

Abstract

Automobility is one of the major challenges for a transition to an environmentally sustainable society. While representing a significant source of atmospheric pollution, it is a technology which is not only practical and necessary, but one which is also replete with symbols and meanings important for contemporary women and men. The aim of this thesis is to explore the gendered nature of automobility in order to gain a better understanding of how differences in women and men's relations to the car may affect adaptability to a sustainable transportation system.

Individuals' relations to the car and to driving are studied by problematizing the car as a domestic, gendered technology. A questionnaire survey was designed and sent out to 1,500 individuals in Göteborg, Sweden in 1996. Women and men's relations to the car are analyzed in terms of its appropriation by individuals as an object, an activity and as a realm of knowledge. A variety of factors are identified through this survey which clarify some of the differences in women's and men's car use. These are presented in terms of individuals' access, experiences, and attitudes to the car, and in their proclivity to change car use. Differences are found between women and men in the availability of the car to individuals and in the appropriation of the car as an object and realm of knowledge, suggesting that the car is experienced as being more suitable for men than it is for women.

The results of this thesis indicate that car use is influenced by factors relating to gendered articulations of power. This implies that women's and men's car use will be affected differently by measures which aim at reducing the environmental impact of the car. If a sustainable transportation system includes an awareness of equality, then political initiatives should not exacerbate existing inequalities. Nevertheless, as the results of this thesis suggest, if the transportation system in Sweden is based upon automobility, then there are clear conflicts between goals of equality and goals of sustainability.