freedom, and independence. I contend that for the second half of the twentieth century, driving became hegemonic, and in the twenty-first century, driving is becoming ideological. The effort of media sources to trivialize Millennials' motives reflects the broken hegemony of driving, and the ability to question driving in our culture presents potential for change.

In loving memory of Aunt Liz (1918-2014).

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Chapter I: Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, there have been reports of declining driving rates in the United States. According to data collected by the Federal Highway Administration and the National Household Travel survey, among other research agencies, an evident downturn in driving has occurred when compared to previous decades. As a population, Americans are purchasing fewer cars, driving fewer miles overall, and fewer licenses are being issued to young Americans in the 16-19 and 20-24 age ranges. For the first time since beginning record keeping in the 1960s, the United States Department of Transportation in 2010 recorded that the number of vehicles had fallen – 10 million cars had been bought, while 14 million were sent to the scrap-yard (Mittelstaedt 2012). There has been a continued decrease in vehicle miles traveled (VMT), both overall and per capita, since 2004. (U.S. PIRG 2013, 12). And in 2011, Americans hit the lowest percentage of driver's licenses in 30 years (U.S. PIRG 2013, 12).

Several different theories exist to explain the declining driving rates, especially focusing on the impact of the 2008 recession and the role of the coming-of-age Millennial generation. Although economic and generational factors are certainly impactful in the declining driving rates that are currently occurring, I argue that they are pieces of a larger story to be told about car culture and driving in the United States. I contend that the change in driving patterns and habits is a shift in the cultural mindset about driving, from hegemonic to ideological, reflected most notably in the attitudes of young Americans. Before I divulge the details of my own theory, I would like to address the other two ideas that attempt to explain the American driving decline.

Some have argued that the phenomenon of reduced driving has been largely spurred by the most recent economic downturn, the 2008 recession. Since the inception of the automobile in the United States, clear drops in miles driven and in motor vehicle deaths and injuries have occurred during economic recessions, characterized by a subsequent rebound in driving during economic recovery (Copeland 2013). Looking at the periods before and after the last five economic recessions in the U.S., economist Joe Cartwright charted monthly vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in order to show patterns in driving during economic downturns (Miller 2012). In four of the five recessions, driving was increasing or stagnant in the two years before the economic slowdown, and quickly rebounded during the recovery. The only exception he encountered was the 2008 recession (Miller 2012).

Since the mid-2000s, the number of total miles driven as well as miles driven per-capita has fallen. A decline in driving was evidenced beginning as early as 2004, when Americans began driving fewer miles per year (Miller 2012). Thus, changes in driving habits actually preceded the 2008 recession by several years, instead of increasing or stagnating like VMT rates usually do before economic slowdown. From 2004 to 2012, the average number of vehicle-miles driven per capita decreased by 7.6 percent (U.S. PIRG 2013, 12). Therefore, characteristic of all other economic recessions in the United States, driving rates did decline throughout the recession. However, unlike the recessions previous, driving rates have not shown signs of recovery as the economy has improved. A recent study of the 100 largest U.S. cities revealed that those with the largest decreases in driving were in fact not the ones that were hardest hit by the 2008 economic recession (U.S. PIRG 2013).

The current reduction in driving is nearly unprecedented in American history. The longest previous drop in driving rates occurred during World War II, when the normal driving rates that had occurred during 1941 were not surpassed until five years later in 1946 (Dutzik and Baxandall 2013, 16). The United States has now gone more than five years since its last peak in vehicle travel, the last of which occurred in 2007 (Dutzik and Baxandall 2013, 16). So while it is evident that, like the other recessions before it, this economic downturn has affected driving habits, the fact that the reduction of vehicle miles driven are now persisting beyond the previous longest-lasting decline in American driving suggests that there are other factors at play than just a response to the 2008 economic recession.

Another theory regarding the decline in driving centers around the so-called Millennial generation and their potential impact on driving rates, particularly evident in the declining levels of driver's licensing for the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups over the last decade. Young people in that same age group also drove 23 percent fewer miles on average in 2009 than they did in 2001—a greater decline in driving than any other age bracket (U.S. PIRG 2013). The Millennial generation, defined by Howe and Strauss (2000) as the demographic cohort born between 1982 and 2002, appear less likely to get their driver's licenses and be out on the roads than the generations before them.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the percentage of driving-age Americans, those aged 16 years or older, holding driver's licenses has stagnated and then declined. In 2011, 86 percent of driving-age Americans held driver's licenses, the lowest percentage in 3 decades (U.S. PIRG 2013, 12). Transportation researchers Michael Sivak and Brandon Shoettle (2011) used sets of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) between 1983 and 2008 in order to show the difference among young Americans, shown below.

Table 1.1. Licensed drivers as a percentage of their age-group population.

Age	1983	2008
16.0	46.2	31.1
17.0	68.9	50.0
18.0	80.4	65.4
19.0	87.3	75.5
20-24	91.8	82.0
25-29	95.6	86.3
30-34	96.5	90.6
35-39	94.9	91.7
40-44	92.2	91.6
45-49	92.5	93.0
50-54	91.4	94.2
55-59	88.2	94.9
60-64	83.8	95.9
65-69	79.2	94.0
≥70	55.0	78.4

Source: Schoettle and Sivak (2013).

While the decline in driver's licenses among young Americans, members of the Millennial generation, is undeniable through statistics such as those shown above, there are competing suggestions as to *why* the Millennials are less inclined to get out and drive than previous generations. Looking at the different ideas behind some Millennials' choice to delay driver's licensing will help clue us in as to what is really going on with the driving decline, and better explain my own theory at the same time.

In light of the reports that revealed a driving decline among young Americans, popular media outlets began speculating on the reasons why Millennials would choose to delay learning how to drive. Many journalists focused on recent and popular topics regarding the Millennial generation, such as the growth of technology and changing requirements for driver's licensing, eventually promoting the idea that young Americans are deterred from driving by the Internet, social media, and Graduated Driver's Licensing (GDL) restrictions. They compare the Millennial generation with previous ones, painting

a picture of driving as a missed rite-of-passage by such young people, a sign of the changing times in which relationships are evidently built over Facebook and text rather than driving. The theory of the declining driver's licenses and changing driving habits perpetuated by the media, then, regards the Millennial generation and its preoccupations with technology and driving restrictions as the main reasons for the downturn.

However, quantitative researchers that have surveyed large samples of Millennial participants have not found the Internet, social media, nor GDL restrictions to be highly influential factors in deterring Millennials from driving. The results of survey research show that Millennials shy away from learning how to drive principally due to factors such as economic expense, other transportation options, or lack of time. Not only do the survey results reveal different reasons for the driving decline among young Americans, but they also directly contrast the GDL and technology-focused reasons perpetuated by media sources. Only small percentages of Millennial respondents in the survey studies mentioned or agreed to believing that GDL procedures or social media/technology were influential reasons for delaying their driver's licensure.

Why media sources would choose to focus on the Millennial impact in the driving decline, rather than other factors or critiques of the car, can help me articulate my theory regarding the current changes in driving habits. The media is actually the primary site for promoting "the theoretical and political domination of the leading social force" in power through hegemony (Artz and Murphy 2000, 43). Hegemony becomes secured when a dominant population gains power and the support of a subordinate group, and keeps a hierarchical system with specific interests (Artz and Murphy 2000, 3). We can understand the automotive industry and its subsidiaries as the dominant population, with the interest of disseminating their product and gaining profit. The subordinate group, then, is the

consumers, willingly supporting the industry by purchasing the cars and providing the automotive industry with profit that they seek.

I am arguing that, during the second half of the 20th century, driving became hegemonic, influenced by powerful car companies, car lobbyists, and government support of highways. Over time and with the expansion of roads, suburbia, and car-based entertainment venues, driving became the singular standard transportation option and ultimately the norm of American culture. In such a hegemonic relationship, familiar explanations of a normative behavior become available to the subordinate population in order to seem beneficial or natural (Artz and Murphy 2000, 29). The belief that driving provides a sense of freedom and independence, that learning to drive is a rite of passage, and that driving is the most common sense transportation option are reflections of that hegemony. Since the media is a principal source for disseminating such hegemonic beliefs about driving, it makes sense that their articles about the decline would critique the behaviors of the Millennial generation rather than driving itself.

The focus on the Millennial generation has been prevalent in the recent quantitative survey studies as well. While the quantitative surveys have been effective in showing the change occurring in driving, such studies have attended almost exclusively to the younger crowd. Even the most inclusive study only surveyed those up to 39 years old, effectively disregarding the driving experiences and opinions of the older generations. Surveys are also a limited methodology; there are only so many answers can be imagined by the survey creator, restricting participants from freely expressing their ideas. So in order to more deeply understand the personal and detailed experiences and opinions that come along with learning how to drive, and how they might factor in to the driving decline, I chose a different approach.

In 2013, I conducted long-form qualitative interviews with participants of the Millennial Generation, Gen X, the Baby Boom, and the Silent Generation. The research that I have conducted focuses on the difference in reasons for learning how to drive, opinions about driving, and driving habits between the members of each generation. In the way my participants approached driving for the first time, there were noticeable divisions across generations. All of the four Millennial participants were more likely to have pursued their driver's license based on necessity or to fulfill specific responsibilities than interviewees from the other three generations. Generation X participants almost exclusively focused on the influence of social pressures and the fact that "everyone else was doing it." Older Americans of the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations, in contrast, tended to express that they learned to drive due to more hegemonic values such as freedom and independence. The prevalence of hegemonic ideals about driving among the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation participants, contrasted with social expectation and necessity among Gen X-ers and Millennials, reveals a change in mindset about learning how to drive over time from hegemonic to ideological.

But when asked about their opinions on why driving is currently popular or important, however, there were far fewer generational distinctions, if any contrast was revealed at all. All 16 participants, regardless of generation, agreed that driving is "important" or "very important" to American society. Overall, participants were mixed in their thoughts and opinions about driving, and across generations few patterns emerged. Factors such as necessity, efficiency, and a sense of freedom were the most prevalent in participant answers, but no clear generational pattern in thinking emerged like the one so clearly shown in their initial motivations to get a license. The differing opinions of my

participants thus reflect an emerging ability to question the role of the car in our culture, and therefore a shift away from hegemony and towards ideologies.

It is also important to recognize the fact that members of older generations, not just the Millennials, were able to question ideas about driving as well and offer varied opinions about transportation. So although driver's licensing is specifically declining among the younger age groups, Millennials are not the only ones present in the ideological shift that I am recognizing. It is only evident that the Millennials are the ones contributing to the decline because they are the group with the most marked changes, and the ones most poised to delay licensure and driving because of their young age.

Overall, the decline in vehicle miles and driver's licensing that we are observing in the United States, then, is a representation of the cracks that are forming in the cultural hegemony of driving. Transportation policy in the United States is "stuck in the past," gas prices show no signs of improvement, and some believe that Americans have reached a peak in the capacity for cars (U.S. PIRG 2013). Use of public transit is at its highest level since 1956, there is an increase in urban living, and other transportation options such as bike-sharing programs are becoming popular (Hurdle 2014). I contend that, in the 21st century, driving is becoming more ideological, and this shift is being represented by the tendency for young Americans to delay driver's licensing and approach driving differently. Although the media generally presents the decline as a critique of the Millennial generation, I argue that the emerging willingness of this generation and others to question the role of driving in our culture shows a possibility for change in the future of American transportation.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework and Historical Foundations

In order to understand the rise of the car and driving into cultural hegemony, it is necessary to both theoretically define and outline my argument, and subsequently trace the operations of car industry giants, their lobbyists, and the vehicle-oriented transportation policies of the American government over time. Hegemony must be understood and judged in its own historic context, so it is for that reason that I will detail the background of the American car industry (Artz and Murphy 2000, ix). Tracing the rise and fall of the American car companies' power throughout the mid-twentieth and early 21st century is instrumental to understanding the cultural hegemony that I argued driving attained over time, and how it has broken. From the breaking of hegemony in the 21st century, I will be able to explain the ideologies that are taking over and how that is being seen in current transportation and living trends.

Although Antonio Gramsci never defines hegemony directly, what comes closest is his often-quoted characterization of the concept as “the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (Lears 1985, 568). In other words, hegemony is secured when the majority of a population follows the norms or beliefs set a powerful dominant group. Hegemony is ultimately a system of power that gains the support of a subordinate group, and retains a system of hierarchical relations with specific interests (Artz and Murphy 2000, 3).

Put differently, dominant social groups can have leadership and power in a society, but without the consent of the subordinate population, the group cannot have hegemony (Artz and Murphy 2000, 3). Hegemony depends on the dominant social forces

and their leadership, political programs, and effectiveness in persuading a population that the norms are beneficial for all (Artz and Murphy 2000, 45). “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships”, meaning that the ideas that are accepted by the subordinate are due to their relationship to the dominant group in a material way (Tucker 1978, 171).

In any hegemonic relationship, common practices and familiar explanations are readily available - without much effort, existing cultural practices appear preferable and even natural, whereas other less common practices or critiques are perceived as deviant (Artz and Murphy 2000, 29). The media compose the primary site for promoting such normative behaviors and explanations, propagating the theoretical and ideological domination of the leading force (Artz and Murphy 2000, 43). The views perpetuated by the dominant group become common sense for the consenting subordinate population, allowing such beliefs to seem normal and beneficial for everyone. In reality, however, the hegemonic relationship is in favor of the dominant group and their specific interests.

Ruling groups are never entirely successful, as there will always be small divided groups that resist. For that reason, hegemony is never completely secured, so the dominant group must be constantly asserting their power (Artz and Murphy 2000, 45). If the dominant group becomes unable to assert or somehow loses the power that they have over the subordinate groups, the hegemony breaks down and the dominant ideology that has been served to the subordinate group is no longer the only one that can be accepted.

If the dominant group is no longer able to impose their ideology, members of the subordinate group are then able to assess multiple other ideologies; these are frameworks of thinking about the world – the ideas that people utilize to figure out how the social world works (Hall 1985, 99). When one dominant ideology is no longer being imposed

on the group, as in the breaking of hegemony, subordinate group members can examine and question that ideology as well as others, in order to choose their own way of thinking about the world.

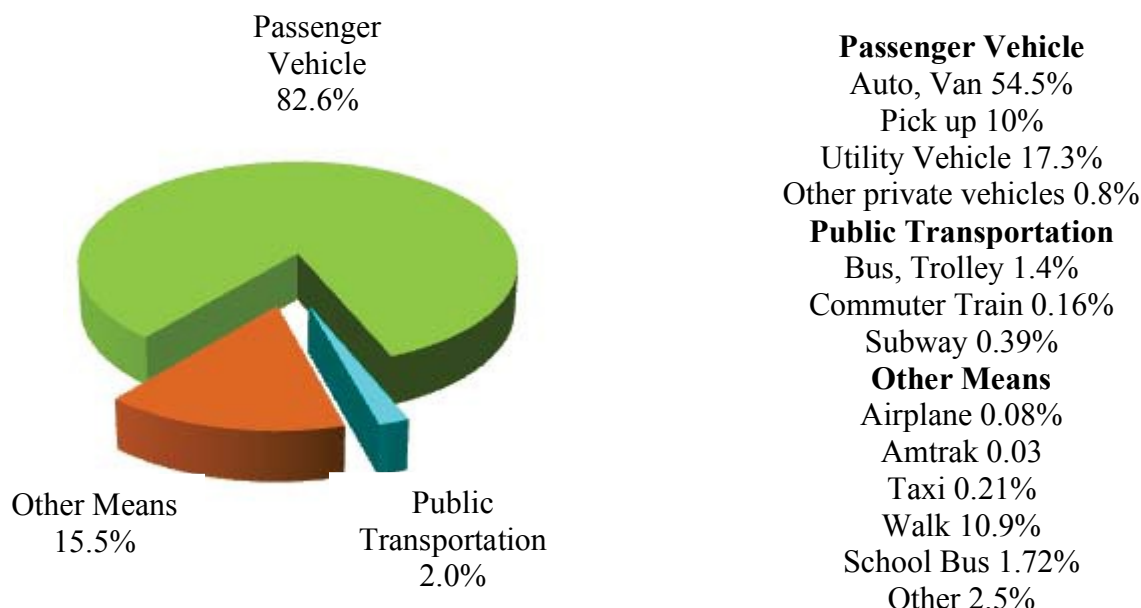
I will be working within the theoretical frameworks of hegemony and ideology in this section order to explain the dominance of driving in the second half of the 20th century, the fall of that power into the beginning of the 21st century, and how ideologies are manifesting into the declining driving rates and other current transportation changes in the United States.

Hegemony is filled with contradictions, as it recognizes subordinate group interests while the dominant forces become more sophisticated in maintaining their leadership (Artz and Murphy 2000, 45). Since its inception and early popularity in the United States, the automobile itself has been one wrought with such contradictions. In its early days, it amassed attraction from the wealthy, the ones who could afford it, as a luxury and a toy; over time, its ability to appeal to the mass-market as a common item allowed it a popularity that would ultimately change the infrastructure of our nation. While many early drivers used the car to move out of living the city lifestyle, the automobile has fundamentally limited many Americans into a life of car-driving in the same suburbs that were originally its own by-product.

Generally believed to be a source of independence and freedom from others' schedules or distances, in reality the car restricts its passengers physically while driving, and can jam us into constraining traffic situations that feel far from liberated. We also tend to think that driving our own personal vehicles is more convenient for our wallets as well, but car payments, ever-rising gas prices, insurance costs, traffic tickets, and maintenance fees logically provide evidence otherwise – a recent analysis of the hidden

costs of driving estimated that over 10 years Americans on average spend \$94,500 on direct car costs (Coombes 2014). The most unfortunate contradiction of all lies with our belief that driving our cars is safer than other modes of transportation, when in reality, crashes caused by negligence, misuse, or product failure cause approximately 40,000 highway deaths per year (Heitmann 2009, 3). Since the beginnings of the car in the late 1890s, crashes have killed 3.4 million Americans, ultimately claiming more victims than all U.S. wars combined (Lutz and Hernandez 2010, 182).

But despite all of the multifaceted and truly fatal contradictions that are implicit within the act of driving and in the automobile itself, driving remains far and away the most popular means of transportation in the United States. According to the most recent National Household Travel Survey, private vehicles constitute over 83 percent of all trips nation-wide, with 15 percent being completed by other modes, and a measly 2 percent by public transit (Federal Highway Administration 2011, 17). As can be seen below, even some types of transportation categorized as public transportation and other means include vehicles, such as the bus.

Figure 2.1. Passenger Travel Modes by Number of Trips

Source: Federal Highway Administration, 2011.

The many contradictions that pervade the car and the act of driving reveal the clash that occurs between the subordinate group and the dominant forces in a hegemonic relationship. By understanding cultural practices in historic context, the concept of hegemony can explain how and why U.S. society has been able to maintain such contradictory relationships, as with driving (Artz and Murphy 2000, ix). How exactly the automotive industry gained the kind of power necessary to dominate the transportation views of the American public into the second half of the 20th century is the objective of this section.

The automobile has undeniably “transformed business, life on the farm and in the city, the nature and organization of work, the environment, leisure time, sexuality, and the arts”- its related infrastructure transformed everyday life as well as our basic values. (Heitmann 2009, 1). The way in which the automobile has so completely altered our

American culture is unrivaled by other modern technologies; the individuals instrumental in creating the car quite literally reinvented the wheel. In this way, the car industry already had a material relationship to its subordinate consumers with their product.

As shockingly revolutionary as the automobile may have been to late nineteenth-century inhabitants. Those who had lived in a world limited by horses, buggies, and streetcars, the car could not have had its deep impact on so many aspects of our culture without some help. Influential groups who, over time, have imposed certain norms, beliefs, and perceptions about driving onto the American public have continuously promoted the rise of driving from its inception through its current-day popularity. The view that driving would be the most common sense way of getting around was propagated primarily by the powerful car companies, which were aided by lobbying groups and a government willing to spend billions on interstate roads and highway systems in a cultural hegemony that lasted throughout the 20th century.

Although the first cars came into reality during the late nineteenth century in Europe, innovators in the United States would soon enter the competition. Hundreds of manufacturers hoped to prosper in the early days of the automobile in the United States, so from the very beginning, organizations formed around the automobile, to support the innovations arising at the time, inform news media about the car, and to gain more followers. The American Motor League was the first automobile organization in the United States, created in 1895. The Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers (ALAM), the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce (NACC), the Automobile Manufacturers Association, and the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association, additional trade organizations established in the 1800s, reveal the rising strength that would back the

burgeoning innovation of the automobile. Politicians were aware of the growing influence of such groups and paid increasing attention to their demands (Foster 2003, 3).

A purchase only possible for the wealthy at the time, the automobile quickly became a subject of the well-to-do's focus, and social organizations established around them as well. The most significant of the early automobile clubs was the Automobile Club of America (ACA), formed in New York City in 1899. Among their missions were "to co-operate in securing rational legislations and rules governing and regulating the use of automobiles" and "to encourage the construction of good roads and improvement of the public highways," clearly lobbying for support for the car (Heitmann 2009, 22). A national federation for several of the leading clubs, the American Automobile Association focused on lobbying for public highways, protecting the rights of drivers, and regulating auto racing. In pursuit of such objectives, the automobile would become less a luxury of the elite and more a fixture for the rural and urban middle classes (Heitmann 2009, 22). The combined lobbying efforts of such automobile interests would also connect a primitive road network into a system of concrete highways by 1930, literally paving the way for future highway systems (Flink 1990, 170).

The early and continuing lobbying for further production, propagation, and physical adjustment to the car by such groups helped create awareness of driving and its possibilities, getting attention by politicians to begin policymaking and roadwork. Although without these automobile organizations, the car likely would not have gone unnoticed, the early support and lobbying for the technology aided in getting more of the public on board with the car, as well as the politicians that would be influential in the spread of roads and highways that allowed the massive proliferation of driving. The auxiliary power of early lobbyists groups and politicians ultimately lent support to the

popularity of the car and the building of highways, in turn influencing the idea of driving as a norm in American culture over time.

It was during these first years of the 20th century that the automobile ceased to be a mechanical oddity and was well on the way toward being a key artifact of the new century (Volti 2004, 42). Car ownership swelled rapidly during the first decade of the 1900s, and in 1904, the American manufacturers produced over 22,000 cars, triumphing over France to become the world's largest producer of automobiles (Volti 2004, 16). Just three years later, American automobile production was greater than all of Europe's combined (McShane 1994, 108). The car industry's position in the world of production, a key characteristic of hegemony, was becoming concrete.

There was a clear opportunity for manufacturers to supply the public of their rising demand for the automobile, a primary reason why so many car companies were founded in the early years of the 20th century; eventually the majority went broke, merged, collapsed, or disappeared, leaving space open for the so-called Big Three to rise in prominence. While many early pioneers of the auto industry in America simply thought of their cars as leisure objects for wealthy buyers, men like Henry Ford, Ransom Olds, and Billy Durant thought differently, focusing on mass production for the larger American public (Heitmann 2009, 34). Their unrelenting focus on mass production, cost reduction, and profit generation allowed these three automakers to become incredibly powerful over the course of the 20th century.

The vision for widespread automobile ownership and mass production dictated the motivations that the Big Three independently held, and the ways in which they strategized strongly influenced the popularization and normativization of the car.

Hegemony not only encompasses the idea of consent by the masses, but also that such

consent is the product of the prestige that the dominant group has due to its position in the world of production. The Big Three automakers were ultimately revolutionary in their production methods and ability to mass-produce their cars, led primarily by the legendary Ford assembly line process. Such developments in production at the time changed American values so that the public would mass consume, therefore supporting the ruling class power through profits.

In 1908, the Ford Model T was introduced and ushered in the future of the automobile age. Alone, the Model T itself would likely not have been able to carry the Ford Motor Company into the big business that is today. It was the conveyor belt assembly line, first of its kind in 1913, that would greatly improve Ford's production and significantly reduce their costs, helping the Model T dominate the automobile industry for two decades (Foster 2003, 9). While other automobile manufacturers produced a few hundred or perhaps thousand units per year, Ford envisioned selling affordable cars to millions of Americans, a dream that would soon become a reality.

In order to achieve this high level of market domination, Ford relentlessly drove down production price and cut retail prices to make the Model T an affordable car for the masses. With its birth in 1908, the Model T touring car retailed for \$950; by 1915 one could buy the car for \$550; in 1924, its price was down to a mere \$290 (Volti 2004, 22). A combination of production efficiency and cost cutting would lead to the popularity and success Ford had dreamt of, and by the mid-1920s, roughly half of all cars on the road were Ford's Model Ts (Foster 2003, 10). The mass production of the automobile encouraged the American public to mass consume, giving more power to the company through increased profits. In 1923, the Ford Motor Company produced over 1.8 million

Model Ts, more than any year before; it was the peak of the car's production (Volti 2004, 48).

However, by that time in the mid-1920s, rival automobile manufacturers were finally ready and able to challenge Ford's primary domination of the industry and his production techniques (Foster 2003, 10). General Motors (GM), though founded by William Durant at the same time as the Model T's birth in 1908, did not have enough power to compete on the same level as Ford until much later, building his business from acquisitions rather than from scratch (Volti 2004, 28). The rise of General Motors paralleled the relative decline of the Ford Motor Company, and their innovations propelled GM to leadership of the American auto industry. By 1928, GM would hold 47 percent of the American market (Volti 2004, 53).

General Motors would not be the last car company to compete in the ring with Ford. A former president of Buick and an executive of GM, Walter Chrysler took over the Maxwell Motor Company in 1925, acquired Dodge Brothers in 1927, and reorganized the companies under his own name. In order to compete with other low-priced rivals, Chrysler put forth the successful Plymouth, with additional features that put it ahead of the others in the bargain market. After the rise of Chrysler into the market, no other automobile firms would be able to enjoy similar successes for decades - in the years to come, 80 percent of the market would be controlled by what would be known as the Big Three: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler.

The true genius of the entrepreneurs of the Big Three was profit through low margins and high sales, possible because mass production created by the assembly line process. The beginnings of the cultural hegemony of driving started at those humble origins, gaining consent from the subordinate public over time. However, the dominance

of the Big Three did not end simply with the automobile industry. Their immense power would directly and indirectly employ 1 in 6 American workers by the 1950s, infiltrating American culture with innovative advertising for their cars, and leaving an enduring influence on the culture of the United States during the decades of their prominence. New markets arose in part because workers wanted and could now afford a car, and because government policies put in place the infrastructure specifically to support more cars, displaying a rise in the consent to the hegemonic power of the automobile industry (Dauvergne 2008, 38). The reign of the Big Three clearly proliferate the car as the dominant option and norm, a significant factor in the cultural hegemony surrounding the car that lasted throughout the 20th century.

Although economic downturn and global warfare had severely strained the automobile industry and the motoring public during the years of The Great Depression and World War II in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, the federal government's road construction and highway maintenance services were essential in empowering some of the social transformations of the postwar era (Volti 2004). The federal government had given support to a national system of roads before, with the passage of the 1916 Federal Aid Road Act and the Federal Highway Act of 1921, but continued to set their sights further (Flink 1990, 171). Planning for what is now commonly called "The Interstate System," an integral part of the cultural hegemony of driving, began in the late 1930s and early 1940s (FHWA 2014, 1).

In 1941, President Roosevelt appointed the National Interregional Highway Committee, whose recommendations for a National System of Interstate and Defense Highways ultimately resulted in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, authorizing an expenditure of \$1.5 billion in matching funds over three years to build and improve the

nation's highways after the end of the war. The act called for designation of a National System of Interstate Highways, to include tens of thousands of miles "as to connect by routes, direct as practical, the principal metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial centers, to serve the National Defense, and to connect at suitable points, routes of continental importance in the Dominion of Canada and the Republic of Mexico" (FHWA 2014, 1).

Significant work on the Interstate system did not begin until the 1950s, prompted by President Eisenhower's initiative to connect the corners of the country through roads and highways for national mobilization during the Cold War. The resulting legislation, the Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, also called the '1956 Interstate Act', was the largest single public works project in American history, and represented a revolutionary and truly national strategy for transportation. The 1956 Act appropriated \$25 billion (about \$197 billion in 2009 dollars) in loans to states to begin construction of the Interstate Highway System — approximately 44,000 miles of multi-lane, limited access highways and roadway critical to the nation's economy, mobility and defense (Shoup and Lang 2011, 4-5, 19). The implementation and completion Interstate project would be a main focus of American transportation for the next 35 years, a clear depiction to the public by the government that driving was a massive priority, valued by the country, and a cultural norm.

In this manner, the government indirectly but quite obviously perpetuated the idea of driving as a popular common sense method of travel in the United States, valued by our country's highest leaders, and worth investing valuable time and money. On the Fannie Mae Foundation Survey of the Top 10 Influences of the past 50 years, "the 1956 Interstate Highway Act and the dominance of the automobile" topped the list (Weingroff 2000, 2). These highways were also instrumental in the prominent spread of suburban

living, the proliferation of franchised motels, and drive-in or fast-food restaurants throughout the country, spin-offs of the cultural hegemony and normativity of the car that continued to eternalize the importance, value, and norm of driving for decades to come in American life (Volti 2004, 111-112).

Automobility revolutionized the lifestyle of the typical American family when it became popular with the working class in the 1950s (Flink 1990, 158). During that time, the “church of the automobile” had an unprecedented number of followers, allowing further proliferation of the car, the rise of car culture, and proving the 1950s to be the golden era for the automobile in America (Heitmann 2009, 133). Although that idealized decade is much more complex than my research can currently describe, it is clear that, to a remarkable extent, the ever-present normativity of the automobile helped create many new opportunities for enjoying life in the United States during that time (Foster 2003, 64). The popularity of the automobile during that era, reinforced into American culture by the powerful automobile institutions that created it, spawned auxiliary living and entertainment establishments that would in turn continuously emphasize the importance of the car.

In the quarter century from the mid-1940s through the 1960s, the suburbs shaped many emerging, dominant, and modern trends in American life, assisted by the automobile (Foster 2003, 56). The interstate highway system was an integral part of the relocation of a substantial part of the American public to the suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s (Volti 2004, 109). Most aspects of such suburban development generally assumed and depended on the centrality of the automobile, and migration to the suburbs closely paralleled the expansion of automobile ownership (Foster 2003, 59, Volti 2004, 110). In the words of economist Richard Porter, “the automobile made suburbia possible,

and the suburbs made the automobile essential” (Dauvergne 2008, 38). The same suburbs that were created in part by the automobile more than half a century ago continue to reinforce normativity of the car as Americans have accepted it as the main means of transportation in suburbia, an embodiment of the spread of the cultural hegemony of driving.

While the post-war automotive culture was altering the nature of homes across the nation, it was also changing the nature of travel, lodging, dining, and entertainment, further propagating the norm of driving. Although automobile travel was well established in prewar years, with the assistance of the interstate system, road trips were made both easier and more extensive (Volti 2004, 11). Traveling by car or automotive trailer became a means of vacation and recreation, making popular the car-oriented campground and the motel. Franchised motels followed the spread of the interstate highway system, and land adjacent to interchanges and off-ramps became prime areas for these locations (Volti 2004, 112).

In addition to these new lodging options, travelers on the interstates looked to franchised fast-food operations to satisfy their appetites. At the height of their popularity in the 1960s, approximately 35,000 drive-in restaurants existed in the United States (Flink 1990, 161). Although few still exist, the idea of the drive-in lives now in the majority of fast-food restaurants in the form of the drive-through. The entertainment industry also utilized the proliferation of the automobile to introduce the drive-in theatre, a concept that was popularized in the 1950s and 1960s. At their peak in the late 1950s, over 4,000 of these theaters existed in the United States. Drag racing, with its origins at the beginnings of the car, gained mainstream recognition in the 1950s with the opening of the first drag strip in the U.S., the Santa Ana Drags (NHRA 2012, 1). The National

Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, better known as NASCAR, was incorporated in the late 1940s and built its popularity throughout the 1950s and beyond (NASCAR Media 2010, 1). These strong associations between driving and recreational activity stand out in the American mind as being classic examples of our culture, and contributed prominently over the course of the 20th century to the hegemonic idea that driving was not only the best way to travel, but also the most entertaining.

At the time, the centrality of the car culture in the United States also had a strong impact on the large and growing generation at the time – the Baby Boomers. The time period between the mid-1940s until the early years of the 21st century have actually been called the “Driving Boom” by some, characterized by car culture as well as the driving habits of the Baby Boomers (Dutzik et al. 2013, 1-3). The aggressive and manipulative advertising by the powerful automobile industry influenced the coming generation of consumers to believe that they needed and deserved unlimited personal mobility (Foster 2003, 59). Associated with freedom, independence, and a gateway to other entertainments, learning to drive and gaining access to one’s own car became seen as essential to growing up and becoming an adult. The age restriction on driving until age 16 put driving in a perfectly poised place to be seen as a stepping stone into adult life.

It remains a popularly held opinion that learning to drive is an essential marker of adulthood for young adults in the United States. In the most recent report of the Federal Highway Administration, the introduction even states that “getting a driver’s license marks a rite of passage for adolescents” (FHWA 2011, 25). The idea of driving as a rite of passage followed the same trend as car culture and the cultural hegemony of driving arising in the United States in the 1950s. Reinforced by the car-centric world at that time, it became known that, since driving was essential to so many facets of life, that it would

also be crucial for young people to assert their independence and freedom through cars to become adults.

The cultural hegemony of the car, created by the powerful car companies and reinforced by the other ascending elements of the automobile at the time, made it seem as if driving was so common sense that it was actually part of the transition into adulthood for American young people. However, a cultural rite of passage is traditionally defined as an event that includes separation from society, a transition or ritual, and re-emergence into society as a different status (Van Gennep 1960, 2-13). Therefore, in the defined sense of the term “rite of passage,” the events associated with learning how to drive do not fit. But just the sheer power of the dominant car industry to make a subordinate American public believe that they were becoming adults by learning how to drive reveals the depth of the hegemony of driving at the time. Not only were cars, highways, and other entertainment venues proliferating, but Americans came to the belief that driving was part of the modern life-course, a not-to-be-missed step on the path to full adulthood. That thought would be enough to convince many young Americans that driving was a cultural norm, and that licensure was an essential behavior for American adulthood.

By 1965, the automobile-based culture had taken hold of the United States. A thriving economy and booming car industry combined to produce an unprecedented economic boom (Volti 2004, 88). In 1950, the number of registered vehicles had risen to 49 million, by 1960 the figure grew to 74 million, and in 1965 108 million vehicles were registered in the United States (Dauvergne 2008, 38). By the mid-1960s, then, it seemed as if the triumph of the automobile in the United States had been completed – cars were advancing in their technology, manufacturers hit record levels of sales and profits, the car had deeply infiltrated American culture (Volti 2004, 116). The sheer growth in car sales

and profits show the power that car companies held during the mid-20th century in the United States.

But in the 1960s and 1970s, questions about the safety of the car, both in regard to automobile accidents and also environmentally, would surface and introduce some of the primary ideological doubts about the car that remain common today. The energy crises of the 1970s forced many Americans to think critically for the first time about their consumption of resources vital to the automobile. In 1975, the Energy Policy and Conservation Act stipulated that American manufactured cars must meet an average fuel economy of 18 mpg in 1978 and placed a national speed limit of 55 mph in 1974 (Volti 2004, 125). Rising concerns over smog and pollution caused governments to begin passing legislation in the 1960s and 1970s to establish standards for air pollution and auto emissions (Dauvergne 2008, 43). Ultimately, the government regulations and competition among automakers since the 1960s have combined to make the typical automobile safer and cleaner (Dauvergne 2008, 43). New products like minivans and fuel-efficient cars helped revive the American automobile industry, but its output of 6.8 million cars in 1989 was considerably lower than the 9.3 million produced in 1965 and the 9.7 million made in 1973 (Volti 2004, 127).

In the years between the golden ages of the automobile and the present day, the interests that initially influenced and indirectly enforced a culture of the car in America have lost the inexorable power that they once held. As we can recall from hegemony, the ruling group must continuously pervade the culture with their dominant views in order to stay in such a position of influence, seeking to win the consent of subordinate groups to keep their social influence (Lears 1985, 569). Without a method to re-assert the dominance of the car over the last few decades, American consumers have had the

opportunity to think differently and more ideologically about driving and consider other transportation options.

The waning influence and power of American car companies, the lacking direction of government automobile transportation policy, and the increased support for alternative transportation organizations have helped shape the changing attitudes towards driving that we are currently observing in the United States, specifically the breaking of the hegemonic mindset and emergence of ideologies.

From 1956 to 1991, our federal transportation program had an obvious goal: to complete the Interstate Highway System. However, since the completion of the system, “Congress has struggled to articulate a coherent set of national goals” for the transportation program (Shoup and Lang 2011, 22). In short, our nation’s transportation is based on policy that has not been significantly updated since the 1950s, and therefore has lacked the reinforcement of the automobiles’ power and hegemony that the Interstate project clearly provided (Shoup and Lang 2011, 3).

Understanding the shift in American work in the past decades can also frame the decline of the American automotive industry and its subsidiary powers. The portion of U.S. production attributable to manufacturing has steadily declined since 1965, with services surpassing manufacturing as the largest contributor to private industry production in 1990 (International Trade Administration 2010). More than 70 percent of the wealth created in the U.S. today comes from providing services, a 33 percent increase since 1950 (Slavov and Ho 2014). In 2000, the American auto industry employed more than 1.3 million Americans, whereas in 2011, that rate had decline to only about 698,000 employees (Muir and Alfonsi 2011). The decline in the American car industry has allowed for a rise for international automotive companies and manufacturers as well.

Japan is now the world's largest manufacturer of automobiles, producing about 5 million more than American manufacturers in 2009 (Ensinger 2011).

The U.S. automotive industry had been diminished by the increase in fuel prices following the energy crises, leaving car buyers unsatisfied with their line-ups that at the time were focused on gas-guzzling SUVs and large trucks in the 2000s (Associated Press 2008). Unable to fill the need for the fuel-efficient vehicles that car buyers wanted, sales of each of Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler began to suffer. Arguing that their demise would lay off workers and negatively impact the already worsening recession, in 2008 the Big Three automakers asked the government for a bailout in order to avoid bankruptcy, with both General Motors and Chrysler eventually being rescued; the government spent a total of over \$80 billion on the auto industry bailout (Rattner 2012).

As of October 2013, the auto bailout officially ended, leaving a \$10.5 billion loss on GM (Weber 2013). Ford, GM, and Chrysler, once the most powerful car companies in the world, lost a large amount of influence and dominance during the bailout, as other companies rose to meet the fuel-efficiency challenges of the future. The auto bailout had a significant impact on the power of both the American automobile industry and the government to reinforce the cultural hegemony of the automobile that previously existed. The government's choice to bail out the Big Three automotive companies during the recession may have shown cars as a priority, but revealed the instability and power loss of Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler, not to mention decreased profits.

One of the most influential effects of the automobile was suburbanization, as evidenced earlier in this chapter. However, the recent move towards urbanization again shows a loss of power and the cracking of hegemony even in the auxiliary expansions of the automobile. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the nation's urban population

increased by 12.1 percent from 2000 to 2010, outpacing the nation's overall growth rate of 9.7 percent for the same period (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Millennials specifically are noted as a large part of this change, with a majority opting to live in urban areas over the suburbs or rural communities (Nielsen 2014). According to Nielsen, 40 percent of Millennials surveyed say they would like to live in an urban area in the future, and for the first time since the 1920s, growth inside of U.S. cities is outpacing growth outside of them (Nielsen 2014). In moving towards urban areas, Millennials are also less likely to own cars - in 2011, 66 percent of Millennials under age 25 owned a car, compared with 73 percent in 2007 (Nielsen 2014).

Many of the other automobile-centered entertainment venues popular in the 1950s, created out of the normativity and cultural hegemony of the car, have lost their charm in American culture as well. Although drive-ins were a product of suburbanization and highway expansion, they were eventually destroyed by them, as owners looked for more profitable uses for their property with rising land values (Volti 2004, 113). Drive-in restaurants would meet a similar fate – at the end of the 20th century, only a few hundred remained in operation, replaced largely by the fast-food drive-thru. NASCAR, America's primary motor sport, has seen its popularity shrink over the last several years, with plummeting revenues, attendance, TV viewership, and sponsorships (Deford 2013).

Though a smaller piece of the overall puzzle than the government or the Big Three auto companies, lobbying groups are an important part of the emerging story of transportation in the United States. The pro-automobile organizations of the early 20th century have been slowly replaced by the alternative transportation organizations in the last few decades, and there has been increased support for other transit options. While some of these groups have been lobbying for better transportation options since the late

decades of the 20th century, others are gaining new ground in the 21st century as demand for other transportation, a feature of the move towards ideologies, increases.

Public transportation use reached historic levels as the Great Recession set in, with rising rates of walking and bicycling in many communities creating demand for safer roadways, bringing a new consciousness to the American public about other transportation options (Shoup and Lang 2011, 22). Use of public transit in the United States recently reached its highest level since 1956, with 10.65 billion trips taken on buses, trains, and subways in 2013 (Hurdle 2014). New transportation options were also created out of the obvious need for better transit and other means in the recession and have gained popularity in recent years, revealing the cracks in the cultural hegemony of driving and the waning power of automobile companies, as well as the rise in ideologies. Bike and car sharing programs, such as Divvy, CitiBike, and Zipcar, allow users the freedom of renting such technologies for a day and then returning them back at the end of the day.

In combination, all of these factors, from the government bailout to the failing of the automotive industry, from popularization of other modes of transit to the decline of car culture, have affected the way in which Americans see the act of driving. The rise of the automobile industry, in power due to high production rates and mass consumerism, has seen considerable decreases in profit, manufacturing, and even employment since the end of the 20th century. Utilizing the theory of hegemony, we can see that the American auto industry has lapsed in asserting their power and dominance, leaving space for other ideologies to come in. Public transportation, urbanization, and use of other new transportation technologies have increased during the 21st century, revealing a shift away from the hegemony of the automobile and towards ideological thinking.

The shift from hegemony towards ideologies is represented through the overall declining driving statistics in the United States. The miles that we drive, as a whole, have decreased steadily since the beginning of the 21st century. Per capita vehicle miles traveled peaked (VMT) in 2004 and have declined each year since then (Sundquist 2013, 1). VMT per capita in 2012 reached its lowest level since 1996. But the most publicized and debated issue surrounding driving habits currently is the decrease in driver's licensing among young Americans.

Driver's licenses for teens aged 16-19 have hit low points since the beginning of the 2000s, and in recent years, such figures have drawn speculation in the media and from researchers. The chart below shows the percentage of licensed 16-19 year olds from 1981 to 2011. Driver's licensing among this age group peaked sharply in the mid-1990s, and has persistently decreased throughout the 21st century. The economic and dot-com boom occurring during those years of the 1990s may have influenced the ability for young Americans to afford the many costs that come along with driving. In recognizing this declining driver's licensing pattern among young Americans, media sources began to speculate, while surveys were created to examine the underlying reasons for the decline.

Table 2.1. Percent of 16-19 Year-Olds Licensed, By Year

Year	16-19
1981	55.1%
1982	55.6%
1983	58.8%
1984	55.2%
1985	54.0%
1986	53.4%
1987	54.4%
1988	54.8%
1989	54.3%
1990	51.8%
1991	63.9%
1992	51.2%
1993	42.1%
1994	41.9%
1995	63.9%
1996	62.1%
1997	63.4%
1998	64.4%
1999	40.7%
2000	48.2%
2001	46.6%
2002	45.6%
2003	45.2%
2004	45.0%
2005	44.4%
2006	45.2%
2007	46.2%
2008	46.3%
2009	46.1%
2010	44.4%
2011	42.8%

Source: Federal Highway Administration data 1981-2011

Chapter III: Media and Descriptive Statistics

Media reports have recognized the current declining driving trend in the United States, but have placed an intense focus on the delay in licensure among young Americans. Largely ignoring the other declines, such as the decrease in overall vehicle miles travelled and in car ownership, media outlets have obsessed specifically over the licensure delay in among young Americans. The idea that Millennials would postpone or even turn down the chance to participate in a popularly construed ‘rite of passage’ has become a cause for concern and speculation among journalists, especially as the recession wanes and declining trends prevail.

Many of the articles by media outlets express concern for the young generation, grasping at reasons why they would abandon the popular mode of transportation, and projecting possibilities for the future of car companies. A majority of the stories have been written within the last few years, revealing that the anxiety over declining driving numbers surged only about half a decade ago, although the trend began in the beginning of the 21st century. Journalists direct the attention squarely on the Millennial generation, titling their articles: “Thanks to Millennials, driving is no longer a thing,” and “Millennials reject car culture” (Abrams 2013; Becker 2013).

When speculating about the reasons why Millennials would delay or choose not to get their driver’s licenses, most of the articles choose to focus on a trinity of influences: technology, social media, and Graduated Driver’s Licensing procedures. In media accounts on the decline in driver’s licensing, it is argued that the rise of the Internet and its related devices, coupled with increasingly complex licensing procedures, have influenced the Millennial generation, leaving them disinterested in getting their driver’s licenses, content with replacing physical interaction with pixelated ones. However, the

idea that Millennials are ditching the popular automobile in favor of Facebook is unfounded from results of research studies on the topic.

Media attention around the decline in driver's licensing among Millennials centers around the idea that driving is an American rite of passage, and that therefore young Americans are choosing to delay or miss out on a crucial step on the path to adulthood. As one Washington Post article put it: "learning to drive is a fundamental part of adolescence," but "the digital generation...no longer sees the family car as the end-all of social life" (St. George 2010). Another reporter reminisced, believing that "there was a time when you couldn't list a teenager's rite of passage without making some reference to access of a family car," implying that such a time has now passed (Automobile Staff 2010).

Some articles focus on the generational contrast in driving habits, asserting, "younger people are less likely to drive...than past generations for whom driving was a birthright and the open road a symbol of freedom" (Schwartz 2013). Journalists assert that cars "don't represent freedom, individuality, a rite of passage or a way to meet up with friends" for Millennials (Glinton 2013). It is feared among other reporters that "Generation Y includes an increasing number of people for whom driving is less an American rite of passage than an unnecessary chore" (Zabarenko 2012). While it is widely believed that gaining one's driver's license is an essential rite of passage, I have previously asserted that it is simply another facet of the hegemonic *mélange* of beliefs Americans have about driving that are fading among the Millennial generation.

One of the central factors highlighted by media reports as a deterrent from learning how to drive are Graduated Driver's Licensure (GDL) procedures. All US states as well as the District of Columbia have adopted the three-stage GDL procedure that

increases from learner to intermediate to full privilege stages of driving. These systems are designed to protect new drivers by initially limiting their exposure to risk and then gradually phasing in driving privileges as they gain experience (Teft et al. 2013, 2). Some suspect that since most states' GDL systems only apply to drivers under 18, they might encourage young people to then wait until age 18 to obtain a license in order to avoid the requirements and restrictions (Teft et al. 2013, 2). Media outlets have pointed at such "systems, which have created new requirements for the learner's permits, supervised practice hours, night driving and passengers in the car" as "responsible for much of the decline in the number of licensed 16-year-olds" because "the rules turn teens away" (St. George 2010; Hirsch 2013). Although GDL restrictions are mentioned in many of the media articles on Millennial driving decline, there is an even stronger focus on the influence of technology and social media on young Americans.

Internet-enabled systems, such as cell phones, gaming consoles, and social media outlets are the most salient factors in the decline in driver's licensing among young Americans according to accounts of the media. Media reports perpetuate the idea that the decline is due "largely to technology that keeps teens connected to one another" and that "the Internet has made the freedom that comes with a license a little anticlimactic" (Hirsch 2013). These journalists assert that "the digital generation...no longer sees the family car as the end-all of social life," and that technology is "displacing the automobile as a symbol of freedom for teens" (St. George 2010; Automobile Staff 2010).

For many reporters on this topic, it is seen that "young Americans are driving less because...cellphones have taken their place" (Abrams 2013). Some have actually asserted that Millennials' "embrace of new technologies and social networking tools [have] enabled them to adopt new ways of getting around" (Copeland 2013).

Media sources essentially propose that the Millennial generation, having come of age with the Internet and smartphones, “thinks cars are pretty lame” (Tuttle 2013). In such accounts, Millennials are pegged as “a generation consumed by Facebook and text messaging, by X-box Live and smart phones” that “no longer needs to climb into a car to connect with friends” (St. George 2010). Not only are they considered to be more likely to stay home on the computer than venture out on the road, some reports say that “they’re more likely to spend [their] money on smartphones, tablets, laptops” (Lassa 2012). Some even tie in a shift in rites of passage, explaining that a license or car was “that moment of realizing that you’re a grown up” for older generations, but that “for young people now, that moment comes when you get your first cell phone” (Zabrenko 2012). Giving advice to the car companies, journalists suggest looking “outside their industry to learn — from cellphones, apps, computers and video games” (Nelson and Glinton 2013). One reporter even suggests, “what automakers really need” in order to pull in Millennial drivers, “is an iPhone with wheels” (Hirsch 2013).

Results of quantitative research studies, such as surveys of Millennials and their driving habits (Sivak and Schoettle 2011, 2012, 2013; Teft et al. 2012; Williams 2011), have not produced a similar list of reasons for delaying driver’s licensing among young Americans. The discrepancies between such media accounts and results of research with young driving-age participants reflect deeper cultural misconceptions about both driving and the Millennial generation, a topic that will be discussed further in the ensuing pages. First, it is necessary to examine the results of quantitative research with young Americans on driving, and the reasons that they are giving for delaying getting their driver’s licenses.

Before delving into the reasons for licensure decline, researchers studied the driver's licensing statistics across age groups to examine the depth of such changes over time. Sivak and Schoettle (2011) used Federal Highway Administration data from the years of 1984 and 2009 to look at licensed drivers as a percentage in their age group, and drivers in each age group as a percentage of all drivers in order to examine the changes in demographics of licensed U.S drivers over time (Sivak and Schoettle 2011, 6). Their main result reveals that the largest difference does in fact involve the youngest drivers, with only 31% of 16-year-olds being licensed in 2008 compared with 46% in 1983, and 50% of 17-year-olds licensed in 2008, in contrast to a 1983 rate of 69%. In an updated version of the previous study, Sivak and Schoettle (2012) extended their analysis of Federal Highway Administration data to include the new U.S. data for 2010, showing a continued reduction in the percentage of young people with a driver's license through 2010 (Sivak and Schoettle 2012, 1).

Williams (2011) was one of the first to delve into the reasons behind the declining licensing trend, focusing on national licensing rates, interests in early licensure, possible reasons for delay, and opinions on licensing policies in young Americans. Drawing from a nationally representative panel of U.S households, a sample of 1,383 15-to-18 year olds completed an online survey on the topic in November of 2010 (Williams 2011, 314). While 87% of their respondents replied as being very or somewhat interested in getting a license as soon as legally possible, 37% of them hadn't even begun the process of learning to drive (Williams 2011, 314-315). Their data does show a component of interest present in the Millennial participants: only 2% of their respondents stated that they were not at all interested in getting licensed as soon as possible (Williams 2011, 314).

Among the 16- to 18- year olds in the Williams (2011) study, the most popular reasons for not proceeding with their licensing included no available car, busy with other activities, costs of driving as a barrier, and ability to get places without driving. Though noted in many media articles that social networking connections may be replacing the desire to drive, it was not cited as a major reason for delaying licensure among Williams' (2011) participants. Only 4% of 15 year olds, 5% of 16 year olds, 10% of 17 year olds, and 6% of 18 year olds agreed that "Facebook, texting, etc. keep me in touch with friends," directly challenging the technology-centric ideas of the Millennial generation presented by the media (Williams 2011, 315). Similarly a target of much media speculation, delaying licensure to avoid Graduated Driver's Licensing restrictions received little mention among participants as a reason for delaying licensure (Williams 2011, 315).

Teft, Williams, and Grabowski, with the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (Teft et al. 2012) similarly investigated the topic of delayed licensure, specifically the ages at which young people obtain their driver's licenses and reasons for delay among those who did not have a license by age 18. Utilizing an online questionnaire, the foundation was able to reach a sample of over 1,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 20 in the United States (Teft et al. 2012, 2). Similar to the Williams (2011) study, questions inquired about licensure status, timing of licensure, reasons for delaying licensure, and opinions about driver licensing policies. As expected, the AAA foundation researchers found that delay in licensure was widespread; while the likelihood of driver's licensure increased with age, only 44 percent of respondents reported having obtained their license within 12 months of the minimum licensing age in their state (Teft et al. 2012, 2, 9).

For the participants in the AAA foundation study (2012), the reasons most commonly rated as very or somewhat important in influencing licensing decisions were not having a car (44%), ability to get around without driving (39%), the cost of gasoline (36%), the cost of driving overall (36%), and “just didn’t get around to it” (35%) (12). In ratings of reasons for delaying licensure, respondents who had not obtained a learner’s permit before their 18th birthday rated not having a car (52%), their ability to get around without driving (45%), and “just didn’t get around to it” (42%) as very or somewhat important reasons why they did not get their license sooner (Teft et al. 2012, 12). When given the option to provide their own reasons as to why they did not get their license sooner, the emerging theme in the participant answers showed that the overall cost of driving most impacted delayed licensure.

Only 17% of participants in the AAA foundation study cited the ability to connect with friends online via social media as an important reason for not getting their license sooner. In conjunction with results of Williams (2011), this finding provides further evidence against the popular technology-based theory about delayed licensure in the media. Further challenging media theories of delayed licensure, fewer than one in four respondents in the AAA foundation study not licensed before age 18 cited reasons plausibly related to graduated driver licensing procedures, such as mentioning special restrictions on young drivers as important to their licensure decision (Teft et al. 2012, 12). None of the respondents indicated that they were waiting in order to purposely avoid graduated driver’s licensing requirements. (Teft et al. 2012, 12).

In one of the most recent research studies on reasons behind delaying licensure, Schoettle and Sivak (2013) surveyed 618 non-licensed respondents between the ages of 18 and 39, addressing issues of primary and secondary reasons for not getting a licensing

and potential future plans to get a driver's license (Schoettle and Sivak 2013, 2).

Although all of the participants in the study did not currently have a driver's license, the majority of respondents said that they do have future plans for getting a license (78.5%) (Schoettle and Sivak 2013, 13). Of those planning to get a license, the youngest age group in the study (aged 18 to 19) was the most likely to say they will get one in the next five years (90.4%), with decreasing frequency as age increased.

For the participants in the Schoettle and Sivak study (2013), the overall top eight reasons, both primary and secondary, for not having a driver's license included: too busy or not enough time to get a driver's license (37%), owning and maintaining a vehicle is too expensive (32%), able to get transportation from others (31%), prefer to bike or walk (22%), prefer to use public transportation (17%), concerned about how driving impacts the environment (9%), able to communicate and/or conduct business online instead (8%), and disability/medical/vision problems (7%) (Schoettle and Sivak 2013, 1). The ability to communicate online as a reason for delaying licensure was actually lowest between the youngest two groups of participants, with 3% of 18-19 year olds, 2.8% of 20-29 year olds, and 4.4% of 30-39 year olds answering this way. In conjunction with the previous research studies, young participants in the Schoettle and Sivak study (2013) did not consider Internet technologies to be an influential factor in not getting their driver's license. In contrast to the media perception of Millennials and the Internet, it was actually the older age group in the study that was more likely to have delayed licensure based on online communication.

By surveying all non-licensed participants, and extending their age groups to include participants through 39 years of age, the Schoettle and Sivak (2013) study gives us an opportunity to contrast the reasons for not getting a license between younger and

older age groups. The oldest age group (30-39 years old) was more likely than the youngest group (18-19 years old) to indicate that they have a medical problem or disability (11.2% vs. 1.0%), are concerned about the environment (4.9% vs. 1.0%), have a fear of driving (3.9% vs. 1.0%), or have some legal issue (4.4% vs. 0.5%) (4).

Percentages of each primary reason for not getting a driver's license between age groups 18-19, 20-29, and 30-39 can be best distinguished in the table below.

Table 3.1. Main Reasons for Lack of Driver's License, by Age Group

“What is the MAIN reason you do not currently have a driver's license?”
(The most frequent response is shown in **bold**.)

Reason	Age group			Total
	18-19	20-29	30-39	
Too busy or not enough time to get a driver's license	37.9	26.6	16.5	26.9
Owning and maintaining a vehicle is too expensive	16.7	12.1	15.0	14.6
Able to get transportation from others	14.6	10.3	11.7	12.1
Prefer to bike or walk	12.1	8.9	9.2	10.0
Prefer to use public transportation	2.5	13.1	13.6	9.9
Disability/medical/vision problem	1.0	6.1	11.2	6.1
Other reason	5.1	8.4	2.9	5.5
Never learned or still learning to drive	4.5	6.5	2.4	4.5
Able to communicate and/or conduct business online instead	3.0	2.8	4.4	3.4
Concerned about how driving impacts the environment	1.0	3.3	4.9	3.1
Do not like to drive/afraid to drive	1.0	1.4	3.9	2.1
Legal issue	0.5	0.5	4.4	1.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: Schoettle and Sivak. (2013). p. 6.

Taken across all of the quantitative research studies that have been conducted on reasons for delaying licensure among young Americans, the most prevalent answers relate to cost (not having a car, too expensive, gas/insurance cost), ability to get around without driving (other transportation), and a lack of time (too busy, other activities, etc.).

Technology, social media, and Graduated Driver's Licensing procedures, three media-perpetuated influences behind the licensing decline, were rarely cited by Millennials in research study surveys.

It is evident that there exists a stark contrast between the media-attributed reasons behind Millennials' delayed licensure and the reasons represented by young Americans' responses to quantitative survey research. This too can be explained through the theoretical framework of hegemony. As we can recall from cultural hegemony theory, the media is the primary location for disseminating the domination of leading forces, by perpetuating their dominant worldview, beliefs, values, and norms. Therefore, it makes sense that instead of finding critiques about the car to explain the driving decline, media outlets would instead portray Millennials as somehow different or even wrong for delaying their licensure.

In choosing to focus on GDL procedures, technology, and social media as reasons for the decline in Millennials, the media is not only inaccurately portraying the actual motives of young Americans, but also trivializing them. When media sources choose to gloss over the real issues given by Millennials, like economic expense, time, and other transportation, they instead make it seem like all young Americans care about are rebellion against GDL restrictions and communicating on the Internet. By trivializing young Americans' reasons for delaying licensing, the media makes assertions about the Millennial generation that expose hegemonic beliefs about driving. That it is a marker of freedom and independence, that learning to drive is a rite of passage, and that driving is the norm are main arguments for driving made by these writers, and are all markers of the hegemony surrounding driving. In the midst of the media speculation and survey research

results, I decided to conduct my own research in order to more deeply examine the real-life experience of American drivers.

Chapter IV: Methodology

While the few large-scale and nationally focused quantitative survey methods that have been used in the previous studies are useful for a general understanding of the Millennial view of driving, it is evident that they are lacking an in-depth understanding of the underlying stories and motivations behind gaining one's driver's license.

Additionally, in the previously conducted research studies, the Millennial generation has generally been the sole focus, with the oldest age group that has been surveyed being 30-39 years old. Focusing solely on the Millennial generation and their reasons for delaying driving tells us an important piece of the story, but largely ignores the rest of the tale.

In contrast, my research focuses on each of the four current represented generations in the United States, utilizing long-form qualitative interviewing techniques in order gain more detailed information from a wider age-range of participants. My qualitative study seeks to develop a theory about the hegemony and ideologies of driving in the 20th and 21st century by examining the driving experiences of four members of each present American generation. In examining the experiences of members of each generation, it is also possible to see the change in driving over time. Based on the historical trajectory of the cultural hegemony present in car culture, older generations should be more likely to associate driving with classic values such as freedom, independence, and adulthood than younger generations.

An analysis of the definition and characteristics of a generation informs the benefits of interviewing participants cross-generationally for my research. A generation is a society-wide peer group, born over a period roughly the same length as the passage from youth to adulthood, which collectively possesses a common persona (Howe and Strauss 2009, 40). I am defining generations in the manner of Howe and Strauss, using

generational birth years to indicate boundaries for each generational persona. The generational persona embodies attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future; it is defined through three attributes: perceived membership in a common generation, common beliefs and behaviors, and a common location in history (Howe & Strauss 2009, 41). In this way, the theorists have defined the birth year boundaries for the four generations I am studying as follows: Silent Generation (1925-1942), Baby Boomer Generation (1943-1960), Generation X (1961-1981), and the Millennial Generation (1982-2002) (Howe and Strauss 2009, 41).

Attitudes towards various contemporary American topics, together with behavioral tendencies, can be traced through these American generations (Howe and Strauss 2009, 43). On a small scale, then, the interviews that I have collected reveal generational attitudes towards driving, and how reasons for driving have changed over time. When taken together with the historical data on driving rates, and the cultural hegemony of the car over time still in mind, a more cohesive understanding of the motivations and behaviors of different generations of drivers come into view.

Qualitative research design, specifically in the data collection method of interviewing, allows for participants to provide their own individual answers while the researcher keeps control over the line of questioning (Creswell 2014, 191). Therefore, I decided that interviewing was the best choice as the method for data collection in my research because I wanted to understand driving experiences from the participant's point of view, the influences behind their driver's licensing, and how their opinions may have changed over time. Qualitative interviewing is also an approach that has not been utilized in the previous studies conducted on the topic, and therefore may explore more deeply the ideas that have been examined on the surface level with survey instrumentation.

It should be mentioned, however, that there are also limitations to the qualitative interviewing method. Although interviews allow for the participant to freely answer the researcher's questions, the interviewee may articulate their answers or be misinterpreted by the researcher (Creswell 2014, 191). While researcher bias and participant misunderstanding can never be fully diminished, my interview protocol laid out specific steps to ensure for ease of understanding, and I recorded and took notes in all interviews with participant consent in order to reduce possibility for my own misinterpretation.

In order to examine the content of my participants' interview answers, I utilized the grounded theory method of utilizing my raw data in order to extrapolate codes and themes in order to find interrelated themes and interpret their meaning (Creswell 2014, 197). In doing so, I transcribed the interviews, put the transcriptions into QSR NVivo to help determine themes in participants' answers, and then create codes for each related theme. I also utilized Microsoft Excel to keep track of participants, demographic information, and code themes in certain questions. Participant transcripts, my interview notes, and all coding and data remain on a password-protected computer.

To best understand the experiences of participants in different generations when learning how to drive and continuing the practice over time, I developed several interview questions that asked about first driving experiences, reasons for getting a driver's license, how the experience of driving has changed, and opinions on various aspects of driving. The full protocol, complete with all of the interview questions, can be found in the Appendix. All interviews were conducted over the phone at a time agreed upon by both the interviewee and myself, and each interview was recorded and then later transcribed as I previously mentioned.

In order to examine generational differences in opinions and experiences of driving, I conducted the qualitative long-form interviews between November 2013 and January 2014 with four members of each of the Silent generation, Baby Boomer generation, Generation X, and the Millennial generation. I began recruiting participants through individuals that I already knew, and then used snowball sampling, asking previous participants to recommend future ones, in order to gather a full sample of 16 participants.

The small number of participants in my sample, while allowing me to conduct longer and more detailed interviews with my participants, also limits the generalizability of my results. The results that will be displayed in the next sections reveal the experiences of the 16 participants that I interviewed, and certainly do not represent the American public at large. Although I did not ask my participants to divulge their race or class, I was in personal contact with each of them and can disclose that they were all white and of approximately middle class backgrounds. Race and class have an impact on individual ability to access resources such as a car, but since I chose to focus on a small snowball sample, I could not control for such demographic factors. Future studies could certainly benefit by utilizing a more demographically representative sample of the United States in examining driving attitudes and experiences. Although my study has its limitations, the experiences of my sample, in conjunction with the previously conducted studies, can paint a fuller picture of what is going on with the declining driving rates in the United States.

The full sample of participants consisted of 7 males and 9 females, with every generational group having a gender balance of 2 females and 2 males, except for the Millennial group of participants. In creating a sample of Millennial participants, I was

interested in finding a participant that had delayed getting their driver's license, reflective of the declining trend of driver's licenses among young Americans, but had ended up learning how to drive years later. When another participant was finally able to suggest a Millennial that would fit the criteria, I made the executive decision that including her in my sample would be more important than maintaining a perfect gender balance among the Millennial participants, as it would provide a unique insight into the importance for understanding a point of view that would not be shared among other participants.

All of the 16 participants had grown up in various Midwestern states, with half having grown up in Illinois and the other half born and raised in Wisconsin. The majority of my sample, 10 participants, described their residence growing up as suburban, with 4 defining it as small town and only 2 living in urban areas. With the exception of one participant now currently residing in Texas, all of the participants continue to live in Midwestern states, with 6 in Illinois, 2 in Ohio, and 7 in Wisconsin. In describing their current residence, 7 participants said they live in a suburban area, with 5 categorizing themselves in a small town and the remaining 4 in an urban area. My sample is therefore obviously skewed towards the suburban population in both childhood residencies and current ones, and though this limits the generalizability of my results, I believe it is important to study the suburban population and their relationship to driving. The concentration of the sample in the Midwestern region also limits the generalizability of my participant's interview answers, and ideally more research can extend my interview practices to other regions of the United States as well to gain a more cohesive view of national driving opinions across generations.

Over the course of my research, I also realized that my participants should be licensed and regular drivers, so that I could better understand the mindsets and opinions

of habitual drivers. Although the possible decline of driving may allow for the rise in popularity of other means of transportation, as other researchers have suggested, its current use is ultimately not the aim of my research. It is for such reasons that I chose to limit my sample to participants that were habitual car drivers. All of the participants that I interviewed asserted that driving is currently their main means of transportation.

Chapter V: Results

In order to examine any possible impact of different factors in the process of learning how to drive, I began by asking participants questions about the age that they started driving, how and by whom they were taught, and their first driving experiences. Participants began driving in a range of ages from 13 to 18. A few began learning how to drive before they were of driver's license age, with one starting to learn at 13, one at 14, and three starting at age 15. Half of participants learned to drive at 16, with the remaining three participants not learning how to drive until age 18. Age ranges did not have any discernable pattern across generations, as can be seen in the tables below, organized in age order by generation.

Table 5.1. Average Age Learned How to Drive, by Generation

Millennial	16.0
Gen X	15.5
Baby Boomer	15.75
Silent Generation	16.5

When examining the way in which participants learned how to drive, I was interested to see the possible differences across generations, as the method of learning may have had some influence on generational beliefs and orientations towards driving. Two Millennial participants mentioned being taught solely by their parents; the other two took a class while being taught by parents or relatives. A similar pattern was present in the Generation X participants and the Baby Boomer Participants. In the Gen X group, two were taught with combination of a driver's education class and parental help, and the other two participants were taught only by relatives. For the Baby Boomer participants, two were taught by a driver's education course while the other two participants learned to

drive from their parents or siblings. The Silent Generation, however, were taught completely by parents, relatives, or friends; one participant mentioned the lack of any kind of class taught by school or privately at the time. In fact, it was not until 1932 that the first organized high school driver's education course in the country was implemented, so it makes sense that few of the Silent Generation would have been taught by a course (Peatman 2011).

Though three of my participants (two Silent generation, one Gen X) could not remember where they drove for the first time, many were able to identify their first driving location easily. Three participants remembered driving around in a parking lot, four drove by the lake or forest preserves as their first experience, and rural areas or neighborhoods were the site for four participants. Lastly, one participant drove in a cemetery as their first experience, and another one described a terrifying highway as the location of her first driving experience during a driver's education course. With the exception of that one highway-driving Baby Boomer, participants drove for the first time in quiet areas. It is seemingly the norm across generations, although half of the Silent Generation participants were unfortunately unable to recall the location of their first driving experience.

What all participants were able to remember, however, was the feeling that they had getting behind the wheel for the first time. A combination of both fear and excitement was reported by participants of all generations, with one participant describing it as being a common experience, that she was "scared and nervous, but still excited, you know, like any first driver would feel!" A Millennial described her anxiety as she drove for the first time – "I literally was like, I am operating a machine that can kill hundreds of people if I do something to mess up, you know. Learning how to learn

the gas pedal and the brake pedal was just like, scary, cause what if I don't learn how to stop properly?" A Gen X participant talked about her experience driving during her first driver's education course, that "The teacher was more scary than the car. So I was more afraid of crashing my instructor's car. That's it. I wasn't scared. I was excited."

Two Baby Boomer participants described themselves respectively as "scared out of my mind" and "scared to death" during their first driving experiences. Though mixed fear and excitement generally dominated the experience of Millennials, Gen X participants, and Baby Boomers, the Silent generation participants showed more enthusiasm for driving in their first experience, with one participant describing himself as "feeling like a hundred bucks, like I owned the car and the road." Another Silent Generation participant explained the possible difference as attributed to fewer restrictions on the road at the time – "I was probably a little nervous but we didn't have all the rules hold us back as much. It was an exhilarating feeling, really exciting to be in control and be able to drive around where I wanted to go." My participants tended to express a combination of fear and excitement when driving for the first time, although older participants were more likely to have felt excited during their first driving experience.

After learning how to drive, it is the logical next step to go out and get a driver's license. A majority of the participants, 10 of them in all, got their driver's license at the age of 16, and 3 participants gained their driver's license when they were 17. The 3 participants that waited to learn to drive at 18 also got their licenses at that age as well. Only six of the participants got their own car soon after getting their driver's license, with the rest having to wait between a few months and years later until they were able to get their own car. Although Millennials in the results of previous survey research have cited

a lack of car as a reason why they are delaying their driver's license, within my sample, not having a car after getting one's license was a common issue across generations.

In the process of interviewing each participant, I would have them go through their process of driving for the first time, learning how to drive, and getting licensed. After hearing their personal and individual stories about their driving experiences, I would simply ask if they remembered why they decided that they wanted to learn how to drive in the first place. In the answers of my participants across generations, there was a clear demarcation between the initial mindset of the Millennial generation participants when learning how to drive and that of the previous generations.

Each of my four Millennial participants asserted that they decided they wanted to learn how to drive because it was necessary for them. I utilize the term 'necessary' or 'necessity' as the code for such answers because participants asserted driving for them was prerequisite for other essential activities in their lives. One simply stated that he "needed a car to drive [himself] places." Another was "forced by [her] parents to get a job," so she needed to learn how to drive and get a license so that she could commute. For another, it was the distance between her private high school and her home, a 30 minute drive, that made a driver's license a necessity for herself and her family - "I had to learn how to drive... living over half an hour away from my high school. My parents are both full time lawyers, so I would have to get myself there and back, and driving was a necessity for them, because they would have to like drive me to swim practice or something, and it would take an hour out of their day that they just didn't have."

For the Millennial participant that had delayed her driver's license until age 18, it was the future 50 mile commute from her residence to her college that necessitated her learning how to drive, explaining her situation in this manner: "I knew that I was going to

move to Ohio and I knew that I would have to commute like 50 miles so then I felt a lot of pressure to learn how to drive really well between, in a short amount of time.”

In contrast, Generation X participants almost exclusively identified their reason for learning how to drive as socially motivated or expected. I use such terms as ‘socially motivated’ or ‘socially expected’ because participants mentioned the influence of peers or others in their decision to learn to drive. For example, the echo of “everybody was doing it” was repeated throughout each of the interviews with the 4 separate Gen X participants, with two of them citing the fact that it was an expected course in their high schools.

The existence of such mandatory driver’s education through the public schooling system is a likely component to the assertion of social expectation – in the 1970s, 95 percent of students received driver’s education coursework in the United States, but there currently remains minimal or no funds for the programs, causing most to disappear (Mohn, 2012). The driver’s education courses mentioned by Millennial participants are not from their public schools, but rather from the private driver’s education companies that have become popular since then. The social pressure that emerged alongside the aspect of driving clearly impacted the participants of Gen X unlike any others, with participants reasoning their learning how to drive by saying sentiments such as “well, because everyone was learning how to drive, everyone I knew was learning how to drive at that time.”

Freedom and independence, two key American social values generally also tied in with the car, were more prevalent in Baby Boomer and Silent Generation participant’s reasoning for learning how to drive. I utilize the terms ‘freedom’ and ‘independence’ because those are the terms explicitly utilized by the participants. They are also, as I have

previously asserted, part of the many hegemonic beliefs about driving in the United States.

Baby Boomer participants had more mixed reactions to the question of why they decided to learn how to drive than participants of other generations. Their answers tended towards a mixture of social expectation, adulthood, and freedom. One participant reported that she wanted to learn how to drive out of social conventions, because “it was the cool thing to do” and because she was growing up – “it was part of entering the adult world.” Another participant mentioned that one reason was social expectation as well, to be able to “hang around with friends without relying on parents.” The remaining two participants mentioned both freedom and the feeling of adulthood, stating that “for an American kid, it’s a big deal to start driving...all of a sudden you have freedom and you feel more like an adult.”

Silent Generation participants leaned more towards the aspects of freedom and independence when describing reasons why they learned how to drive. One participant described learning to drive as the ability “to have the freedom to go places and do things,” and another echoed these sentiments, identifying driving as “that feeling of freedom and independence, being able to go where you want to go when you feel like going.” Another Silent Generation participant focused solely on the idea of being independent, saying that she wanted to “be able to get around easier, so I could be more independent and not rely on others.” The last participant incorporated freedom, independence, and the feeling of adulthood as catalysts for her decision to learn how to drive, describing driving in this way: “I guess it’s a sense of freedom. All of a sudden, you’re almost like a grown up, you know at 16. And you get that nice feeling of I can go

when I want to go, and you know, not have to worry about someone having to pick you up or anything like that.”

For my sample of participants, therefore, there was a distinct difference between initial reasons for learning how to drive between the Millennial generation, Gen X, Baby Boomers, and Silent Generation participants. Millennial participants mostly decided to learn how to drive out of necessity, whereas Gen X-ers were compelled to get their driver's license based on social convention and expectation. Baby Boomers originally wanted to learn how to drive for mixed reasons including social expectation, adulthood, and freedom. Silent generation participants focused more on the classic American descriptions of the car, freedom and independence, as well as adulthood, in their reasons why they decided to learn how to drive. The change in responses through generations of the participants in my sample show a shift from the more hegemonic reasoning such as freedom and independence in older generations, to social pressure for Generation X participants, through to necessity for the Millennials.

I argue that the more hegemonic motivations of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, focusing on independence, freedom, and adulthood, are products of the powerful cultural hegemony of the car at the time. As I previously stated in the history section, these generations were influenced by the early ages of advertising, in which car companies utilized their vast resources to reach the public and disseminate their dominant values. Even the socially motivated reasons of the Gen X participants show the idea of a cultural norm, showing the continuation of the hegemony at the time. The fact that the behaviors of a large subordinate majority, in this case, the act of driving, would influence others of that group to participate in the same behavior is again the product of the power of a dominant group in hegemony.

The orientations of the Millennials towards driving, however, show a different connection to driving: necessity. These participants did not decide to drive because they wanted to, but because there were no other means for them to get around. I argue that this is an indication of a shift occurring in the beliefs that young Americans have about driving, from cultural hegemony to a more ideological framework. When the dominant group loses power and hegemony breaks, other ideologies can be questioned by the subordinate group. Instead of repeating the hegemonic values and beliefs about driving, Millennial participants show a shift: instead of choosing driving because of its normality or dominance in American culture, they decided to learn how to drive because they did not have any other transportation option. The ability to question alternative options when initially learning how to drive is not present in the older generations experiences of driver's licensing.

However, when asked to identify the reasons why driving is overall still such a popular means of transportation in the United States, participants offered generationally mixed responses that centered around aspects of necessity, efficiency, and a sense of freedom. Participants of each generation, even the older ones, mentioned and evaluated other types of transportation in their explanations, which I will argue is part of the shift in mindset towards ideologies. Although the Millennial participants were the only ones to show a shift towards ideologies in initially learning how to drive, participants of all generations showed their ability to think about other ideologies in transportation when asked about driving's current popularity and importance in the United States.

Many mixed responses were seen generationally when asked to evaluate if and why driving is still popular in the United States. One participant, a Millennial, identified the reason for driving's popularity as socially driven, describing it in this way: "I think

because in society it's still known as like the cool thing, like having a car when you're young, like having something to flash in front of other people." Another Millennial said that it was freedom that kept Americans driving, saying that "once you can drive you can do whatever you want, so you know, that's really why driving is popular in the U.S."

The other two Millennial participants still determined necessity as the reason why driving remains popular in America, citing such issues as lack of other transportation.

One described the difference between suburban and urban transportation, saying that driving remains popular "in the suburbs because it is necessary...when we get into city driving and that type of thing I know a lot of people don't learn right away when they're 16...one of my best friends is from Milwaukee and she didn't get her license until college, and it was because she was able to use public transportation around her city."

The other Millennial participant used her experiences abroad to inform her argument of the necessity for driving-- "Because the United States is huge, I have to drive just to go to the grocery store. If this was Europe I could just walk there, or I wouldn't have a problem taking public transportation."

One Gen X participant identified freedom as the biggest reason for driving, saying that the car was most popular because of the "freedom it provides and the ability to travel long distances." Another Gen X-er said that driving was popular due to its efficiency "a reasonable economic for people to get around town, to get to point A to point B."

Another specifically pointed at necessity of driving and the lack of public transportation in the United States as the reason for driving's popularity - "because when you have a kid, and you get a real job and you get out of school and you know, you have life, you kind of have to have a mode of transportation, and since we don't have a decent public transportation system, or buses and stuff like that, yeah, of course, you have to drive

everywhere. Because we live in the United States where people are selfish and self-centered and they don't want to put money into other public transportation like trains, and other things that other countries rely on. It's a me-me-me society." The other Gen X participant also described the popularity of driving in this way: "Because you have to get somewhere, you know what I mean, you have to get places and that's going to be the easiest way to do so. I have a job and kids and I need to get places and driving is going to get me there."

The Baby Boomer participants also had mixed responses to the questions about driving's popularity. One described driving as necessary due to infrastructure and suburban living: "I think it's so popular because our whole infrastructure right now is geared around driving. So, if you can't drive, like, if you lived where I did, where I do, in the suburbs, and you couldn't drive a car, you would be really uh, have a lot of difficulty getting to work, getting to the store, doing anything because to walk anywhere would be way too far." Another described driving as efficient and necessary in that it is " basically the only way to get from one place to the other, and you can drive no matter what the elements are." Additionally, another Baby Boomer said that driving is efficient in the daily responsibilities of life in America – "because we need to get places, get to our jobs and where we need to go on a daily basis. Driving provides those to us." The last Baby Boomer participant combined the idea of distance and speed in the necessity of driving to get around, saying that driving "gets us from A to B in the quickest manner possible, that's why it is so popular."

A combination of the aspects of freedom, necessity, and efficiency of driving for its purpose as reasons why participants of the Silent Generation believed that driving remains popular in the United States. Driving was seen as popular by one Silent

Generation interviewee “because you have to go places, and driving gets you to those places.” Another Silent generation participant said that it is still popular as a mode of transportation because “driving is just the quickest way to get around.” One interviewee combined the ideas of freedom with this echoed aspect that driving is efficient, saying that it is popular because “it is partly that freedom and also it gets us where we need to get going to.” Lastly, one Silent Generation participant responded to my question of driving’s popularity by pondering if it really still is among young people – “I’m just quoting some of my grandkids here... they were not so anxious to learn how to drive. Some of them went a couple years past the time they could be driving. In fact I think there’s four or five of them that didn’t push for it.” When taking in the possible experiences of other young Americans, she identified freedom as a reason for driving’s popularity – “I think on the other hand I think a lot of young people do want to, it’s a sense of freedom, it’s a breakaway I think.”

I was also interested in not only why participants believed that driving was still popular in the United States, but also if and why they thought driving was ultimately important. Every participant, regardless of generation, said that driving was either “important” or “very important” to our American society, with varying reasons as to why they believed that to be so. Similar to the answers about driving’s popularity, there was a generational mixture of responses as to why driving is important in the United States, and an even greater emphasis by participants of each generation on other options such as public transportation.

For Millennial participants, a lack of public transportation and the necessity of driving were the two main reasons for the importance of driving in the United States. Simply stated by one participant: “Driving is very important because it is a priority means

of transportation for the majority of people.” A lack of public transportation was also mentioned by Millennial participants, with one saying that driving is “extremely important, obviously, because most of us do live suburbanly, or like less urbanly than others...we have an extremely large country, and so it means a lot of us don’t have the opportunity to take advantage of public transportation, so, you know I think it is really important, because a lot of people’s jobs are far away.” Just the opinion of other means of transportation was one reason provided for the importance of driving, with a participant exemplifying her difference in perception just from one continent to another – “I think it is very important...I remember when I went to Europe, and I was in the car with my aunt, I saw people actually going on a bicycle to work...they had their full suit and everything. And you know, there it’s completely acceptable. And then I came back here, and I was driving my own car and saw the same kind of thing, and I’m like, look at this idiot, like I felt bad for him, that he didn’t have a car, you know.”

Public transportation was also a topic that came up in many of the assertions by Generation X participants that driving is important. One balked at taking it even if it were available, saying that driving is “very important, that’s how people get to their jobs, that’s how people get a living. How do you think people make a living? They take the bus? That would suck.” Another felt that public transportation, when available, could potentially deflate the importance of driving – “I think kids in areas that are highly populated, you know the big cities, like New York, Boston, places like that that have public transportation where you don’t need a car, I don’t think it’s important to them. I think that even though we’re urban, we’re still not urban enough and we don’t have enough public transportation that’s reliable or safe enough, that is what makes driving very important.” Another couldn’t fathom how to get around without car, asserting the

cultural hegemony of driving in that it is “very important because you have to get where you need to go, with a job, with kids, with everything you have to have a license and you know like learn how to drive. It’s incredibly important for getting around otherwise I honestly don’t know how we would operate.” The infrastructure of our country and its impact on public transportation was the focus for the last Gen X participant - “For us in the United States, driving is tremendously important. We depend on cars to get around; we depend on supplies to be trucked in and out to our stores. We do not have a mass infrastructure system for public transportation, monorail or high speed train system so driving is the predominant means of transportation.”

Efficiency as well as lacking public transportation systems were reasons why Baby Boomers participants thought that driving is important. One similarly mentioned infrastructure, stating that “our whole infrastructure is geared right now toward everyone driving... transportation is a huge thing, so it’s incredibly important for us right now. I think 100 years ago it, no one drove, so everyone lived in a completely different situation, like in the cities, and they rode trains so everything was just geared differently for transportation.” Another echoed the sentiment about other transportation options, asserting “driving is important to us especially because we need to get where we need to go and we don’t have any other large-scale options to be able to do that at all.” The efficiency of driving was the basis for importance for other Baby Boomer participants - “I think it’s really important, without driving you know, a lot of us couldn’t get to our jobs, we couldn’t travel, you know. It’s very important to our culture, it’s how we get our food, our clothing, it’s kind of like an impetus for our economy for us to drive to get places and do things.” Another Baby Boomer participant also thought driving was the most efficient means, stating that “driving is very important, it’s the number one way of transportation.

In order to get to the grocery store, to get to places to shop, to get to our entertainment, just get away from your spouse before you kill them, you know, you have to drive to be able to do those things.”

From the perspective of the Silent generation participants, the importance of driving was based on independence and maturity that comes along with the responsibility. One explained her own situation as a senior citizen: “I would be lost without it...I go to the senior center now for exercise and every once in a while some old lady comes in and says ‘the children took my keys away they don’t think I can handle the car anymore’ and they’re in tears.” Another summed it up more succinctly - “driving itself is very important... to learn how to drive as soon as you’re mature, it gives independence.” Efficiency was a main reason for another Silent generation participants, saying, “as for the United States, driving is very important here because it is the best way to get to where we need to go when we need to get there.” One believed a lack of other transportation had to do with driving’s importance, describing the different situation for her grandchildren in France: “Like in France I know the kids don’t mind because they don’t know anything different, they have good transit and just hop on the Metro to go where they need to go. So if there was a good transit system I don’t think it would make much of a difference...driving wouldn’t matter as much.”

Unlike the clear distinctions between generations when asked about initial driving reasons, no clear pattern emerged between generations in opinions on why driving remains popular and important. A trio of three themes were shown across participants: that driving is necessary, efficient, and provides freedom. The fact that participants across generations were able to realize the impact of other means of transportation shows a breaking down of cultural hegemony. In hegemony, we see a one-track mind, an inability

to conceive the world without that norm – for example, the inability to think about how transportation would work without the car. Although not all of the participants mentioned that or could see that viewpoint, many of different generations tied their answers to other transportation and infrastructure, showing a mindset towards ideologies and the ability to evaluate and question driving as the norm.

The fact that members of other generations identified these different ideologies about transportation shows that there may be a shift in mindset not only among the Millennials, but older Americans as well. We are able to see the behaviors of young Americans, such as delaying driver's licenses, more clearly through declining driving rates right now because they are coming-of-age, and therefore choosing whether or not to get those driver's licenses. For older generations, while some of their ideas about driving may have changed, it is difficult to track such changes because they do not manifest in such statistics such as driver's licensing rates. In addition, qualitative survey studies have only focused on the younger Americans and their opinions on driving, which makes it even more difficult to speculate about any ideological shift in the opinions of older drivers.

However, from the interviews and information that I gained through this qualitative research, I argue that the mindset about driving is ultimately undergoing a change, from culturally hegemonic to ideologies, as Americans move further into the 21st century. Although both hegemonic and ideological beliefs about driving were present in the interviews, this also shows a cracking of the hegemony and the fact that there is still a transition to ideologies that is occurring.

Chapter VI: Discussion

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been clear changes in driving and vehicle transportation habits in the United States, characterized by reports that as a population, Americans are purchasing fewer cars, driving fewer miles overall, and the young driving age population is gaining fewer licenses. Several different theories have attempted to explain the possible reasons for the declining driving rates, fixating on the economic downturn of the 2008 recession and the impact of the Millennial generation. While both the economy and the Millennials have clearly impacted the change in driving in the United States, these factors alone tell only part of a much larger story about the decline in driving. I have examined here what I argue to be the fuller tale, that driving became hegemonic in the 20st century and is transitioning towards ideologies in the 21st century.

In order to support that argument, I have focused on the evidence in the American automobile industry, government expenditures, and auxiliary cultural factors that have risen and fallen over the past century in order to reveal the once hegemonic structure behind driving habits. In the second half of the 20th century, driving as common sense became hegemonic, shown principally by the influence of powerful car companies, as well as lobby groups and government support of highways. The expansion of highways, suburban living, and automobile centered entertainment venues assisted the car companies in driving becoming standard transportation and ultimately the norm of our culture. The belief that driving provides a sense of freedom and independence, that learning to drive is a rite of passage, shown most prominently in the initial responses of the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation participants, are reflections of that hegemony.

In the 21st century, however, I assert that driving is becoming more ideological, and this shift is being represented by the tendency for young Americans to delay driver's licensing and approach driving differently. Lobbyists for alternative transportation options, a rise in using public transportation, new transportation innovations, and a move towards urbanization have combined to show an awareness of these transportation options and a questioning of the role of the car. Ideologies about transportation were seen in the responses of different generations of participants, and tentatively shows that both younger and older Americans are changing their mindset and how they think about driving. The potential for both the Millennials and participants of older generations in my sample to question the role of driving in our culture shows a possibility for change in the future of American transportation.

It is necessary here that I point out that my argument is based off of the overall culture changes and driving habits present in the United States, and cannot account for individual influences on driving, such as the personal impact of one's close social group, race, or class. Previous quantitative survey studies on the subject of American driving habits have delved into such detail, but it the purpose of my study to examine the larger generational and cultural patterns therein. However, my small sample is not representative of the population of the United States, and therefore I cannot generalize the results of my study to the experiences of all Americans. A more comprehensive view of the change in American driving habits and opinions would have to include a broader scope of age ranges, diversity, and region. The declining driver's license rate shows specifically the impact of the younger generation on American transportation, but extended surveying and interviews specifically of older Americans is certainly necessary to further examine their viewpoints.

Now that I have effectively detailed my argument and my research, it is necessary to acknowledge the subject of future implications, specifically how the ideological shift that I recognize may affect and change the structure of American transportation in the years to come. Much of the previous research, both in media attention and quantitative studies, on Millennials and their driving habits suggest in their implications that this young American generation will choose other transportation methods. Many journalists and researchers approach such an implication more as a fact than a possibility, as if it is obvious that the Millennials will continue to support other means of transportation while rebuffing the car. Unfortunately, I am not so sure. While the Millennials' ability to question the car and the importance of driving presents an opportunity to move towards a diversified transportation system, it is necessary to understand the trends we are observing are by no means guaranteed for the future.

Driving has dominated the realm of transportation for the American public through cultural hegemony for decades, and has only recently shown the declining interest through federal statistics. Although it is the anticipation of alternative transportation lobbyists, environmentalists, and the authors of the Millennial driving surveys that this generation will continue to utilize other transportation options, it is possible, as the car industry is projecting, that as they marry and have children, Millennials will turn to cars simply to get them where they need to go. The theory of the geography of aging shows evidence that Americans are most likely to move to core cities in their twenties, and move increasingly towards the suburbs in their thirties (Kotkin 2013). The oldest wave of Millennials now entering their thirties, and there is some data to suggest that they are moving into the suburbs (Kotkin 2013). Without adequate

alternative options in the suburbs, as many of my participants asserted, the aging Millennials may find themselves moving instead towards the car.

As evidenced in my own research, all of the Millennial participants in my study mentioned necessity as the catalyst for learning how to drive, and many mentioned it also as part of the reasons why driving remains popular. It is possible that if Millennials' living and working conditions continue to necessitate driving in the future, such as in the suburbs, they may utilize driving in the same large-scale ways as previous generations. Many of the older participants in my research talked about needing a car to get "from A to B" and the role that their jobs and their children play in their driving habits. If Millennials' lifestyle choices in the future necessitate the use of a car, as many of the older participants in my study suggested, there is still a chance that they will use it.

Necessity, of course, is the mother of invention, transforming the central question into who will meet that need for the Millennial generation and beyond. If the Millennial generation finds itself in the same position, without other transportation options in suburban areas, the American automobile industry could regain its power and assert dominance once again. The automobile industry could similarly come up with "an iPhone on wheels" like one reporter suggested, and reel Millennial customers in that way instead. However, as many researchers have noted, there are certainly reasons to hope for future change and a movement of this generation towards alternative transportation methods.

Beyond the declining rates of driver's licensing and vehicle miles traveled for the young American age groups that have been detailed here, there is other evidence of a move towards competing ideologies about driving and transportation. Although most have focused on the impact of the Millennial generation, the ideological shift in mindset about driving was present in my older participants as well. Regardless, the Millennials

seem to be the ones enacting habitual change rather than only a shift in mindset or opinion. If they continue to live in urban areas, utilize other forms of transportation, care about environmental impact, and moreover demand a transition towards a more user-friendly transportation system, there is hope for the real change in American transportation that other researchers have detailed.

Clearly, though, such a future transportation initiative would still include cars, whether current models, hybrid, or flying. The point of a more diversified transportation system in the U.S. should not be to eradicate the automobile, but rather to allow the public to be able to have the option to freely choose is the transportation method that is the best for them. That would be the ultimate realization of the hegemony to ideological shift that I am arguing is presenting itself in the current American mindset about driving; a final move away from an imposed and dominant norm of driving towards a structure in which competing ideologies about transportation could coexist.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Of:

Date:

Preliminary Introduction (must be read to all interview subjects):

“This interview is part of a Sociology-Anthropology senior thesis by myself, Samantha Molinaro, a student at Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Illinois under the direction of my project advisor, Holly Swyers. This project focuses on the question of driver’s licensing as an American rite of passage and car culture in the United States. First, I will ask you five demographic questions that should not take more than a few minutes. Next, there will be a series of nine short answer questions, and then a final section of open-ended questions that can take as much or as little time as you prefer. At any time during this interview, you can choose not to answer a question or decide you no longer wish to continue. Just let me know and we will stop. Before we start this interview, I need to check with you about a couple of things.”

First of all, are you willing to do this interview? Yes No

I would like to record this interview and transcribe it later. Is this acceptable to you? Yes No

If you agree, this interview will be recorded and transcribed, and this project will be produced into a senior thesis. It is possible that I will want to use some of your quotes from this interview to illustrate trends that I observe in the data.

Is this okay? Yes No

Introductory statement: “Thank you for agreeing to do this interview today. Just to remind you, you can stop this process at any time and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. I am studying the experience of driver’s licensing as an American rite of passage as well as car culture in the United States. I will

be recording and taking notes throughout the interview to be sure we can accurately remember what you said. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

Demographic Questions:

The following is the demographic section of this interview. If you decide you don't want to answer any question, just say, "pass" and we'll move on.

- Year of birth:

Country (state/region) of current residence:

Type of region: Rural Small Town Suburban Urban

Country (state/region) growing up:

Type of region: Rural Small Town Suburban Urban

The following is the short answer section of this interview, which means the answers will be mostly yes/no or something you can answer in a couple of words. Again, if you decide you don't want to answer any question, just say, "pass."

At what age did you start learning how to drive?

How did you learn to drive?

Who taught you?

Where did you drive for the first time?

What car did you learn to drive in?

At what age did you take your driving test?

Did you receive your driver's license on the first try?

Did you get your own car after receiving your license? Tell me about that.

As of now, is driving your main means of transportation?

Great. That concludes the short answer section of the interview. Now, we'll move on to the open-ended section. Please remember that you're able to answer as freely as you

wish, and if you decide later that there is a part you'd rather not share in print, let me know.

Describe your first driving experience for me in as much detail as possible.

What were the reasons why you decided to learn to drive?

How much did you drive when you had just gotten your license?

How often do you drive now?

Why do you think that driving remains such a popular means of transportation?

How has your attitude towards driving changed over time, if it has?

Do you have children?

How do you feel about them driving?

How do you feel about young people driving today?

What do you think about age 16 as the driving age?

How do you think being 16 has changed since you received your license?

What do you think would happen if we changed the driving age?

What do you think would happen if teens stopped driving?

How important do you think getting a driver's license is? How important do you think driving is?

Closing statement: "Those are all the questions I have for you today. This project is going to be produced into my senior thesis, so while you're here, let me remind you that you're able to scratch any parts of this interview that you may be uncomfortable with. Is there anything you'd like me to remove from the interview or keep out of my project? Would you like to see the typed transcript before I do anything more with this interview? If so, how would you like to receive it (email, mail, hand delivery, etc)? Do you have any other questions or comments for me? Thank you again for participating in my study. If

you have any questions or concerns about this research, do not hesitate to contact myself at (262) 331-3039 or Professor Swyers at 847-735-5252.”

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