

Professor
Justin Spinney

(with Dr Andrew
Ivins, Cardiff
University)

Driven to care:
Exploring the roles of
social acceleration, practices, and forms
of care in car dependence

Thursday
18th July 2024

**UWE
Bristol**

University
of the
West of
England



Centre for
Transport &
Society

“Literally no one is saying: I’ve got a tight schedule, a large family and lots of stuff, I think I’ll take the bus”

Introduction

This presentation seeks to explain increasing demand for cars from a sociological perspective:

- Time – ever tighter scheduling; lack of routinisation
- Practices - doing more, with increasing amounts of stuff
- Caring relations - importance of self-care and familial care in shaping mode choice

Three preliminary insights:

- Societal level sociological change (acceleration) is reshaping the qualities we value in transport
- Time saving, flexibility and load carrying are becoming the primary qualities to achieve a fulfilled life - can public transport and active travel deliver these?
- Time remains of primary importance, but in transport outside of labour relations (commuting; leisure social; reproduction): time \neq money; time = care

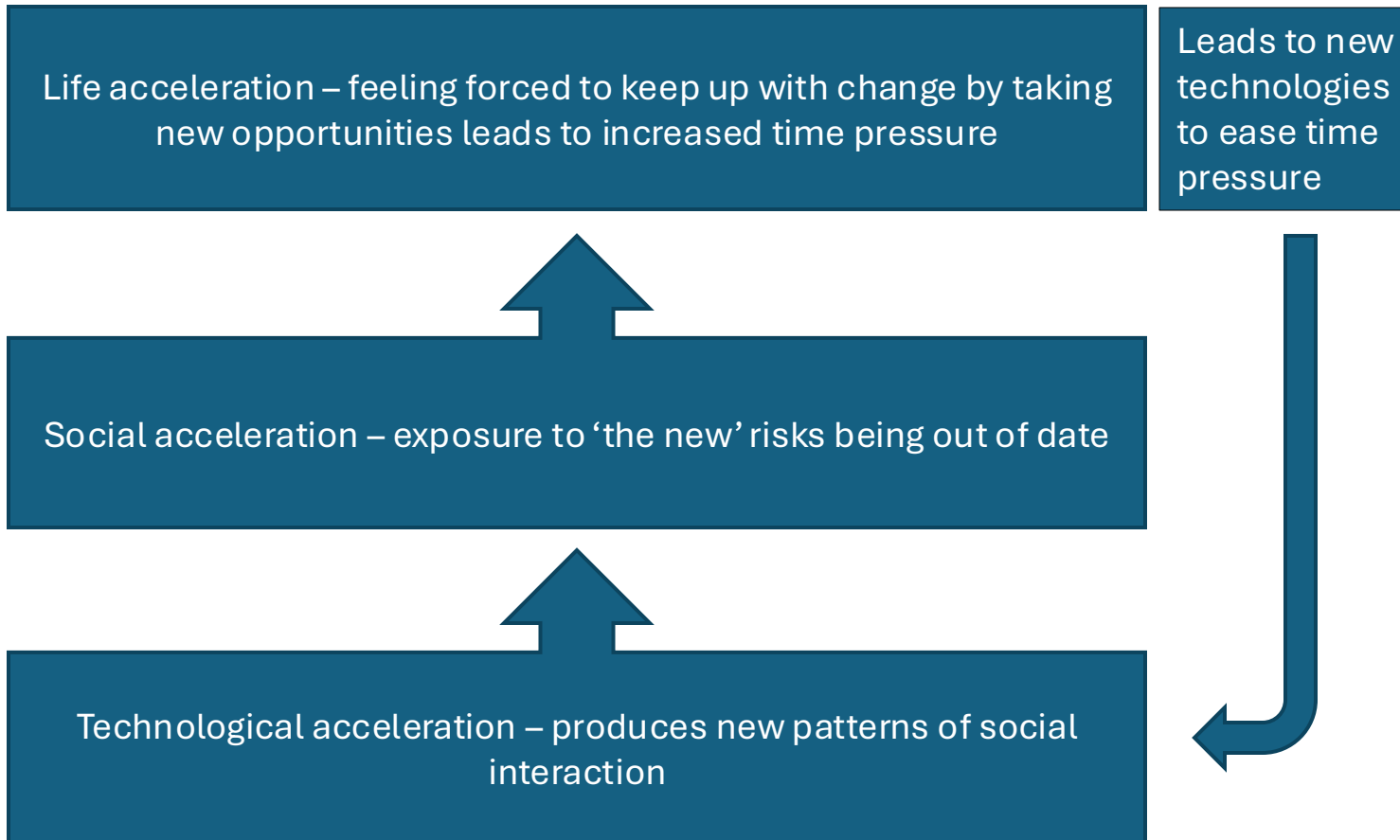
Presentation content

- Study details
- Social acceleration, care and qualities
- Sample qualitative data and coding
- Insights

Study details

- Family Mobilities 2023 (Cardiff University): Survey (244); 2 x focus group
- Making Mobile Mums 2010-2012 (UEL): 20 participants in London (2 x in-depth interviews; social network mapping, travel diaries before after birth of first child)

Social Acceleration Cycle



- The fulfilled life increasingly synonymous with the 'filled full' life: cramming in all there can be, because there is no next time.
- A self-contradictory cycle: new technologies that we utilize to maximise our time, produce new possibilities of experience: most technologies yield a net decrease in the ratio of actual to possible experiences.
- Scheduling a key obstacle to the fulfilling life: ever-denser web of deadlines required by multiplying social spheres
- Routinisation: consistent patterns easier to manage, but mobile ICTs enable real-time reconfiguration which requires more flexible physical mobility

Defining care

Care: 'physical and emotional labour for self and/or others'

Three forms of caring relation:

- Self-care: activities that are directed towards maintaining/ enhancing our own well-being (staying safe, enjoyment, being active, relaxing etc)
- Familial care: activities directed toward maintaining/ enhancing the wellbeing of others (e.g family and friends) (staying safe, shopping, chaperoning etc)
- Environmental care: activities directed toward maintaining/ enhancing local and natural environments

(Bowlby 2012:2101; Hobson 2006)

From care to qualities

- Quality: ‘a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by a person or thing’
- All products and services have qualities – not natural or inevitable but ‘chosen’ and manipulated to maximise the utility / attractiveness of the product/ service for a particular task / buyer in a market
- (Mobility) service users attempt to align what they are trying to achieve (doing the shopping, tight scheduling, maximising time with their children, going rock climbing, relaxing...) with specific modal qualities (speed, flexibility, load carrying, cost, activity level etc.) that enable them to achieve their goal

Mediating qualities

We don't all prioritise the same qualities even if we are trying to achieve the same thing: qualities are mediated by a range of (additive) factors including:

- **stuff required to achieve a practice;**
- **social/ sexual identity;**
- **mental/ physical health condition;**
- **cost;**
- **family constitution (eg single/ dual parent, number/ age of dependents)**
- **Weather**
- **Time of day**

Coding framework

- **Goal** – what we are trying to achieve
- **Qualities** – what is important to achieving the goal
- **Mediators** – what shapes how important a quality is
- **Outcome:** mode choice

Self-care
Accompaniment (Q)
Comfort (Q)
Enjoyment (Q)
Flexibility (Q)
Load carrying (Q)
Positive affect (Q)
Productivity (Q)
Safety (Q)
Sustainability (Q)

Familial care
Accompaniment (Q)
Comfort (Q)
Enjoyment (Q)
Flexibility (Q)
Load carrying (Q)
Positive affect (Q)
Productivity (Q)
Safety (Q)
Sustainability (Q)

Practice and familial care

"When I compare my childhood with my children's childhood, [what we have] allowed them to access is ridiculous. They have had access to so much more extracurricular activity than I ever did, and I think it's largely down to the fact that my mum couldn't get us there." (Group 1:4,2)

"On a Tuesday I'm working from home, so I can go and pick daughter number two up, bring her back home, after school club, go and pick daughter number one up and bring her back home... no, sorry, take her to Cardiff Met where she plays basketball, pick her up from Cardiff Met and take her to the Heath where she plays football, pick her up from football, bring her home, feed her tea, get her shower, then take her to Explorer Scouts out Rumney way. Then go and collect her from there and bring her back home." (Group 1:6,5)

Practice and familial care

"On a Tuesday I'm working from home, so I can go and pick daughter number two up, bring her back home, after school club, go and pick daughter number one up and bring her back home... no, sorry, take her to Cardiff Met where she plays basketball, pick her up from Cardiff Met and take her to the Heath where she plays football, pick her up from football, bring her home, feed her tea, get her shower, then take her to Explorer Scouts out Rumney way. Then go and collect her from there and bring her back home." (Group 1:6,5)

Coding

Goal: Familial care

Qualities:

flexibility;
reliability;
load carrying;
accompaniment

Mediators: Family composition; number of activities; distance

Scheduling and familial care

"So my commute doesn't finish from four o'clock in the afternoon when I finish work until nine o'clock in the evening when she comes home from that last club. So, for five hours I am all over the place. I don't have any more than forty-five minutes in any one place at any one time." (Group 2:8)

"Flexibility is probably the greatest from a bike or a car because you've got your own vehicle that you can access when you need it, you're not relying on public transport. I hate anything in life where I have to give something fixed time." (Group 2:8)

Public transport and scheduling

"It would take me two bus journeys to get to the office, so I'd have to go along the road into the centre of Cardiff and then find a way either by bus or walking to the office, which, all in all, would probably take twice as long as me just driving. So, it doesn't feel very convenient." (Group 1:2)

"I'd have to go on those two buses and then change to get to any part of the city. So, where I am, the most convenient route is to go straight onto the bypass or the motorway to get anywhere. It would double my journey if I ever thought of any kind of public transport. I did contemplate it because I've recently come back to work in January after maternity, and I contemplated doing the park and ride because I didn't want to pay for parking for one day a week, essentially. Then they stopped it in January, so it's only available to people that work in the hospital. So, again, it's either the car or take three journeys. Then obviously, having young children, if there are any issues and I need to leave work, I don't really want to be taking two buses or a taxi to get home and sort them out, so convenience, definitely." (Group 1:6)

Public transport and scheduling

"I'd have to go on those two buses and then change to get to any part of the city. So, where I am, the most convenient route is to go straight onto the **bypass or the motorway to get anywhere**. It would **double my journey** if I ever thought of any kind of public transport. I did contemplate it because I've recently come back to work in January after maternity, and I contemplated doing the park and ride because I didn't want to **pay for parking** for one day a week, essentially. Then they stopped it in January, so it's only available to people that work in the hospital. So, again, it's either the car or take three journeys. Then obviously, having **young children**, if there are **any issues** and I need to leave work, I don't really want to be taking two buses or a taxi to get home and **sort them out**, so convenience, definitely." (Group 1:6)

Coding

Goal: Familial care

Qualities:

time saving

flexibility;

accompaniment

Mediators: **cost**;

family composition; **proximity**

Practices and stuff

"Weekends are different. Me and my husband enjoy rock climbing, and rock-climbing venues are not easy to reach by public transport or cycling, so we usually drive to the countryside carrying a lot of gear as well, so it's convenient to use the car" (Group 2:4)

"We bought an estate on the basis of putting our bikes in it - back to bikes again - but it wasn't just about that, it was about having the family, and when you've got small children, everyone seems to have more and more stuff, but you don't have to worry about the stuff because you can just put all the coats in, all the gear in. If it's a day out somewhere, you default to the car because it feels like more of an adventure when you've got the distance to travel. It's your adventure as a family, and you can leave when you're ready. So, you can stop where you want, you can change your plans, you have the flexibility to say, 'We're really enjoying ourselves, shall we stay longer at the beach?', not, 'The bus is leaving'" (Group 2: 3)

Practices and stuff

"We bought an estate on the basis of putting our bikes in it - back to bikes again - but it wasn't just about that, it was about having the family, and when you've got small children, everyone seems to have more and more stuff, but you don't have to worry about the stuff because you can just put all the coats in, all the gear in. If it's a day out somewhere, you default to the car because it feels like more of an adventure when you've got the distance to travel. It's your adventure as a family, and you can leave when you're ready. So, you can stop where you want, you can change your plans, you have the flexibility to say, 'We're really enjoying ourselves, shall we stay longer at the beach?', not, 'The bus is leaving'" (Group 2: 3)

Coding

Goal: Self-care (being active);
Familial care (enjoyment)

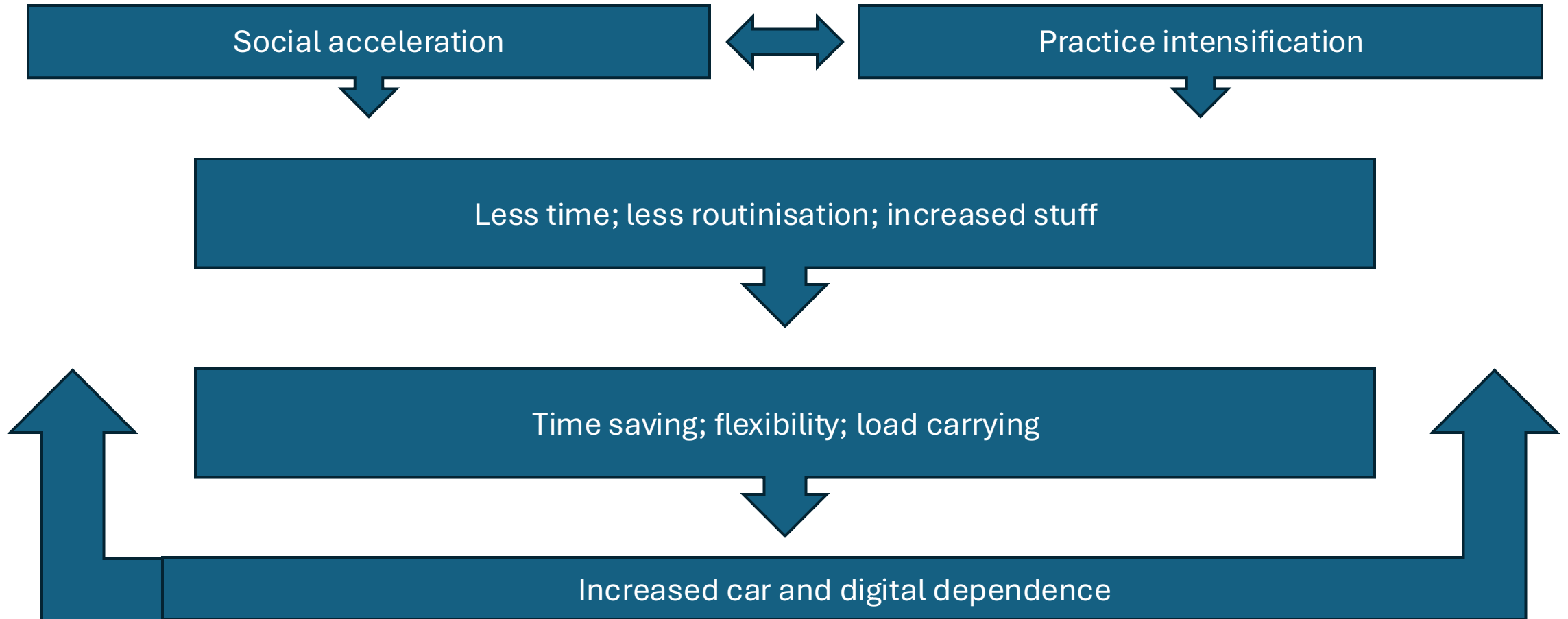
Qualities:

Load carrying
flexibility;
accompaniment
adventure

Mediators:

family composition; proximity; type of activity

Societal level sociological change (acceleration) is reshaping the qualities we value in transport



Transport outside of labour relations (commuting; leisure; social; reproduction): time \neq money; time = care

- In transport, time = money. If you are a government, that's probably right: moving goods or workers, delays mean lost economic productivity
- But what about mobility outside of labour relations?
- What do we achieve by saving time? What are we trying to maximise?
- Should we place care above money/ productivity when we think about non-wage mobility?

So What?

- Policy recommendation: Slow down social acceleration: uninvent smart phones; the internet; air travel; social media. Tell people that they can still lead a fulfilled life without doing very much, and without so much stuff.
- So how does a sociological perspective help us? Social life is accelerating and reshaping the qualities that citizens require from transportation systems: if we continue to produce mobility systems that don't accommodate these, how successful do you think they will be?
- Who will these mobility systems serve? Solo (mainly male, able bodied) commuters; those with no alternative; those deeply committed to environmental care
- Focus on transport service qualities situated within labour relations produces a fixation on minimising costs rather than maximising care: frequency; routing etc matter, but so too does design

Thanks for listening

Justin.spinney@uwe.ac.uk