Room for one more inside? Negotiating the Situated Practice of Organised Ride-sharing

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Abstract:

This thesis examines organised ride-sharing: the coming together of two or more people, otherwise unacquainted, in sharing a car journey for the fulfilment of their individual mobility needs. I use both online and offline ethnographic data to develop a situated, practice-based understanding of the social, cultural, and affective aspects of ride-sharing in the UK. In policy-focused discourse, ride-sharing is often talked about in terms of surplus or excess, the notion being that empty seats represent an untapped resource to be utilised in efforts to reduce energy demand. Yet, my research demonstrates that giving up an empty seat in their car does not only involve giving up otherwise empty space, but– for both drivers and passengers – involves taking on a range of obligations inherent in the relational practice of ride-sharing.

Negotiation of these obligations is subject to the physical circumstances of enactment, which the introduction of smartphone has substantially reconfigured. Digital platforms, which match drivers and passengers who have similar temporal and spatial configurations of mobility needs, have become integral to the communication infrastructure that enables this negotiation.

At the same time, procedural and relational complexities of practice enactments directly challenge or highlight the gaps in the scheme's governance.

For a majority of practitioners, organised ride-sharing is an infrequent undertaking, and an engagement that doesn't persist past a handful of trips. For a committed minority, however, the practice of ride-sharing is one that has become incorporated into their wider mobility practices, and their lives more generally. In this thesis, I have explored the practice as it is enacted by practitioners at either end of this spectrum, and points in between. In the process, I reveal how the existence of both standardisation and

flexibility in forms of practice, and in situated notions of virtue, enables organised ride-sharing to perpetuate.

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Declaration

I hereby declare this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Iain Goddard

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Chapter One: Introduction

I check my watch, again. Five minutes to go until I'm due to meet John, my driver for the next three hours. I've only spoken to him twice, each time by text. That's how they want you to do it on this ride-sharing platform where we met. A week earlier I had searched for drivers offering a lift from Lancaster to Edinburgh and found his listing. It was hard to gauge what sort of person he might be, what we might have in common. His messages were straight to the point. In the photograph on his profile, he looked friendly enough. I had tried to do the same in my communications, polite and relaxed, at least I hoped that's how I came across. I suggested he pick me up from the main road near the motorway, rather than drive to my house. It had felt safer back then. Now, I wasn't so sure. I glanced around, uncomfortable at the thought of how exposed I was at the side of that busy road, cars whooshing by in the dark. I pulled my hood up against the driving rain, shivered, then saw it. The bus stop where we had agreed to meet. I hurried over, grateful for the little shelter it promised me, and the small suitcase I was still trying to get used to. I had packed lighter than usual for the trip. The 'how to ride-share' section of the website said I should limit my luggage to one airline carry-on sized case. Not to risk putting the driver out. As I stood looking out into the rainy night, my mind wandered back ten years, when my younger self had stood at the roadside, six foot six and trying to work out how to appear non-threatening as I stuck out my thumb. The worst part of hitch-hiking was standing at the roadside for what felt like ages, unable to get a ride and powerless to improve the odds. At least back then the experience of travel and the pleasure of the company made the waiting worthwhile, and the uncertainty. I tried to hold on to that memory so it might reassure me about the journey I now faced.

A car pulled up next to me, stopped just a foot away. I jumped back, as much in surprise at the car as at the face staring at me from the dark window. It took me a moment to realise I was looking at my own reflection. In a rush I pulled my hood down, worried about the menacing impression I must be making on the driver, but before I could worry any more about the unfamiliar tensions of strangers meeting in the night, the window came down and a friendly looking man smiled out at me.

"Hi, you must be Iain?"

It was February 2017 that I found myself waiting for my first ride-share and, thus, entering the data collection phase of this research. This extract represents a mere few minutes in my experience of ridesharing, yet the multiple elements it draws together highlight the complexity of the practice: My awareness of timekeeping emphasises the significance of temporal sequencing; The shelter, visibility, and feeling of familiarity from being a bus-passenger all contribute to the significance of place; The fact that I was drawing on knowledge from my previous experience of hitch-hiking illustrates how ride-sharing is linked to other practices, from which I brought meanings and ways-of-doing; The significance of artefacts, in the ways their materiality both harbours and conveys knowledge of their use in practice.

My awareness of these different aspects is reflective of a theoretical orientation which leads me to understand that "individual behaviours are, primarily, performances of social practices" (Spurling et al. 2013:8). This is the essence of social practice theory: an approach that emerged in response to the limits of rational choice theories and other behavioural approaches that foreground the individual and "exaggerate the autonomy of individual choice" (p. 7). After all, despite widespread public awareness of, and sympathy for, the need to reduce energy demand, attempts to encourage carbon reduction have been largely unsuccessful. The potential for shared travel presents a case in point. In a Department for Transport commissioned paper, Cairns and her colleagues suggest that demand reduction initiatives could lead to a reduction in national travel levels by 11%, and peak travel levels by 21%, within a ten-year period. Among the initiatives named in the paper, titled *"Smarter Choices: Assessing the Potential to Achieve Traffic Reduction Using 'soft measures'"* (Cairns et al. 2008[1]) were "organised [ride-sharing] schemes, where individuals are encouraged to share their private vehicles for private journeys, also known as 'car-pooling' or 'ride-sharing'," (p.3). Yet, if ride-sharing and similar initiatives offered such an effective and apparently straightforward

[1] This paper published in the journal 'Transport Reviews' was an overview of the original report by Cairns et al. (2004)

strategy for energy demand reduction, why is the practice not widely established among transport users in the UK?

For practice theorists, the answer to this question, at least, is simple: because humans do not make what might appear to be, objectively speaking, “smarter choices”. Rather, they make decisions that relate, first and foremost, to their engagement in practices. As Spurling and her practice theorist colleagues observe, “Whether electricity, gas, petrol or water, resources are not consumed for their own sake, but rather to enable people to take part in practices that are required to live a normal, comfortable and both socially and personally acceptable way of life.” (Spurling et al. 2013:10). With a specific focus on the topic of shared travel, Golightly et al. (2019) note that travel choices “do not conform to traditional models of rational analysis, but are more associated with affective influences [...], logistics and flexibility [...] and factors of trust and of sharing social space”. (p. 1).

This, then, is the foundational premise of this research: In asking how people come to know how to ride-share, my interest is not limited to the individual and the ways in which their personal values and attitudes shape their behaviour. Rather, my research looks beyond these to the ways in which “routine, convention, and the everyday constraints of resources, infrastructures and institutions” shape, and are, in turn, shaped by, ongoing engagement in practice (Spurling et al 2013:8). To be clear, this does not mean I am disregarding people’s motivations for ride-sharing, but that it pays attention to individuals as “‘bodily and mental agent[s]’ and as the ‘carrier[s]’ of a practice,” (Olohan 2021:18, quoting Reckwitz (2002:50). Thus, the individual is approached as “a carrier of patterns of bodily behaviour and also of routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring,” (Olohan 2021:19).

Ride-sharing is, of course, a specific kind of social practice in that it involves travel. As the practice-turn was occurring within the social sciences in the early years of the 21st Century, so too a turn towards ‘mobilities’ was taking place in a multitude of disciplines with an interest in movement and travel (see, for example, Hannam, et al. 2006; Sheller & Urry 2006). The mobilities paradigm emerged in response to a frustration later summed up by Urry’s that “There is too much transport in the study of travel and not enough society and thinking through the complex intersecting relations between society and transport," (Urry, 2007: 20). The way forward - as described by the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe, 2021) - was a shift in focus towards "how social and material realities are made in and through the movement, blocked movement or immobility of people, goods, resources, ideas, and information." The ontological connections between mobilities and practice theories are evident in texts from the decades before the 'emergence' of the two fields. De Certeau's (1984) classic work on *The Practice of Everyday Life* focused on a mobile practice, namely walking in the city. With this thesis, I join a growing number of scholars engaging with the study of mobilities using a practice-centred approach (Larsen, 2008; Lorimer 2011; Bale, 2011; Dewsbury 2011; Laurier 2008; DeLyser 2011; Watson 2012; Aldred and Jungnickel, 2013; Benson, 2011; Hui, 2013; Cass (Chan and Shaheen, 2012)& Faulconbridge, 2016; Cass & Faulconbridge, 2017).

1.1 What is ride-sharing?

Before going any further, I need to clarify what the term 'ride-sharing' is used to signify in the context of this thesis. It is worth noting that the terms ride-sharing, car-sharing, lift-sharing, car-pooling, among others, are used widely and interchangeably in public discourse to refer to a range of shared mobility practices. This confusion is, in no doubt, due to the fact that these are newly emergent practices, closely related to one another and being undertaken in various forms across the globe. This is illustrated by the example of sharing a ride to the workplace as it features in two popular TV series: In the USA, *The Late Late Show with James Corden*'s 'Carpool Karaoke'[2] and, In the UK, the BBC series *Peter Kay's Carshare*[3], both of which depict shared occupancy of a single vehicle for the ostensible purpose of commuting.

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[2] A segment featuring in-car interviews and performances with celebrities during Cordon's commute to work. The most popular of these clips currently has over 245 million views on YouTube (Cordon, 2016)

[3] The show depicted two colleagues commuting together through a work-place initiative. It was broadcast between 2015 and 2018 with a peak audience of 8.47 million live television viewers (BARB, 2021)

Confusingly, both terms ‘carsharing’ and ‘carpooling’ are both widely used to refer to the shared occupancy of a vehicle during a specific journey and to individual access to a shared vehicle; two fundamentally different forms of practice. Marsden et al. (2019) classified these two approaches to shared mobility using the broad categories of ‘sharing trips’ and ‘sharing vehicles’. The practice of sharing vehicles involves communal access to a vehicle, or fleet of vehicles, which are made available to multiple users who drive these vehicles themselves. I refer to this as ‘car-sharing’ but do not examine the practice in this thesis. Sharing trips, on the other hand, involves multiple people travelling together in one vehicle. I refer to this practice as ‘ride-sharing’, which is the subject of my investigation. The primary reason I have chosen to use the term ‘ride-sharing’ over all others is that - to my knowledge - the term is not used to refer to the provision of communal access to vehicles. Secondary reasons include the prevalence of this use of the term ‘ride-sharing’ in the wider academic literature and, increasingly, in the public vernacular.

Yet, it seems there is no perfect solution to the problem of terminological confusion. The term ‘ride-sharing’ is, at times, used in the academic literature to refer to another sort of mobility provision, namely, mobile data-enabled private hire taxi services such as Uber and Lyft. For the purpose of this research, I will refer to these as ‘ride-sourcing,’ a term borrowed from Rayle et al. 2016. These services have not traditionally been part of discussions on shared mobility, yet, over the past few years they have begun to develop taxi-sharing options, enabling users to book a ride at a lower cost if they are prepared to share with an unknown third party (Marsden et al., 2019:14). With these new options, ride-sourcing services have been included in several studies of shared travel in which the practice has been termed ‘shared ride-sourcing’, (Rayle et al. 2016), and ‘ridepooling’ (Marsden et al., 2019).

As this short overview indicates, there is no one-size-fits-all classificatory scheme to deal with the multiple and various forms of shared mobility, yet the diagram (Figure 1) offered by Marsden et al. (2019, adapted from Golightly et al. 2019) is a useful indicative guide.

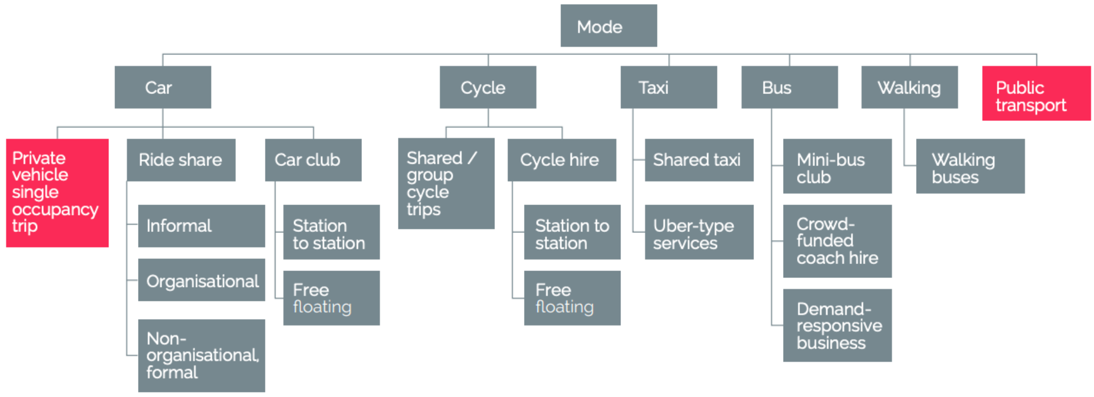

Figure 1: Common Shared travel modes (Marsden et al. 2019, drawing on Golightly et al., 2019)

1.2 Variants of ride-sharing

Having clarified that my study attends specifically to the shared occupancy of individual vehicles, I can now examine the various forms this takes. This task is aided by the work of Furuhata et al. (2013), who present a comprehensive classification of these systems, echoing those described by Chan and Shaheen (2012). Within this overarching category, the first distinction to make is between what are termed 'unorganised' and 'organised' forms of ride-sharing (Furuhata et al. 2013:29). In its unorganised form, ride-sharing can be undertaken by friends, family, and acquaintances, as indicated by Chan and Shaheen's (2012) use of the phrase 'acquaintance-based ride-sharing'. This form of ride-sharing, they point out, "has a long history," (Furuhata et al. 2013:30). Even beyond informal networks, ad-hoc side-sharing has been practiced, for example, in the form of hitchhiking (Laviolette 2020).

Organised ride-sharing, by contrast, is "operated by agencies that provide ride-matching opportunities for participants without regard to any previous historical involvements," (Furuhata et al 2013: 30, drawing on Dailey et al., 1999). In their classification, Furuhata et al. divide such service providers into the categories of 'service operators' and 'matching agencies'. Inevitably, the boundaries between these categories often blur but, broadly speaking, service operators provide services using their own vehicles and drivers. In the UK, an example of this is community transport services, which provide mobility resources for vulnerable and isolated people on a not-for-profit basis (see CTA, 2018). As Furuhata et al. (2012) observe, in such cases, "most of the decisions are made by service operators while participants simply decide whether or not to partake," (p. 30). Matching agencies, on the other hand, facilitate ride-sharing by matching individual car drivers intending to make journeys with passengers looking for lifts. In many cases, this takes place among work-place colleagues looking to share their commute. Lastly, and most importantly for this thesis, is organised ride-sharing between assumed strangers facilitated by regionally or nationally-focused matching agencies.

1.3 Ride-Sharing in the UK: Past and Present

Organised ride-sharing between strangers is a variant that has emerged relatively recently, largely as a result of the development of digital communication technologies. This intersection of technology and transport has encouraged a flurry of research over the past two decades. Prior to this, however, academic accounts of organised ride-sharing in the UK are limited, with very few studies addressing the practice prior to the 1970. While governments elsewhere, for example, in the United States, had been actively incentivising ride-sharing (Bonsall 1981), authorities in Britain had been somewhat circumspect. Bonsall suggests that "the availability of North Sea oil, and the relatively highly developed public transport system, meant that there was no necessity to seek out the supposed benefits of car sharing as avidly as in the U.S.," (p. 35-36). Interest in the subject did, however, lead to a number of UK-based research projects during the 1970s, and, in the later years of the decade, organised ride-sharing was mentioned in several parliamentary debates (Gunn, 2018). In particular, these referenced the provision of transport services in rural areas. Rural isolation was increasingly becoming a problem due to the contraction of public transport services in the context of rapid increases in car dependency. This was resulting in increased social disadvantage among groups for whom access to mobility was limited (for more in transport inequality, see Mullen 2012; 2019). Examples of localised shared private transport schemes were identified as a means through which access to mobility could be efficiently provided in areas where demand was low (Gunn 2018). These debates culminated in legislation in the *Transport Act 1978* (c. 55) amending existing licencing so as to allow "a private car driver to receive payment from passengers so long as the payment did not entail a profit," (Bonsall 1981: 36). Greening and Jackson (1984) note that, prior to 1978, the only places in which shared journeys could be advertised were places of worship and parish magazines. It was only with the amendments made by this legislation that people were allowed to advertise as social clubs and work sites. Two years later, the T*ransport Act 1980* (c. 34) further relaxed the rules to the point where all forms of advertisement were permitted (Greening & Jackson, 1984:108).

As Gunn (2018) notes in his *Foresight Report: The History of Transport Systems in the UK,* though the environmental effects of "coal-burning steam trains, petroleum-fuelled and carbon-emitting cars, buses and lorries" had been acknowledged two decades earlier, "it was only after 1970 that a wider environmental awareness emerged in Britain," (Gunn 2018:25). With an increasing awareness of the problems of transport-related pollution, in the early 1980s, parliamentary debate on ridesharing extended focus to the potential benefits in urban contexts. Proponents argued that ride-sharing could play a cost-effective part in the reduction of urban congestion and fuel use[4]. Yet, ride-sharing initiatives aimed at achieving these reductions were generally limited to commuting, assumedly because organising shared travel among a specific workforce was more feasible. Following the deregulation of public bus services set out in the *Transport Act 1985* (c.67) and its impact on local government transport support budgets, organised ride-sharing was further considered as an alternative means of mobility provision (Morency 2007). Yet, despite this sustained interest among policy-makers, it was not until 20 years later, in 2005, that the Department for Transport report '*Making Car Sharing and Car Clubs Work*' (DfT, 2004) was published. The report drew on multiple case studies of ride-sharing schemes in operation around the UK, most of which examined shared travel associated with commuting and delivered through schemes supported by large scale employers. Until 2018, this remained the only substantial government report specifically focused on ride-sharing.

Since the turn of the 21st Century, the rapid and ongoing emergence of communication technologies has revolutionised shared mobility practices (see Chan & Shaheen, 2012; Siddiqi & Buliung, 2013). By significantly increasing the ease with which practitioners can communicate with (or be contacted by) collaborators, these technologies serve to

[4] HC Deb 25 June 1980 vol 987

reconfigure the circumstances under which ride-sharing is considered a viable travel option. The integration of these technologies has been facilitated by the development of online ride-sharing platforms, owned by ride-sharing scheme providers, such as Blablacar. The principal functions of these platforms are to provide access to journey-matching services and to support communications with other users (Buliung et al. 2010). Where in the past, this had been facilitated by notice boards in communal areas, newspaper advertisements, or 'hand-matched' through a third party (Pratsch, 1975), online platforms now allow digital communication. To return to Furuhata et al.'s (2013) classification, these, then, are 'matching agencies' that facilitate organised ride-sharing between assumed strangers (p.30).

1.4 Organised ride-sharing via matching agencies

The process of arranging travel via the sort of organised ride-sharing investigated in this thesis relies on a series of communication exchanges between driver and passenger(s). For the most part, these exchanges take place through the online platforms to which participants have subscribed. Thus, central to development of organised ride-sharing in the UK has been the recent emergence of private companies established to provide the online tools that enable ride-sharing to be carried out. The main service they provide involves enabling ride-sharers to communicate mobility needs between one another, matching drivers with spare seats with potential passengers looking to travel. The schemes also offer various additional services, including access to user profiles, secure payments, direct messaging, priority parking, and travel insurance. This thesis examines the platform provided by Blablacar, globally the largest ride-share scheme. Of the other available platforms in the UK, the most popular include Liftshare and goCarshare, although ride-sharing is also organised through Facebook where groups have been set up to arrange ride-sharing between specific towns or cities.

The various ride-sharing schemes in operation differ in terms of the services they provide, and the audience to which they cater. Blablacar primarily focuses on organised ride-sharing, as defined in the previous section. Drivers post their proposed trips, which are uploaded to an online database. Passengers may then view these trips in order to identify a driver with whom they wish to travel. Blablacar operates on the basis of charging a commission on these journeys. Trips advertised on the platform tend to involve intercity travel, with journeys typically several hours in length. A number of UK ride-sharing schemes focus on specific circumstances of travel - for example, workplace commuters, festival attendees, and students returning to university towns. Indeed, these schemes also work together with other organisations to actively draw new recruits into the practice. These include local and national government bodies promoting ride-sharing as a sustainable transport initiative, businesses encouraging employees to share travel in order to reduce localised congestion, and event organisers, again, with a focus on reducing congestion caused by an influx of attendees. Blablacar, however, professes no such focus. And while other schemes present ride-sharing as a social or environmental endeavour, Blablacar presents the practice as a convenient means of travel through which its users can save money compared to the alternatives of travelling alone or via public transport (Blablacar, 2021a).

The first version of the platform that would become Blablacar was launched in France 2006 under the name Covoiturage.fr (CHAFEA, 2017: 7). Ten years later, in 2017, the platform had amassed more than 40 million members across 22 countries and was facilitating over 12 million shared journeys covering more than 3 billion kilometres of road (ibid.). As detailed in Figure 2, the platform had expanded to 15 EU countries: France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia and Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom, where Blablacar was introduced in 2011. Outside the EU, the platform was also available in Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Serbia, India, Mexico, and Brazil (ibid.).

Year	Country	Website	Acquisition
2004 2013	France	covoiturage.fr renamed BlaBlaCar.fr	
2009 2012	Spain	Comuto.es Re-named BlaBlaCar.es	
2011	United Kingdom	BlaBlaCar.com	
2012	Italy	BlaBlaCar.it	PostoinAuto.it[31]
	Portugal	BlaBlaCar.pt	
	Poland	BlaBlaCar.pl	Superdojazd[32]
	Netherland	BlaBlaCar.nl	
	Luxembourg	BlaBlaCar.fr	
	Belgium	BlaBlaCar.be	
2013	Germany	BlaBlaCar.de	Carpooling.com (2015)33
2014	Ukraine	BlaBlaCar.com.ua	Podorozhniki[34]
	Russia	BlaBlaCar.ru	Podorozhniki
	Turkey	BlaBlaCar.com.tr	
2015	Hungary	BlaBlaCar.hu	AutoHop[35]
	Croatia	BlaBlaCar.hr	AutoHop
	Serbia	BlaBlaCar.rs	AutoHop
	Romania	BlaBlaCar.ro	AutoHop
	India	BlaBlaCar.in	
	Mexico	BlaBlaCar.mx	Aventones[36]
2016	Slovakia	sk.BlaBlaCar.com	Jizdomat[37]
	Czech Republic	BlaBlaCar.cz	Jizdomat
	Brazil	BlaBlaCar.com.br	

Figure 2: Blablacar's international expansion (CHAFEA, 2017:13)

A 2016 article in Business Insider by editor-in-chief, Jim Edwards, noted that "On paper, Britain is perfect Blablacar territory. Petrol is expensive. The trains are expensive, crowded, and service is often patchy. The roads are good. And millions of people need to make routine journeys between the major cities." (Edwards, 2016). Yet, five years after its national launch, and despite significant capital investment, Blablacar had made the decision to "defocus" its efforts in the UK, continuing to develop its services in other locations. In 2017, Blablacar CEO Nicolas Brusson was quoted as saying that "Western European markets are relatively similar, except in the U.K. where [Blablacar] never really took off. It sort of works but it's nothing exciting," (Brusson, 2017). Elsewhere, Brusson has been vocal in his opinion that the limited uptake of the platform in the UK is due to cultural differences, in particular, attitudes towards sharing (see Edwards, 2016).

From 2017, the Blablacar platform and app remain in service in the UK, albeit with a reduced active presence. And while the initiative may never have taken off in the way it has in other European countries, the app and platform remain in use. Despite the UK being a significant outlier for Blablacar in terms of global ride-sharing uptake, little research has been undertaken into how and why this has become the case. The implication, in Brusson's words, is that the UK population is not predisposed to sharing travel. This sentiment was refuted by the founder and CEO of rival ride-share scheme Liftshare, Ali Clabburn, who has been outspoken in his dismissal of the notion that British people are too socially awkward to ride-share. In a 2017 interview with *The Guardian* newspaper, Clabburn conceded that the impact of ride-sharing in the UK had been limited, but suggested this was "an issue of education':

> *"We need to make more people aware of the option and let them know it's easy to find people they have something in common with [...] For some people sitting together in silence is totally fine, or playing the radio is fine, or letting other people have a snooze is fine, [...] but many people who give lift sharing a go find it's interesting to have a chat and get to know people,"*
>
> **(Clabburn, 2017)**

After all, as Marsden et al. (2019) note, almost 40% of car journeys in the UK *are* shared with at least one other person (Marsden et al., 2019, citing Department for Transport, 2018). Moreover, they argue, "unless we deliver on sharing, our creative capacity for transport innovation could simply support the delivery of a more individualised transport system which creates higher demand futures" (p. 4).

1.5 Research objectives

My research sets out to develop a situated, practice-based understanding of organised ride-sharing. In doing so, it addresses the research questions:

1. ***How do participants come to know how to practice organised ride-sharing?***
2. ***What are the different meanings attached to sharing a ride?***
3. ***What is negotiated by ride-sharers when they come together to share a journey, and how are these negotiations enabled?***
4. ***What is the significance of the differences in roles between 'driver' and 'passenger' in organised ride-sharing, beyond who is 'in control' of the vehicle?***

In developing these questions, my aim has been to attend to the ways in which ride-sharers negotiate the collaborative aspects of performance. After all, when compared with conventional travel by car, ride-sharing represents a reduction in autonomy, and involves collaboration with - if not dependence on - other practitioners who are relative strangers. This reliance on cooperation between strangers is often cited as a reason for people's reluctance to ride-share. To refer back to the tenets of social practice theory, noted above, it is a focus on such behavioural barriers, drivers, and attitudes that make the concept of ride-sharing seem difficult from a current policy perspective. As another example, when asked if they would be willing to give up their cars or to share ownership of vehicles, "many people struggle," (Marsden et al. 2019). Yet, as Marsden et al. argue*,* practice theory and mobility approaches challenge us to consider whether "these answers come from asking the wrong sort of question," (p.3). After all, "People already share their mobility today quite extensively. They used to share more, even in the recent past. And there are places where greater levels of sharing are normal," (p. 3). This, then, guides my approach in this study, in which I refrain from asking 'Why *don't* many people in the UK ride-share?", to instead ask, observe, and develop a situated, practice-based understanding of how some *do*.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the research paradigms of mobilities and social practice and provide an overview of the associated literature. These are the two main areas of research that have influenced my practical and analytic approach to this thesis. My interest in these two fields comes, in part, from my position as a researcher based at Lancaster University's DEMAND Centre, wherein theories of social practice provide a focus for the conceptualisation and analysis of energy demand and related social phenomena. At the same time, my specific interest in shared travel led me to connect with the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe) - also based at Lancaster - and, in particular, John Urry, with whom I was able to spend time before his passing in 2016. These relationships encouraged me to incorporate contemporary research on mobilities into my own work. In particular, I was interested in how the epistemologies of mobilities, and practice theory speak to one another. Beyond the institutional settings in which this project has developed, my work connects with the wider fields of sustainable consumption, environmental studies, and human geography. These are all fields in which analytical approaches grounded in theories of social practice and mobilities have recently gained traction. In particular, the two have transformed the ways in which social researchers have engaged with the study of transport and related aspects of social life.

The emergence of a 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006) can be viewed as a response to the social change related to the increasingly varied time-space affordances that technological advances provide. Broadly speaking, the mobilities approach is framed as a means by which these aspects of modern life can be accounted for in social research. A mobilities approach to social research draws attention to the mobile nature of everyday life. As Mullen (2012) observes, "Transport is needed in production and distribution of basic goods such as food, fuel, and material for shelter, [...] to reach or to be reached by health and emergency services," and can, indirectly, "sustain our lives and health through its role in enabling and creating economic activity." Moreover, "The economic activity that relies on transport can support not just our basic needs but also our comfort and well-being [...] Beyond this, living well may depend on our ability as individuals to move freely, with or without vehicular transport" (p.138).

Two prominent theorists in the field, Sheller and Urry (2004), describe the emergence of the mobilities paradigm as a response to the 'sedentarist' approach that they see as present in many geographical, anthropological, and sociological studies (p.208). The call for a greater appreciation of mobility has far-reaching implications for social research in that mobility is relevant, in some form, to almost all social contexts. Sheller (2013) describes this as reuniting "some of the more purely "social" concerns of sociology (inequality, power, hierarchies) with the "spatial" concerns of geography (territory, borders, scale) and the "cultural" concerns of anthropology and media studies (discourses, representations, schemas), while inflecting each with a relational ontology of the co-constitution of subjects, spaces and meanings." (p. 47) Hence, mobilities asks us to consider the interconnected social, cultural, and affective aspects of movement that have been neglected or simplified in much prior research. For example, as Kent notes, the preference for the private car has traditionally been conceptualised as "motivated by rational and utilitarian factors, such as the desire to save time or increase reliability" (p.726). And while more recent transportation studies have attempted to understand the "psychological appeal of the automobile, with an emphasis on the way the car fulfils various symbolic and emotional needs" (p.727), such approaches are still nonetheless limited to individual psychological and behavioural factors. On the other end of the spectrum from behavioural approaches, the majority of socio-technical carbon reduction models continue to assume that efficiency gains will be the result of technological advancement rather than reduction in use. As Spurling et al. (2013) observe, "Since the late 1990s, it has been increasingly recognised that the Innovating Technology approach alone will not achieve the speed, scale and depth of transitions required," (p. 7).

By the same note, one major contribution of social practice-based studies of travel and movement has been to extend the focal point of analysis to include not only the 'how' of transport (i.e., the modal choice), but also the 'why', this being intimately linked with the range of other connected practices that constitute everyday life. In keeping with the aims of this study, drawing together aspects of practice theory and mobilities encourages me to look beyond reductionist approaches to further reveal the complexity of mobile practices. In the case of organised ride-sharing, this would involve, for example, attention to the affective experience of the shared journey within the limited physical space of the car. To this end, both mobilities approaches and practice theory have brought an increased appreciation of the diverse methods via which researchers can gain deeper insights into aspects such as affect and emotion, largely absent from the technologically-focused studies that preceded the mobilities and practice turns (see Sheller, 2004; Hui, 2013; Kent 2015; Glaveanu & Womersley 2021). With the above in mind, I will now provide an overview of the aspects of mobilities and social practice theory relevant to my aim of undertaking an in-depth investigation into the performance of organised ride-sharing. I begin with the mobilities literature, focusing on what the field has to say about the car, a material arrangement central to enactments of ride-sharing.

2.2 Automobility

Today, the car holds an elevated position in mobilities literature, with the majority of research examining the car and driving in some form or another (Vannini, 2010). This comes as little surprise given that Sheller & Urry's (2006) article laying out of the new mobilities paradigm highlights the widespread failure to account for the significance of the car in reconfiguring social life and holds up this failure as evidence of the sedentary approach. In particular, Sheller and Urry observe that social theorists have often neglected to account for the 'overwhelming impact' of the car in transforming the time-space `scapes' of the modern urban/suburban dweller (p. 209). Yet, as Pooley et al. (2006) point out, the mid-20th Century transition away from public transport and towards the car as a means of commuting had little to do with the development of new transport technologies. Rather, they argue, this shift reflected the changing urban structure of cities. These two interrelated aspects are central to Sheller and Urry's notion of 'automobility' as a dominant socio-technical paradigm of the 20th Century: in sum, changes in urban structure perpetuate reliance on the car which, in turn, encourages further changes in urban structure.

As Kent (2015) observes, our endemic use of the private car, termed ‘automobility’, is a central feature of debates of social and environmental harm from climate change to lifestyle diseases such as obesity. As such, “automobility is regularly situated as a problem that needs urgent attention,” (p.276). Kent agrees with Sheller’s (2004) earlier works suggesting that, in order to consider what a transition “from today’s car culture [...] to more socially and environmentally ‘responsible’ transport cultures” might involve, we must first “re-evaluate the ethical dimensions of car consumption and the moral dimensions of car use” (p. 224). Sheller emphasises that these aspects are, in themselves, products of ‘car cultures’ associated with distinctive dispositions and ways of life. For Sheller, the growth of automobility as a dominant culture is bound with the production of a deeply embedded sense of emotional affect, embodied in the relationships between “people, machines, and spaces of mobility and dwelling” (p.221).

In suggesting how systems of automobility might be examined, Sheller and Urry draw on their earlier work, ‘The City and the Car’ (2000). In this publication, they set out six “interlocking components,” of automobility through which they suggest the automobile has developed a steadfast grip on modern life. These six components are: (1) the car as an object and the automotive manufacturing industry; (2) the car as a major object of individual consumption; (3) the powerful complex formed of other technically and socially connected industries (petroleum, house-building, advertising, etc.); (4) the car as a ‘quasi-private’ form of mobility that reorganises opportunities for everyday life, subordinating other forms of mobility; (5) major discourses on what constitutes a ‘good life’, specifically what is necessary for ‘an appropriate citizenship of mobility’; (6) the extensive environmental resource use associated with the automotive system, including its medical, social, and other consequences (pp. 738-9).

Although these components are collectively presented as key dimensions of mobility, point (4), in particular, stands out in relation to my specific aim of examining organised ride-sharing. As Sheller and Urry observe, the automobile emerged in the early part of the 20th Century as a ‘quasi-private’ form of mobility that was distinctive from other common modes of passenger travel in that it segregated those travelling within the vehicle from the external, public spaces through which they travelled (ibid.). The notion of the car as a ‘quasi-private’ space is particularly significant as a starting point for this thesis which develops the argument that, by inviting relative strangers into the vehicle, organised ride-sharing represents a significant reconfiguration of the car in terms of its position on a private-public continuum.

This notion of the transformation of public and private life through the automobile is developed further in Sheller & Urry (2003), in which the authors outline various interpretations of public and private. In doing so, they demonstrate the complexity involved in the task of interpreting a space as ‘private’ or, indeed, ‘public’. For example, is a household to be considered a private space when it is shared amongst multiple family members, receives electricity supplied through the national power grid, and has windows through which passers-by might observe its occupants? Equally, a bench in a public park might represent a space in which people might purposely occupy for the purpose of private reflection. This complexity is somewhat resolved by interpreting the ‘private sphere’ as pertaining to “the domestic, the familial, the personal, the bodily and the intimate inner world of the individual” (p.115 citing from Ariès & Duby, 1989; Elias 1982). But as Sheller & Urry (2003) note, even these abstract notions of private space can be undermined by, for example, radical feminist critiques that point to the intervention of the modern welfare state in various realms of domestic life (p. 117 citing Pateman, 1998). The automobile, in which ‘private citizens are cocooned within their iron cages of modernity’ (Sheller & Urry, 2003:115), but which travels on public roads that it occupies alongside other drivers and other road users, is equally difficult to categorically interpret as private. This is further complicated by mobilities theorists’ conceptualization of the ‘driver-car assemblage’ as an entity in itself, responsible for a range of social actions that have become routine and habitual, many of which are unique to the driver-car (Edensor, 2004; Dant, 2007). It is for these and other reasons that Sheller & Urry (2003) adopt the term ‘quasi-private’ in conceptualizing the transformative processes of automobility. As this thesis reveals, my research demonstrates how organised ride-sharing further complicates and disrupts the notion of the car as a private space. Building on the work of Sheller & Urry, I develop the argument that organised ride-sharing reconfigures the interior of the car into what might be considered a ‘quasi-public’ space.

This reconfiguration spurs the question: How do ride-sharers negotiate the spatial transformation of the car? To address this question, we must reflect on how the field of mobilities frames car travel as a private experience. As I note in the introduction to this chapter, reflecting on the significance of mobility as an embodied experience is a fundamental component of the mobilities approach that Sheller & Urry advocate. Sheller's article, *'Automotive Emotions: Feeling the car,'* (2004) provides an in-depth discussion of the affective experience of car travel from the perspective of the driver. In a later paper, Kent (2015) draws on Sheller to "centre the body as a site of attachment to the private car and propose that the physical sensations associated with being in, and in control of, the car, need to be considered in any challenge to its ongoing authority," (p. 272). These discussions encourage me to reflect on what might be lost – or, perhaps, gained – through changes brought about by participating in organised ride-sharing (from the perspective of the driver).

Elsewhere, mobilities theorists' have engaged with the experience of travelling as a passenger, albeit on more familiar terms with the driver than one might expect from organised ride-sharing. The resultant literature provides some insights into how drivers and passengers inhabit the car as a shared space, together. 'Passengering' is presented as a distinctive way of travelling in a car (as opposed to 'driving') and is incorporated into a variety of perspectives obtained through a range of methodological approaches. Laurier's (2008) study of 'Driving and "Passengering"' provides perhaps the most in-depth discussion, examining the social interactions between drivers and passengers in intricate detail, based on video analysis of recordings made within the vehicle. Laurier pays particular attention to the role of 'interior architecture of the car' and the 'front-seat-backseat geography' (p.12) in facilitating and hindering different forms of interaction. Yet, whether this accounts for the diversity of the passenger experience is perhaps questionable. Merriman (in Adey et al. 2012), for example, reflects on various historical contexts of passengering to illustrate the passenger as "a being whose embodied movements, experiences and subjectivity are politicized, socialized, technologized and encultured in a variety of different ways" (p.178). His observations suggest that to discount the passenger as a passive agent is akin to discounting the driver as an autonomous component within the assemblage of the vehicle.

In what might initially seem like a far-fetched example of diverse forms of passengering, McCormack (in Adey et al. 2012) uses a novel ethnographic approach of tracing our life experiences as passengers back to the car seat, buggy, swaddle, and womb: spaces are occupied through sleeping, squirming, seeing, feeling and playing. The parallels between these earliest forms of passengering and the sensory, material, and affective aspects of car journeys, experienced even as an adult, are made evident in the thick descriptions McCormack offers. Beyond car travel, McCormack's early-life examples are perhaps some of the few instances wherein the experience of passengering involves comparable intimacy and implicit relationality between driver and passenger. Certainly, this level of driver-passenger intimacy is rare in other modes of transport such as air, rail or bus. Indeed, Dant's (2013) work highlights the diverse nature of driver passenger roles, relationships, and identities asking the seemingly simple question of 'Who is a driver?' (p. 367) before going on to illustrate just how complex and multifaceted the answers to this question can be. As Dant points out, in many contexts, any answer will be inextricably linked to the question of 'Who is a passenger?' As he elaborates, 'In our contemporary culture we think of the passenger as a person who gets into the vehicle and is driven away by someone else (the car driver, bus driver or train driver). The driver is an active subject and the passenger a passive one; the driver initiates and steers mobility, the passenger gives themselves up to mobility steered by someone else' (p.367). Bissell (2013) draws out this connection by discussing the metaphysical relation between 'driving' and 'being driven' (p.184). For Bissell, to be driven is to submit to the power of the driver in a process that exchanges agency for an economy of ease. Yet, as Adey et al. (2012) observe, the presence of the passenger compels us to look beyond imagined solitary individuals on the move towards more complex 'compositional assemblages' (p.171) within which new relationships can emerge.

As Dant (2014) points out, the driver and the passenger 'are two contrasting subject positions associated within mobility in the twenty-first century, but their social and material relations are undergoing changes and are even converging.' (p. 367). Attention to passenger and driver interactions and experiences enables a mobilities approach to provide new perspectives from which car travel can be understood. Yet, it bears repeating that these extant works is on drivers and passengers familiar with one another prior to the journey. In this respect, Sheller & Urry (2003) refer to these interactions as the reproduction of private zones of domesticity (p.55). By contrast, most journeys in organised ride-sharing are undertaken with strangers. In this case, observations from the extant mobilities literature provoke questions about how interactions in the car may differ in these contexts, and the degree of formality ride-sharing introduces in this ordinarily "private" and "domestic" space.

The fact that ride-sharing is predominantly undertaken in collaboration with unfamiliar others means that Sheller & Urry's (2004) discussion of the transformative force of the car in the reconstitution of space from public to private is a key point of reference in my analysis. Yet, it is important to note that their observations are not limited to reflecting on space within the vehicle. They also reflect on the transformation of 'public space' into 'public roads', wherein spaces that were formerly available for a variety of uses – and users – become dominated by the automobile. Invoking de Certeau's (1984) work on 'walking in the city', they reflect on how travelling at great speed diminishes the extent to which the spaces travelled through can be sensually experienced. Critiquing this earlier work, Edensor (2004) argues that the 'motorscapes' of distinct material structures made familiar by driving through them are important aspects of our everyday mobile lives. In conceptualising these motorscapes, Edensor notes that the 'sense of place' to which they contribute is also subject to the rules and procedures that govern our movement through these spaces, represented materially by road signs, road markings, crash barriers, and other 'road furniture' (p. 108). In this regard, Merriman (2013) also observes how driving and the spaces of the road "have become associated with a diverse array of practices, affects, atmospheres, and cultural meanings and values". (p.202). We might, therefore, ask to what extent organised ride-sharing serves to reconfigure interactions with material structures external to the vehicle. Laurier (2008), for example, finds that the driver's perception of the roadway is altered by the presence of a passenger. With this in mind, it seems important to note that ride-sharing adds further actions through which these spaces are encountered as drivers drop-off and pick-up passengers, who wait for, board, and alight from the vehicle at particular points along the route. This leads me to reflect on how these actions further impact the ways in which spaces of and around the road are occupied.

Perhaps the closest mobile experience to organised ride-sharing comes from a further mobility mode – namely, hitch-hiking, the enactment of which could be described as decidedly disorganised. Hitch-hiking has a rich cultural history world-over, as Wald (2006) demonstrates through his review of translations of the concept from twenty different languages. Despite this cultural prominence, there has been little written about hitch-hiking in mobilities or the wider social sciences. Laviolette (2020) corroborates this observation, presenting his work as “the first comprehensive English language monograph within the humanities and social sciences on the phenomenon of hitchhiking in contemporary times” (p. vii). Elsewhere, Wald (2006) provides an emotive account of the interactions that can occur between a hitch-hiker and the drivers that pick them up. Although more a personal musing than academic account, his autobiographical account of a journey across North America reflects on past personal experiences and common socio-cultural perceptions of hitch-hiking to provide a depth of emotive detail. He romanticises the image of the hitch-hiker as a ‘lone-wanderer’, and observes that, within the relationship between driver and passenger, “there is no past or future to be overcome”. (p. 8) Wald celebrates the fleeting, transitory nature of the encounter, which he views as definitive of the experience. He also identifies that these encounters bring together individuals with diverse perspectives on the world outside the car. In this respect, he argues, the hitch-hiker stands to gain from other people’s knowledge of cultures and spaces that would otherwise remain inaccessible (p. 10). Wald speaks of feeling little risk of, for example, sexual violence, when traveling in cars with strangers. Yet, this is an issue that Carlson (1972) discusses at some length in her mini ethnography in Britain, wherein she describes how she and other female hitch-hikers she encountered felt particularly compelled to consider personal safety when planning their journeys. The contrast between her and Wald’s accounts highlights the fact that hitch-hiking – and, possibly, ride-sharing – is likely to be a very different experience for, for example, thirty-something white males, as opposed to people of other genders, races, ages, etc.

Accounts of travel via the shared space of public modes of transport – such as the bus, train, and plane – are, no doubt, of general interest in any study of travel. Yet, the specific insights generated by such studies refer to distinctly different spatial configurations than those that form the focus of my own work. Counter-intuitively, given the close physical proximity of passengers, public transport provides a degree of privacy, as the higher occupancy levels can mean passengers receive the anonymity of a crowd. This provokes Thrift's (1996:266) grotesque depiction of "an anonymised parcel of flesh which was shunted from place to place, just like other goods. Each of these bodies passively avoided others".

Interestingly, past configurations of public transport provide some observations that more closely parallel the spatial configuration of the car. For example, in their historical description of transport systems, Pooley et al. (2006) draw attention to the importance of the mail coach during the 18th and 19th Centuries, when it served as a means of travel for those people without access to a private horse-drawn carriage. Following one of the many distinctive methodologies advocated by proponents of a mobilities approach, Pooley et al. incorporate literary accounts into their research, including Charles Dickens' fictitious portrayal of travel by mail coach in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The author's juxtaposition of the sense of protection that the coach provides from external dangers alongside the sense of fear that one's travelling companions might have nefarious intentions suggests that travelling in close proximity to strangers might make for an uncomfortable journey. While such fictional accounts should not be assumed to accurately represent social phenomena, as cultural artifacts, they provide useful insights, particularly in circumstances where data is otherwise limited.

It is the use of a wide range of historical sources that enables Pooley et al. (2006) to reflect on the modes of travel favoured by different social classes at various points of history and based on the available technology of the time. In doing so, they note a preference for privacy on the basis that those who could afford it would minimise their contact with other people and maximise their control over the journey and their personal space (p. 256). At the same time, their observation that the wealthy were quick to adopt rail travel as it displaced the slower horse-drawn carriage indicates that this relationship is less straightforward than it may first appear. Again, this serves as a reminder that social class is a factor to consider when looking at the practice of ride-sharing, both in relation to drivers and passengers.

My aim in this review of mobilities literature has been to highlight how the conceptual ideas from this approach can be drawn on to present ride-sharing as a uniquely transformative travel mode. In particular, I have attempted to illustrate how my engagement with the field of mobilities has led me to reflect on the ways in which organised ride-sharing transforms the car into a shared space occupied by driver and passenger(s). As well as raising questions as to how this shared space is negotiated, these discussions highlight the differences between the practices of driving and passengering. This awareness has led me to further consider how ride-sharers might best be approached – both methodologically and analytically – in order to reveal the individual and relational specificities of these distinctive forms of practice. These are questions that, to date, remain largely unaddressed in the available literature on ride-sharing.

Incorporating a mobilities perspective into my response to these gaps in knowledge provides me with key concepts to guide my work. In particular, ideas about "passengering" as a practice separate to and distinct from driving, and the question of approaching the ride-sharing vehicle as a "quasi-public space" promise to be productive avenues in my research and analysis. In the hope of furthering understandings of human activity in motion, I now turn to review the relevant literature on practice theory and ask how this might be combined with mobilities perspectives to further academic understandings of ride-sharing as a situated yet mobile practice. In doing so, I follow a path previously taken by several other mobilities theorists who have recognised that a practice approach is compatible with the central concepts of mobilities. Indeed, although this connection is not always overtly recognised, the language of practice is mobilised throughout much of the mobilities literature including a significant proportion of that presented so far in this review. As the focus of this chapter shifts towards social practice I introduce some recent literature that is more overt in connecting the two.

2.3 Theories of Social Practice

I begin by discussing some of the literature from the mid-20th Century onwards that places a conceptual focus on practice at the forefront of social theory. It could be said that the origins of practice are also apparent in the work of earlier theorists, with the likes of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Kant, Durkheim, and Marx amongst the many through whom the origins of this approach have been traced. Given that others have previously provided detailed accounts of these philosophical foundations, in this review, I present an overview of the key concepts through discussion of more recent literature. I then discuss how practice approaches have gained traction during the 21th Century, focusing here on the work of Theodore Schatzki, and extract a number of themes that I take forward in my investigation of ride-sharing.

As Genner (2020:3) notes, the intention of work on practice that emerged around the turn of the 21st Century was to highlight the underestimated but fundamental role of practice in social life. In this sense, the growing appreciation of practice theory mirrors that of mobilities described in the preceding section of this chapter. In summarising the field, Schatzki (2016:27) identifies four tenets of practice theory: firstly, that "practices are enacted by multiple people and, in this sense, are inherently social". Secondly, "important social phenomena must be understood as dimensions of, constellations of, or rooted in practices." Thirdly, that "practices – or the actions that compose them – rest on something that cannot be put into words." This notion that "human activity rests on non-propositional knowledge" is articulated in the work of other theorists in the use of terms such as "know-how", "skill", "practical understanding", and "habitus". Fourthly, Schatzki's final tenet is that "practice theories develop with the ideas of two philosophers Heidegger and Wittgenstein, in the background" (Schatzki 2016:27). It was through their engagement with the work of these two thinkers that the notion of practice gained traction through the second half of the 20th Century as it was embraced by a number of prominent social theorists to whom Schatzki now refers as "first generation practice theorists" (p. 26).

In Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) work, practice had a notable influence on social research, particularly through generating social, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital and as a means of theorising habitus – the dispositions, habits, and skills we develop through our practical engagements in the world. Foucault's later works (e.g. Foucault, 1982) can be interpreted as operating with a praxeological framing, examining the way in which power is distributed via 'practices' which constitute professional disciplines and social institutions. Taylor (1971) makes use of the concept of practice to dispute the notion that ‘meanings and norms’ are formed as a set of individual actions. Rather, these should be seen as “modes of social relations, of mutual action” that exist not in the minds of actors but “out there in practices themselves” (p. 27). This application of practice-centred analysis in response to critique of behavioural approaches is a recurrent theme in practice literature. In her somewhat provocative publication ‘Beyond the ABC’, Shove (2010) challenges behaviour-based social interventions that she sees as having dominated environmental policy, particularly in relation to climate change (e.g., Stern, 2007). As Shove observes, such interventions are principally based on causal models of ‘drivers’ and ‘barriers’. At the same time, they tend to attach the caveat that these should be interpreted ‘holistically’ or ‘within a broader cultural context’ that detract from their applicable value (Shove, 2010: 1276). Shove sees a practice approach as capable of moving beyond these and other shortcomings of a behavioural approach. From the perspective of my research, focusing on ride-sharing as a practice – the meanings and norms of which are not confined to ride-sharers themselves – overcomes some of the drawbacks faced by research grounded in behaviour psychology. Specifically, a practice approach considers the ways in which meanings and norms are socialised.

For transport theorists, this notion of representing human activity by centring on the things people do (and say) rather than the people themselves is perhaps an easier concept to grasp than in other areas of social life. The ease in doing so is reflected in the frequent use of driving practices used as a conceptual example by practice theorists (e.g., Shove et al. 2012; Shove et al., 2015). Where practice theory is perhaps more progressive in this means of representation is in the ways in which this conceptual framing is used to reflect on the various ways in which different practices connect. This is demonstrated in the development of ‘practice theories’ that approach practice more directly.

Ortner (1984) is recognised as one of the first to coin the term ‘practice theory’ (Hui et al. 2017:1), albeit in summarising theoretical contributions made by others. She describes practice theory as a conceptual approach that focuses on the relationship “between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we call ‘the system’ on the other” (Ortner, 1984:148). Ortner notes that these relationships are omnidirectional, with the impact of practice on the system and of the system on practice both being of relevance. This position is further developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens. For Giddens (1984), social practices and their ordering across space and time represent the basic domain of study of the social sciences by which the recursive relationship between human activity and the social structure can be accounted (p. 2). Giddens, thus, presents practice as a means by which the importance of broad social structures can be accounted for, without overstating their influence as a determining force on the going-on of everyday life. To paraphrase Giddens, through the practice of ride-sharing, the constitution of ride-sharers as agents and the structural features (i.e., rules and resources) that shape their conduct 'are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality' (p. 25).

The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) raised the profile of practice as a useful concept in discussing knowledge and learning. Yet, it was not until the turn of the 21th Century, and what has been described as 'the practice turn', that a practice approach developed as a significant paradigm within social research more broadly. This increased interest came about perhaps most notably through the philosopher Theodore Schatzki, who has dedicated several decades of work to developing the philosophical foundations of his version of social practice theory as a conceptual approach. In the first of his many influential contributions, Schatzki (1996) mobilises Wittgenstein's notion that intelligibility and understanding as key features of human action and social structure, are located in practice. This position ontologically connects constructivist epistemologies, the likes of which are mobilised in the work of Lave & Wenger, to other social and cultural phenomena, such as those discussed by Giddens. In short, practice links knowledge and understanding with meanings and norms. Knowledge and learning have since remained prominent themes addressed by those who identify as practice theorists. In the context of my research on ride-sharing, a practice-based approach encourages me to ask how practitioners learn, in the course of 'doing,' to negotiate the changing space of the car. This aspect of practice theory is discussed in further depth in Section 2.3.2.

Schatzki et al. (2001) present a collection of essays that demonstrate what Shove et al. (2012:6) describe as a variety of positions "gathering under the practice banner but lacking the neatness of a definitive theoretical movement (p. 6). This echoes the work of another notable contributor to the recent practice literature, Andrea Reckwitz. His 2002 publication Towards a Theory of Social Practices has been drawn on in a number of publications to form the theoretical foundations in approaching practice-based research. Reckwitz reminds the reader that there is no unified theory of practice, observing a diverse body of research ostensibly adopting a practice approach. He draws on this work to develop the following often-quoted characterisation of a practice as:

> *"a routinized type of behaviour which constitutes of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge."* *(p.249)*

This year also saw the publication of Schatzki's *'The Site of the Social'* (2002), which provided a more comprehensive account of his conceptual position. Schatzki's framing identifies 'tasks', 'projects' and 'ends' as concepts by which 'doings and sayings' compose a given practice (p. 77). The structure through which the three interconnect essentially involves 'tasks' being undertaken as part of particular 'projects' which are, in turn, orientated towards particular 'ends'. As Schatzki sees it, "a practice always exhibits a series of ends that participants should or may pursue, a range of projects that they should or may carry out for the sake of those ends, and a selection of tasks that they should or may perform for the sake of those projects," (p. 80). Schatzki develops the concept of 'teleoaffectivity' to account for the emotional and motivational engagements that are connected to the orientation of goals and ends (Welch, 2020). The 'teleoaffective structure' of a practice, then, represents the range of normativised and hierarchically ordered ends, projects and tasks, along with 'emotions and moods' with which they connect (Schatzki, 2002:80). Schatzki relates the notion of 'normativity' to oughtness and acceptability in a way that is reminiscent of the notion of legitimacy deployed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Those performances recognised as belonging to particular practices generally fall within a range of configurations that are represented by the practice's teleoaffective structure. Schatzki's observation that this 'generally' occurs provides the conceptual space for mutations through which a practice-entity is able to evolve.

In this work, Schatzki also seeks to mobilise some of the concepts developed by other social practice theorists through his 'site ontology', building on Giddens' (1984) notion that practices link together to form wider complexes and constellations as a 'nexus' that forms the 'basic domain of study of the social sciences' (p. 2). Recognising the significance of the way in which practices are connected has become an important component of a practice approach. From this perspective, practices can also be described in the ways that their elements relate to other practices, and through the shared temporal and spatial settings in which they occur. Shove et al. (2012:81) suggest that practices can link together to form bundles and complexes. Bundles are seen to be "loose-knit patterns based on co-location and co-existence of practices. Complexes are described as "stickier and more integrated combinations". In further explaining the idea of complexes, Shove et al. take the example of driving. Using their model, driving can be seen as a combination of component practices (such as signalling, overtaking and manual operation) connecting together to form a complex of practices that we recognise as a single entity. Rather than using this concept of complexes, Røpke (2009) describes a practice as "clusters or blocks of activities where coordination and interdependence make it meaningful for practitioners to conceive them as entities" (p. 2491). Schatzki (2002) conceived of a network as consisting of connected practices, but also of material arrangements - i.e., artifacts, materials and technologies. For Shove (2017), although theorists such as Schatzki had provided detailed accounts of 'things' within and as part of social practice, less had been said on precisely how material entities figure in what people do (p. 156). Schatzki's later publication, Social Change in a Material World (2019) answers this critique, extending his earlier work on the material dimension of social phenomena. A particular feature of this work, and one of the reasons I have steered towards Schatzki's interpretation of the material component of practice, is his focus on conceptualising social phenomena, materiality, and social change in reference to contemporary digital media. With respect to ride-sharing, this provides a means by which the communication technologies and digital infrastructures that match drivers and passengers can be conceptualised. As Lord (2018) notes when applying social practice theory to examine the changing use of the tablet computer, "a focus on social practices provides a distinctive, novel and useful means of conceptualising how technologies and people come together, and how such configurations evolve and change over time" (p. 12). Section 2.3.1 presents further detail on how the connections between practices and material arrangements can be further understood.

2.3.1 Material Arrangements

Two of the key questions practice theorists ask about material arrangements and infrastructures is how these "support contemporary performances and [...] how they [...] affect the evolution and development of practices over time," (Hui 2013:2). Within the context of automobility, the most apparent material arrangement is the car, and perhaps the material infrastructures of the road system that aids the vehicle's navigation through various spaces via surfaces and signs. For my research, these material arrangements play a role in the analysis of ride-sharing through reflecting on things like the interactions that occur within the vehicle and the spaces in which people arrange to pick-up and drop-off passengers. I am also interested in the material arrangements of a digital nature that are principally involved in matching drivers and passengers but also serve other purposes. While it may seem unconventional to interpret digital resources that are interacted with via other devices such as the mobile phone and home computer as material, Schatzki is clear in his writing that they fall within his conceptualising of material arrangement. *"Digital communication embraces a set of communication practices that are carried out amid, with, and through multiple fixed or mobile arrangements with the help of electronic devices."* (p. 56)

Shove & Pantzar (2005) note that the early conceptual applications of practice through the likes of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1986) made little effort to account for material artifacts, infrastructures, and products. They see the latter reinvigoration of interest in social practice theory as going some way to redress this (Shove & Pantzar, 2005: 44). Elsewhere, materiality has a rich history in the social sciences, particularly through its relevance to phenomenology within which the sensory experiences of interaction with material artifacts is central to the ways in which we inhabit the world. Practice theory's application of materiality is, as Schatzki (2019) notes, more 'naturalistic' in its positioning (p. 53), opposing the notion that materiality cannot be separated from the experience of material phenomena or the meaning attached to this experience (Steinberg & Peters, 2015). For this reason, my review of literature focuses specifically on developing the concept of 'material arrangements' as they are understood by

Schatzki and other practice theorists, of which I will, henceforth, avoid describing as 'materiality' in order to avoid muddying the conceptual waters.

Schatzki (2019:52-3) uses the notion of 'material' to denote the physical-chemical composition of entities. As he sees it, these entities are diverse and not restricted to tangible objects. Thus, the examples he provides of human bodies, bacteria, rocks, pencils, software programs, computer processors, buildings, air, pools of water, water currents, eclectic currents, wind, sunlight, and the atmosphere are all, for Schatzki, to be interpreted as material arrangements. Schatzki then interprets their 'physical-chemical composition' as everything that 'makes up' an entity. On a most fundamental basis, this includes the atomic and molecular structures, such as the oxygen and hydrogen atoms that make up water and the molecular interactions that make it flow. Also included are the tangible ingredients or materials that humans incorporate into the entities that they make, such as the ink, glue, and paper that make up the pages of a book. More abstractly, Schatzki sees 'material' as an adjective that can be used to describe all of the 'properties, processes, and events' that relate to an entity, along with the structured 'causal powers' that produce them (p. 53).

As Shove et al. (2015:279) observe, the way in which Schatzki positions material arrangements as distinguishable from (but co-dependent to) practices is distinctive from the position of other practice theorists, notably from that of Shove et al. (2012) for whom material elements play a constitutive role in practices. Morley (2017) argues that this framing of material arrangements helps to avoid interpreting material phenomena as 'discrete and bounded physical entities' (p.83). For Morley (2017), Schatzki's positioning of material arrangements in relation to practice provides an opportunity to move beyond thinking about whether material phenomena are related to practice to consider *how* they are connected (p. 84). Schatzki (2019) describes different ways in which these relations between practices and arrangements can be conceived. "Forms of participation are modulated and mediated through material relations" (Morley, 2017:85). "Automated machines have powerfully modulated who participates and how and thereby whether certain practices persist or disappear" Morley (2017:86).

"The expression "digital environments" signals that I treat digital devices, most prominently, computers, tablets, and mobile phones (as well as, today, watches and

glasses), as elements of the world through which people proceed, that is, as parts of the material arrangements with which peoples' practices are entangled." Schatzki, 2019:20)

"Technological connections are especially important because they link physically nonadjacent settings, thus promoting the meshing of action over objective spatial distance." (Schatzki, 2002: 191)

2.3.2 Knowledge and Learning

A key point of interest in my engagement with practice theories is the question of how drivers and passengers undertaking ride-sharing learn to negotiate shared occupancy of the car. My aim in reviewing the existing literature on learning and knowledge is to consider how previous work might help me to think through the ways in which this learning takes place in the course of practice. Generally speaking, contemporary academic work on learning draws heavily on practice-based approaches. The concept of situated learning, in particular, invokes the concept of practical engagement with one's environment as central to the development of knowledge.

Cognitivist and mentalist approaches conceptualise knowledge as an object and, learning as the acquisition and encoding of such knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge exists outwith the individual, culturally-specific and transferable between individuals and across generations to be put to use in practical contexts (see Ingold 2000: 159). Against this backdrop, the mid-20th Century saw a shift in focus towards a more practical interpretation of learning as related to the acquisition of skill, capacity, competence, and ability. This repositioning was articulated through a focus on 'know-how' as a form of practical knowledge, as opposed to propositional knowledge which represents a capacity to 'know that'.

In particular, Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) work on practice suggested that knowledge was not brought by the individual to practical engagements with the world, but was, instead, generated within these contexts. For Bourdieu, it is through ongoing practical engagement that we develop the sensibilities and dispositions that make up our *habitus* (1990: 66-67). As Ingold (2000) describes, unlike cognitivist approaches in which cultural knowledge is taken to "exist independently of, and prior to, their application in particular situations of use," *habitus* "exists only as it is instantiated in the activity itself,"

(p. 162). *Habitus*, then, “is not expressed in practice, it rather *subsists* in it,” (ibid.): it is the non-discursive knowledge that we are continually refining in the course of our practical engagement with the world. Crucially, this perspective reframed knowledge as a process. As Marchand (2007) writes, “Knowledge is not fixed, but rather in an ever-present process of becoming,” (p. 183). Likewise, more recent work by Schatzki (2017) emphasizes that the acquisition of knowledge is rarely, if ever, a discrete event. Rather, the ‘practical knowledge’ (or ‘knowledge-in-practice’) associated with the process of ‘learning by doing’ is accumulated as the practitioner becomes more experienced over time. This perspective is communicated in the phrasing ‘coming to know,’ now widely used across the social sciences.

With this understanding of knowledge-as-process comes the understanding that knowledge is an activity which takes place between beings and their environments, and through which both are mutually constituted (Lave, 1988: 171). Thus, along with the notion of ‘coming to know’, Harris observes that the phrase ‘ways of knowing’ “... is used to remind us that any knowledge is inevitably situated in a particular place and moment: that it is inhabited by individual knowers and that it is always changing and emergent” (Harris, 2007: 3). Central to practice theory is the understanding that knowledge is situated, and, hence, relational - that is, it develops the context of our engagements with our social and material environments. This notion was further developed by Lave & Wenger (1991) in their work on communities of practice, wherein they proposed that learning should be interpreted as a relational process of negotiation between multiple actors. This shift in focus, Harrison et al. (2002: 5) would later observe, challenged the conceptualisation of knowledge as a ‘stable commodity that belongs to an individual and can be transmitted, assessed and accredited’ and refuted the ‘novice-to-expert’ trajectory charted by Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986). Indeed, Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that there is rarely a linear path from novice to skilled practitioner. From this view, the development of skilled practice is “not a matter of furnishing a set of generalised capacities, given from the start as compartments of a universal human nature, with specific cultural content. Skills are not transmitted from generation to generation but are regrown in each, incorporated into the *modus operandi* of the developing human organism through training and experience in the performance of particular tasks,” (Ingold 2000: 5). The developing field of practice theory largely rejected the cognitivist view of knowledge as an external resource to be accessed and accrued by individuals, and has, instead, focused on a more phenomenological view that foregrounded the ways in which humans ".... conduct themselves skilfully in and through their surroundings, deploying capacities of attention and response that have been developmentally embodied through practice and experience," (p. 11).

Yet, theorists such as Reckwitz (2002) emphasised 'the significance of shared or collective symbolic structures of knowledge in order to grasp both action and social order' (p. 246). This highlights the fact that practical engagement takes place within social and material contexts to which meaning is attributed to objects and practices, again, emphasising the situated nature of knowledge (Grasseni, 2007: 203). In short, people learn ways of doing through the material; from the knowledge stored and passed on through their engagement with material artifacts. In this respect, Preda (1999), conceptualises the material artifacts of a practice as 'knots of socially sanctioned knowledge' that 'develop specific forms of social order' (p. 362). And as Annemarie Mol observes, it is the culturally-specific nature of these attributed meanings that 'opens them up for historical and social scientific investigations.' (Mol 2002: 10).

Gherardi (2009) has, likewise, focused on material engagements to depict knowledge as 'a practical accomplishment' whereby 'practitioners act both aesthetically and cognitively'. (p. xiii) This notion of 'aesthetic' is derived from a phenomenological perspective that relates to knowledge of 'the world as known to the senses […] embodied in the bodies of practitioners and the materiality of the artifacts of practice' (p. x). Gherardi describes how knowledge can be seen as distributed between both human and 'non-humans', explaining that embodied knowledge, anchored in materiality, institutionalises performance by restricting various actions (pp. 354, 356)., Mol (2002 citing Young, 1981) reflects on the embedded nature of such knowledge which, she observes, "cannot be deduced from the people's talk. It is incorporated into nonverbal schemes, in procedures, in […] apparatuses,"(p. 15). Again, the emphasis here is that people learn 'ways of doing' through the material, from knowledge stored and passed on through engagement with material artifacts. Gherardi & Strati (2012) view knowledge and knowing synonymously, as an activity 'situated in social, working, and organisational practices’ and involving an alignment of people, symbols, and technologies working together (p. xi).

What this brings us to is an understanding that phenomenological engagement in practice is overlaid with culturally-specific meanings. The implication is that ‘practice can cradle and nurture social and cognitive skills, habits and attitudes, value-laden stances, emotional patterns and engrained beliefs etc. thus defining the boundaries of what we can consider a form of life.” (Grasseni, 2007: 204). In other words, ontology is not “...simply a system of knowledge; it is equally, as the term itself implies, an account of a way of being in the world and a definition through practice (not only through cognition) of what the world is and how it is constituted.” (Clammer et al., 2004: 4). As such, Mol (2002) is clear that “*Ontology* is not given in the order of things, but... instead, *ontologies* are brought into being, sustained, or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, socio-material practices,” (p. 5). This observation seems to support Gherardi’s (2009) view that, “For practitioners to be able to recognize ‘a shared way of doing things’, and therefore for practices to work as practical and temporary agreements on how action should be carried on, it is necessary for a practice to be institutionalised even when its institutionalisation is contested or challenged,” (p. 356).

The role of institutionalization in the establishment and perpetuation of shared practice forms part of wider discussions on variation in performance. This topic is fundamental to theories of social practice, as observed in the recognition accompanying Reckwitz’ (2002) popular conceptualisation of practice as a ‘routinised type of behaviour’ (p. 249) that performances ‘can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions’. Literature examined earlier in the thesis that examined the conceptualisation of learning from a practice perspective (e.g., Schatzki, 2017; Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017) suggest that these circumstance-specific adaptations to performance are made possible through practitioner’s acquisition of know-how. The ‘events’ within which these adaptations occur are, for Schatzki (2019), crucial to interpreting social change.

A key point to note, here, is that it is through their accumulation of knowledge that practitioners become more capable of enacting performance while accommodating situational conditions. This observation carries with it an implication that greater know-how is in turn related to a capacity to undergo performance within a greater variety of circumstances. In this respect, the term 'knowledgeability' refers to a practitioners' capacity to maintain commitment to performance under varying circumstances over the course of their career. Schatzki (2017) sees this as central to interpreting the outcomes of acquiring 'know-how' (or as he has it, 'coming-to-know'), which he describes as augmenting the capability to maintain performance under varying conditions. For Schatzki (2017), it is the learning associated with this variation that allows practices to exist and continue through internal evolution.

2.4 Mobilities, Practice Theory, and my Approach

Ultimately, the question for this review is how can mobilities and practice theory help me to think about the mobile practice of ride-sharing? What emerges from the respective literatures on practice and mobilities theories- and, hopefully, from this review - is a sense of the ontological compatibility of these two approaches. Practice theory approaches social life as materially constituted, material which is either in a state of mobility or immobility. And, whether it is to examine how and why something moves or - on the other hand - does not, material arrangements are at the heart of mobilities studies. This apparent compatibility brings to mind Schatzki's (2016) proposition that ontologically compatible theory can be combined with practice theory. Empirically, "practice [theories] provide a way of framing questions about when, how, and where people, ideas and things move. These questions are a subset of all those that populate the 'mobilities' agenda," (Shove, 2013). As Hui (2013) observes approaching specific forms of travel as practices "helps to shed light on the skilled performances linked to particular modes of transport, as well as the distinct and evolving meanings and rules that are attached to them." (p. 1). Likewise, a practice approach highlights "specific variants of what might be identified as larger practices," and enables us to foreground "the distinct skills and meanings that can mark mobility practices" (p. 1). Yet, it is not only that practice theory provides extends current work in mobilities: As Sheller might argue, mobilities challenges practice theorists to ensure their awareness accounts "not only [for] physical movement, but also potential movement, blocked movement, immobilization, and forms of dwelling and place-making," and, importantly, to attend to the ways in which these are "deeply enmeshed in relations of power and counter-power, disciplinary power and capillary power, strategies of control and tactics of resistance." (Sheller, 2013: 50).

In asking researchers to focus on these social, cultural, and affective aspects of travel, a mobilities approach foreground the wider material and relational contexts in which ride-sharing takes place. One of the prominent questions in mobilities is how this can be done. What this literature review sets out to demonstrate is the ways in which practice theory provides a conceptual toolkit via which we can usefully and productively respond to the challenges involved in applying a mobilities lens to the study of ride-sharing. For example, following the 'affective turn', recent literature in mobilities has explicitly tasked researchers with investigating the affective aspects of travel. This approach connects with the phenomenological approaches of practice theory. Yet, practice theory also encourages us to examine the meanings attached to the practice of ridesharing, and to ask how these meanings are encountered and transmitted. And, while the interpersonal aspects of shared travel remain significant, engagement with the material provides a means of thinking through how the material entities involved - cars, roads, signs, digital platforms, smartphones, etc. - are mutually constitutive of the wider practice. With this emphasis on the material, both mobilities and practice theory remind us that technological aspects are important, not merely in their existence, but in the meanings we attach to them via their incorporation into practice. Combining the two approaches to ask, "how and why is ride-sharing done"? opens up the multiplicity of experience and perspective that constitute social phenomena. How I go about this forms the subject of the following chapter on methodology.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Having established a theoretical position incorporating mobilities and social practice theories, I now set out to establish a methodological approach through which these can be usefully applied to the examination of organised ride-sharing. The chapter begins by evaluating an ethnographic research approach. This immersive approach to data collection is well established within mobilities research (Büscher, 2010) which has emphasised the need for a considered and creative methodological approach from its advent. Amongst practice theories the precedent is less firmly set- in part due to the challenge of pursuing a research agenda specifically directed towards decentring individuals. For Schatzki (2016), ethnomethodologies are not incompatible with practice theories provided they adhere to a common ontological position. For Nicolini (2012), ethnomethodology provides the tools and resources through which the enactments of practices can be accessed, in a way that surveys or interviews alone cannot. Thus, I draw together here suggestions and perspectives from practice-focused researchers and theorists who have found productive ways to incorporate ethnographic approaches into their work. The chapter follows this discussion by outlining the specific research methods I applied in pursuit of this perspective, by combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and collection of online data.

Developing the methodology for this research was an iterative process that evolved with my growing understanding of ride-sharing in practice. Early on in the project, I narrowed the focus of my research to 'organised ride-sharing', reflecting those instances of shared travel that involve people who are otherwise unacquainted travelling together by car in order to meet their own individual mobility needs. My research intentionally steers away from grey areas that emerge in differentiating between organised ride-sharing and other forms of shared travel. This includes unacquainted ride-sharers coming together and intending to continue to regularly travel together in the future (e.g., the initial trips undertaken together between unacquainted colleagues introduced through a workplace ride-sharing scheme). Another example is people travelling together to undertake ‘organised ride-sharing’ who get along so well that a friendship develops, and they undertake other journeys in the future (my analysis in chapter 5 describes my having observed this taking place). I also disregard instances of informal sharing between people brought together to share a trip who have been introduced to one another by a mutual acquaintance. Again, this has similar characteristics to organised ride-sharing, but for the purpose of simplicity is excluded from the study.

Formulating this definition of ride-sharing provided the structure for my empirical data collection and analysis, and - importantly - provided a boundary that set the limits of my research. Doing so also enabled me to focus my attention on acquiring empirical data that effectively addressed the overall intentions of the research: to develop a situated, practice-based understanding of organised ride-sharing. It is also important to note that the practice of ride-sharing is not confined to the car. The practice involves initial organization and interactions via the online platform, getting to the pick-up location, waiting for the ride, and then, as the journey ends, onward movement from the drop-off location and, back online, leaving feedback and rating the experience. Thus, my research is multi-sited (Marcus, 1995), taking place both on and offline, in the localities of pick-up and drop-off points (as in the opening vignette to this thesis), and in the car. Research techniques involved participant observation, interviews, online interaction and data collection, and engagement with wider cultural discourse surrounding the practice.

My motivation for establishing/working with a specific definition was to exclude those instances of ‘informal’ ride-sharing between friends, acquaintances, family members, colleagues or teammates who had already developed some form of direct social connection. This type of shared travel had already been examined in a degree of detail (e.g., Laurier et al., 2008). What is more, these established social connections undermine precisely what it was that had made the relatively recent uptake in organised ride-sharing so interesting to me as a researcher - that it brings together strangers within the otherwise private setting of the car.

The challenges I faced in defining the boundaries of ‘organised ride-sharing’ reflect the observations from the literature review on theories of social practice that practice entities are in constant flux and as a result difficult to pin down. This leads to an empirical challenge that practice theorists often address by foregrounding an investigation of historical analysis of practices' trajectories in their research and has led to the critique that practice theories struggle to conceptually account for change (cf. Warde, 2005). Lord (2018) looks to Gadamer (1999) 's description of this as the shifting orientation of research 'horizons', which she infers are determined by "the particular questions and priorities of the research itself, dictated by how these influence the framing and understanding of the object that is being examined" (Lord 2018: 30). With this in mind, it is worth noting that, although my priority of developing an understanding of organised ride-sharing persisted, throughout the project, developing my methodological approach led to some adjustment to these horizons.

3.2 Developing an ethnographic approach

As noted in the previous chapter, my doctoral research was undertaken within the DEMAND centre, where practice theory provided both a methodological and analytical focus. Working in this field instilled in me the fundamental understanding that "Practice theoretical methodologies always have to adapt to the field of practice they are studying". From a mobilities perspective, theorists such as Dawson (2015) were, at the same time, emphasising the need for automobilities research to "stand back from its disposition of critique and develop a more thoroughgoing ethnography of driving," (p.17). It, thus, became clear to me early in the conception of this research project that my own participation in the practice of ridesharing would provide the sort of situated, embodied understanding of the practice that would enable me to engage with methodological challenges from both fields. Bueger (2014: 399) suggests that, more than any other methodology, is it participant observation that best lends itself to the study of practice. As Bueger points out, the visual observation of a practice enables us to perceive aspects of practice that do not involve speech, and it is through participation in a practice that we can develop the implicit embodied knowledge that underlies practice.

Much like Laviolette's (2020) recent study of hitch-hiking, my project substantially "relies on participant observation and hindsight memory of experiences that are largely autobiographical and autoethnographic in character" (p.10). I would not be the first researcher to engage as a participant in the form of movement I was studying. Beyond Laviolette's study, other researchers from mobilities and practice-focused research in sociology, human geography, and anthropology have taken part in diverse forms of mobile practice, including walking (Morris 2004); backpacking (Johnson, 2010), car trips (Laurier, 2004), bus trips (Couser, 2005) and rail travel (Löfgren, 2008)). Yet, I was also aware of the value of interviews in studies of practice (Bueger & Gadinger, 2018; Hitchings, 2012) and, like many other ethnographers of mobility practices, decided to incorporate in-depth interviews into my research. More unusually, I decided that, wherever possible, these interviews should not be conducted in a different setting but in the car itself and while the subjects and I were engaged in the practice.

3.2.1 Framing my participation

I had come to the study of ride-sharing with some knowledge of the practice from my Masters thesis, for which I had conducted an interview-based study of a workplace ride-sharing scheme at the University of East Anglia. Prior to this, my undergraduate thesis examined the administration of community shared transport service provision. Yet, in both of these studies, I had acted as an observer of, rather than a participant in, mobility practices. The closest my own prior experience had come to ridesharing was in the practice of hitch-hiking, which I had undertaken in the UK and New Zealand. These experiences had furthered my interest in shared travel as an under-utilised approach to the challenges of energy demand reduction. My early engagement with work from the DEMAND Centre led me to focus my curiosity on shared-automobility as practice, and, specifically, formalised versions of car-sharing facilitated by the emergence of smart technology and online platforms.

All this is to say that, when it came time to begin my research, I came to participate in ride-sharing as a novice. Yet, I brought with me a history of practical engagement in the related practice of hitch-hiking. I highlight this with reference to Bourdieu's (2003) insistence that "Each of us, and this is no secret for anyone, is encumbered by a past, his or her own past, and this social past, whatever it is… is particularly burdensome and obtrusive when one is engaged in social science." (p. 291) Bourdieu's advice was that "... the researcher can and must mobilize his experience, that is, this past, in all his acts of research. But he is entitled to do so only on condition that he submits all these returns of the past to rigorous scientific examination." (ibid). My past experience of hitch-hiking meant that I began my experience as a ride-sharer already comfortable in occupying the vehicle with complete strangers. This potentially stood me apart in experiential terms from other participants who did not hold, nor develop, similar comfort. I also brought from my experiences of hitch-hiking the sense that, as a passenger, it was incumbent upon me to accommodate the preferences and specificities of the driver. For example, I would leave it up to them to decide what to listen to on the radio, to where I would sit in the car, to where I would be dropped off. I also felt under pressure to talk to the driver, which was something I had felt as a hitch-hiker when my understanding was that, in return for a free lift, it was expected that I would entertain the driver.

These were my understandings of specific ways of being-in-relation in the car which I held as important moral aspects of the practice - that is, they were ways of being a good passenger. This self-awareness enabled me to approach the process of data collection, and subsequent analysis, with a level of reflexivity, which, I hope, contributes to a more careful and reflective view. Yet, I remain aware that through the process of ethnography, the researcher creates and represents ways of knowing based on their own subjective experiences. Thus, as Pink (2020) notes, ethnography "does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographer's experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced," (p.22).

3.2.2 Auto-ethnography

This awareness of the subjective nature of knowledge led me to the decision to include my own first-person perspective in my thesis. Again, this brings me to engage with Bourdieu (2003) in his assertion that "Nothing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself into his research," (p.287). My hesitancy to draw too heavily on my own experiences was countered by his suggestion that the researcher should ".... on the contrary, refer continually to his own experience but not, as is too often the case, even among the best researchers, in a guilty, unconscious, or uncontrolled manner" (p.288). In this regard, it also helped me to remember that “Part of the appeal of phenomenology [which, for many, underlies theories of practice] is its insistence that any attempt at objectivity is always mediated by the context and personalities in which it is framed” (Harris, 2007: 2). As such, the ethnographer “... must give up the ideal of objective knowledge, in the sense of an understanding that everybody might share … In this sense, 'subjectivity' is the price that has to be paid to do fieldwork,” (Bourdieu, 2003: 443).

For Bourdieu (ibid), the ethnographer “... gets caught up in the series of events that constitute social life, where there is no objective truth, but simply potentially exclusive versions of the truth that together constitute the event,” (p.443). In other words, theories of practice navigate the methodological and theoretical issue faced by dualistic approaches to knowledge production by reframing the question. No longer are we seeking individual objective ‘truths’ but, through the multiplicity of engagements, focusing on practice. And, as Mol (2002) argues, ethnographic studies of practices do not only search for knowledge “in subjects who have it in their minds and may talk about it,” but also locate knowledge “in activities, events, buildings, instruments, procedures, and so on,” (p.32). This attention to activities and events - in ‘ways of doing’ - speaks to Lave and Wenger’s earlier assertion - here, paraphrased by Grasseni (2004) -that “it is not a systematic corpus of knowledge that defines and maintains a community of practitioners, but rather certain social modes of co-participation in which transmission of knowledge and reproduction of the community is embedded.” (Grasseni, 2004: 49, c.f. Lave and Wenger, 1991). On this basis, “Knowledge of everyday life is not available to the disinterested gaze of an inquirer; rather, fieldwork is an apprenticeship of signs, a process of entry into a particular world” (Jenkins 1994: 445). The participation element of participant observation as an ethnographic method of enquiry thus becomes central to investigating situated knowledge practices.

An important point to return to here is that some tasks within the practice of organised ride-sharing take place online. Hence, my methodological approach needs to account for online, as well as offline, traces of the practice. Schatzki (2019), treats digital services - mobile phones, computers, tablets, smart watches, etc. - as “elements of the world through which people proceed, that is, as parts of the material arrangements with which people's practices are entangled," (p.20). I take from this the helpful point that, while, conceptually, we might imagine a hard divide between digital services and other material arrangements, this separation is perhaps not reflective of people's daily lives and the ways in which digital or non-digital materiality figures in practice. Hence, my approach needs to account for the ways in which ride-sharing spans on and offline environments. This challenge of doing so is recognised by mobilites theorists, both analytically and methodologically. For example, Büscher & Urry (2009) note that, "While ethnographers may be moving with some participants in physical space, their research subjects' communication and movements in virtual spaces are often not easily available to the researcher," (p.106). They suggest that observing and analysing digital activities should be part of the ethnographer's own reflective review of their experiences. This, they suggest, allows the researcher to track the "multi-sited, collective or collaborative action of distributed mobile participants," (Büscher & Urry, 2009 drawing on Crabtree et al., 2006). Also attending to the multi-sited nature of ethnographies of online and offline practices, Sade-Beck advocates a strategy involving the "integration of three complementary qualitative research methodologies of data-gathering: online observations, interviews, and content analysis of supplementary materials," (Sade-Beck 2004:45). In terms of online resources - such as the Blablacar platform - Bueger (2018) suggests the practice-focused ethnographer should approach these as they would any other handbook or manual, "taking a reflexive stance towards the idealized character of the instructions provided and their silences and limitations" (p. 400).

What all of the previous paragraph serves to acknowledge is that practices exist beyond the moment of enactment, and my data collection approach was designed to capture ride-sharing beyond the journey. For my research, this, first and foremost meant involving myself in practice, which not only involved travelling in cars with other ride-sharers, but also undertaking the tasks that precede travel: signing up to the online platform, searching for rides, contacting other users, negotiating parameters of a journey so as to accommodate our (sometimes disparate) needs and, in the aftermath of a journey, leaving feedback for other users to review. Doing so allowed me to develop an embodied sense of the multiple aspects of ridesharing - the repetition and, sometimes, the frustration of searching the online platform for rides; the satisfaction in figuring out how to manipulate the search functions - splitting journeys, widening search parameters, etc. - to reveal compatible journeys not highlighted by the platform's algorithms. I experienced the panic of being late for an arranged pick-up, the awkwardness of sharing an intimate, 'domestic space' with multiple strangers. While many of these aspects of ride-sharing were discussed with participants in interviews (see below), I felt relying on interviews alone would limit access to the embedded and situated nature of many aspects of practice. Jenkins (1994) draws on Bourdieu (1977) to note that "If we cannot rely fully upon oral accounts, this is in part because the knowledge involved is largely 'non verbal': much of the behaviour or action in question passes 'on the hither side of words or concepts'," (p. 439). Likewise, conducting interviews with subjects while we were simultaneously engaged in practice went some ways to addressing the issue that verbal accounts of practice are often "generalized and abstract, extracted from its context and its temporality," and thus often involve "consideration in terms of a set of rules or a generalized 'structure', while at the same time [concentrating] upon exceptional events," (p. 438). One advantage of conducting ethnographic interviews in the car was that it encouraged me to ask about aspects of practice while they were being undertaken: to inquire about the mundane and easily overlooked, as well as the exceptional. It also gave me direction in terms of developing different lines of enquiry beyond those I might have asked as a passive onlooker of the practice.

3.3 Pilot study and framing the research area

These and other advantages of engagement in ride-sharing practice became evident in the earliest phases of my fieldwork, which began with a pilot study undertaken in April/May 2017. The initial planning phases had envisaged research into additional forms of shared-vehicle use, namely shared ride-sourcing of the sort facilitated by UberPOOL, and workplace ride-sharing schemes organised by private companies or local government. Even in the planning phase, undertaking the pilot study revealed that dividing my attention between three different forms of shared mobility, all with their own participants and forms of practice, would severely limit the depth of my engagement and analysis. It soon became apparent that focusing on one form of ride-sharing would be a more productive and achievable strategy. Having surveyed the three above-mentioned forms of the practice, organised ride-sharing through one national online platform - namely, Blablacar - emerged as the clear forerunner in terms of lending itself to the kind of practiced-focused, in-depth participatory research I was keen to undertake, not least because it involved lengthy journeys in the company of practitioners.

The pilot study also allowed me to consider the usefulness of different research techniques. One big question had been whether people would want to talk about ride-sharing while they were engaged in the practice. This was particularly significant as I do not drive and so would, in all cases, be participating in the practice as a passenger. While this would enable me to participate and observe, I was aware of Nicolini's (2009) observation that, 'because of its multifaceted and complex nature, practice can never be captured by a single method," (p.196). Thus, I was also keen to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews during journeys. This would, thus, rely on drivers being willing to engage in sustained conversation while on the road. Journeys undertaken during the pilot study suggested that drivers used to organised ride-sharing would be willing to converse: of the three forms of ride-sharing, this was the one in which conversation appeared to be a common element of practice, as indicated both by my own experiences and the accounts of other participants.

With findings from the pilot study, I returned to Lancaster to refine my research aims and intentions. Having settled on research involving organised national ride-sharing schemes, I focused my attention on the three main online platforms facilitating this type of ridesharing in the UK. Of these three, two focused primarily on ride-sharing attached to other practices - one of them, commuting, and the other, attending music festivals and other cultural events. The third platform, Blablacar, was much broader in scope and facilitated a significantly greater number of shared journeys. This informed my decision to focus attention on the use of this platform.

As I indicate above, my intention in developing an ethnographic approach to the research was to capture my experiences as a ride-sharing novice. An important aspect of doing so was to directly engage with organised ride-sharing as a viable transport mode through which my own mobility requirements could be met. As a consequence, the routes I travelled while ride-sharing were restricted to those which corresponded to my own movements, which were concentrated between Lancaster, where I reside; Edinburgh, due to my family living nearby; and London, Manchester, and Liverpool, where I have friends that I occasionally visit. The journeys I made were also determined by the availability of ride-sharing drivers advertising passage along the routes I travelled. While I could have supplemented these trips with journeys made specifically for the purpose of collecting data in other areas of the UK, I deemed these journeys as reasonably representative of organised ride-sharing as it is typically undertaken by its practitioners.

Like other organised ride-sharing services, Blablacar primarily serves demand for inter-city travel, and, as such, these journeys were much more frequently available than trips to more rural areas, for example, the north of Scotland. Nonetheless, even on intercity routes and using the largest national scheme, journey options were limited. To use the Lancaster-Edinburgh route as an example: Lancaster sits next to the M6 motorway, the longest motorway in the UK, which runs from the populous Midlands, bypassing the cities of Coventry, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Lancaster, and Carlisle, before becoming the M74 just before the Scottish Border near Gretna, the main westerly route to Glasgow, and, via the A702, Edinburgh. The southerly end of the M6 connects with the M1, bringing traffic north from London and the Southeast, and slightly further north, with the M5, Bringing traffic from Bristol, Worcester, and the Southwest. Traffic volume on the southerly half of the M6 is such that sections have been converted to ‘smart motorway’, involving active traffic management techniques such as variable speed limits and intermittent hard-shoulder running. Yet, despite the fact I was seeking rides on a large motorway that connects southern England with major cities in Mid and Northwest England and Scotland, it was usually the case that the platform returned only three or four journeys on this route per week.

Part of my learning about how to ride-share taught me that I could, for example, adjust the parameters of my search to include listings from drivers travelling to other destinations from which I could pick up other journeys to my destination. This sort of improvisation and adaptation is discussed at length in Chapter 6, but it is important to make the point here that my methodology was very much, as Shove (2017) suggests, continually adapting to the practices with which I was engaging.

In total, my fieldwork enabled me to draw ethnographic data and amass fieldnotes based on my experiences of 22 shared journeys totalling ~80 hrs of travel time, ~20 hours of travelling to and from pick up points and waiting for drivers, ~10 hours of using the online platform to search for drivers to travel with and exchanging ~100 messages with drivers organizing these trips.

3.4 Participant Interviews

From the earliest days of planning, it had been my intention to conduct in-depth interviews with participants of ride-sharing. While I hoped that many of these would take place in situ, I anticipated that at least some would end up taking place in different settings. As my research began, it became clear that conducting some of the interviews in contexts other than the car would not be a second-choice option but, in fact, a necessary methodological and ethical approach. An important aspect of the practice which I had so far overlooked was coming to light. That was, participating in the practice as a driver seemed to be a significantly different experience to participating as a passenger. The findings to evince this perspective will be presented in further chapters, but for now, it is enough to say that apparent lack of crossover between the roles served to emphasise two points: Firstly, the importance of conducting interviews with both driver and passengers, and, secondly, the importance of conducting these interviews in settings wherein passengers could speak freely without being overheard by drivers, and vice-versa. On the drivers' part, this raised the issue that in conducting interviews in-situ, I was, of course, present as a passenger. My preparatory research on interview techniques had highlighted that "an informant's account is oriented towards the presumed expectations of the enquirer." (Jenkins, 1994:438). The question here was whether this role limited the drivers' willingness to speak of potential tensions or difficulties they experienced in travelling with passengers. Yet, it soon became apparent in the course of early interviews that, in my role as passenger-come-researcher, I was somewhat of a novelty to drivers and so experienced as something other than a 'typical' passenger. Of course, working on this basis means that opportunities to interview drivers were limited to journeys where I was the only passenger. Fortunately, at least from this perspective, I was the sole passenger in over 80% of the journeys I undertook. When it came to passengers, the only opportunity to conduct interviews in the car was in the presence of a driver. This raised fundamental questions about the ethics of conducting interviews in the presence of an observer, which would have been problematic both in terms of the interviewee's privacy and in terms of the validity of their responses. The best solution, it seemed, was to interview passengers in different settings. Hence, I made the decision that these interviews were conducted in private and away from the practice of ride-sharing - either in cafes, or, if participants felt more comfortable, in their homes.

Both in the car and in other settings, my interviews were semi-structured. That is, I had in mind a range of questions and topics that I wanted to cover, but was also open to direction from participants if there were subjects that they were keen to elaborate on. Taking my lead from practice theorists such as Nicolini (2009), Hitchings (2011), and Bueger (2014) who advocate the use of interviews, my aim was to "reconstruct [...] the interviewee's detailed everyday actions and underlying evaluative standards [....] ask how the interviewee performs certain activities that are part of the practice. And [reveal the] knowledge, motivations, or emotional states [with] the practice is performed," (Bueger 2016:400). My interest was not limited to the journey itself but also to participants' use of the digital platform which, following Schatzki (2019), I approach as a material arrangement. In all cases, when it came to examining material engagements, I remained mindful of Miller's suggestion that the aim is to "try and understand which attributes are salient for the population we encountered and why and at what times,**"** (Miller 2007:24). For example, I have my own understanding of comfort in the car, what I am seeking here is an understanding of what participants experience as comfort, the process through which they find themselves becoming more or less comfortable, "and the consequences this has for them" (Miller 2007:24). Here, as elsewhere, my hope was to reveal both the explicit and implicit knowledge associated with practice.

As is widely agreed among practice theorists, attempting to reveal implicit knowledge involved in a practice is an important research strategy, yet, one with which the field has long struggled, methodologically (Bueger 2016). As Bourdieu (1977) suggested, in most cases, successful engagement in practice does not involve knowledge of the logic of the practice. Emerson (2009) would later echo Bourdieu with the observation that “Many meanings, background experiences, and emotional currents may not be directly expressed and are not readily visible in particular interactions.” Thus, “To appreciate these dimensions of interaction often requires interviewing, that is, talking to people about what they are doing with others.” (p. 536). Afterall, “Without the presence of an outsider asking questions, the actors do not need to give any account of what is going on,” (Jenkins 1994:440). In this, it becomes clear how “interviews can be an important means to unravel the implicit structures of meaning” (Bueger 2016:400). Yet, others might dismiss the use of interviews, often on the basis that they reduce practice to limited linguistic representations, encouraging reductive rationalized accounts of complex socio-material engagement. As Hitchings (2011:63) observes, the framing of a practice approach as decentring ‘human will’ is intended to counter the ‘hyperationalism’ of existing theory (Reckwitz, 2002:257), but not to eliminate the scope for individual ‘will’ entirely. For Warde (2005), Reckwitz’ (2002:256) view that practice theory positions agents as ‘carriers of the practice’ still allows for ‘description and characterisation’ of individual behaviours. From Hitchings’ (2011) perspective, this justifies the use of interview methodologies, provided researchers appropriately approach their subject of inquiry. As Lord (2018) makes clear, the success of this strategy is contingent on how effectively interview questions are framed, and how their responses are interpreted in a practice-theory appropriate context.

3.5 Limitations of the Research Approach

The limitations of this research relate to an underlying issue familiar among practice theorists: the difficulty of attempting to undertake analysis on what Schatzki (2001) , and later Reckwitz (2002), describe as the ‘practice entity’. This term refers to the “collectivised integument” (Ward 2016: 46) comprised of - and continually reconfigured by - multiple enactments of a practice. As Olohan (2021) describes, the practice entity might be thought of as “a construction that is abstracted or inferred from observed performances, and then reconstructed systematically, which then contributes to the regularization of performance,” (p.28). The problem here is that, as Hui (2011) notes, due to their status as “a collection of doings across many spaces and times,” (p. 37) it is not possible to observe practice entities directly. Rather, practice entities can only be accessed via the traces of performances that provide us with insights into entities, but do not provide exhaustive overviews. As Hui goes on to note, while practice entities are composed of many situated enactments, it is not theoretically consistent to generalise from one to the other.

These traces of the practice entity are shaped by the observations I make above in recognising the subjective nature of the data I collected. Perhaps the strongest example of this relates to the fact that I cannot drive, and therefore have no direct experience of ride-sharing as a driver. Additionally, as a student, I do not face the time constraints that someone else might experience. As a male, I do not experience the same understanding of risk, nor endure the male-gaze as experienced by a female. My motivation for ride-sharing was also inextricably linked to my desire to collect data, as Schatzki (2002) would see it, disrupting my teleological engagement. Contextualising the ethnographic observations and interview extracts with profile and journey data goes some way to overcome these difficulties, but there is only so much detail they can provide. Inevitably, the wider the net is cast the less detail in the data obtained.

3.6 Profile and listings data

In examining the online user data from the Blablacar scheme, my aim is not to draw attention to any statistical patterns that can be observed between them. Rather, I do so to enrich my dataset to account for a greater range of encounters between ride-sharers than I experienced first-hand and through the accounts of those I interviewed. The data itself demonstrates the value in doing so. For example, I have described through this chapter how my own experiences of ride-sharing were influenced by my desire to be agreeable in order to encourage participation in the research. But what of the experiences of others wherein disagreements did arise? Gathering the feedback and rating data allowed me to select a large enough sample size so that data relating to these relatively uncommon occurrences could be accessed. The techniques that I used in navigating the publicly available data from the Blablacar website in order to compile a sample of this data are discussed in an appendix to this thesis, which also provides an outline of the data that was included. Three separate data sets were obtained from the Blablacar website, consisting of 100 user profiles, 300 journey listings posted by drivers, and 300 feedback and ratings received from other ride-sharers with whom users had travelled.

3.7 Implementing Research Design

3.7.1 Recruitment of interview participants

The simplest way to access ride-sharing drivers would have been to contact them directly through the scheme, in the same way that passengers contact them if they are interested in sharing a journey. Unfortunately, the terms of use set out by Blablacar prohibit use of the platform in this way for any reason other than to share a ride. Through the pilot study, I found that the ride-sharers I encountered during the journeys made through Blablacar were very open to talking about their experiences and were interested in my research, and were willing to give consent to being interviewed in person. While I was initially apprehensive about the ethical implications of undertaking interviews in circumstances that may have pressured people into taking part, I resolved this by maintaining research protocols such as ensuring that drivers were comfortable engaging in conversation of their experiences, and that they could withdraw from the interview at any point.

As well as talking about the details of the journey we were making together, participants also relayed past experiences of journeys they had made with other ride-sharers. I therefore determined that a suitable approach for gathering these experiences as data would be to formally request an interview with drivers during the journey. I limited this to situations in which the driver and I were the only people travelling in the car, and so was only able to collect interview data from drivers in this way. All of the journeys I made via Blablacar lasted over ninety minutes, giving ample time for interviews to be conducted. It also allowed me to ease into the journey, and I would typically allow 20-30 minutes to pass before inviting them to formally participate in an interview. The benefits of doing so were numerous. Firstly, it allowed me to gain some experience of conversation that occurs between driver and passengers in getting to know one another in person. Secondly, it avoided overwhelming the driver and pressuring them into participating - after travelling together for a short amount of time, I felt a sense of rapport developed that might not have been so had I requested an interview immediately upon entering the vehicle. Thirdly, it provided the driver the opportunity to speak freely on aspects of their performance that they felt were important, upon which I could raise again during the interviews. Fourthly, it gave me the opportunity to establish whether or not interviewing a driver was safe and would not be overly distracting. Fifthly, it also gave me an indication as to whether the driver might not be comfortable participating in the interview, largely based on how comfortable they seemed to be talking about ride-sharing in general conversation.

As noted above, recruiting interview participants during journeys was only able to capture ride-sharers with experience as drivers (although some had also done some ride-sharing as a passenger in the past). In order to access other practitioners whose experience was primarily as a passenger, I also recruited participants through my own social networks for face-to-face interviews taking place in a stationary setting. I sent a callout to my personal contacts via email and on social media that gave an outline of my research and asked anyone who had experience of ride-sharing as a passenger and were willing to discuss their experiences to get in touch. In addition, I posted some invitations to participate on public notice-boards in the central Lancaster area echoing the callout I made via social media.

After expressing interest in taking part in an interview, participants were presented with a participant information sheet and asked to provide a preferred method of contact. For interviews undertaken with a driver during a shared journey, a pre-prepared explanation of the research was read out before the interview began, and a copy of the participant information sheet left with them, or a digital copy sent via email depending on their preference. A total of 25 interviews were undertaken, consisting of 10 interviews with drivers during a journey, 12 recruited through my own social network, and 3 members of the public responding to the public callout. All of the drivers that I encountered were comfortable being interviewed and agreed to participate - an observation that is, in itself, useful in reflecting on the relationship between driver and passengers.

The sample is not intended to be representative, in that there were aspects of performance that I wanted to capture that required some selectivity. As I have indicated above, I felt it was important to capture the experiences of both drivers and passengers, and the dataset consisted of roughly an even split between both roles, along with several participants who had some experience of both. I also wanted to capture a range of different amounts of experience in order to obtain insights into how experiences of ride-sharing varied over the course of the participant's careers. While I could have relied on the more experienced participants to provide details on their earlier experiences, the pilot study indicated that participants might find it difficult to recall the details of ride-sharing that they had done in the distant past, and accounts of more recent events were generally more descriptive. Being experienced related not only to the time that had passed since a participant had started ride-sharing, but also the number of journeys they had undertaken during that period. While there was a general trend within the population of ride-sharers that were observed through the website data for careers to be relatively short lived, there were a minority of drivers with a lot of experience who advertised journeys very frequently with whom I specifically sought to travel. Flyvbjerg (2001) makes the case for specifically seeking out 'extreme' or 'deviant' cases in order to address gaps in knowledge and provide important insights. This information-oriented selection of data works on the basis of establishing 'exemplary, relational or logical ties' rather than that of representativeness (Hui et al. 2018:349). There were also a number of users of the Blablacar site advertising travel but not having accumulated any experience. Two participants who responded to the public callout fitted this description, and were included in the sample.

As I indicated earlier in the chapter, the ethnographic and interview dataset was skewed towards ride-sharers with experience travelling in the north-west of England. Through the design of the project, the data I collected was restricted to participants living in the UK and this meant that the majority of ride-sharing under discussion took place in the UK. In addition, several participants had also accumulated experience of ride-sharing outside of the UK. These experiences were included in the research analysis, as they were deemed important in describing how the career of the participant had developed.

3.7.2 Approaching interviews

The interview process itself was similar for participants who were interviewed in the car and elsewhere, with all interviews occurring in person and recorded by Dictaphone to be transcribed at a later date. All participants were given pseudonyms in interview transcripts and consequently in any presentations of the data. Where necessary, other personal details in interview transcripts were also amended to ensure that published quotes do not lead to the identification of participants.

I developed a semi-structured interview technique that made use of a list of pre-prepared questions that served as a guide for myself. This aimed to extract aspects of performance to provide a detailed account of the typical ways in which participants went about ride-sharing. As Lord (2018) notes, interviewers should help to reassure participants that the researcher is interested in hearing details of practices that might otherwise be considered mundane. Hitchings (2011) identifies this as a barrier that an interviewer seeking to examine everyday practices must overcome. I was also interested in discovering some experiences that were not so ‘everyday’, and questioned participants about specific past encounters that they had enjoyed or found difficult.

Efforts were made to ensure that drivers were not distracted, and that they maintained focus on control of the vehicle at all times. This included avoiding asking questions when the driver was overtaking other vehicles, at road junctions or roundabouts, or during any other challenging manoeuvres. On a number of occasions when driving conditions were observed to risk impacting the driver’s control of the car, namely through adverse weather conditions and when the driver was navigating unfamiliar roads, interviews were paused until conditions improved.

3.7.3 Research ethics

In both the fieldwork and writing-up of this thesis, among my primary ethical concerns has been my participants’ right to privacy. Like many others conducting ethnographic fieldwork, I occasionally had trouble establishing whether or not participants understood the nature of my research and so, in some circumstances, felt unsure as to whether I had their full informed consent. These occasions were few, but I have nonetheless chosen to omit information gathered. To the best of my knowledge, all of the participants whose accounts and opinions are presented in this thesis were aware of their part in my research.

During my research, I was careful not to disclose names or any other information that might identify participants. While the chances may have been slight, I was aware of the possibility that participants may encounter one another during other ride-sharing journeys, and, hence, made mention of no information that might be attributed to specific individuals. Likewise, in writing up I have taken care to ensure that participants remain anonymous, using pseudonyms and omitting any identifying information. I also erred on the side of caution when it came to traces of myself and others online. This has meant deleting information from my profile on the Blablacar platform which indicated the users with whom I had travelled.

Throughout my fieldwork, I carried with me an awareness of my position in relation to others, and the ways in which this might shape encounters and the data I gathered. In terms of my interaction with participants, I recognise that - as white, 6’7” tall, British, male, and of a middle-class background - aspects of my identity will mean different things to different people, and lead them to relate to me in different ways. Likewise, I recognise the same will hold true for the way I relate to others. In both my fieldwork and writing, I questioned and reflected on the ways in which I participated in and co-produced the social and material environment, attempting to acknowledge “the political and ideological agendas and power relations integral to the contexts and circumstances of ethnographic processes.’ (Pink, 2009:23). In the context of interviews, for example, I recognise that the dialogical nature of the endeavour means that “the interviewer and the interviewee re-construct meaning together; they co-produce an interpretation of practices.” (Bueger 2016:400). This awareness added an ethical dimension to the process of interviewing, and a responsibility to recognise interviews as “situated moments in which people engage with aspects of life which may not surface elsewhere [and which] makes strange the informant’s life to them, providing a punctuation point from which to stand aside and generate meanings which then feed back into future life.” (Hockey 2002:214). In other words, if we understand the interview as a relational process of knowledge co-production, as the interviewer, we must continually reflect on our contribution to the emergent knowledge, not only in terms of what we, as researchers, take away, but in terms of what are interviewees are left with. I, thus, refrained from asking leading questions or introducing things outwith the interviewee's frame of reference. This awareness of my responsibility toward participants at times also limited my willingness to ask questions that might well have been relevant but which I anticipated might be upsetting. For instance, when raising the issue of safety with female participants, I felt it was not appropriate for me to ask directly whether women had experiences of feeling unsafe but, instead, raised the general issue of safety and let them determine the path our conversation took.

Interview participants were given participant information sheets and an opportunity to discuss these prior to their participation. They were then asked to sign a consent form before any data collection began. Both of these documents provided information on how to opt out of the research, and how to obtain further information on the research. A copy of the consent form and the information sheet were provided to the participant for their own records (see appendices to this thesis).

Chapter Four: Infrastructures- Configuring Organised Ride-sharing and the Digital Platform

4.1 Introduction

In this first of three analysis chapters, I provide an in-depth account of the various tasks within the practice of ride-sharing that are supported by Blablacar as a ride-sharing scheme. Under the conceptual framing of social practice theory, I examine how the online resources provided by Blablacar comprises a specific material infrastructure, in digital form, through which organised ride sharing as a practice is enabled. This chapter takes as its starting point Schatzki's (2019) argument that, "material arrangements can have essential roles in inducing, channelling and prefiguring practices, as well as other roles such as bestowing meaning" (p.44). From this perspective, the chapter focuses on the ways in which practitioners are guided through specific tasks, and how the material arrangement of the platform encourages particular forms of practice and imbues meaning. My approach also recognises what Teubner et al. (2021) have termed the "hybrid character," of products and services purchased or booked online but consumed offline, many of which, including ride-sharing, involve "a significant interaction between providers and consumers both online and offline," (p. 2, drawing on Hsu & Lin, 2020). Teubner at al. make the important observation that "interactions occurring online (offline) influence the level and quality of those happening offline (online)," (p. 2). The point I draw out in this chapter is how the practice of ride-sharing is shaped by the material configurations of the platform.

In response to my first research question - How do participants come to know how to practice organised ride-sharing? - my analysis reveals how the material arrangements of the platform are structured and what they require and enable in procedural terms. I show how, in effect, the platform lays out a set of tasks that are integral to, or options within, performances of organised ride-sharing. In its 'terms of use', the Blablacar platform states that:

> *"The Platform constitutes an online mobility platform on which the Members can create and post Adverts for Trips for the purposes of*

carpooling. These Adverts can notably be viewed by the other Members to find out the terms of the Trip, and where applicable, to directly book a Seat in the vehicle in question with the Member having posted the Advert on the Platform."

Blablacar, 2021b

As shall become apparent in this chapter, the ways in which Blablacar supports ride-sharers in sharing a journey are, in practice, more complex. The chapter is structured around the temporally sequenced set of tasks through which the Blablacar platform guides its users in order to organise and undertake a shared trip. I argue that the ways in which practitioners, or 'users', are guided from step to step holds consequences for the ways in which they engage with these tasks and, furthermore, how they engage with one another. This effectively traces the steps that would be taken as a first-time user who, without any past experience of ride-sharing, must rely on the visual prompts and instructions for guidance in undertaking the tasks involved in planning and undertaking a shared journey. In adopting this approach, I provide a descriptive account of the tasks involved in performance based on the configuration of the information that the Blablacar web page provides, supplemented by further relevant information from the Blablacar 'Help Centre' (Blablacar, 2021c), 'Blog' articles (Blablacar, 2021d), and the Blablacar terms of use (Blablacar 2021b). While much of this information appears to be procedural, as I shall highlight, much also conveys implicit or explicit moral aspects of the performance. In short, encounters with the website not only tells the user how to rideshare, but convey expectations about what makes 'good' practice. In this sense, the chapter engages with my second research question, which asks 'what are the different meanings attached to sharing a ride?'

Firstly, in section 4.2, I describe the initial task of registering onto the scheme and completing a user profile. In Sections 4.3 and 4.4, I cover the ways in which registered users (or 'Members') are able to identify other people with whom to share a specific journey. A key point to note here is that arranging - and, ultimately, undertaking - a shared journey is a distinctly different process for ride-sharing drivers and passengers. Unlike some other schemes such as Liftshare and goCarshare, Blablacar, only allows drivers to post journey listings. Passengers are then tasked with searching through listed journeys in order to identify a driver with whom to travel. Section 4.5 then describes the payment system that Blablacar provides in order for passengers to recompense drivers, and Section 4.6 the rules and procedures for users who wish to cancel their reservation. In the penultimate section 4.7, I discuss the advice that Blablacar provides that relates to the journey itself, including the information they provide in their guides on 'being a good ride-sharer'. While the chapter is broadly focused on addressing my first and second research questions, as indicated by these brief overviews it also connects with the subsequent questions of 'what is negotiated by ride-sharers when they come together to share a journey, and how are these negotiations enabled?' and 'what is the significance of the differences in roles between 'driver' and 'passenger' in organised ride-sharing, beyond who is 'in control' of the vehicle?'

4.2 Creating a user profile

The Blablacar platform presents the process of organising and undertaking a shared trip through their online infrastructure as quick and straightforward. The Blablacar UK 'carpool' page summarises the process as *"Scroll, click, tap, and go!" (Blablacar 2021a)*, adding that, thanks to their technological resources and mobile app, *"Booking a ride has never been easier!"*. Yet, like many other websites, Blablacar requires users to register before they can gain access to some of its features. Once registered, users are able to establish the necessary connectivity to, and relations with, other users, and so enter a community of recognised practitioners. Although it is possible to view journey listings without being logged in to the website, registering is an essential entry point, as it is with other, similar schemes. Signing up involves connecting the account with an email address or Facebook account, as well as registering a mobile phone number. This provides a unique login for the Blablacar website, allowing users to enter some personal details that are then made available to other ride-sharers who are interested in sharing a journey. Through the infrastructure of the scheme, each practitioner is, thus, able to establish some degree of shareable identity, rather than remaining anonymous. Making users register a profile also establishes a degree of accountability, as does the further option of users confirming their identity by uploading a photograph of their passport or driver's licence. Little research has been published on how participants in collaborative practices such as ride-sharing expect to encounter their collaborators (Teubner et al. 2021:1), yet as Teubner et al. note, user-profiles are particularly important in such practices as they are the main - if not, the only - means by which prospective collaborators can assess one another prior to meeting offline (p.2). There are four principal aspects of their user profile that Blablacar users are invited to personalise: their profile picture; a 500-character text ‘bio’; a series of multiple-choice descriptors indicating some of their travel preferences; and a means by which users can indicate the make, model, and colour of their car. Completing these aspects of the profile is encouraged by Blablacar on the basis that doing so will improve the user’s chances of finding someone with whom they can share a ride, reflecting the inherent relationality of ride-sharing, which will re-emerge at various points throughout the thesis as a key theme. Adding a profile picture and describing the car serves a practical purpose, allowing users to recognise one another when they eventually meet.

In my own case, the task of completing my profile spurred significant consideration as to what type of image and wording would be most appropriate. I wanted to communicate that I was friendly, trust-worthy, and non-threatening, but likewise wanted people to see me as someone who appeared interesting and with whom they would want to share a ride. This felt particularly important because, as Teubner et al. (2021) note, for a novice practitioner with no ratings or reviews, it was my profile alone that would need to do the work of appeasing potential collaborators (p. 2). The platform also requested a short text entry to accompany the profile, with the system posing the example questions of *‘What would you like other members to know about you?’*, ‘*What are your interests?’*, ‘*Is there anywhere you travel regularly?’*, and *‘Why should people travel with you?’.* These kinds of 'ice-breaker' questions seem aimed at defusing potential awkwardness of being confined in the relatively small interior of a moving vehicle with a stranger. Certainly, I felt compelled to keep my own response light-hearted and include points that might serve as conversation-starters, rather than note that, for example, I am particularly tall and so appreciate as much leg-room as possible. No doubt this, in part, reflects my personal reluctance to make demands on people, but also mirrors the general tone of other profiles, which likewise tended to signal sociability and a willingness to accommodate others’ preferences. For example:

"I like travelling all around the UK and further in my Citroen Nemo camper. Love to meet people and hear their stories (or not, if that's what you prefer!) Hope to speak soon!"

"I work as an economist in Oxford. On a less boring note, I love music so if you have anything interesting to listen to I'd love to try it on the journey."

"Married with two kids, I work as a psychologist and therapist. I also lecture across the UK so I'm often travelling. I tend to hire cars so I won't know the registration plate until I collect the vehicle. I'm friendly, chatty and enjoy a good laugh to pass the time on a long journey!"

"I travel a lot for work regularly across the UK so happy to help others reach their destinations whilst keeping the costs as low as possible. I drive an electric car, hence I am happy to keep costs low. I enjoy talking about experiences, music, film etc!"

"Hey everyone! I'm a freelance drummer and singer commuting regularly between London & Bristol! I love music, speak a bit of Spanish and want to better my Portuguese! Always happy to fill my car up with interesting company :) I'm very chill and easy going. We can chat or chill and listen to tunes! Happy to stop wherever needed."

"Hi everyone! My name is Paolo and I am a London-based musician. I love to play guitar, travel and meet cool people! I am very easy going and I love the BlaBlaCar community, I had some great experiences so far."

"Friendly, positive and love driving. Husband & Dad of two girls. love music and traveling. Man United season ticket holder. Driving from London to Old Trafford for Man United home games very often. Love meeting new people and talk about random stuff."

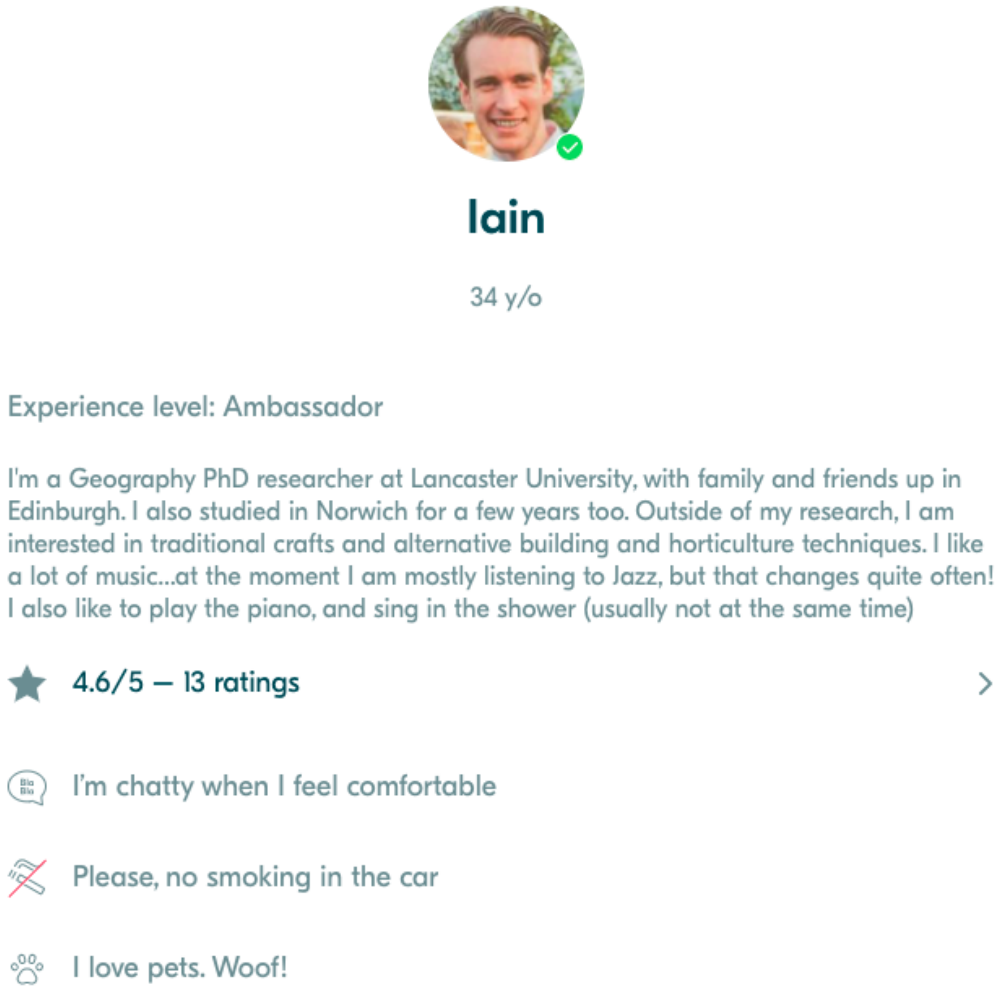

Figure 3: My Blablacar Profile

The multiple-choice descriptors through which users provide additional personal details in their profile not only highlight the relational nature of ride-sharing but also foreground specific aspects of this relationality. Users are invited to indicate their travel preferences regarding a number of topics that relate to being in the car. These topics include 'chattiness', 'music', 'smoking', and 'pets'. Chattiness, in particular, is a quality Blablacar emphasizes. The descriptors of 'bla' (I'm the quiet type), 'blabla' (I'm chatty when I feel comfortable), and 'blablabla' (I'm a chatterbox!') are options with which users can indicate how talkative they consider themselves to be. The ability to indicate one's preferred level of conversation is framed as a way of enabling users to identify and avoid others whose enthusiasm for intense conversation - or lack thereof - might make them feel uncomfortable. Elsewhere on the website, a blogpost from Blablacar describes how these preferences are 'not set in stone' and that users are able to change their selections from journey to journey (Blablacar, 2021e). Furthermore, they indicate that these criteria are included to convey an understanding that, more generally, users should expect to encounter a range in the extent to which conversation will flow during a trip. This suggests that relational aspects are not always straightforward, and that divergent or conflicting preferences for ways of being in the car represent a potential source of discord between users.

The platform is clear in communicating the fact that providing information on their profile will increase users' appeal to potential collaborators. Completing a profile is also one of the criteria required for obtaining higher 'Experience Levels' awarded to users. Figure 4 demonstrates the criteria that qualify users for the different ranks within this system. Blablacar suggests that the Experience Levels help other users to 'choose the right co-traveller for the ideal journey', and that gaining a high level of experience shows that a user is 'a highly trusted member of the Blablacar community' (Blablacar, 2021f). They also suggest that obtaining the highest rank of 'Ambassador' grants users a 'special status in the community', and that they may be invited to TV interviews and focus groups (ibid.). Blablacar appears more active outside of the UK in this respect, where, for example, they celebrate 'Member of the Month' in different countries (Blablacar, 2021g). These promotion strategies aim to encourage commitment to ride-sharing by elevating its visibility to other users. In my own experience, the concentration of the 'experience levels' within the first 12 journeys helped me remain committed to the practice thanks to the sense of career progression and my increased status as a member of the community. The notable lack of any further status markers for those of greater experience suggests that Blablacar's 'experience levels' are at least in part, a means of encouraging ride-sharers to remain committed at this early phase in their careers. At the same time, it felt somewhat disingenuous to be awarded the title of 'experienced' ride-sharer after completing only 3 shared trips.

	Newcomer	Intermediate	Experienced	Expert	Ambassador
Verified email and phone	Welcome!	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Preferences set		✓	✓	✓	✓
Profile photo added				✓	✓
# of positive ratings received		★ 1 rating	★ 3 ratings	★ 6 ratings	★ 12 ratings
% of positive ratings received		★ >60%	★ >70%	★ >80%	★ >90%
Seniority		1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months

Figure 4: Blablacar Experience levels (Blablacar, 2021f)

4.3 Listing a ride as a driver

In this section, I describe the ways in which Blablacar enables its users to list a journey that they are willing to share. The process of setting up a user profile described in the previous section makes clear that ride sharing is more than just a way of getting from A to B, yet the mechanics of matching specific journey routes and times are clearly still fundamental. Blablacar only allows drivers to advertise journeys, whereas other scheme providers also allow passengers to list journey requests. This limitation impacts how shared journeys are organised and the details negotiated, as the onus is on the person posting a ride (hence, the driver) to specify the terms of travel, such as the start and end point, the route, and the time of departure. More broadly, the restriction also influences the nature of relationships between those in the roles of driver and passenger, as, regardless of how listing a ride is configured by the scheme provider, the task represents the first of many significant differentiations between organised ride-sharers as either drivers offering, or passenger seeking, a lift (see section 4.4). As Laurier (2008) observes, the relationship between driver and passengers in all car journeys is distinctly unequal, fundamentally (but not only) in terms of the agency afforded to the driver through control of the vehicle. I argue that, even before the driver and passenger have initiated contact, Blablacar assigns further agency to the driver in providing the means by which they can describe what they are and are not willing to do.

The first step a driver undertakes in listing a journey involves inputting a departure location. The driver is then presented with a map upon which they are asked to select the precise point from which they would like to pick up their passenger(s). This process is repeated to indicate the point at which they would like to drop off their passenger(s), and the driver is asked to identify the route that they will take between these points. They are then asked whether they would like to include any stop-offs at which passengers can ask to be dropped-off or picked-up, with the platform suggesting popular locations along the route. Drivers then indicate the date and time at which they intend to travel. With the exception of the recommended stop-off locations, the selection of spatial and temporal characteristics of a trip is based entirely on the driver's preferences, to the degree that structure and design of this part of the platform's digital interface indicates that a driver should input criteria based on how they would undertake the trip were they not intending to ride-share. Arguably, the way that Blablacar tasks the driver with setting the terms encourages the driver to attend, first and foremost, to their own needs.

Indeed, the first point at which the passengers' wellbeing during the journey is directly considered is when the driver is asked to confirm how many passengers they can take, ranging from one to four, and whether they will keep the rear middle seat empty 'so that passengers are comfortable'. The phrasing of this question speaks of potential tensions implicit in relationships between passengers and drivers, yet also makes clear what Blablacar considers the virtuous thing to do in this circumstance: that is, to keep the space free.

It is at this point in the process that drivers are asked to set the price that they would like passengers to pay for their journey. Again, this represents a potential point of contention. The prices drivers can specify fall within a set range calculated by Blablacar and based on the length of the journey. First-time drivers are encouraged to charge the minimum price within this range in order to increase their chances of finding passengers and, subsequently, receiving their first rating, which will help them to attract passengers in the future. For subsequent trips, the scheme recommends a higher price. These upper and lower figures are specified using a basic cost-per-mile calculation. Yet, despite the disparity between the two amounts, the platform provides little indication of what might justify a driver choosing to charge a higher or lower price. For example, one might ask: should the lower running costs of an electric vehicle be taken into account? Should drivers of luxury vehicles expect to charge more? Are drivers entitled to increase the amount they charge when demand is high, for example, when public transport is disrupted due to bad weather or industrial action? Although there are pages on the Blablacar Help Centre dedicated to providing information to drivers about payments (Blablacar, 2021h), most of the information therein relates to the service fees that Blablacar charges. Drivers are left largely to their own devices in determining whether or not to adjust the cost of their advertised trip.

Finally, drivers are asked whether they have any other information that they want to add about their ride. A text box is provided, along with an example entry that states '*Hello! I am going to visit my family. I travel with a cat and have a lot of space in the boot!*'. This exemplary text might be taken to speak of the give and take between the driver and passenger, and the expectation that both will be willing to accommodate, to a point, the needs and comfort of the other. Yet, the fact remains that these are terms set by the driver: in the example, the presence of the cat is not presented as negotiable, and the offer of space in the boot is a concession the driver has chosen to make, rather than a condition imposed by the passenger.

While the website does not explicitly address the potential imbalance of power between drivers and passengers, the terms of use do go some way to recognising the power the driver holds. For example, Blablacar's 'small-print' insists that *"when you use the Platform as Driver, you undertake to post Adverts corresponding only to Trips actually planned"* and that the driver must undertake *"to make the Trip as described in the Advert (notably with regard to using or not using the motorway) and to respect the times and places agreed with the other Members (notably meeting place and drop-off point)".* Implicit in these terms is the disparity between driver and passenger in terms of agency and control when it comes to the enactment of the journey: ultimately, as the owner and operator of the car, the driver has control over if, when, where, and - to a large extent - how the journey takes place. And, while these terms of use attempt to dissuade drivers from violating agreements made with passengers, subsequent observations in the thesis reveal how the enforcement of these rules by Blablacar is far from straightforward.

4.4 Searching for a ride as a passenger

As is made evident above, the online tasks that passengers must undertake in organising and planning a journey differ from those that must be undertaken by the driver. Having logged into the platform, passengers begin the process by specifying the locations that they intend to be 'leaving from' and 'going to', the date on which they wish to travel, and for how many passengers they would like to make a booking. They are then presented with a list of journeys that drivers have posted that match the spatial components of their trip. They are also given the option of viewing journeys beginning earlier or later than their specified departure time, and are further encouraged to view these options when their initial search yields no results. The design of the journey-matching system in this way places the onus on the passenger, rather than the driver, to be flexible in terms of the time, or even day, of travel.

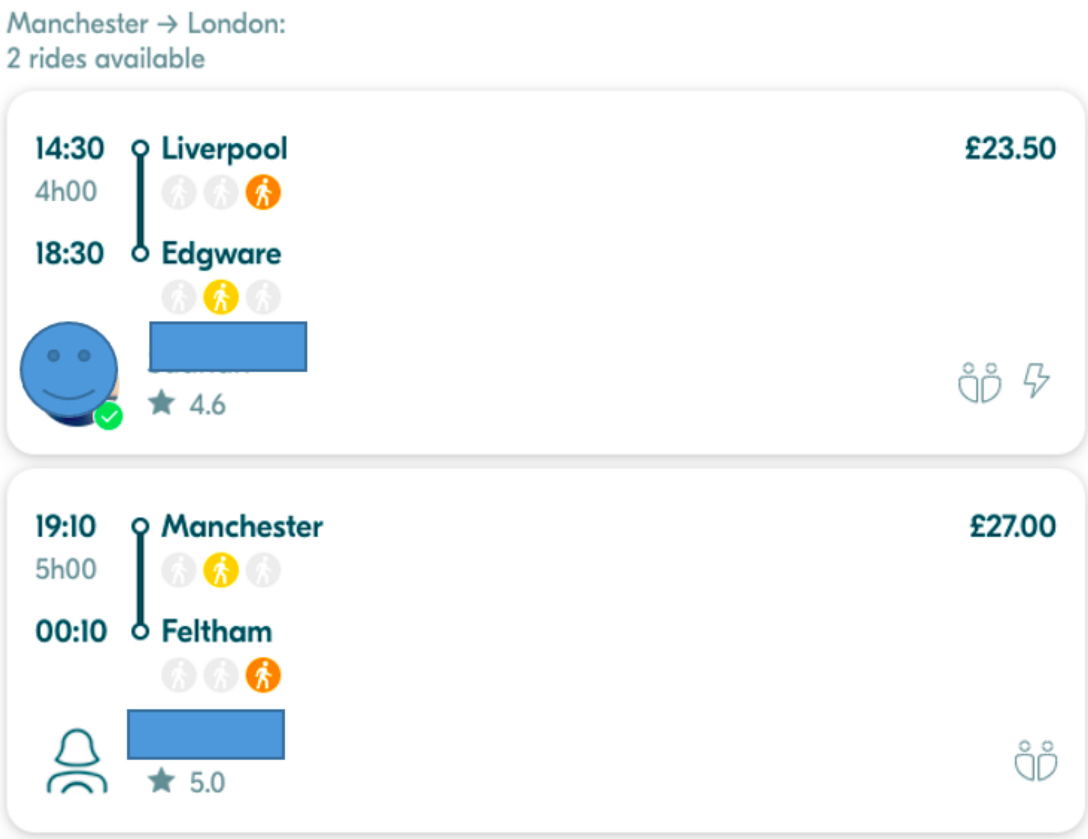

Figure 5: Example Blablacar search results between Manchester and London. (Driver names and profile pictures redacted)

The search results depicted in *Figure 5* returned two journey listings. As is often the case, the passenger is, thus, presented with a choice. The coloured symbols underneath the driver's start and end locations indicate their distance from the locations specified by the passenger. The colour of these symbols range from green, through yellow, to orange to signify increasing distance from the passengers preferred locations. Again, this system anticipates a degree of flexibility on the part of the passenger: In the example, the passenger has searched for a journey departing from Manchester yet is given the option of sharing a journey with a driver travelling from Liverpool. The implication is that the passenger would need to travel to meet the driver and incur the costs and inconvenience in doing so. The journey beginning in Manchester may, thus, seem the obvious option to choose. Yet, the journey leaving from Liverpool would purportedly take an hour less than the second (Manchester) option, possibly as a consequence of the second driver having listed stop-off points along the way. On the other hand, the drop-off locations for the second journey might make this the preferred option as Feltham is close to Heathrow Airport which provides a good transport link to central

London. That being said, this second journey arrives much later in the evening than the first, which might dissuade the passenger. The multiple factors involved in the task of choosing a driver with whom to travel demonstrate the potential complexity in making this decision. As noted in Haggett's (1965) classic text, paths often divert from optimal paths in terms of distance for a number of reasons (p. 33).

The scheme determines the geographical and temporal criteria a passenger initially uses to search for a ride. Yet, matters of user identity also come into view in the returned results, raising the possibility these factors also figure in a passenger's choice of driver. The green tick on the first driver's profile picture indicates that they have verified their identity by uploading a picture of their passport or driver's license. In the second listing, the image to the bottom left shows that the user is female but has not uploaded a picture. The only aspect of identity communicated in the default image is the driver's gender: in this case, female. Indeed, gender is one of the non-optional pieces of personal information that both drivers and passengers must provide and is publicly displayed. Female passengers are able to adjust their search preferences to only return rides offered by women, and gender is one of the few identity-related grounds on which a driver may refuse to provide a ride for a particular passenger. The aim, assumedly, responds to potential concerns among users about personal safety.

Sensitivity to gender dynamics between participants is part of Blablacar's efforts to create what they describe as "A community built on layers of trust and safety." (Blablacar, 2021i) These efforts are frequently discussed in posts on the platform's blog. In one such post, titled "In Trust We trust" (ibid.), Blablacar describes how, over the years, they have set out to add 'layers of trust' to the services they provide, through the introduction of features including "members' photos, ratings, background verifications, social network connections, activity information, as well as the online booking system." In 2016, Blablacar collaborated with researchers at New York University to produce an industry report entitled *Entering the Trust Age (see Blablacar, 2021j)*, which positions the platform as providing "the tools that allow people to trust each other" (p.11). A visit to the online platform makes apparent Blablacar's strong emphasis on trust, yet, what is notable is the lack of discourse about the potential dangers and risk more widely associated with traveling in a car with a stranger (see, for example, Reisinger & Mavondo

2006; Korstanje 2009; Greenley & Rice 2012). The safety tips that are provided by Blablacar are focused, instead, on generic car safety advice, such as wearing a seatbelt, not drink-driving or driving while distracted or tired (Blablacar, 2021k). When it comes to personal safety in traveling with strangers, rather than naming and addressing the potential risks in themselves, the platform focuses, instead, on describing its risk mitigations strategies; verifying user identities via passports and driver's licenses, keeping digital records of users' shared-journeys, and strongly encouraging users to provide feedback on the individuals with whom they have shared journeys. Rather than giving individual users information about potential risks and leaving it to them to make a 'rational' choice about whether or not to engage in the practice, Blablacar instead seems to be accepting - or, in any case, tacitly acknowledging - that risk is a factor in ride-sharing, and making efforts to adapting the practice in ways that risk is minimised.

Returning to Figure 5, as well as features that verify the 'trustworthiness' of a driver, the passenger is also presented with information relating to other aspects of journeying and sharing. The symbol on the right-hand side beneath the price for the lift offered by each driver indicates that both have opted to carry a maximum of two passengers to travel in the back seats, and that the first driver has activated the option for 'lightning booking' feature outlined in section 4.3. Attached to each listing is also a separate page that can be accessed by clicking on the individual listings. Doing so provides the users with a map that displays the route, including the driver's start and end locations and any pick-up points along the way. This is accompanied by additional information that the driver provides as described in section 4.3, such as the model of the car, their preferences regarding smoking, and a short description of the proposed journey. The profiles of both the driver and any passengers as outlined in section 4.2 are linked to this page. Significantly, the user can also access the ratings assigned to their potential co-travellers in view of previous shared trips. Throughout the process of searching for a ride, the arrangement of information links the practical and personal aspects of the journey: As users learn more about the spatial and temporal characteristics, so too do they learn more about the driver and any other passengers already booked to travel in the vehicle.

4.5 Booking & Payment

The processes of booking and paying for trips are, ostensibly, more procedural than those tasks described thus far in the chapter. Yet, their structure has important consequences for how ride-sharing is configured and, in particular, how these tasks are differently configured for drivers and passengers.

Blablacar dictates that journey prices must be set via a hybrid of what Furuhata et al. (2013: 35-36) describe as 'catalogue pricing' and 'rule-based pricing' systems. An initial price is suggested by Blablacar, which drivers are then able to adjust within a certain range should they wish to do so. Alternative systems of 'negotiation-based pricing' (p. 35) implemented by other schemes allow the price of a journey to be negotiated between drivers and passengers, usually in the communications that precede travel. Blablacar justifies its control over pricing and payment with reference to UK Government legislation that prohibits drivers profiting from ride-sharing. Echoing this law, the platform states that *"It is strictly prohibited to profit in any way from using our platform. Consequently, you agree to limit the Cost Contribution you ask your Passengers to pay to the costs you actually incur to make a trip"*. Thus, the upper limit drivers can charge for a journey represents Blablacar's estimate of the costs the driver will incur. Of course, there are ways in which drivers can work around these limits, some of which are described in Chapter 6. Presumably with an awareness of this possibility, Blablacar's 'Terms of Use' insist that *"when using the Platform and during Trips, you undertake not to try to bypass the online booking system of the Platform, notably by trying to send another Member your contact details in order to make the booking outside of the Platform and avoid paying the Service Fees"* (Blablacar, 2021b).

Attempts to bypass the online booking system are actively restricted by Blablacar's messaging system. Users are prevented from exchanging contact information by an automatic detection of messages containing phone number and email address, as I found out myself when attempting to directly contact a driver. Ensuring that the task of payment remains within the secure infrastructure of the scheme is presented as a means by which users can avoid problems associated with cash payments or fraudulent online transactions through external payment infrastructures. As a consequence of these measures, the possibility of drivers offering transit to passengers altruistically without payment is negated, as is the option of exchanging a ride for other goods or services. This imbues the practice of organised ride-sharing through Blablacar with a transactionality that potentially contradicts the 'shared' image of ride-sharing as a practice involving meanings of altruism and community. This conflict emerges as a further point of discussion in Chapter 5.

Passengers using Blablacar must make payments to the platform before they travel. Blablacar then holds the money before it is transferred (minus a booking fee) to the driver after the journey has been completed. As Furuhata et al. (2013:36) note, third-party payment systems avoid the problem of 'no-shows', although drivers and passengers are both afforded the option of cancelling their journey before departure (see below). Blablacar has described the role of the payment platform as "*making it easier and safer to process transactions and thus be [committed to] the transaction prior to the ride*". (Blablacar, 2021j:20). Arguably, the standardisation of the payment process does confer these benefits, but also acts to ensure that Blablacar is not cut out of the transaction.

4.6 Cancellation

Both drivers and passengers are able to cancel journeys through their profile. The Blablacar Help Centre provides step-by-step instructions for both drivers and passengers who would like to cancel their booking. Along with this information, the platform provides a guide to any cancellation fees that passengers are liable to pay. As laid out in the Blablacar terms of use, drivers are permitted to cancel a trip at any point, in which case the passengers who have booked receive a full refund. On the other hand, passengers making a cancellation are provided with a refund minus the booking fee charged by Blablacar, but only when the cancellation is made at least 24 hours prior to the agreed time of departure. Cancelling with less than 24-hours' notice only entitles passengers a refund of 50% of the payment that would have been made to the driver, with the driver receiving the other 50%. Ostensibly, this penalty might discourage short-notice cancellations that could inconvenience fellow travellers. Yet, significantly, there is no requirement - nor option - for drivers to make any compensatory payment to passengers left without a ride when a driver cancels a trip, however little notice is given. Arguably, a passenger left without a driver is likely to be in much more difficulty than a driver left without a passenger, in that the driver still has access to the means of transport. This discord, I suggest, speaks of the relative positions of drivers and passengers, and the significance of their disparate roles in the practice, as perceived - and configured - by the platform.

4.7 Travel

Once a journey has been arranged and paid for, practitioners can move away from the digital infrastructure that Blablacar provides. Having exchanged telephone numbers, communication via the platform is no longer required, and users are left to undertake the journey together. However, the influence of the scheme remains present during the trip.

The Blablacar website provides advice on how ride-sharers can 'improve' their journey by way of the Advice Centre and the Blablacar blog page. An example of this comes through the guidance they give on the task of identifying an appropriate meeting place. In my experiences of organised ride-sharing, it was never the case that a driver came to collect me from my house, and only for a handful of journeys did I travel to the residence or workplace of the driver. Rather, it was usual that we would both travel to an agreed upon location from whence our journey would begin. Blablacar offer advice on choosing an appropriate meeting point in a blog page that provides 'best practice and tips for meeting your fellow ride-sharers' (Blablacar, 2021l). The page, specifically aimed at drivers, states that it is the driver's responsibility to identify a meeting place and to communicate clearly about this with passengers 'so that they are able to find you.' The article suggests a number of generic meeting locations, including town or city centres, train stations, public transport stops, shopping centres, airports, and festivals. Each is discussed in terms of different factors that characterise a 'good' place for meeting. By providing users with this information, Blablacar encourages them to engage with its specific notions of better or more skilled ways of conducting ride-sharing performances. Specifically, these focus on choosing a location that can be easily accessed by both driver and passengers, taking into account how long it takes for each party to reach the location, as well as any costs that they might incur; amenities, such as cafes and shelter from rain that might make passengers more comfortable when waiting for their driver; the ease with which drivers and passengers will be able to navigate the locality to find one another; and the availability of space in which drivers can park or pull over to wait for passengers to arrive. In particular, Blablacar points to the value of clear agreements and detailed information in facilitating quick and easy pick-ups and drop-offs. These suggestions indicate some of the situated complexities involved in making shared journeys work well.

The norms of organised ride-sharing, as they are prescribed by Blablacar are, arguably, nowhere as evident as on the scheme's platform in their pages that direct practitioners as to "How to be a Good Driver" (Blablacar, 2021m) and "How to be a Good Passenger" (Blablacar, 2021n).

How to be a good driver?

> *The golden rule to remember: To be a good ridesharer, the driver must be like a welcoming host, and the passenger like a well-behaved guest in someone's home.*
>
> *The driver must be irreproachable at all levels, sensitive to the well-being of their passengers and respecting their requests, within reason of course.*
>
> *The driver must drive cautiously and confidently, staying focused on the drive and abiding by the rules of the road.*
>
> *Drivers should drop passengers off at the agreed-upon locations, and not at motorway rest areas or in the middle of nowhere. Drivers must also think about the comfort of their passengers and avoid overloading the car, especially if each passenger brings luggage.*

Carpooling is a great opportunity to meet people and engage in some interesting discussions! While this is not always the case, as we can be tired and not up for much conversation, a little effort goes a long way in breaking the ice, at least early on in the ride.

Finally, remember when the trip is done to leave a rating for your driver. It is always nice to receive a positive rating. You'll most likely receive a rating if you leave one yourself.

How to be a good passenger?

Even if much of the responsibility falls on the driver to ensure a successful ride, there are some common sense rules to respect on the passenger's side!

The golden rule to remember: To be a good member, the driver must be like a welcoming host, and the passenger like a well-behaved guest in someone's home.

Carpooling is an exchange between people, so just apply some basic rules of etiquette:

- *The driver should not be treated as a personal chauffeur or taxi*
- *Do not book a seat with different drivers for the same ride*
- *Do not arrive late or cancel at the last minute*
- *Do not make outrageous demands (20-mile detour)*
- *Arrive prepared to pay in cash if the ride is not available for online booking*
- *Do not try to negotiate the originally agreed upon price*
- *Do not dirty the vehicle, etc.*

All these little rules may seem obvious but it is always good to keep them in mind :-)

Carpooling is a great opportunity to meet people and engage in some interesting discussions! We understand that this is not always the case,

> *as we can be tired and not up for much conversation, but a little effort goes a long way in breaking the ice, at least early on in the ride.*
>
> *Finally, remember when the ride is done to leave a rating for your driver. It is always nice to receive a positive rating, and this contributes to the proper functioning of the carpooling community. You'll most likely receive a rating if you leave one yourself.*

The guides frame being welcoming, respectful, and cautious as important attributes of practice, "significant felicity condition[s] or at least as attribute[s] of practice," (Lambek 2010: 15). Together, these conditions contribute to the imperative to take care while engaged in the practice; "not only to say and do the right thing but to say and do things well, to do them carefully," (p. 16). Blablacar's focus on careful practice is, to draw on Lambek, "an affirmation of both Aristotelian notions of virtue as excellence and Heideggerian concern with being, as well as a reminder that practice theory's focus on routinized disposition needs to be supplemented with the disposition to take care, to carry out one's tasks with due attention and consideration," (pp. 15-16). To return to the earlier discussion on pick-up points: this was a process I undertook thoughtfully, considering the needs of the driver and how my choice would facilitate or hinder aspects of the practice, such as their ability to easily find the location, and park and turn their car. In short, I was being careful and considerate in my engagement in the practice, and, as such, understood my approach as virtuous within this context. While one of the fundamental tenets of practice theory is the foregrounding of the practice, rather than the individual, it is attention to moments such as this that enables us to move away from "the performance of individual acts to practice more generally, to examine specific notions of virtue internal to the practice. As Lambek surmises, "Virtues are qualities of actions or practice and [...] cannot be defined in an absolute sense but only insofar as they are contingently applied to specific actions, in specific circumstances [...]," (p. 19). Ultimately, this focus on goods as they are defined within a specific practice "directs attention away from practice in the abstract toward the appreciation of specific practices in their complex social actuality," (p. 22).

In Schatzki's (2002) work, it is the concept of 'teleoaffectivity' with which he accounts for people's emotional and motivational engagements with particular aspects of practice. From his perspective, these engagements are connected to the orientation of goals and ends (Welsch, 2020). To again refer to my choice of pick-up location, my specific goals and ends were inextricably connected to my understanding of what and what was a "good" instantiation of the practice of ride-sharing, and, in particular, what it meant to be a "good passenger". As my shared-journey with John was my first experience of ride-sharing, my understandings were based on norms encompassed and communicated in the "oughtness and acceptability" (Schatzki 2002: 80) of particular ways of engaging as they were presented in the platform's directives. From these, I understood being a good passenger meant that, among other things, I should not treat the driver "*as a personal chauffeur or taxi,"* and that I should "*not arrive late or [....] make outrageous demands (20 mile detour)."* Hence, I did not suggest that he should collect me from my house in central Lancaster and proceed to arrange pick-up in a location that fit my situated understanding of *the needs of the practice*, in the sense of what the practice required in order for this instantiation to be successful and "good".

As Laurier et al. (2008) note, "Sharing a car journey to work (or elsewhere) involves the unusual responsibility towards one another which we usually associate with those forms of co-habitation such as sharing a flat or an office," (p.15). Like Blablacar's itself, Laurier et al. use the analogy of the host and house guest when discussing the driver and passenger, and observe that, whether that which is being shared is a house or a car, it is situated notions of what constitutes a good host or guest that are "crucial to the arrangement of sharing," (p. 15). As such, the 'background categories' of 'driver' and 'passenger,' - like those of 'host' and 'guest', become "resources for moral assessment of each person's conduct during the journey," (p. 16, citing Sherlock, 2001). Part of the work of this chapter has been to demonstrate the ways in which these categories of 'driver' and 'passenger' are conferred upon users of the Blablacar ride-sharing platform.

4.8 Concluding remarks

As Schatzki (2002) observes, "a person's identity consists in the collection of subject positions she assumes in participating in a range of practices" (p.197). Part of what I have begun to examine here, and will continue to investigate in subsequent chapters, is how “sociality within practices is organized to varying extents around the subject positions made available in those practices,” (ibid.); in this case, the positions of driver and passenger. What I have attempted to demonstrate here is how, in the context of organised ride-sharing, “assuming and being identified with a particular position [...] assigns meaning to a person for all participants, including herself.” (ibid). With these positions come standardised ways of participating in the practice, prescribed and enforced via the material configurations of the platform with which users must interact. As Cass et al. (2018) note, “Standards coordinate by homogenising, defining what is standard and, conversely, what is not standard and, thus, to be avoided,” (p. 78). My intention here has been to open a discussion about how these standardised positions and associated meanings serve to help “... determine how others are behaviourally directed toward [the user] and how [the user], in turn, is directed toward them” (Schatzki 2002: 197).

In this case, I take ‘others’ to mean both individuals and institutions - primarily, in the latter case, Blablacar as a ride-sharing scheme. As Zigon (2009) notes, “Part of what it is to be an institution is to claim that it is the bearer and securer of the truth or rightness of a particular kind of morality. And while institutions have varying levels of power available to them in order to propagate and enforce their version of morality, it is generally a formal prerequisite of interacting with the institution that one, at least publicly, adheres to this morality,” (p. 258). This chapter has examined the ways in which Blablacar’s preferences for how ride-sharing is undertaken are enforced, in the context of online aspects of practice, through a set of distinct rules, and, in the context of offline aspects, through a prescriptive moral code of best practice. What is of interest here is how the rules of engagement, as they are determined by the platform, “assign different actions, duties, or forbearances to the occupants of different positions,” (Schatzki 2002 p.197) - in this case, the positions of ‘driver’ and ‘passenger’ identified and conferred, to a significant degree, by the platform itself. More generally, engaging with Schatzki’s observations leads me to question in subsequent chapters how wider teleoaffective structures “standardly evince a patterning of ends, projects, tasks, and even emotions among positions,” (ibid.).

This chapter, then, has also raised the question of how the configuration of material arrangements reflects and impacts the distribution of power. This applies not only between users and the platform, but also between drivers - as owners and operators of the vehicle - and the passengers seeking to share a ride. In beginning to examine how relationships between people in these two positions play out in practice, this chapter has considered the ways in which notions of what is, or is not, acceptable - and, thus the teleoaffective structures of organised ride-sharing practices - are shaped by people and institutions in positions of relative authority (Schatzki 2002:83). Yet, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, organised ride-sharing is a hybrid practice which takes place both on- and offline. While the distribution of power and authority might appear relatively clear in aspects of practice located online, the question this raises for subsequent chapters is how the distribution of power, the positions people and institutions occupy, and the meanings with which with these positions are associated are disrupted in the transition from on- to offline engagement in the practice.

Chapter Five: Interactions between Practitioners

5.1 Introduction

The practice of ride-sharing relies on close collaboration between practitioners. The positions of driver and passenger are mutually contingent. In Schatzki's (1996) terms, this is a form of sociality wherein each is an "object" of the other's "life conditions (including understandings and actions)" (p. 188). As Schatzki describes it, "two lives hang together, for instance, when one person knows or thinks something about someone else, when the second person is the object of an emotion, feeling, or action of the first, when the first understands or intends to do something with regard to the second, and so on," (ibid.) This is one of the distinctive characteristics of ride sharing - as a collaborative practice - that does not typify other more solitary practices (e.g., baking a cake, doing laundry, riding a bike). In the case of organised ride-sharing, these interactions are not necessarily regular or repeated between specific practitioners, and usually occur as one-off journeys rather than repeated trips. In this respect, ride-sharing is also distinct from other collaborative practices, such as team sports, wherein participants meet and perform together on a repeated basis. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of organised ride-sharing is the way in which its enactment brings together absolute strangers in the intimate environment of the car for several hours, after which they depart usually never to see one another again.

The previous chapter began the process of presenting and analysing the data collected during my ethnographic research, and presenting my situated understanding of how participants come to know how to practice organised ride-sharing. In doing so, it went some way to revealing the different meanings attached to sharing a ride (research question 2), what is negotiated by ride-sharers when they come together to share a journey and how these negotiations are enabled (research question 3), and the differences in roles between 'driver' and 'passenger' (research question 4). Yet, the responses this thesis has so far provided to these questions have been largely focused on the online platform. This chapter shifts the focus to practitioners, spanning the online and offline aspects of the practice to examine how meanings, negotiations, and roles translate between different environments.

As discussed in Chapter 2, for Schatzki (2002), a ‘practice is a set of doing and sayings’ (p. 73). Both ‘doings’ and ‘sayings’ are forms of action which often aggregate to form tasks. In turn, these tasks form parts of overall projects in which practitioners are engaged. As Schatzki argues, ‘a practice thus embraces a set of hierarchically organised doing/sayings, tasks and projects,’ (ibid.). In this chapter, I pay attention to the forms of saying - both verbal and written - as actions that are part of the sets of tasks involved in performing ride-sharing, with that performance constituting the project in which a driver and/or passenger is engaged.

This chapter looks at the online set-up, the offline enactment, and the online reviewing of the journey. The three temporally-sequenced stages of set-up, enactment, and review - all involving interaction and communication between ride-sharing practitioners - form the structure of this analysis. In Section 5.2, I examine specific ethnographic examples of communication between ride-sharers organising shared journeys via the online platform. In Section 5.3, I then consider the ways in which the enactment of the journey - most notably, the close physical proximity involved in travelling together in a car, often for several hours - engenders and shapes relational dynamics. In particular, I focus on the ways in which these encounters in the intimacy of the car lend themselves to extended conversation, and the ways in which practitioners accept or resist expectations conferred by the specific relational setting engendered by the practice. In 5.4 I examine the online feedback that practitioners provide following a journey. This final task of leaving feedback upon completion - or, in some cases, non-completion - of the journey provides a further means of communication that ostensibly allows practitioners to review their experience for the benefit of other ride-sharers, but may also serve other purposes.

In Chapter 4, it was established that Blablacar, through its website and app, provides an online infrastructure with a set of rules and guiding principles. These seek to define and regulate the specific ways in which collaborating practitioners perform the practice of ride-sharing. As the previous chapter emphasizes, organising a shared ride requires communication between drivers and passengers, yet this takes place online where Blablacar determines the process and monitors the content of such interactions. During the journey itself - at pick-up locations and in the moving vehicle in a moving car - interaction takes place in person: that is, without the intermediary presence of the platform and in spaces wherein Blablacar's agenda may take on different types and levels of significance and, hence, affect participant's practice in different ways.

5.2 Pre-travel interaction

This section of the chapter examines interactions between ride-sharers preparing to share a journey. As discussed in Chapter 4, Blablacar requires drivers to list the details of journeys they wish to share. Passengers can search within these listings before contacting a driver whose journey matches their requirements. In examining the details of this process, I highlighted the ways in which the scheme prioritises and values certain aspects of practice. Yet, what also becomes apparent is that the priorities of the scheme might not match those of the practitioner, and, equally, practitioners' priorities may not match those of their peers. Perhaps to accommodate potential discord, a degree of flexibility is built into the design of the platform, enabling practitioners to communicate and negotiate the details of performance beyond those aspects of performance prefigured by the scheme. While these negotiations often continue beyond the point of departure (see 5.3.1), most begin online. My interest here is how practitioners address aspects not covered by the scheme, and the potential issues and opportunities that arise as a result of these gaps. In undertaking analysis of these pre-trip interactions, I am therefore not only concerned with forms of direct communication (person to person), but also how ride-sharers list their proposed journeys online and providing a user profile, as well as how ride-sharers view journey information posted by other practitioners.

5.2.1 Journey Listing

The process of organising a shared journey through Blablacar begins with drivers listing their shared trips through the combination of a discrete set of options, which describe the physical characteristics of the intended journey, and a text entry, to provide further detail. Collectively, these comprise the database of proposed journey listings through which passengers can identify a match with their own mobility requirements. In my experiences of ride-sharing as a passenger, viewing journey listings not only helped me to identify specific driver opportunities for shared travel but also afforded me a general sense of which routes and times of travel tend to be popular. Unlike public transport services, in organised ride-sharing the parameters of supply are not subject to structured timetables, but operate under particular rhythms of the road. I will discuss in Chapter 6 how my increased awareness of these rhythms enabled me to optimise my process of journey planning. The point to note here, however, is that my interviews indicated that it was also common for drivers to review the listings data, evaluating patterns of supply and demand as a means to gauge the likely appeal of their own listed journeys. For example, Participant Y describes how "some people who advertise are into checking exactly what price other people are charging" in order to ensure that the price they charge remains competitive. This strategy is significant as - to use Schatzki's (1996) term - there is a lack of interaction between people occupying the same 'position'. In other words, drivers do not routinely interact with other drivers doing ride-sharing and, thus, have limited opportunities to develop an understanding of what others are doing. Thus, journey listings provide an indirect means by which drivers are able to access such information.

The text entries that supplement journey listings provide a means by which practitioners can communicate further details of their preferred configurations of performance. Specifically, the scheme presents this as an opportunity for drivers to set the terms of the journey based on their own preferences. This reinforces the notion that, as the party listing the journey, it is the driver who assumes both responsibility and control over the configuration of the journey. Yet, while the design of the scheme seems to suggest this as an opportunity for drivers to establish their preferred configuration, my research shows that, in practice, drivers use this text to signal their willingness to be flexible in the direct negotiations that follow (see Section 5.2.2 below). This is demonstrated in the following examples:

> *"Going home for the weekend. Happy to make drop offs along the way and give you full control of the music. Always up for a convo and a laugh."*

"Hey! I can possibly detour into Oxford / Warrington / anywhere along the way, just message and I'll try help out! Timings are pretty much locked in though! Don't hesitate to message :)"

"I'm super flexible about where to meet and timings so do get in touch, and we can arrange something! Let me know if you have any other preferences and I'll do my best to accommodate you."

These examples also show that, while the function of this text is nominally practical in its nature, the entries also provide an opportunity to communicate something of the person themselves: a relaxed attitude and willingness to negotiate. As a passenger, I felt this helped me to gauge the likely disposition of the driver with whom I was considering booking a ride. Yet, while some people used this text as an opportunity to signal flexibility, others also used it as a chance to set the boundaries of this willingness to accommodate the passengers' preferences. This is illustrated by the following examples, again taken from the sample of Blablacar driver listings:

"Can pick up from your house if no more than 15 minutes out the way."

"Pickup can be Edgware station of black line, Stanmore station of grey line, Mill Hill Broadway station, Borehamwood station."

"Happy to pick up or drop off en route up to 2 miles away from direct route"

"I am a little flexible in terms of pick up and drop off location as well as time. and can detour for up to 15 minutes to accommodate if required. You can use Google maps to plan your journey and establish detour."

"Happy to pick up from any service station or minimal detour but won't be able to go far out of way as have to be in London in time for work."

This sample of text entries suggests that these ride-sharers have developed personal preferences regarding their flexibility in negotiating pick-up or drop-off locations and times. Moreover, the sample also demonstrates that these drivers feel able to communicate their preferences in online communications.

The previous chapter detailed Blablacar's advice on "Being a Good Driver". When it comes to flexibility, the scheme states that drivers should respect passengers' requests, "...within reason of course," yet refrains from elaborating on what might be considered reasonable. What we see in the text entries above is that some drivers take it upon themselves to specify these parameters. Interestingly, there is a significant degree of uniformity in the limits drivers lay down. For example, several drivers set 15 minutes or two miles as the upper limit for detours. This commonality raises questions about the ways in which these drivers came to establish the extent of their flexibility. As a passenger, my interpretation of the appropriate degree of flexibility in negotiating pick-up and drop-off locations was partially informed by viewing these and other text listings. For example, this was the means by which I came to understand that drivers were unlikely to agree to travel 30 minutes from the M6 to pick me up at my home in central Lancaster. Thus, I usually arranged to meet drivers at a bus stop on an A-road near to a motorway junction.

The ability to specify their preferred configurations of performance was particularly important for those drivers who would repeatedly advertise shared trips along a route that they regularly travelled. One such driver, Participant X, made a fortnightly trip from his home near Liverpool to his place of work in London. He described how he had written a fixed template of text that he used to list all the journeys he made, informing passengers travelling from London that they should take the Underground to Ealing to meet him for pick-up. He felt that providing this information minimised the need to negotiate further with passengers who were unwilling to agree to his terms. Thus, he saw this text entry as a key part of ensuring the process of organising shared journeys went as smoothly as possible. Participant X had clearly defined for himself what he considered to be acceptable in the give-and-take of the shared project - specifically in terms of his willingness to enter negotiations as to the route. Interestingly, he also asserted that "people who are asking me to be more flexible about pick-up and that sort of thing are gonna be the ones who are a pain to have in the car," Participant X. Unlike the driver quoted above, this participant was happy to exercise the power available to him as a driver and assert his preferred configuration of the practice.

While Participant X was clear about his unwillingness to negotiate, a number of other drivers indicated their willingness to travel further out of their way for passengers who would compensate them for doing so. For example:

> *"Can be flexible with pickups for £20 - but please send a request with an accurate pickup address. Time can be flexible to a degree."*
>
> *"I'm driving from London to Geneva and am happy to go off route for a tip!"*

Asking for additional payment is strictly prohibited in the rules of the scheme. Moreover, such a request stands to tip the balance from a collaborative to a transactional endeavour, repositioning the driver and passenger in the roles of customer and service provider. Such a reconfiguring of practitioners' roles - and, hence, relative positions within the practice - is, thus, likely to significantly disrupt the relational aspects of the encounter. After all, different roles/positions are associated with deeply embedded cultural meanings that hold implications for the perceived distribution of power and agency. Examples of ride-sharers breaking the rules of the scheme by asking for additional payment play an important part in the Chapter 6 discussion of how practitioners learn to modify their performances over the course of their career.

As well as enabling drivers to specify their willingness to deviate from their planned route, the supplementary text also allows them to specify the size and type of luggage that they will allow passengers to bring along. My sample of the listings revealed several examples of drivers who specified the maximum size of baggage that they would allow, through comments such as "Limited boot space, enough for a suitcase," or "I would like everyone travelling with me to only carry small bags because I have a lot for myself." One driver also emphasised that they would not allow passengers to bring "very heavy luggage". Another driver specifically requested that passengers "don't ask me to deliver anything if you're not travelling with me yourself", suggesting that they had previously received previous such requests. This may reflect the fact that Blablacar previously allowed their system to be used as a courier service for several years before removing this option from the rules of the scheme. There were equally as many drivers within the sample who advertised being able to accommodate a large quantity of luggage, through comments such as "The car has a massive trunk and there is ample space for large suitcases and stuff," "The car is an estate with a big boot so space for a fair bit of luggage," and "I got big and comfortable SUV so plenty of space for you guys,". One such listing invited interested passengers to contact them directly in order to discuss their luggage requirements further. Two listings advertised also having space for passengers to bring a bicycle, with one asking that they make a separate payment should they wish to do so.

Across the sample of listings there were therefore both patterns of similarity and difference in how practitioners were communicating about shared journey opportunities. Roughly half of journey listings provided only the minimal information necessary, while the other half took advantage of the opportunity to elaborate and communicate the terms under which they were willing to collaborate with other practitioners. As suggested above, in laying down these terms, it appeared the intention was sometimes to set boundaries and limit the parameters of collaboration. At other times, the aim was to indicate willingness to accommodate the needs of others, remain flexible, and enter further negotiations about how a ride-sharing journey would be enacted.

5.2.2 Direct Communication

After searching journeys listings and identifying a potential match, a passenger using Blablacar would usually initiate direct communication with the driver in order to negotiate the terms of travel. Several drivers who were interviewed described how the majority of these requests from passengers would occur a day or two before their planned departure. For Participant V, who travelled as a passenger, this was a deliberate strategy. In their experience, arranging a journey close to the time of departure minimised the risk that the driver would change their plans or cancel a journey. Other participants suggested that the high incidence of last-minute booking reflected the fact that many passengers came to ride-sharing as a last resort after other travel plans had fallen through, or in seeking a short-notice option cheaper than public transport.

As I established in Chapter 4, until payment for a shared-journey has been made to the platform, Blablacar insists that all communication between drivers and passengers takes place only via the online messaging system. This restriction prevents users from bypassing Blablacar's booking fee. As payment is usually made only once all - or, at least, most - of the the terms of travel have been agreed, the majority of pre-trip communication occurs through the messaging system. Occasionally, however, this is followed up by email, text message, or telephone call.

Participant P explained that some passengers would call on the day of travel to check how he is getting on with his journey. He preferred that these inquiries be made via text, noting that safely receiving a phone call while driving can be difficult, but was sympathetic to the fact that passengers often preferred to call in order to seek reassurance that their driver would turn up. Participant S preferred to use the 'hands-free' function on his mobile phone, explaining this as a straightforward means by which he was able to communicate during the journey:

> *"I've found I'm much better at using hands free than texting. Press the button and there we are, I'm chatting to you and I can keep my eyes on the road. I have got this text to speech thing […] yeah, I've tried lots of different things"*
>
> **Participant S**

I found it useful to set up a WhatsApp group with my driver, through which we could then share our location. This was a function that I had become used to when coordinating with friends when meeting up in town. Doing so was not always possible, and often depended on how capable my driver was in utilising this technology. As Participant Y explained, *"I'm not familiar with ride-sharing on my phone (…) I'm not that savvy with technology. I am interested, but I wouldn't know how to do it.* Communications via mobile phone applications such as WhatsApp that rely on mobile data networks also relied on ride-sharers having access to a mobile data. Participant M described how he would stop off at motorway services and use their WIFI to respond to any messages in order to avoid using up his personal allowance.

Through these various observations, my data shows that the disparate needs of ride-sharing practitioners meant that they often opted to move away from the limited communication infrastructure provided by Blablacar. Whether due to a lack of mobile data, unfamiliarity with the use of hands-free settings on a mobile phone, or a preference for speech rather than text-based communication, once entering the enactment phase of the practice, many practitioners switched to other communication networks better able to meet their specific requirements. Yet, even with the option of using phone, text, and email, keeping in touch with co-travellers was not always straight-forward. Moving communication away from the platform for the first time, practitioners were tasked with figuring out how to communicate with other ride-sharers while in motion. While new communication methods that enable drivers to keep in touch are now technologically well developed, driving, as a practice, emerged prior to such means of mobile connectivity. Indeed, it is only relatively recently that communication and information technologies that were tied to landlines and desktops have become mobile (Molz, 2013). These examples of ride-sharing emphasise that the question of how connectivity can be smoothly incorporated into driving - or, to look at it another way, the practice of driving expanded and reconfigured to incorporate mobile connectivity - has yet to be resolved.

It should be noted that Blablacar also presents drivers listing a journey with the option of allowing passengers to instantly book a seat. This process, termed 'lightning booking', entirely bypassed the online process of journey negotiation. Of the journey listings within the sample, just under half (46%) of the drivers advertising a ride were found to have enabled this function, as had a number of the drivers with whom I travelled. My research suggested that drivers accepting 'lightning bookings' would invariably still contact passengers in order to get a sense of the person they would be travelling with and negotiate details of the journey. This was the case for Participant M, who immediately rang to discuss our arrangements after I had made a 'lightning booking'. During our journey, he explained that he found phone calls a more straightforward means of communication for negotiating and he felt happy to take lightning bookings on the basis that, if there were any issues during the phone call, he could always cancel the booking.

When reflecting on journey negotiations, it is important to recognise that the contexts within which these occur plays a role in shaping power dynamics between drivers and passengers. As established in Chapter 4, the fact that the driver is charged with initiating communication sets a precedence in the distribution of responsibility for, and control over, configurations of performance. It could also be said that the bearing of this power dynamic is influenced by the relative experience held by practitioners. Data gathered from journey listings and user profiles indicated that the most experienced practitioners tended to be drivers. Examining user profiles from the schemes gave an indication that this was because drivers frequently undertook long-distance journeys for the purpose of work or to visit their family, and they had engaged with ride-sharing as a means of offsetting their travel costs. Based on the descriptions provided in the interviews, passengers were typically less-experienced, often having booked because their usual means of travel had been disrupted.

To illustrate the negotiation involved in arranging a ride-sharing journey, the following excerpt captures an exchange that occurred between a driver and myself as we discussed the possibility of undertaking a journey together. As well as the direct messages that were sent between us, I include the initial listing on Blablacar.

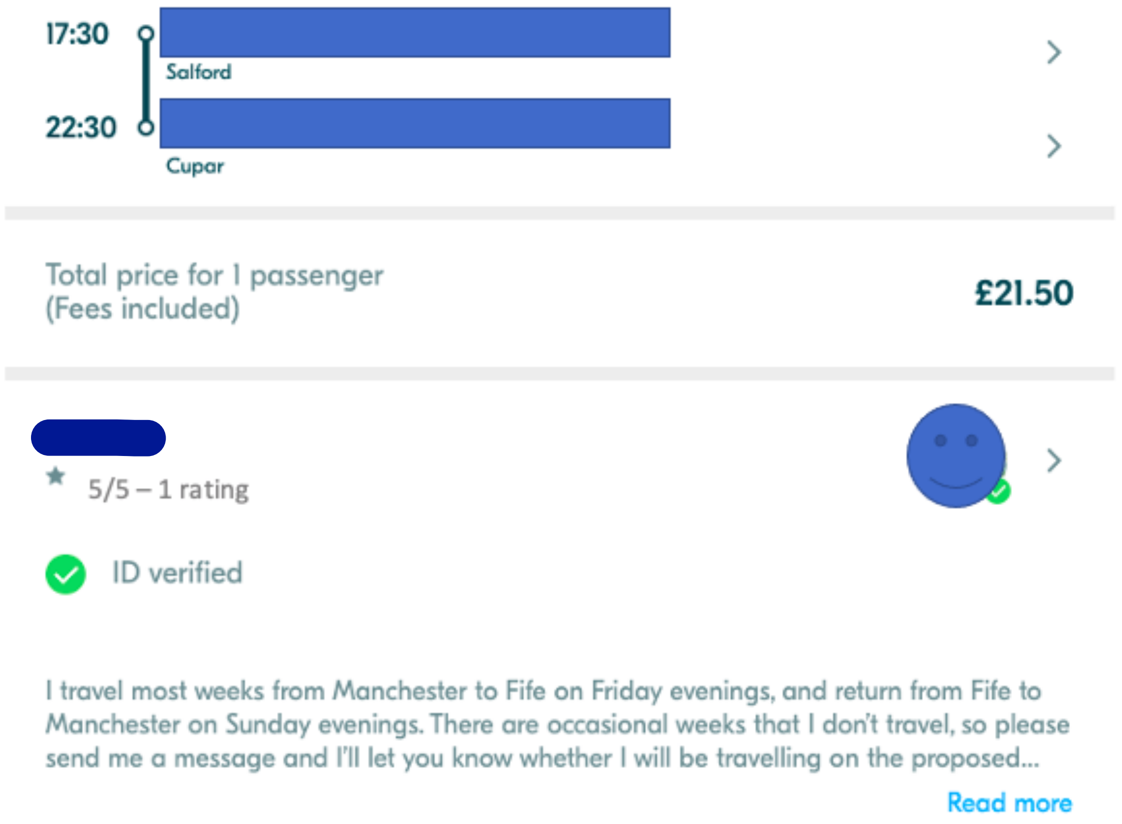

Figure 6: Blablacar listing- David

5/2/18

Hi David,

I'm interested in sharing a ride from the Lancaster area up to Edinburgh on the 23rd March. Are you travelling up on that day? I am at Lancaster University (LA1 4YW) but at a push could get the bus to the Plough Inn at Galgate (LA2 0LY) for an easier pick-up.

Many thanks,

Iain

5/2/18

Hello Iain

I'm not 100% sure at the moment, though provided that's not Easter weekend, it's likely to be a yes.

We can arrange a pickup point nearer the time, if it's just a couple of miles off the motorway and not congested, that's ok.

Where in the Edinburgh area are you heading to?

Best regards

Dave

6/2/18

Hi David,

Thanks for the swift response - I am happy to confirm nearer to the date.

Regarding drop off, I am visiting my mum who is based in East Lothian, but she will be in Edinburgh until around 1030 so should be fairly flexible in picking me up. If you are taking the M8 to Queensferry you could drop me at the station at Dalmeny (EH30 9JU), provided I could get there by the last train at 10.30. Otherwise, if you are taking the Biggar road, you could drop me at the Esso garage just before the Edinburgh bypass (EH10 7DU), and I should be able to get a lift from there. If we arrive earlier than that, I can always head into town to wait, so anywhere with decent public transport links should work!

Thanks,

Iain

12/3/18

Hi David,

Anything sorted for next week?

Thanks,

Iain

13/3/18

Hi Iain,

Still not sure unfortunately, looking like 50/50. I won't know till the Tuesday of that week, sorry.

Best regards

Dave

21/3/18

Hi Ian,

Yes, can do Friday, if you can get to the Plough Inn, as that would be easier for me to come off the motorway and get back on it.

At the Edinburgh end, how about somewhere like the Edinburgh Gateway on the Gogar roundabout, that would let you get bus or tram into the city, but it may be about 10-10:30 before we get there?

Best regards

Dave

[BOOKING PAYMENT MADE]

22/3/18

Fantastic! What time do you anticipate pick up at the plough? You can get me on 07######### if needs be, although I'm in meetings today until 4pm so might not answer

----

22/3/18

Hi Iain

The exact timing will depend on the traffic, as the Salford to Preston bit can be quite variable. Probably somewhere between 6:45and 7pm, I suspect, but I will phone you as I leave Salford, as it will take about an hour to get to you after I set off. My mobile number is 07#########. It's difficult to take calls during the working day, but texts are ok. I have a red Mazda 6, so you can recognise me.

Best regards

Dave

This exchange was typical of many others that took place when I organised shared trips. I initiated communication with the driver quite far in advance of the journey on the basis that there were no other appropriate journeys listed and my fall-back was to get the train which would have become more expensive closer to the time of departure. David later indicated that part of his uncertainty as to whether or not he could offer me a ride was related to the fact that his wife was considering joining him for a shopping trip in Manchester and he was not comfortable sharing a journey while she was in the car.

The initial message that I sent was based on a common template that I adopted for multiple journeys as a way to save time. In the earlier days of ride-sharing, I tried to be as flexible as possible in the places and times that I was willing to be dropped off- a mentality established through past experience of hitch-hiking - but I eventually observed that other passengers were more forthright in making more specific requests. In this instance, my flexibility was limited as the driver wanted to travel in the evening and public transport options for the onward part of the journey were limited. These direct messages allowed me to inform the driver that it was important for me to arrive on time, while providing him with a range of options that would work for me. The flexibility associated with the convenience of travelling by car is accompanied by a degree of uncertainty when the decision-making is undertaken by another person, and so the ability to communicate any specific needs was valuable in mitigating the risk of disruptions further down the line. In this case this involved articulating that arriving late at my destination would be problematic, and communicating this to the driver before committing to travel together presents them with the opportunity to back out of negotiations if they felt that this might occur. Establishing boundaries at this point in the negotiation avoids incidents of tensions flaring further down the line, as the contradictory needs and wants of the driver and passenger are exposed.

It was common through this process of negotiation for both passengers and drivers to consult an online map (usually Google Maps) to evaluate whether the proposed meeting points were appropriate. In the following extract, Participant Q describes how having done so allowed him to be more flexible than he might otherwise have been:

> *"She said 'you can come and pick me up at my place. I will pay additionally'. I always prefer Haymarket, because that is very near to my house and it is a public place. I don't usually agree to something different because I don't want to take a risk. And then she said, 'is it ok for you to come?', and then I asked for a postcode and checked it in google maps. It was a known place to me. It was very near to the meadows. I have been there so many times and it is not too far- it is very near to that children's hospital. So 'that's fine', I said."*
>
> **Participant Q**

Other interviewees also referred to using Google Street View as a means of visually evaluating a meeting point to determine whether it was a safe place for drivers to stop and passengers to wait.

Another important aspect of this direct communication is its decidedly human element. As a passenger this is particularly important, as until the driver physically shows up at a pick-up point, there is always an underlying worry about whether they will show up at all. Personal interaction provides a degree of reassurance that the driver you are booking with is genuine.

Participant interviews demonstrated how these negotiations were often distinctive based on the particular person with whom you negotiate. Participant K, for example, describes negotiating with one particular passenger who they identify as 'having the knowledge' in the sense that they were particularly knowledgeable of the available places to meet and descriptive in their instructions of how to get there. Participant K concluded that within this particular process of negotiation, they chose to defer to the passenger's better understanding. They note the fact that they were travelling in a location with which they were less familiar also determined their having done so, showing that the circumstance of a particular performance can also impact interaction.

So far, I have focussed on examples of negotiation whereby the different parties involved were in general agreement. There was also evidence in the data of times where reaching an agreement was less straightforward. For example, Participant B describes attempting to only book one seat when negotiating to travel with her dog. She describes having "tried to bargain a little bit with people" but that through a number of encounters, she eventually came to understand that booking two seats was "just what you have to do" and that this system of payment was "pretty standard really". In her particular case as a passenger travelling with a dog, she was limited in the options of alternative travel mode, and this placed her in a position where she often had to adhere to the requirements of travel that were dictated by the driver. Participant S describes another such example of an exchange during which negotiations were difficult, as he and the passenger making a request were not able to reach an agreement over the time it would take to undertake the journey:

> *"'How long will it take?' They asked.*
>
> *I said 'nine hours'.*
>
> *They said 'According to Google it should take six and a half hours'.*

I said 'I have driven for a long time, I'm telling you- minimum nine hours. And also, you have to consider that I can't drive like a machine, I need a break'.

Then he said, 'I'm not booking'.

'Thank you' I said. And that was it."

Participant S

The data examined in this section of the chapter has shown that, in addition to the processes set up by the ride-share schemes that were discussed in Chapter 4, organising ride-sharing also involves ride-sharers providing additional information that relates to the particular configurations of performance that suit their specific circumstances of enactment. While some of these circumstances are included as standardised elements within scheme infrastructure (e.g., preferences of smoking within the vehicle, option of bringing a pet, listening to music), there were others featuring in the data that were not, including plenty that could be considered unique to the particular ride-sharer. This is to be expected, as the convenience associated with travelling by car is contingent on flexibility in choosing when and where to go and what to carry along the way. The research highlights how this flexibility brings with it a need to accommodate the fact that ride-sharing involves collaboration between multiple people, each with their own interpretation of how performance should be configured that extend beyond the procedures and rules established by the scheme that were described in the previous chapter. The fact that Blablacar provides the option for additional text alongside listings and the direct messaging system demonstrates that they recognise the importance of ride-sharers resolving this through communication. The task of negotiating was in itself afforded a degree of flexibility, with ride-sharers adopting various approaches, a number of which I have outlined. All the same time, the ways in which ride-sharers undertake these negotiations is restricted by the scheme provider through controlling the means by which interactions occur via the digital infrastructure that they provide. This is most apparent in determining that drivers are obliged to charge a minimum price to passengers that is set by the scheme. Although the data showed that a number of practitioners had proposed additional charges, Blablacar is clear in its terms of use that doing so is not permitted. Chapter 5 examines these and other ways that ride-sharers develop their own ways of doing ride-sharing in further detail.

I have also touched on some of the actions and tasks within the performance of ride-sharing that these interactions have addressed- chiefly the place and time of passenger pick-up and drop-off and the acceptable luggage that they are permitted to bring along. While these stand out in characterising the specific needs of the ride-sharer, it raises the question of whether there are other such needs that are not accounted for in this way. One such need that was observed to be highly important to some practitioners but was only discussed in a limited capacity relates to the social interactions that can take place when sharing a journey. The next sections of the chapter examine this in detail, as well as observing the disruptive influence inconsistencies in understandings of acceptable conduct between different practitioners can have on performance.

5.3 On the road

In this section, I discuss the interactions that occur during the journey itself. Being in the car is clearly a central part of the series of tasks that make up ridesharing as a practice, and whilst this period of time might be distilled into a series of specifics actions (e.g. for the driver, those associated with the detail of driving the car), here I am interested in the interpersonal communication that goes on during the journey. This takes the form of verbal communication between driver and passengers, and potentially just between passengers where there are multiple ride-sharing passengers travelling in one vehicle. For many ride-sharers the social experience of sharing a journey is an integral aspect of performance, reflected in the fact that the scheme Blablacar is named as it is. Again, I rely on data collected through participant interviews along with my own experiences of how conversations tend to occur during journeys. Given my academic interest in acquiring knowledge of people's experiences steered some of the conversations to focus on ride-sharing, I limit the extent to which I rely on my own experiences in evaluating how ride-sharing was discussed reflexively in this environment. This aside, participants were generally found to be forthright in sharing their experiences, sometimes to the point where I would have to ask them to repeat their earlier comments once I had begun recording our conversation.

5.3.1 Conversation

Ride-sharers were observed to differ in the extent to which they would engage in conversation during a journey. Chapter 4 established that Blablacar acknowledges how some ride-sharers are more sociable than others, allowing its users to indicate how sociable they consider themselves through their public profiles. Users self-identify as 'bla- I'm the quiet type'; 'bla bla- I'm chatty when I feel comfortable'; or 'Blablacar- I'm a chatterbox!'. Providing users with the ability to indicate their preference places emphasis on the social aspect of the journey, whilst also reducing the potential for any feelings of obligation for intense conversation.

The research showed that ride-sharers differed in terms of their expectations that the people with whom they shared a journey would engage in conversation. Quality of conversation was a common reason that ride-sharers presented to justify a high rating in the feedback that ride-sharers exchanged following a journey (see Section 5.4). Participate G describes, as others did, a clear sense of expectation that as a passenger "you need to be sociable (...) there is an expectation. You couldn't spend the whole journey looking at your phone". Participant B recognises that drivers doing ride-sharing would also need to be comfortable with making conversation:

> *"If you are the sort of driver that gets very stressed when people talk to you while driving, you just don't talk to them. I don't want them to crash the car while chatting. I guess if you are that kind of driver, you would not have people in your car a lot of the time, because it's just not worth the trouble. The money isn't worth it if it's going to stress you out for the whole journey. And you cannot expect everyone to be quiet for five hours."*
>
> **Participant B**

In placing emphasis on the 'sort of driver' rather than the way the practice is performed their comments suggest that a practitioner's enjoyment (or at least capacity to avoid stress) when socialising within the vehicle relates to factors external to ride-sharing. She notes that drivers have usually made a choice to share their journey, and therefore as a passenger she feels comfortable engaging them in conversation. In my experience this was the case for most of the drivers that I encountered, but at times other passengers could be less talkative.

On the subject of conversation, it was common when ride-sharing to encounter passengers, and sometimes drivers, who had travelled to the UK from overseas. Equally, several of the interview participants that were UK citizens who had themselves undertaken organised ride-sharing abroad. While participants were generally welcoming of the opportunity to share a journey with someone of a different nationality, a few found that language could be a problem. Participant P was unhappy with the prospect of travelling in the UK with passengers who could not speak English, describing his frustration with a passenger who had tried to get an-English speaking friend book a journey on their behalf earlier that week:

> *"he got somebody else to ring for him. And then I said 'well how on earth is he going to cope when he comes in the car', because Blablacar is all about blablabla, so you know how is he going to blablabla? You know we have had it constantly in the past where people have just sunk into the back of the car because they just can't keep up with the conversation."*
>
> **Participant P**

These comments emphasise that the relational aspect of ride-sharing is of central importance to Participant P in their approach to ride-sharing. The fact that they are apparently unwilling to accept a booking for a passenger who is unable to converse in English demonstrates their resolve in engaging with ride-sharing as a social rather than purely transactional encounter. For them, the interpersonal communication within the car is fundamental to performance, and therefore viewed as non-negotiable. Other drivers were more forgiving in encountering non-English speaking passengers, such as Participant Y, who described using Google translate on his mobile phone as a means of communicating important information, but noted that small talk was limited.

In my own experience, all of the drivers that I travelled with were both happy to engage in conversation and comfortable with the prospect of spending some periods of time not talking during the journey. Participant M reflects this observation through observing how his tendency to talk was dependent on the particular mood he finds himself in for a particular trip. Participant V estimates that conversation occurs for 'around 70-100%' of the time spent travelling. At times I did feel a sense of obligation to engage the driver in conversation, although I recognise that this was something that had become engrained through my experience as a hitch-hiker. For most of my trips as a ride-sharer, the driver and I would spend the first hour or two talking, and then there would be intermittent breaks in the conversation in the time that followed. A number of participants that I spoke with indicated that this was fairly typical, but they did not have a problem with a lack of conversation. Participant K, for example, described spending extended periods of shared journeys listening to the radio, while Participant V recalled that during quieter trips "it's not been awkward because we just enjoy the drive and the scenery". Participant X was even happy for passengers to sleep during their shared journeys, recognising that there were times when they had been out drinking over the weekend and would appreciate the opportunity to get some rest. For Participant V, as a passenger it was a case of making a judgement as to whether the driver expected them to engage in a "*massive conversation*", but they also acknowledged that their own preferences could also be influenced by previous night's indulgences. They explained that in their case, "most of the time when I use Blablacar it is to visit friends, so we had usually been out the night before and the hangover is kicking in so you are feeling like you want to fall asleep".

My experience of travelling via Blablacar was that often, if there were three people travelling together, the conversation would be dominated by the two people sitting in the front of the car while the passenger in the back remained fairly quiet. Laurier et al. (2008) make similar observations which they describe as "front seat- back seat geography (p. 20), the spatial arrangement of which detracts from both audial and visual communication. In the few journeys I made under these circumstances, the person in the back seemed content in withdrawing from the conversation and keeping to themselves in the relative anonymity of the back seat[5].

[5] The one occasion that I have undertaken organised ride-sharing in a full car took place outside of the research area when I was travelling in France. The driver and her son, who were both

Overall, then, there appears to be some felt need to communicate whilst on the road, constituting a shared norm of how ride-sharing should be practised. This is not necessarily universal, and has some conditionality around it in that particular circumstances might reasonably preclude this, but it generally happens and has a number of roles in the practitioner's performance of ride-sharing.

5.3.2 Getting to know one another

Ride-sharing can be seen as an opportunity to have an in-depth conversation with someone that you might otherwise not expect to encounter in everyday life. Participant J describes feeling that "T*he good thing about it is that you are on the road, you talk about your life with people, the trip is not boring. You get to know people; you get to experience people*". Among the many memorable social encounters that I can recall include journeys with a fraud lawyer who spoke with some impunity about some of the cases he had dealt with in the past; a soldier with specific insights into the effects of Brexit on the procurement of military vehicles; and a church organist with an extensive knowledge on the history of the pipe organ. All of these encounters provided an opportunity to gain an in depth understanding of subjects that would have been difficult to gain elsewhere. For Participant S, it is not just that ride-sharing presents the opportunity for them to acquire this in depth of understanding, but also to experience conversations amongst multiple passengers travelling with them for one trip. As they describe:

> *"[…] you might have a business analyst on this side, someone that is maybe in media, and like a US marine behind. It can get so diverse. And they are the best ones because we have such conversations coming out as we talk about different things".*
>
> **Participant S**

French, travelled in the front, while two Australian men and I sat in the back. Conversation flowed throughout the two-hour trip on both sides of our temporary geo-linguistic border.

The intimacy of the car as a shared space facilitates these interactions in a way that travelling by other modes does not, even though the diversity participant S describes is often likely to occur within them.

The fact that ride-sharing is more popular outside of the UK makes encounters with travellers from overseas a common occurrence. Participant S notes that the value in these encounters is reciprocated in that they often find themselves offering up their own knowledge to other ride-sharers about the local area, describing how "If they are out of town, I might say, check this restaurant out, give them a heads up on things**".**

5.3.3 Continuing negotiations

Negotiations of the kind described in section 5.2.2 were on occasion observed to spill over to the journey itself. The most common aspect of ride-sharing that this relates to was negotiating further details of the passenger drop-off location. This was an approach that I found to be useful, as I felt drivers would usually become more flexible once a sense of rapport had developed through face-to-face conversation. Participant G agrees that in their experience, it was usual for them to arrange their specific drop-off point in the vehicle "when you had got to know somebody". Participant V echoes this point, perceiving that "generally with Blablacar I think if it's going to where you generally need to go, you can chat to the driver and he will drop you off at the door". This apparently common experience indicates that passengers recognise that the boundaries of negotiation are malleable and subject to shift over the course of the encounter, as a relational connection develops that can introduce a sense of desire, or even obligation, to help out. As a driver, Participant F describes how their flexibility in dropping off their passengers was dependent on their schedule that day, explaining that "if I have loads of time, I don't mind taking people to where they want to go. But if I don't, then the drop off location is where we go". Their comments imply that they are unable to establish whether or not this will be the case at the time that they post their journey, and so the ability to continue negotiations in the vehicle provides them with this opportunity to be as flexible as possible.

Other drivers were less agreeable to the prospect of negotiating changes to drop-off location in this way, including participant S who resolutely refused several such requests from another passenger with whom we were travelling. This created a sense of tension in the car, as the other passenger was clearly frustrated at the prospect of having to undertake the final part of their journey through another means. The driver attempted to alleviate this tension by explaining how a short detour could lead to significant delays, and that it was particularly important for him to be on time as he was planning to pick up his children from school. From my position, I could certainly see where he was coming from, especially as we were arriving in an area well served by public transport, in the early afternoon of a particularly sunny day. Despite this, the journey continued with a degree of tension, as conflicting between their respective expectations of entitlement remained unresolved.

5.3.4 Discussing ways of doing ride-sharing

Conversations within the vehicle that involved discussing past experiences of ride-sharing that the travellers had accrued during previous journeys. For participant J, this process of discussing past experiences of performance anecdotally was common within conversations when sharing a ride:

> *"Meeting new drivers and new passengers makes you learn. I like to get the best of everyone […] As you are driving with people that you don't really know from anywhere; you need to break the ice. Everyone is using it at this moment so a good way to start a conversation would be like 'hey how are you? Have you been using it for long?' So yeah, in every single trip I've had we always talk about 'how long have you been doing it?', 'Have you had a nice experience?', 'Has any time happened anything different to you?' So yeah, all the trips I've had the same conversation."*
>
> **Participant J**

Participant J notes that talking about ride-sharing as a shared interest provides a common topic of conversation that can ease initial apprehension about socialising during the journey ahead. Participant V reinforces this notion, observing that conversations about ride-sharing tend to occur when she and her fellow travellers "don't have much else in common, because that is our common ground isn't it?".

As well as discussing previous ride-sharing experiences, I also found that some ride-sharers would be keen to discuss the process that had been undertaken in the organising and planning of the journey that was itself being undertaken. My encounter with Participant Q provides an example of how this exchange of knowledge can prove particularly useful for practitioners with relatively little experience. As a driver with only a few journeys under their belt Participant Q explained that "most of the people that I talk with are passengers using it for the first time". Through our conversation, they became interested in my experience, inquiring whether as a passenger I had spoken to many other drivers and what I had discovered. Throughout our conversation, Participant Q continued to ask questions about whether other drivers usually stop for breaks, what kind of cars they drive, and how they go about increasing the number of passengers they carry. The journey took place shortly after my trip with Participant P, and I relayed some advice that he had provided based on his extensive experience driving a similar route-specifically that travelling out of Bristol was a more popular route than Swindon, and that lowering the cost of travel would usually attract multiple passengers, increasing the total money received. I checked back on their profile after a few weeks, and since our conversation, Participant Q had seen a sharp rise in the number of passenger-reviews they had received from an average of one passenger review per month for the six months prior to our meeting to ten reviews in the month that followed. As the previous section of this chapter established, ride-sharers usually identify as either a driver or a passenger, rather than switching between these roles. This meant that despite the collaborative nature of performance, the majority of drivers had no direct interactions with other drivers. This was also true for passengers, but to a lesser extent as there would occasionally be times where multiple passengers booked with one driver, but as Participant S notes, people tend not to book a journey if another person has already reserved a seat. This was also the case for the majority of the journeys I experienced, whereby I was the only passenger. Ride-sharers therefore rely on conversations within the vehicle to develop an understanding of how the configuration of their own performance compares with others. This encounter with Participant Q highlights how the disparity in experience between different ride-sharers can translate to a disparity in the distribution of knowledge. It is through encounters such as ours that the knowledge produced through experience can be mobilised (see Chapter 6).

Several of the more-experienced practitioners recognised that the initial experience of ride-sharing was important in encouraging ongoing commitment to performance and endeavoured to make sure new recruits had a positive encounter. Participant P describes sharing the knowledge they had acquired with new recruits so that they might find it easier to find people to share with in the future. During my other ride-sharing trips as a passenger, I found that even the more experienced drivers that I encountered were keen to find out through our conversations how their own patterns of performance reflected 'the norm'. At the same time, there were limits of what some participants were willing to discuss with other ride-sharers in relation to their performance. For example, Participant G felt uncomfortable with the idea of raising the question of "why did you choose me?" on the basis that having to "fess up all the reasons why you thought they were suitable or not" might place someone in a difficult situation.

In summary, talking about different ways of doing ride-sharing that had been encountered in the past was found to be beneficial in alleviating any social tension in collaborating with a relative stranger and furthermore as a means by which knowledge on different configurations of performance can circulate.

5.4 Post- travel Feedback

Once a journey has been completed, collaborators using Blablacar are invited to rate the different people they have travelled with and provide a comment to explain their rating. The scheme encourages ride-sharers to undertake the task of leaving feedback on the basis that it is a way of establishing trust amongst ride-sharers within a broader community. Conversations with interview participants suggested that leaving feedback as a process of communicating post-travel was a task that they were happy to engage in undertaking. All of the feedback ratings in this sample were positive, accompanied by a rating of 'excellent', 'good', or 'okay'. Skimming additional profiles beyond this sample indicated that this was true for the majority of feedback that had been left, with very few users having received any negative feedback whatsoever. The small amount of negative feedback that was identified was also collected for analysis, all of which had been received by drivers from passengers who were unhappy with some aspect or aspects of their journey.

5.4.1 Positively rated feedback

Examining the content of the comments that accompany these ratings indicates that for the most part, feedback consists of generic observations relating to different aspects of what made the journey positive. Ride-sharers often referred positively to the conversations they shared, through comments such as "friendly and chatty" or how "the conversation flowed throughout the journey". Several comments also expressed gratitude regarding punctuality, flexibility, and clarity in communicating. The majority of comments point to several of these factors working in combination to make their journey a pleasant experience, for example: "*Nice car, safe driver, pleasant company, on time and great communication, what else could you ask for?! Would definitely use again and recommend.*.".

There were also examples in the dataset of positive feedback that had been left despite disruptions having occurred, on the basis that the person in question had dealt with them appropriately. This is illustrated through the following two comments that were accompanied by a 'good' and '*excellent*' rating respectively:

> *"Very cool car, generally pleasant though a little late due to traffic & other circumstances."*
>
> *"Felix was very kind and friendly during the whole trip. He dropped me off where I asked him to without any problems, and the journey went well despite the accident we found ourselves in. I fully recommend him (:".*

Comments of this kind indicate that there are occasions where disruptions occur but the fact that they are resolved amicably prevents them from leading to negative feedback.

At times, some of this feedback that was purportedly positive gave a sense that the reviewer wanted to highlight an aspect of performance that they considered unsatisfactory. This was particularly the case for reviews that had received a 'good' or 'okay' rating. Among such reviews were comments that related to having booked on behalf of another person, being 'quiet' leading to 'limited conversation', turning up 'a little late', and the car being 'a bit small to have three in the back'.

Conversely there were occasions that feedback ratings of ‘okay’ or ‘good’ having been received despite no indication in the accompanying comments as to how their conduct could have been improved. I experienced this myself in some of the feedback I received, with comments relaying that they “strongly recommended” me as “a very good passenger” leaving me somewhat perplexed as to what I could have done differently to receive a higher rating. Participant V perceives this as a reflection of the reviewer rather than the person receiving the review, on the basis that “It’s the sort of people that ‘you can never be perfect’. It’s like you can’t earn 100% on an exam”. Their observation plays an important part in shaping how they make use of feedback, as discussed in 5.4.3.

5.4.2 Negatively rated feedback

As indicated at the start of this section, I was able to identify a small amount of feedback that was accompanied by a negative rating. Evaluating the content of these comments indicated that it generally related to a combination of factors experienced by passengers that had left them particularly frustrated. Two of these related to the same incident of a driver having cancelled a journey only a few hours before they were scheduled to depart without contacting their passengers directly:

> *“:D It was so funny experience in progressing. Yes of cause I couldn't get his car. 'cause he cancelled the appointment just 3 hours before departure so coooly. it's very unfortunated to all of people but, I had to get Swindon. If I knew his car is not available at least morning, then I didn't have to leave this rediculous feedback. car broken? I can't put anything more.. haha”*

> *“Everything was good, he seemed nice and the feedbacks were excellent. Only one thing went wrong: he cancelled the ride the exact moment I left. I found myself stuck in Birmingham and I had to pay a huge amount of money to get back.”*

In this instance, the driver in question was actually one of the interview participants, Participant P. These two pieces of negative feedback were contrasted by 468 other ratings he had received, so when we met, I was keen to get his interpretation of what had happened:

"The two bad ones were because I cancelled the journey on the same day. Which I am allowed to do. If something happens, and I have an accident or a breakdown, there is nothing I can do about it. I'm not going to go to a car hire firm and rent a car because I'm going to be paying extortionate money. But what I didn't do is I didn't contact the passenger before cancelling the journey, physically contacting them and saying "I'm ever so sorry, the journey can't take place today because of this reason".

Participant P

From this comment we can see that Participant P feels his actions were justified based on the rules of performance established by Blablacar as the scheme provider. At the same time, he recognises an expectation on the part of other practitioners for him to undertake the additional task of directly contacting passengers to explain why he had to cancel the journey or to apologise for any inconvenience he has caused. Participant P goes on to explain that he feels justified in not doing so as the journey cancelling process does not include an option to provide such an explanation to passengers of why a trip is cancelled.

Drivers' reluctance to be flexible in negotiating pick-up and drop-off location, as described in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.1, was another such event that led passengers to leave negative feedback. One such review relays a passenger's frustration at a driver refusing to drop them at their preferred location, despite said driver showing up "*30 min late at collection point and it was pouring it down -meeting at open bus stop with no shelter".* Another passenger left a negative review on the basis that a had made them feel guilty at having delayed their journey having agreed to a specific drop-off in exchange for payment.

There is a sense within some of these negative comments that they are posted as a means of expressing frustration to the person that they travelled with rather than providing feedback that is useful for other users. This was epitomised by the following comment accompanying a 'disappointing' rating:

"I would recommend Alan as a friendly driver who is safe, experienced and puts your comfort first in the car. However in this case I thought that there was an option to go into central London, rather than Ilford. I may have misread the description but he is not willing to drive out of his way, although I was aware he had nowhere to be for hours, and was willing to reimburse more than my share."

The fact that this purportedly negative feedback begins by recommending 'Alan' as a 'friendly driver who is safe, experienced and puts your comfort first' does not suggest that the commenter intends to warn future possible collaborators that he should be avoided. Apart from this small number of negative ratings and reviews, ride-sharers were generally observed to be sympathetic to the fact that unexpected disruptions can occur given that sharing a journey often involves coordinating multiple travellers each with their own itinerary.

5.4.3 Valuing feedback

Although the feedback and rating system is presented by Blablacar as integral to ensuring that "trust is established between members", the reality is that a substantial proportion of people that travel via organised ride-sharing do so without having accumulated any experience in the past. Furthermore, the limited number of journey-offers and requests that are available to drivers and passengers limits the extent to which they are able to avoid travelling with ride-sharers who do not have prior feedback without severely limiting the options of when and where they can travel. Accordingly, interviewees indicated that approaching or being approached by someone on the basis of sharing a trip who has a lack of feedback would not in itself preclude their willingness to share a trip. If this were the case new recruits to ride-sharing would clearly find it challenging to gain experience in the first place. What a lack of feedback did impact was that practitioners would often adjust certain tasks with their performance to mitigate the potential for negative consequences. For example, Participant N explains that the extent of their communications before travel varies depending on the feedback of the person with whom they are travelling. They describe undertaking additional measures such as texting confirmation of booking details for passengers without feedback that provides evidence that they are organised and trustworthy. For participant Q, their concerns regarding passengers who have not previously received feedback relate to personal safety. They discuss a previous occasion of having asked such a passenger to show their passport on arrival to confirm their identity. They also explain that it is the previous feedback I had received that reassured them that I was “a genuine guy” before the journey we shared.

The data suggested that the task of checking the feedback that had been received after a journey was just as important to ride-sharers as using it to evaluate a potential collaborator’s credentials beforehand, for some even more so. Participant V describes not bothering to check other ride-sharers profiles, explaining that “it’s just important for me to have a good profile. Currently I am all fives apart from one who gave me four. I'm angry that it wasn’t a five”. Participant M takes this focus on the rating they receive a step further, describing how “if someone books a ride with me, I check the feedback that they have been leaving other people. And if for example they have been leaving feedback that is only ‘good’ but writing really glowing reviews then I don’t pick them up. I just say ‘don’t bother’”.

Participant Q describes a journey on which they agreed to be more flexible than was perhaps convenient on the basis that they would benefit from the good feedback they would then receive, going as far as to include this as a condition within the negotiations that were made. Their annoyance when no such feedback was subsequently received was perceivably greater than that which arose through the inconvenience caused by the disruption to the journey itself.

Another participant’s difficulty in navigating the task of providing feedback on occasions whereby one person books on behalf of another passenger highlights their recognition that the feedback they provide has implications for other practitioners within the community. They explain how in their feedback, they “always say if it was someone else who took the ride”, an approach that was mirrored in some of the sample feedback that was collected.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In Chapter 4, I described the ways in which scheme providers aim to facilitate and support the interactions and negotiations involved in arranging a shared journey. This chapter shifts attention from the scheme providers to focus on ride-sharing as a lived, relational encounter. It shows how the practice brings together individual participants who understand, enact, and reproduce the rules and strategies of performance in different ways. It also highlights the fact that individuals approach the performance of ride-sharing with their own distinctive needs, and that these needs often conflict with those of other practitioners.

In following the ways that ride-sharing is done in practice, this chapter has asked what the actions and interactions of participants say about the scheme provider's efforts to formalize the endeavour. The ethnographic data presented reveals that their coming together for the purpose of sharing a journey encourages practitioners to establish some common way of doing ride-sharing. And while some of these ways of doing are effectively facilitated by the provider, in other cases, practitioners found the advice and structure to be limited, impractical, or, indeed, absent. This chapter has shown how, in such cases, participants themselves are engaged in the task of determining what constitutes 'good' and 'correct' ways of doing ridesharing. Where clear guidance from the provider is felt to be lacking, these subjective notions become the focus of ongoing negotiations.

Building on the findings in Chapter 4, the research in this chapter thus highlights the ways in which formalised ridesharing involves ongoing processes of negotiation, evaluation, and feedback. In examining when and where this takes place, it has shown how participants experience and respond to provider's efforts to facilitate interpersonal communication. In many ways, the spaces and channels created by providers simplify and streamline the process of offering or acquiring a space in a vehicle. In particular, providers facilitate transactional elements of the encounter, enabling participants to specify their needs, wants, and expectations. Yet, while these spaces bring opportunities for communicative clarity and assertion of individual needs, the room for some types of negotiation is limited. Hence, this chapter also highlights the limits participants encounter in the course of provider-mediated interactions with other users. The question that arises here is whether and to what extent these limits of both hinder the development of a truly collaborative ridesharing, in ethos and in practice. For, while the flexibility afforded by providers seems to limit tension - and with it, mutual responsibility - between the organization and individual participants, flexibility in the context of this relationship seems, in some ways, to foster or exacerbate tensions in relationships between collaborating practitioners.

In examining how participants' needs are articulated, discussed, and resolved during the journey and in the intimacy of the moving vehicle, what becomes apparent is the coexistence of an ethos of sharing and the transactional elements of the practice, both of which become more or less apparent at different moments and in different relational contexts. The chapter serves to illustrate the multiple and multifaceted ways in which ride-sharing, as a collaborative endeavour, both relies on and encourages the development of facilitative relationships between participants. Yet, it also emphasises the tensions which arise in the course of a practice which, in its very nature, challenges prevailing social mores and preferences for relational interaction deeply embedded in British culture. It is perhaps unsurprising that, against this backdrop, the gaps and limits of providers' efforts to facilitate the practice of ridesharing are made apparent in the context of these lived, relational encounters. Moving on to the final chapter of analysis, I will next introduce some of the ways in which practitioners were observed to develop their own specific strategies that enable them to overcome these gaps and inadequacies in order to make ride-sharing work for them, allowing them to maintain an ongoing commitment to the practice.

Chapter Six: Improvisation- Learning to make it work

6.1 Introduction

In the final chapter of analysis, I focus on some of the ways in which practitioners learn to develop their own specific strategies that enable them to make ride-sharing work in a way that enables them to maintain an ongoing commitment to the practice. I established in the course of my fieldwork that ride-sharing was being undertaken by a small number of very active participants (generally, participating as drivers), along with a larger number of practitioners who only undertook a handful of journeys. This small number of active participants are of particular interest in this final analysis chapter, in which I address the four overarching research questions of this thesis specifically in terms of those practitioners who had learned to make ride-sharing work for them to the point that they were managing to successfully sustain a career as a ride-sharer.

1. How do ***committed practitioners*** come to know how to practice organised ride-sharing?
2. What are the different meanings ***committed practitioners*** attach to sharing a ride?
3. What is negotiated by ***committed practitioners*** when they come together to share a journey, and how are these negotiations enabled?
4. ***Amongst committed practitioners***, what is the significance of the differences in roles between 'driver' and 'passenger', beyond who is 'in control' of the vehicle?

This specific analytical focus of this chapter is on how such committed practitioners have become successful ride-sharers through learning-by-doing. As discussed in Chapter 2, for Schatzki, (2017) 'the process of learning is intimately linked to the augmentation of operability' (p. 29). If we are to interpret learning as located 'in the engagement in practice over time' (Lave, 2019: 85), it stands to reason that examining how ride-sharers draw on past experience to configure their performances will provide some explanation as to how some ride-sharers are able to remain committed to performance over time.

In Chapter 5, I focused on the interactions between collaborating practitioners involved in the set of tasks that constitute performances of ride-sharing. This provided various examples of how practitioners were making ride-sharing work for them. This included, for example, how drivers specified information through the ride-sharing scheme infrastructure when they were advertising journeys, how flexible they would be in determining the structure of a shared journey, the degree to which they would or wouldn't be open to negotiation, and so on. This diversity of ways in which practitioners make ride-sharing work begs the question of how they developed their ways of doing, their routines of interaction, their norms and expectations. In this chapter, I emphasise that processes of learning through doing are integral to how practitioners make ride sharing work for them. I show that this is particularly the case for committed practitioners, who develop 'careers' as ride-sharers involving repeated performances that are, to a greater or lesser degree, continually being reconfigured in response to the ongoing evolution of the practice.

The analysis in this chapter is structured around data on three aspects of ride-sharing performance that I relate to the 'learning by doing' involved in making ride-sharing work over time. In Section 6.2, my main focus is on the driver and their various efforts to maximise the financial returns they receive when ride-sharing. This includes aspects of drivers' performance that are specifically prohibited by the rules of the ride-sharing scheme, and those that move beyond the specific scheme infrastructure, integrating external infrastructures to improve monetary return. Here I examine the ways in which drivers accrued knowledge of how and when they could bend and break scheme rules in their favour. In Section 6.3, my attention switches to the passenger and, specifically, the ways in which the process of finding a driver was observed to change over the course of a passenger's career. Here I present ethnographic descriptions of my own experiences to depict my progression from complete novice to 'ride-sharing ambassador'. I also draw on the ways in which my performances were configured through learning I brought to ride-sharing from my prior experience of hitch-hiking; a connection between practices frequently mentioned by other practitioners. Finally, in Section 6.4, I discuss various ways in which ride-sharers learned to overcome some of the common anxieties associated with shared travel, particularly anxieties relating to personal safety. I reveal that this involves both the reconfiguration of certain practical aspects of performance (such as the pick-up and drop-off points at which they agree to meet) and the development of specific relational strategies to mitigate their anxieties about sharing a car with strangers. In concluding the chapter, I outline the different mechanisms of learning observed throughout the analysis, and reflect on the particular significance of the intentionality of self-improvement associated with experimentation.

6.2 Learning to make ride-sharing pay as a driver

The payment arrangements involved in ride-sharing represents an important aspect of travel for many practitioners. The different approaches that ride-sharers adopted varied between drivers and passengers. When interviewees spoke of payments from the position of a ride-sharing passenger, it was usually to draw comparisons between the cost of ride-sharing and other transport modes. In contrast, drivers often spoke of various ways in which they adjusted their performance to maximise the remuneration they received. Despite the insistence of several drivers that they 'didn't do it for the money', all of the more experienced drivers had spent some time configuring payment in a way that matched with their intent to get what they saw as a reasonable monetary return and fit with other aspects of their preferences as a practitioner. Within the journey arrangement process through the Blablacar scheme it is the driver who sets the price of a journey, based on a guideline price suggested by the scheme and a range around this with a maximum and minimum that the driver is able to work within (as discussed in Chapter 4). However, whether or not drivers stick to these rules or learn how to circumvent the limits set by the scheme regime is a question to be explored in the data. Throughout this section of the chapter, I therefore focus specifically on the ways in which drivers come to 'make ride-sharing pay', through the knowledge and experience they accumulate over time and the learning this enables. I draw heavily from the experiences of one particular interviewee, Participant P, who provided particularly in-depth insights into his approach and how this had developed.

6.2.1 Adjusting the route and departure time to maximise appeal

Prior to my research I had not appreciated just how dedicated some drivers' could be to maximising occupancy of their vehicles. This wasn't necessarily about offsetting the specific financial cost of the journey - more so, it was about making the added inconvenience of sharing their journey 'worth it' to the driver. As far as most of these drivers were concerned, if they were sharing the ride with one person they might as well be sharing with three. Blablacar did not adjust the cost of a journey according to the number of passengers, and so drivers stood to double or triple the amount of money they received by picking-up extra passengers. The ethos of such configurations of the practice stood in contrast to what I recognise as my own ethic of ride-sharing practice, rooted in the enmeshed virtues of democratised mobility, carbon reduction strategies, and sociality among travellers, which I had - arguably, with some naivety - assumed other practitioners would share. As it transpired, for some drivers, financial return was the main reason for their engagement, and it was the experience they accumulated through repeated ride-sharing trips that enabled them to learn how to understand and predict patterns of passenger demand for journeys, and so maximise uptake. Their understanding of such demand enabled these drivers to adjust the routes they drove, the pick-up and drop-off points they identified, and the times and day of the week they travelled in order to increase their appeal to passengers.

By far the most experienced ride-sharer encountered through the research was Participant P, who attributed his success in finding passengers to developing his ‘business-like’ approach, explaining that “You have to be as shrewd as possible in getting those passengers on board, because you do want people in the vehicle”. Through the 400+ journeys that he had undertaken over the past three years, he had developed a formidable knowledge of the various routes that he travelled, which enabled him to effectively plan each trip. Although the knowledge that he had accumulated was specific to his own experiences of ride-sharing, there were aspects of his performance that mirrored those of other ride-sharing drivers. During our shared journey, he described how he might advise a novice driver to optimise journey configurations so as to attract more passengers. In doing so, he decontextualised the knowledge he had obtained from his own experience.

He began by noting that he had worked a long shift the evening before our journey and so had decided to limit the extent to which he adjusted his plans. Had this not been the case, he would have adjusted the spatial routing of the journey in order to attract more interest:

> *"I'm going to go from Worcester to Edinburgh and I'm already sure that unlike if I'm starting from London, I'm not going to fill the car up. One of the changes that I'm going to do is I'm going to go round Nottingham and Derby on my way up the A1".*
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> **Participant P**

Adjusting his route to pass close to the cities of Nottingham and Derby would have extended it by 40 miles. Furthermore, the proximity of the M6 to Worcester makes taking the A1 up the east coast counterintuitive under most other circumstances. So how did Participant P come to learn that the A1 would be a more popular route for passengers? He put this down to "a good geographical knowledge of the UK", that allowed him to identify areas of the country likely to be more or less busy. He used the example of the Cotswolds as an area on his regular route from Worcester to London where demand was particularly low. This knowledge often led him to take an alternative route where demand was relatively higher, such as the less direct route along the M5 and M4 that travels close to Bristol. Participant P implied that his knowledge related to generic understandings of the type of places where demand would be higher (i.e., areas of higher population density) as well as to more practice-specific learning about patterns of demand in certain places. For example, in his proposed reconfiguration of the route from Worcester to Edinburgh along the A1, he referred to travelling via Nottingham and Derby, yet, when prompted, he dismissed the significance of the detour's proximity to the major conurbations of West Yorkshire and Tyneside. In his understanding, these were not areas likely to yield passengers. Participant P explained that he had developed such knowledge about specific locations through monitoring the popularity of routes he had previously listed on Blablacar, observing, as he described, whether or not they were "*kicking the numbers,*" - that is, whether particular parts of the country were yielding passengers.

Participant P used the example of the route we were travelling from Worcester to Edinburgh along the M6 to further illustrate how he would typically choose where to stop along the route in order to maximise passenger appeal, but without causing excessive delays:

> *"Instead of putting small towns and villages, you want to put cities if you can. [...] I'm going to start from Worcester to Birmingham. Now Birmingham is a huge metropolis, and I don't really want to be going into the city centre or I'm going to get caught up in traffic and I'm going to start to regret doing this ride. [...] So I put down a place close to where I live that I know through local knowledge, which is 'The Hawthorns'- West Brom football ground. Park and ride there, Bang! It's an ideal place. If people are going to take that ride, they're going to look at the place and go 'ok, I can take a short journey for two or three quid from the city centre, and I'm going to join at the park and ride in Birmingham'. Second place I usually go for is Keele University. Just off the motorway, not a problem at all. It's been popular in the past. Then you've got Manchester- where do I go in Manchester? Well it's the same as in Birmingham really, I don't want to be going down the M62- it's going to take me at least half an hour to get in and out. So I'll put Manchester on there, but I'll put somewhere like Wigan station which is near the M6. And again, I look at how people are going to take the ride. [...] From Manchester, I'll put Carlisle because I get a lot of people there."*
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> **Participant P**

The detailed description provided by Participant P indicated that he was not only concerned with identifying routes with higher demand, but had also learned places along his route with good public transport links were useful stopping points. He went on to explain that it was important to select a precise location that the Blablacar system labelled as a transport link. By doing so, he could avoid deterring passengers who might otherwise be confused about the remoteness of the location. At times he framed planning the different possible configurations as a process of negotiation with a hypothetical passenger, although he was keen to emphasise that there was no such thing as a 'typical ride-sharer'.

Other drivers talked about similar processes of learning and responsive adaptation of performance. For example, when I booked a seat with Participant N from Lancaster to

Crewe, his listing indicated that we would be detouring along the M62 to Manchester rather than taking the more direct route along the M6. When I got in the car on the day of travel, he informed me that he had not received any other bookings, and so we ended up travelling along the M6 after all. When questioned, he explained that over the course of his time travelling back and forth from Bristol to Cumbria, he had received a lot of requests from people asking him to take them further into Manchester. He realised that doing so would usually only add ten minutes to his trip, and had therefore started including this detour into his route. He noted that this was contingent on minimal traffic congestion, indicating that whether or not this diversion was advertised was somewhat time-dependent.

Participant P also talked about making use of a Blablacar feature that allowed drivers to check how many people have viewed the details of their listed journeys:

> *"I'm looking at the ride, going over the past two weeks. I'm looking at the numbers that have hit my ride, which is what I can do as a driver to see exactly how popular it's going to be."*
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> **Participant P**

Overall, I was impressed by the degree to which he had been able to make use of the infrastructure of the scheme as part of his learning process - monitoring the platform, integrating new knowledge, and making ongoing adaptations to his practice. Another experienced driver, Participant X, took this process even further, having adopted the practice of advertising the same journey through two separate listings by setting up two separate accounts.

> *"Once or twice, I went along the M1 instead of the M6 for whatever reason and picked up a few passengers along the way. People travelling from the Northeast: Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, on their way to London and the other way. It takes a bit longer that way, but I don't really mind, so I started offering lifts that way as well. And then the website won't let you post two journeys that overlap from the same account, so I just set up a second one (…) Basically (the route I eventually take) is based on who asks to travel first."*

Participant X

By removing one of the listings once a request for the other was received, Participant X still used the procedures and affordances of the scheme infrastructure. Yet, he had learned that strategically breaking the rules of the scheme could increase his chances of getting a rider to share with him.

The advice from Participant P to other drivers wanting to learn about passenger demand was to experiment with different journey configurations:

> *[…] Try different variants of doing that journey. If you care about what you are doing and if you enjoy doing this and you have found that your first few journeys weren't very successful, then by all means try different variants. Try doing just the A to B and seeing where you go. If you live in London and you are going to Edinburgh, you might not need to do all these stops, you might find all of your passengers in London. Then you've got no reason at all to want to stop at Oxford, Birmingham, Preston, and Manchester along the way."*
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> **Participant P**

Throughout, Participant P presented learning to ride-share as an active and deliberate process of experimentation. In short, while he couldn't tell a novice ride-sharer *what* they needed to know, he could tell them *how* they could develop this knowledge.

Fundamentally, the notion of being able to improve performance implied a preliminary configuration of practice with which the practitioner is unsatisfied, along with some understanding that an alternative configuration is available, and that this alternate way of engaging would lead to 'better' outcomes. These processes of experimentation recommended by Participant P were also contingent on the fact that he anticipated undertaking spatially similar ride-sharing journeys at a later date, and doing so with some degree of embedded routine. Thus, experimentation presupposes a commitment to ongoing performance in order for the knowledge derived from trying out different journey patterns to be of practical use in the future.

Participant P noted that experimentation was particularly important for less experienced ride-sharers who were lacking the history of positive feedback that might encourage passengers to sign up for a ride. For new drivers, Participant P felt that this lack of feedback could be offset by an increased knowledge of passenger needs and responsive flexibility. Participant P, however, told me he was well past this point, and had enough positive feedback that, whether or not his journeys met passengers' specific wants was not an issue. As far as he was concerned, he was "in that section now where I can do a ride from the moon and it's going to be successful*,"*. However, the reliability of this last statement was cast into some doubt by the fact that I was the only passenger in his car. However, as he had earlier noted, this was an enactment of the journey that did not reflect his situated knowledge of the practice. My own feeling was that his usual popularity as a driver was, in part, a reflection of his positive feedback ratings, and also of his experience travelling his usual route, which had been, by that point, reconfigured to incorporate the knowledge he had accrued in practice.

Participant P appeared proud of his success in learning how to experiment, and to adapt and optimise his performance. In my journey with him, he came across as a confident and accomplished practitioner, able to enact ride-sharing in a way that fit his criteria for 'success'. The main criteria, in his case, was no doubt attracting multiple passengers for each journey. Yet, he was also pleased that, through his experimentation, he had successfully learned how to limit his flexibility in cases where additional detours to pick up passengers might lead to excessive delays and, therefore, diminishing returns on the journey and/or additional inconvenience or complexity. In short, he had learned to navigate the fine balance between the potential inconvenience of increased flexibility with the benefits of financial return. My journey with Participant P was a case in point: he was aware he might be tired after his long shift at work the previous evening and so decided that the increased payment he could accrue via his usual adaptations and increased flexibility was not, on this occasion, worth the extra effort.

This highlights a broader observation that adjustments to performance aimed at maximising gains are balanced against the inconvenience that they cause. As Participant P articulates, *"you want to enjoy that journey, you don't want to become a bus service,* you don't want to go into city centres if you can possibly help it. But you want to generate as many people as possible along the ride,".

6.2.2 Setting the price and additional charges

Another aspect that drivers can adjust is the amount of money they charge passengers for a journey. As discussed in Chapter 4, payments made by passengers to drivers in exchange for transit are governed by UK law, which stipulates that drivers must not make any profit from these arrangements and can only cover reasonable expenses that they incur in undertaking the journey. Blablacar provides drivers with a suggestion of how much to charge passengers, but gives them the option to adjust this amount within a range of approximately 0.75 and 1.5 of the recommended value. For example, a journey priced at £20 could be adjusted within the range of £15 and £30.

For drivers aiming to maximise the remuneration they receive, the task of setting a journey price once again involved achieving the right balance - this time between charging as much as possible and limiting the appeal of the journey to passengers. Several drivers described learning how to achieve this balance by comparing the cost of other means of travel along a similar route. They spoke of inspecting journey listings posted by other ride-sharers, and rail and bus ticket prices, and then purposefully experimenting with setting different rates. Participant Q described having recently done so when trying to figure out why very few people were booking to travel with him on his weekly commute. He observed that "*If I search Edinburgh to Birmingham, people pay, like, £30. If I put £32, which is recommended by Blablacar, nobody will come [...] When I last put the [recommended] rate I got over fifty views, but no one booked.*" The observation had led him to speculate that substantially reducing the price of a seat might attract multiple passengers. This, in turn, could potentially make the journey much more cost-effective. He had put this to the test, and the results had seemed to support his hypothesis:

> *"This time I tried instead charging the lowest and trying to get two people to travel. Actually, it worked [...]. I feel positive, people are willing to travel. At last I am getting people. "*
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> **Participant Q**

Participant Q had developed this strategy of substantially lowering the price through a process of experimentation and experiential learning. The practical knowledge he acquired mirrors that which Participant P described as important to his success in attracting passengers:

> *"I tend to look at four passengers and then knock the price way down. If I was going to pick up one passenger, I would split the journey costs. [...] So I want to make it as cheap as possible. Cheap is the thing that people look for. Between London and Bristol, because I do that journey a lot, they compare against Megabus. And they will look at that as a cheaper option. So, what happens after you put all that information in, it will then suggest a price that you should go with. Now, unfortunately, that's where people go wrong, is that they look at that price and they stick with it. You've got plus minus buttons that can bring the cost right down. And again, as a four-person driver, I'll bring the cost down and, low and behold, I've got passengers. Because, you know, I've got the price right down, I'm tempting people. And that's what really makes me successful"*
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> **Participant P**

Another reason that Participant P preferred to charge the minimum price was that he wanted to avoid the possibility of multiple passengers booking at a higher price so as to make the total amount he received exceed his expenses for the journey. As he explains, "*I am very aware that you mustn't, if at all possible, make a profit, because you will then become a taxi and you will step into certain legal issues as far as that journey is concerned."* The interview data gave the sense that whilst conforming to the formal rules of the practice was important for some drivers, others were less concerned with the prospect of charging more than the legal limit. Participant M, for example, acknowledged that there were some journeys where a car full of passengers meant that he would profit, but that this "*evens out with the less popular journeys*" over time. He had developed his own interpretation of what it meant to 'make a profit' that was based on averaging out his income over multiple journeys. This strategy enabled him to make a virtue of a configuration of ride-sharing that others might see as transgressing the legal and institutional rules of the practice.

As I established in Chapter 4, Blablacar forbids its users from making or soliciting payments outside of their booking system. In an attempt to enforce this rule, the scheme encourages users to report any drivers who request payments of this kind. Despite this, I came across several examples of drivers asking passengers for supplementary payments, both in my experiences as a passenger, through interviews with drivers, and in the sample of journey listings. Participant L described having learned from specific experiences that the delays he incurred as a result of his flexibility could be mitigated by soliciting additional fees from passengers:

> *"Sometimes, when you are not that experienced, you find that you have just offered to drop someone off where they live, and you haven't, sort of, checked the map or postcode, or something like that. And you check the postcode, and you find that you've just driven 20 minutes out of your way, and you've got to drive 20 minutes back to the motorway. You're like ' I should really be charging people for this'."*
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> **Participant L**

In concluding that he 'should really be charging', Participant L speaks of how specific experiences are often important in provoking reconfiguration of performance going forward. His words suggest that an important part of learning to ride-share is reflecting on how experiential knowledge can be incorporated into future configurations of practice in order to improve performance and avoid further negative experiences. The fact that Participant L ties this process of learning and reflection to both his own experiences and those of other, less-experienced practitioners suggests some recognition of uniformity in the career trajectory of the ride-sharing practitioner. His statement also illustrates a broader observation that different processes of learning can become more and less relevant at various points as the career of the ride-sharer unfolds.

Participant M gave a detailed account of his approach to the additional payments he charged. Despite professing that, for him, ride-sharing 'isn't about the money,' this process of charging additional costs had seemingly become well-integrated into his performances, adjusted to the specifics of trips he had been making and the specific needs of the passengers he had been carrying.

> *"If people want to be dropped off more than 3 or 4 miles from the motorway then I charge them. I just discuss it with them at the time and if they want to be dropped off en route then I don't charge them any extra for that. [...] When people want to be dropped off elsewhere, I tend to just charge them a little bit extra for me going off-course [...] When we are in the car, I will say to them, for example, 'if you want me to drop you off at that postcode, I will charge you an extra fiver for it'."*
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> **Participant M**

The language he used in describing "*just discussing it with them*" and "*just charging them a little bit extra*" suggested that Participant M was at ease with the task of asking for this extra payment in what some people might consider a somewhat awkward social encounter - particularly as it often took place within the confined space of the car. He went on to explain that he still felt he was doing passengers a favour by adding this charge. The alternative for them, as he saw things, was an expensive taxi ride or increased payment through Blablacar which would, in turn, have involved an increase to the booking fee. Adding this supplementary charge meant Participant M's configuration of the practice directly contravened the formal rules of the scheme. It also contradicted Blablacar's moral prescript of "How to be a Good Driver". Yet, Participant M's justification of the extra charges he levied was not based on abstract, rational notions of 'good' or 'bad', but rather on his situated understanding of the practice. Were he to uphold the rules of the scheme, he would have left his passengers at a financial disadvantage. Hence, as he seemed to see it, his actions were virtuous in that they responded to the specifics of the situation. This, despite the fact that the supplementary costs that Participant M charged could sometimes become quite substantial, as he illustrated through one specific example, he gave of a passenger he had picked up a few weeks prior to our conversation:

> *"When we had all the snow, I had somebody that wanted to be picked just outside of Glasgow and he couldn't make his way. There wasn't any public transport, no trains or buses. There wasn't even any taxis so he couldn't make his way to a pick-up point. So I said 'If you want me to pick you up in the middle of Glasgow, I'll charge you an extra tenner for it,' bearing in mind how snowy it was and everything. And he wanted me to drop him off in the middle of Manchester so, again, I said 'I'll charge you an extra tenner for it,' because he couldn't have got home anyway. He could have walked I suppose. My car's got snow tires on, I had snow chains and everything, so my car was more equipped than other vehicles that day. So I could drive in conditions that other people just couldn't."*
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> **Participant M**

In Participant M's view - or, at any rate, in his narrative - his actions were ethically sound in that, even though he was charging more money than had been agreed, he was offering a lift in extraordinary circumstances wherein the passenger's other mobility options were severely limited. From another perspective, however, it might be suggested that his actions were opportunistic. The rules of the scheme are clear that extra charges must not be levied in any circumstances. Yet, Blablacar offered no advice or directives on what should be done in unexpected circumstances such as these. In this case, the snow arguably left the passenger at greater risk if he were dropped off at a location far from his ultimate destination and had to make a journey in difficult conditions. Arguably, this might be covered by the driver's commitment to treat their passenger in the same way that a "*a welcoming host,*" would treat a guest in their home. To extend this analogy, dropping the passenger off far from their destination might be seen as akin to pushing them out of one's house into the snow.

Blablacar insists that "The driver must be irreproachable at all levels, sensitive to the well-being of their passengers and respecting their requests, within reason of course." Yet the scheme gives no clear guidance on how far the limits of reason should extend. So while it might be argued that Participant M held some responsibility for ensuring his passengers safety in these circumstances, driving the extra distance to the passenger's final destination would also increase the risk for Participant M. In this case, it might well be considered reasonable that he should seek extra payment. This is perhaps an extreme example, but the point I want to make here is that, while the rules of the scheme are clear in prohibiting external payment or profiteering, the specific circumstances of enactments often mean that what it means to be a good driver, in practice, is often not so clear-cut. Thus, practitioners often learn to take it upon themselves to determine how and when it is appropriate to ask for additional payment.

6.2.3 Moving outside of the scheme

Another approach that some drivers were observed to have developed in order to increase the money they received was to advertise their trips elsewhere. For some drivers, this involved listing journeys through more than one of the ride-share schemes that operate in the UK. I noticed that Participant X had adopted this approach for one of the journeys we had taken together, listing the journey on both the Blablacar and Liftshare platforms. He explained that this was something he did only occasionally, as the Liftshare platform was less popular and listing journeys took a bit of effort.

It was also common for drivers to supplement their journey listings by advertising their ride outside of ride-share scheme infrastructures, most notably via Facebook. Participant P described how, through conversations with passengers that he had previously carried, he had learnt about a number of Facebook groups that were set up to facilitate ride-sharing along specific routes. Participant X similarly described having given a ride to a flight attendant, who over the course of their journey had informed them of a Facebook group that catered to people sharing journeys within their industry. Participant Y also described using Facebook to advertise her rides, but would do so through her own social contacts rather than to strangers via a group. As discussed in Chapter 5, conversations in the car in this way had taught reconfigurations of performance that could be integrate into their practice.

Drivers also described how the experience they had accumulated had allowed them to amass a pool of contacts who could also arrange travel without necessarily having to book a seat. As Participant P explains:

> *"what's happened now is I've built up a small group of people who have taken journeys in the past, and who randomly text me and say to me "hi mike, I took a ride with you six months ago" I've no idea who they are, I often get this now, and they say "can you take me from Bristol to London and I say "yeah no problem at all, I can do that." There's an extra passenger, so I get this quite often. So I've got this pool of people who've got my number, and are basically ringing me to ask me, and to avoid going through the Blablacar system"*
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> **Participant P**

Again, this seemed to be common to the performances of a number of drivers who had accumulated substantial experience, many of whom would tell me after we travelled together that I should get in touch if I was travelling a similar route in future- an invitation that felt both socially and practically motivated. During my experience of ride-sharing, I encountered other passengers who had developed this kind of relationship with drivers. During my trip with Participant X, we made an unscheduled stop along the way to pick up another passenger who had seen his listing and contacted him directly in order to arrange a lift.

Participant P was comfortable with the prospect of approaching the task of finding passengers in a way that some might see as surreptitiously avoiding Blablacar's booking fee. He explained that, from his perspective, the fee he paid to Blablacar was made in exchange for being introduced to a passenger, and should they decide to share a journey in the future they were perfectly entitled to do so.

Participant S, another experienced driver, saw this process of arranging travel outside of the scheme as problematic. He felt an obligation to support the scheme financially in exchange for the services that they provide, explaining that he therefore "*always get[s] people to book through Blablacar purely because I like to support the site*". Participant P acknowledged that bookings made outside of the scheme- particularly via Facebook- were less reliable, but felt that this was balanced by the opportunity to directly contact passengers.

The degree to which drivers learnt that stepping outside of using just one ride-sharing scheme could have negative consequences that needed to be balanced against the potential monetary benefits was not apparent from the interview data. My own position on drivers filling up their vehicles this way was somewhat negative. If I booked with a driver, I wanted to know who I was travelling with, and felt a little put out when others were in the vehicle if I had not expected them to be there. I prefer not to cram into a car with several other passengers, particularly on longer journeys, so would often try not to book into cars that had already been booked. There is at least potential therefore for some degree of negative rebound from drivers adapting their ride-sharing practice when it involves stepping outside of the procedures, rules and expectations set up by the scheme provider.

6.3 Learning to find a ride as a passenger

As the previous section of this chapter explained, learning to make ride-sharing cost-effective was important for many drivers. Passengers, on the other hand usually came to ride-sharing having already identified the practice as a cheaper alternative to other forms of transport. Indeed, few passengers specified cost as a significant factor in choosing between drivers. Rather, learning to make ride-sharing work as a passenger was more a question of learning how to identify suitable journeys to meet one's specific needs. Below, I draw specifically on my own experiences as a ride-sharing passenger - from novice practitioner to 'ambassador' and through the changing configurations of performance - to reflect on some of the ways in which this learning could be practically achieved. In doing so, I provide insights into some of the mechanisms of knowledge circulation that enabled ongoing adaptation and reconfiguration of ride-sharing practice.

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter of this thesis, relying on my own experiences to provide this depth of understanding comes with certain drawbacks. In the context of this section of the chapter, it should be noted that my own mobility needs were sometimes surpassed by my desire to gain experience and to encourage drivers to be willing to participate in the research. As such, I would go out of my way to be as flexible as possible in finding a ride and would generally agree to most of the requests that a driver made. The observations in this chapter are also made within the context of my own personal history. Of particular relevance in this respect is my previous extensive engagement in the practice of hitch-hiking as a form of mobility. For me, as for other ride-sharers, past experiences played an important part in shaping my subsequent engagements in practice, including the ways in which I learn in these situated contexts. Experience in the practice of hitch-hiking provides an interesting case-in-point: When it came to the process of learning ways of doing ride-sharing, like many other practitioners, I found myself drawing on the commonalities, as I saw them, between doing hitch-hiking and doing organised ride-sharing. There are two separate yet related points to note here: One is that reflexivity with specific regard for my past experiences of hitch-hiking remains important for both my research and analysis. The other is that the connections between the two practices figured, in different ways and to various degrees, the experiences of a significant number of committed ride-sharing practitioners. So, while it is important for me to think reflectively about how my past experiences influence more recent configurations of connected practice, it is also important to note that these connections are not unique to me and may also be present, in some form, in the experiences of other participants. Lastly, in theoretical terms, the observation that my own process of learning to ride-share was influenced by hitch-hiking fits with the broad conceptualisation of knowledge circulation in practice theory.

6.3.1 Knowing when to ride-share (and when not to)

When I began my research, I was interested to see how many of the journeys I undertook on a regular basis could be made through organised ride-sharing. I was aware that ride-sharing was possible for long distance journeys, but was curious as to how possible it might be for shorter trips. I had found that the hitch-hiking I had done in the past had been most successful when travelling relatively short distances in rural areas. I had come across a number of listings on Blablacar that seemed to offer rides over short distances. After a few attempts to book shorter trips, such as the 22-mile journey from Lancaster to Kendal, I concluded that drivers were simply not willing to offer rides over such distances. It turned out that the listings my searches had returned were actually for sections between stop-off points on longer trips and as such, the drivers had not expected passengers to try and book rides between these locations. In subsequent conversations with drivers, it became clear that there was a lower limit to the distance for which most would carry a passenger. Given the inconvenience of organising and undertaking a journey, such short trips were, as Participant N describes, "*usually not worth it*".

I also learned through searching the journey listings that there were some areas of the UK wherein obtaining a ride would be very unlikely. Ride-sharing in rural areas and between towns was extremely difficult as the number of drivers offering a ride was so low. I came to learn that opportunities to travel via organised ride-sharing were limited to journeys along major routes, such as the M6 which I regularly used to travel up to Edinburgh. Getting to more remote locations involved additional effort in negotiating with drivers or establishing alternative modes to transit that could be linked up or chained together. These restrictions did not necessarily make travelling to these areas an impossibility, but they did limit the extent to which I could be flexible in planning my trips.

As I gained experience in searching for journeys, I also learned that the limited availability of rides restricted the viability of ride-sharing for journeys that were subject to time constraints. As a student, I was usually able to accommodate ride-sharing with relative ease but, on occasions where my time was restricted, I would often resort to taking the train. Usually this was when I was travelling up to see my family for a weekend and wanted to make the most of the time we were spending together. My decisions to ride-share also depended on whether I was travelling alone. Although all of the trips I shared involved me travelling on my own, I wouldn't have had a problem doing it in the company of friends or family. However, the opportunity to ride-share with an accomplice did not arise: the people I travelled with were simply happier taking public transport or using their own car. I did try and convince my girlfriend to accompany me on a few occasions, but she was anxious about the prospect of spending time in the car with a stranger.

As well as learning to recognise the circumstances in which ride-sharing was not an option, I also came to recognise circumstances particularly well-suited to the practice. For example, ride-sharing could prove particularly useful during disruptions to public transport services. The journey that I took with Participant M, for instance, took place after a prolonged period of snowfall that had caused disruptions to train services on the east and west coast main lines. Participant M described having received a much greater number of requests than usual during this period. During rail strikes in 2017, Southern Rail recommended ride-sharing as an alternative for passengers who had been affected by the interruptions to services. I also learned that ride-sharing was an option worth investigating when the need for long distance travel arose at very short notice. There were a few occasions on which I or someone I knew was planning a last-minute trip and I checked Blablacar to see if any rides were available. In summary, many of the circumstances that lent themself to ride-sharing were either those in which I was entirely free from other obligations, or in which my plans had been disrupted at short notice. In most other circumstances, the limitations of ride-sharing, or the convenience of other practices, prevailed.

6.3.2 Refining the search for a driver

Success in finding a driver was an aspect of my ride-sharing performance that improved as my knowledge and experience of the practice grew. Learning to be creative in adjusting the search parameters meant that organised ride-sharing became a viable option in areas where few journeys were listed and, thus, in which I might not have found a driver earlier on in my career. The following excerpt from my field notes provides an example that typifies how I eventually went about the task of searching for a ride:

> *"An initial search on Blablacar for drivers travelling from Lancaster to Ellesmere Port on the date I wish to travel yielded no results. This was not unexpected, as it would require a driver travelling that specific route with stops at both locations. If I was more flexible in the day and time of travel it might be possible, but I need to travel on a specific day. I could have amended my search terms to find drivers travelling between Preston and Liverpool, bigger cities that are relatively close to the start and end points. However, from searching in the past between Preston and Liverpool I knew that there are relatively few journeys offered: People don't tend to use ride-sharing for travel over such a short distance unless it's a regular commute. Instead, I opted to*

try and find someone heading south on the M6 as there are usually a lot of people travelling from Edinburgh who will be passing Lancaster on the motorway. Searching from Edinburgh yielded a few options, and one in particular was at a suitable time for me to travel. It's not the best time, so I decided to get in touch with the guy and see if he is flexible in the time he wants to travel."

Notes on trip from Lancaster to Ellesmere Port- Feb 2018

As in this example, I had developed a pattern of first searching for drivers travelling the exact route I planned to take, and then broadening my search to other journeys that I knew would take the same route if no matching results were found. Door-to-door travel was preferential, but I was also willing to travel a short distance by alternative mode if necessary. If there were no direct rides available, I would wait a few days to see if any journeys were listed closer to the time of departure. If no options became available, I might then attempt to use my knowledge of patterns of supply to check the viability of booking indirect routes.

This was knowledge that I developed in the course of practice. As my experience of searching for and undertaking journeys increased, I became more aware of the popularity of different routes around the UK. This supplemented information on the most popular routes between cities published on the Blablacar website. For example, in the journey described in my field notes above, I might consider getting a train or bus to Preston, where I would be more likely to find someone travelling my way. At the same time, I would draw on knowledge obtained through previous searches that direct trips between Preston and Liverpool are uncommon. This would save me time in making adjustments to my search that were less likely to yield results. Were I to undertake a similar search in the future, I might skip the initial act of searching between Lancaster and Ellesmere Port, further refining the process.

Through experimenting with the text in the address bar, I learned that I could configure my searches to include all listings that either started or ended in a particular location. In the above example, I used this feature to view all the journeys starting in Edinburgh in order to identify drivers travelling down the M6 who had not listed Lancaster or Preston as stop-off points. Had this not provided any options, I could have used the same technique to search for drivers travelling down from Glasgow or Carlisle. Identifying drivers in this way involved a slightly more complicated process of communication that required me to contact the driver directly in order to ask whether they would stop and pick me up along the way. As discussed in Chapter 5, most drivers understood that this was a necessary part of ride-sharing. This method of searching for all journeys starting from or ending at a specific location is not an affordance obviously or explicitly provided by the infrastructural configuration of the Blablacar site, but was something that I discovered through my prior knowledge on website design and through my own curiosity. The technique worked well for places such as Edinburgh, where a reasonably large proportion of drivers were coming from my direction. Adopting the same strategy for somewhere like London would be much less effective, due to the greater range of directions from which drivers would be arriving.

Learning to apply these refinements came with the realisation that their enactment restricted the technology I could use when undertaking a search. I found that the search function included in the Blablacar app was quite restrictive for planning journeys compared with the website, as was the condensed mobile browser version. Adapting searches and viewing the different results they produced was much more straightforward with a larger display screen and a keyboard, and so undertaking a refined search was only really feasible on a laptop, PC, or if necessary, a tablet. This somewhat limited the occasions on which planning travel via Blablacar in this way was possible to times where I was at home or work, unless I was carrying my laptop with me and had access to an internet connection. This was another reason that searching on behalf of someone else was often limited, as noted in the previous section. The one time that I did identify and book a shared trip via mobile was while on holiday in Spain, where journey supply is much greater which made planning much more straightforward.

When asked about how their approach to finding a ride had developed over time, several passengers that I interviewed indicated that doing so was a relatively simple task in which they had felt quite accomplished from the outset. As Participant B saw it, arranging a journey was "*pretty intuitive. You create an account, you search for a ride, and then you adjust your search criteria*". Participant Q felt that thanks to their past experience in using computer technology, using the Blablacar system required "*basic knowledge only. I don't think it really requires a lot of knowledge to search, just do something and see what it does.*" Under a social-practices lens, this notion of 'intuition' can be understood as knowledge acquired through practitioners' past encounters with other practices. In the given examples, the simplicity both participants associated with the activity described can, at least in part, be attributed to the fact that the knowledge required for navigating the website and online mobile application is already in their possession, having been acquired through previous encounters with similar booking systems. It is telling that the participants present their perception of simplicity in the second person. This linguistic framing indicates that, in this instance, the capability to undertake these activities is perceived to extend beyond the personal. While the quotes from Participants B and Q suppose that the capacity to undertake booking a journey is universal, there is a minimum level of knowledge required to undertake the task. An older person, for example, might well struggle to make use of the mobile application without guidance on how to use the touch screen, open the application, identify the text input field etc.

The processes I describe represent tweaks and adjustments to my proposed route as initially planned challenges these assertions that searching for a ride is a simple task. As I gradually increased the range of driver journeys, each subsequent search deviated further from my initial travel plans in a way that implies an increasing requirement for flexibility. At the same time, this needed to be balanced against the flexibility of the driver, and so another important part of enacting these refinements was in learning to recognise how willing drivers might be to change their own plans, and how best to negotiate with them.

6.3.4 Learning where to meet

The vignette at the beginning of the thesis recounts my experience waiting at a pick-up location. John, the driver I was waiting for, lived in the Midlands and had driven up the M6 motorway from the south. I was travelling from my home in central Lancaster to Edinburgh, and while John was happy to pick me up near the motorway, he didn't offer to pick me up from nearer to my house. We agreed on a bus stop on a main road less than two-minute drive from a junction on the M6 (Figure 6a). Although it was some distance from my house, I had intended to spend some time at the university campus which was only a 10-minute walk from the rendezvous point. Yet, when the day arrived, it was raining heavily, and I ended up taking a taxi from campus which, although only a short ride, added £7 to the cost of my journey. The bus stop featured a shelter that offered protection from the rain, and was easy for John to identify thanks to its proximity to other reference points. What I hadn't anticipated was that finding somewhere to turn the car would be a problem, and it took several minutes to find a point at which to turn before heading back on to the motorway. This left me feeling awkward, despite the fact that John had been the one to suggest the spot. Based on this initial experience, when arranging subsequent journeys with other drivers, I suggested a different pick-up point in the car-park of a nearby pub (Figure 6b). This spot was still close to the M6 motorway yet easy for me to reach via campus. Yet, in contrast to the bus stop, it offered a place where drivers could pull off the main road and park up. It also enabled them to turn and so head straight back to the motorway. most conveniently, perhaps, the pub provided somewhere where I could wait in relative comfort for the driver, and they could use the facilities if required.

Figure 7: My initial meeting point when ride-sharing out of Lancaster (Google Street view, June 2021

Figure 8: The eventual meeting point that I recommended to drivers (Google Street view, June 2021)

While the use of this pub repeatedly proved to be an advantageous meeting point, it was not, as suggested by the platform, the drivers with whom I shared subsequent journeys who picked this spot. Contra to Blablacar's instructions, I took the liberty of suggesting this site as a pick-up point, based on my knowledge of the local area. In all cases, drivers seemed happy to defer to this knowledge and, if anything, happy not to have to suggest a location themselves. Being able to demonstrate my awareness of the drivers' needs by arranging an opportune place for them to pick me up felt good: It gave me a way to show the driver my broader appreciation for the nuances of the practice and demonstrate that I was a considerate and accommodating ride-sharer.

The sense of virtue I felt when engaging with the practice of ride-sharing in ways that I felt other practitioners would recognise as thoughtful and good brings me to the subject of ethics, and, specifically, to the relationship between ethics and practice. Writing on the 'ordinary' everyday aspects of ethics as situated practice, Lambek (2010) observes that "Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is considered right or good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good" (p.1). Lambek's engagement with MacIntyre's (1981) virtue ethics leads him, along with other practice-focused theorists, to "try to evade Kantian oppositions between sense and reason by returning to Aristotle and locating ethics first in practice and action," (p. 7). In Schatzki's (2002) terms, "Participating in a practice is operating in an arena where certain actions and ends are prescribed, correct, or acceptable on certain occasions," (p. 75).

6.3.3 Learning to negotiate

As a passenger, my own approach to willingness to negotiate travel also developed as I accumulated experience. In the early days, I generally avoided asking drivers to go out of their way and would travel to a location that was on their route. This related to learning from my past experience of hitch-hiking, through which I felt that I should avoid inconveniencing drivers by being as flexible as possible. My attitude changed after one particularly memorable journey where traffic travelling to meet a driver meant that I was late as my bus was delayed. I was only a few miles away from the agreed pick-up point at the time we had agreed to meet and tried to book a taxi, but none were available. I had been texting the driver to reassure him that I was on my way, but after missing the bus I was almost certainly going to arrive after the 15-minute cut-off that Blablacar askes drivers to wait. In the end I decided to call him and explain the situation, at which point he agreed to drive over and pick me up. For future journeys to this pick-up location, I opted to pre-book a taxi rather than rely on taking the bus.

There were similar examples of specific learning events that interviewees described from a negative perspective, whereby the outcome of their actions was perceived as less-desirable than they expected. Through these negative encounters, practitioners identified, and consequently attempted to avoid repeating configurations of performance associated with outcomes they considered unfavourable. The tendency for ride-sharers to retain these memories suggest that negative encounters play an important role in the learning process.

Speaking with drivers and observing other passenger pick-ups during the journeys I shared, I learned that it was not unusual for passengers to be collected from their home. Often this involved additional payments to compensate drivers for their inconvenience, as discussed in Section 6.2.2. When I spoke with participant K about having asked to be picked up near to the motorway, rather than at the university where my journey began, he told me that he had considered messaging me offering to pick me up there but had concluded that "*he has decided that's where he wants to be so I will just go*".

These encounters and conversations with drivers taught me that at times it was okay to ask them to go out of their way. Given my conclusion that reliably making my way to a pick-up spot often required paying for a taxi, I eventually became more open to approaching drivers to ask whether they were willing to go out of their way to pick me up. In doing so, I learned that I could turn the fact that I was asking for a pickup at a spot that had not been advertised to my advantage. Rather than have them go through the bother of relisting the trip to include Lancaster as a stop and let Blablacar calculate the cost, I would offer to pay for a longer trip in exchange for a pick-up or drop-off that was out of their way. For example, drivers travelling up the M6 would often put Preston or Warrington, as the Blablacar system recommends these as popular stops. If I wanted to travel from Lancaster to Edinburgh, relisting the journey would reduce the recommended price from £15 to £12. A taxi or bus to my usual pickup spot would cost more than £3, so I would say to the driver, 'I'm happy to pay from Warrington if you go a bit further out of your way to collect me'. I found drivers usually agreed to this, so kept doing it.

When booking out of places other than Lancaster, I would either defer to the preferences of the driver, or use google maps to try and identify a convenient location that was accessible by both public transport and car. I came to recognise that park and ride parking spaces and out of town shopping centres were particularly useful in this regard. After one particular experience where the place the person had chosen was not ideal, I was more active in my input. The trip in question was advertised from Perthshire, but I was actually looking for a lift from Edinburgh. I could see from the driver's route that he would be travelling within a mile or so from Edinburgh Gateway station. The previous driver who had taken me up from Lancaster the week before had travelled the same route in the opposite direction and was happy to drop me there, so I thought it worth asking this driver to do the same. He called me up and told me it would be easier to pick me up in Rosyth. I checked on GoogleMaps and Rosyth station was only 20 minutes or so further on the train and I would get to travel over the Forth Rail Bridge, and so I agreed. Driving back over the road bridge at 3pm on a Friday we hit some heavy traffic, which extended the length of my journey by quite a bit. This made me regret agreeing to meet in Rosyth, but in the end, I just had to suck it up.

Participant B also described having concluded through booking several journeys that drivers would usually have set preferences of the pick-up and drop-off points at which they would agree to pick you up.

> *"Going to France, Lewisham in the southeast of London was always the spot where people wanted to go (…) at a petrol station. Different people, but it was always this petrol station out there (…) drivers always have a place to meet. It's just shared knowledge that you go where they tell you to go (…) I find that in big cities, no matter who is driving, people have similar drop off and pick up points."*
>
> **Participant B**

In Chapter 5, I describe having identified through journey listings that drivers often have a specific degree of flexibility in terms of the extent to which they are willing to deviate from these preferences.

6.4 Learning to ride-sharing with confidence

Learning to ride-share is not just about the logistical challenges of booking a journey or attracting paying passengers. It can also involve overcoming anxieties about travelling in a car with a stranger. Speaking informally with friends and acquaintances, a lot of people said what put them off the prospect of ride-sharing was the idea that travelling with a stranger would place them in a socially uncomfortable situation, and furthermore that it could put their personal safety at risk (particularly as a passenger). In this section, I discuss how ride-sharers learned to overcome these concerns in order to gain confidence enough to share travel.

While there are some specific tasks that ride-sharers introduced and reconfigured in order to reduce the likelihood of disruptions, I also highlight that, for many practitioners, part of gaining confidence involves coming to accept risk as an unavoidable aspect of performance.

As this thesis has so far highlighted, the concept of flexibility is central to ridesharing, yet requires give and take on the part of both drivers and passengers: not only does the practice offer increased flexibility in meeting participants' mobility needs, it also requires flexibility on behalf of participants when faced with unexpected delays or changes. Here, my research findings emphasised the significance of participants' wider attitudes towards delay and disruption.

In this section, I rely more heavily on auto-ethnographic data, and present my own experiences and feelings concerning safety. There are two reasons for this: one, this was not a subject I found easy to raise in the course of interviews with relative strangers conducted in the intimate space of a moving car. Part of this was my awareness of my position as a tall, somewhat imposing male, and my concern that I might cause others discomfort. Whether or not this was an intuitive assessment of interpersonal boundaries or reflective of my own anxieties, I thus decided to raise the topic only in interviews that felt more relaxed and were conducted in public settings. The second reason is that, again, reflecting on my own position, it feels ethically fraught for me, as a white male, to speak about the experiences of others when it comes to the topic. Having said this, the ethnographic data here feels important in that it serves to highlight that these are concerns that affect even someone in my relatively comfortable position.

My own experience of learning to be confident when ride-sharing borrowed heavily from my past experiences of hitch-hiking. This was also true for a number of interviewees, with more than three-quarters having mentioned a past or present connection to the practice. The connections that I observed included both drivers and passengers having hitch-hiked in their youth, some participants who indicated that they would currently hitch-hike when circumstances allowed them to do so, and drivers who would occasionally pick people up at the side of the road. Several interview participants noted the connection between organised ride-sharing and hitch-hiking. Participant P observes how, *“I think that we are dealing with a lot of ex-hitchhikers in Blablacar, who have done the hitchhiking thing in years gone by and now they are doing the Blablacar thing. So, they understand the concept of it”.*

6.4.1 Socialising

One aspect of ride-sharing that I identified as causing a degree of anxiety about the prospect of ride-sharing was in socialising with other ride-sharers during a journey. Anecdotally, the idea of being effectively trapped in a confined space and forced to socialise with strangers was seen to prevent many people from considering ride-sharing in the first place. Travel by car is usually either a solitary activity or is undertaken with friends and relations. When travelling with strangers on public transport one can generally select an unoccupied pair of seats, and there is usually the option of moving elsewhere in the vehicle if necessary.

I approached ride-sharing being relatively comfortable with the prospect of socialising with strangers in the car, as it was something that I had become confident in through my hitch-hiking experience. I had developed an understanding that when hitch-hiking, there was an expectation that you were offering an engaging and interesting encounter to the driver in return for transit. I therefore felt like I had a responsibility to make a good impression with drivers as an expression of gratitude for receiving a free ride and in acting as a representative of hitch-hikers so that the practice could be encouraged. I came to see the prospect of interacting with strangers as a positive aspect of shared travel rather than something that I was worried about, and when I began ride-sharing I was interested to see whether I found it equally as enjoyable. I found that the people who opted to stop and offer you a ride were usually open-minded and sociable, and had interesting personal histories that they were happy to share. Participant W agreed that when hitch-hiking, whoever picked them up "would be the sort of person they wanted to know more about".

Several participants acknowledged that their confidence in socialising within the vehicle increased as they became more experienced. Participant Y describes how in his experience, this didn't necessarily involve altering the way in which he went about ride-sharing. As he explained,

> *"You get a bit more confident about it because you know what to expect. Sometimes there can be a bit of awkwardness when you don't know someone, and you are giving them a lift. I think I have become a bit more comfortable with that. Not much has really changed though."*
>
> **Participant Y**

Participant K describes similar feelings of becoming more relaxed based on the previous encounters that they had enjoyed:

> *"I feel much more relaxed about it. Having used it half a dozen times you become much more relaxed. All the people you get a lift with tend to be really friendly, really chatty. I've never come across anyone who is emotionally or socially illiterate, everyone is really friendly and wants to talk about anything. Because that's always a worry, but I've become much more relaxed about that."*

Participant K

In both of these examples, the process of building confidence involved developing a sense of familiarity with the various possible circumstances of enactment and the likelihood that they would be encountered. Participant Y related her increased confidence to 'knowing what to expect', and similarly Participant K described developing an understanding of what will 'tend to' occur. Participant F made a similar observation in conceding that "With Blablacar you don't know the kind of person that you will meet" but noting that "so far in all the time I have used it most people have been open minded".

Although many participants felt that they could usually expect that they would have a lot in common with the people with whom they shared a ride, others recognised that within the confinement of the car it was often wise to restrict certain topics of conversation. As Participant S explained:

> *"people know they are in a small space. And the environment is so close as well. Were all sitting together. Even if people know they have different opinions, they might say it in the most nicest way, or they will just hold their tongue. Because they know it's not worth it."*

Participant S

Participant E provided a similar justification for "steering away from talking about politics, religion, you know, anything like that". I remember having some apprehension on one particular journey that I booked with a driver who made clear in his journey listing that he was an army recruitment officer. I am occasionally uncomfortable when in the presence of people who work in the armed forces, and was anxious that things could be awkward. When it came down the journey, we got along very well, although there were some comments that he made with which I disagreed but chose not to take issue. This was more so the case with Participant X, who made some quite derogatory observations about the ethnicity of other drivers on the road and some misogynistic comments about some of the female passengers he had previously driven. Again, I chose not to challenge him. Another aspect of conversation that I avoided was raising the issue of personal safety in the company of females in the car, described further in Section 6.4.2 that follows.

6.4.2 Safety

A second aspect of ride-sharing that interviewee identified as potentially causing some anxiety was personal safety. I personally approached ride-sharing with relatively few concerns, again through my experience as a hitch-hiker as well as my gender and stature as a six-and-a-half-foot tall man. That being said there were some concerns about personal safety that did develop as I gained experience, of which I had to learn to address.

The two main aspects of concern that developed through my experience were fairly fundamental to the practice of organised ride-sharing. They related to changes that driver were able to make to a trip after we had agreed to share the journey. Firstly, they could accept bookings from other passengers after I had agreed to travel, and could do so without my knowledge or permission. This meant that there were occasions on which a driver would unexpectedly travel to places with which I was often unfamiliar. One of the tasks that I had learned to integrate into my performance of hitch-hiking that carried forward to ride-sharing was making sure that a friend or family member knew the details of my journey plans. Thus, these unforeseen detours made me uncomfortable with the prospect of the driver being able to take me almost anywhere on the basis that they were going to pick someone up. This was a concern shared by participants of my study. Participant F, a female passenger, recalled having ended up in just such a situation with a male driver, and had resolved not to travel with a lone male from then on.

Secondly, the fact that drivers were able to accept subsequent bookings after my own meant that there were times that I unexpectedly found myself travelling with someone without having much of an idea of who they were. While I was provided some reassurance about the driver through the rating system and our communications prior to travel, it was entirely up to them to decide who else they allowed to book space in the car. As shown in section 6.3.1 it was also common for some drivers to acquire passengers from outside of Blablacar, further calling in to question their character. As well as travelling with other passengers, there were also several occasions where drivers would be accompanied by other people who, again, I would not be expecting to be joining us and knew little about. Again, this was a concern shared by others- Participant T observed that a driver's failure to warn them that others would be in the car went against general social courtesy that they would expect when travelling with, for example, friends or colleagues. My own perception of this as problematic was amplified by one journey in particular that involved travelling out of Liverpool.

I made my way via the metro from the outskirts of the city where I was staying to meet in the centre. It had been difficult to communicate with the driver because of poor mobile phone signal on the underground. The driver was also Spanish and was visiting for a holiday, so they were not familiar with the layout of the city and kept calling me to try and work out where they were, despite me having a limited knowledge of the city. It felt quite chaotic trying to navigate both of us along the busy streets of the city centre in order to meet, and so I was feeling quite stressed. When we both finally arrived at the meeting point, the person with whom I had arranged the booking was in the passenger seat and someone else was driving. I squeezed into the back of their small three-door car and within the space of a few minutes, the driver accidentally ran a red light, and we were involved in a minor head-on collision. Fortunately, nobody was injured, but I felt quite shaken up. Although I knew that the accident was not a direct result of traveling with a different driver than I expected, it raised it as something of a concern. It also called into further question the value of the feedback system, as the past feedback on which, at least in principle, I had based my trust in the ability of the driver had not been given to the person driving the car. This particular example was a one-off occurrence that fell outside of the terms of conduct that Blablacar enforces, but demonstrates how specific events impact perceptions of personal safety.

In Chapter 4, I described the ways in which the Blablacar system promotes user feedback and rating system as a way of building trust between ride-sharers by addressing concerns that ride-sharers might have over the person with whom they are travelling. At various points in the thesis, I have also described how the low levels of ride-sharing in the UK mean that often there was no choice but to travel with people who had no such feedback. Furthermore, in Chapter 5 I observed that the feedback and ratings that were left were not always representative of the user's actual experience. At times when I was concerned about my own personal safety, my knowledge of the feedback and ratings system thus provided little comfort. Given the purported purpose of the feedback system as a means to inform ride-sharers of any issues that there were with the shared journey, I might have considered mentioning in the feedback I provided to drivers that I found these actions to have been problematic. The difficulties that I faced in doing so was that I was uncertain as to whether they were breaking any rules of the scheme, and that they were undertaking actions that were very much normalised amongst other ride-sharers. I emailed Blablacar to ask them whether deviating from the advertised route was something that drivers were allowed to do, and got a fairly generic response that side-stepped the question by recommending that I find someone with a good rating to travel with if I am anxious. Despite this advice, I remained sceptical of the value of feedback.

Another aspect of ride-sharing that I came to recognise as presenting some safety concerns related to the locations of the pick-up and drop-off points. There were two occasions on which I felt particularly vulnerable during a pick-up. The first involved meeting a driver in the early afternoon outside Hangar Lane underground station in West London. The A-roads that passed through the area had a constant flow of heavy traffic and there was no immediately obvious place for a driver to wait. I took a short walk to a nearby row of shops which had some parking spaces outside that looked like they might be the place that the driver could have meant for us to meet up. While waiting for him to get in touch, a boy of about 12 years old rode up to me on a BMX and asked me if I wanted to buy any drugs. When he left, I walked back to the underground station, aware that I was walking in an unfamiliar London suburb carrying a suitcase that had my laptop inside.

The second occasion took place a few weeks after the first, and involved getting dropped off in Manchester at the end of a journey that I again took from London. The driver was in a bit of a rush to get to Old Trafford for a football match that he had travelled up for the kick-off at 8pm. I had hoped to negotiate for him to drop me off somewhere central while we were in the car, an approach that I describe in Section 6.3.3. On this occasion, doing so was not possible, but I was reluctant to travel all the way to his advertised drop off point at the football ground as there would be crowds of people attending the game. Using the limited mobile signal, I had to cross reference google maps and rail timetables, I hurriedly found what seemed to be a suitable station on the way. It was late in the year, and darkness was setting as we approached the drop-off point. The driver was not familiar with the area and was anxious to drop me off as quickly as possible, and was pushing me to give directions via my phone. In the dim light of the evening, it was difficult to navigate the area, and my phone battery was getting low having not been able to charge it since the morning and using it to navigate London earlier in the day. I told the driver to just pull over and that I'd find my own way to the station. Once again, I found myself in an unfamiliar suburb walking with a suitcase and feeling a bit lost. When I eventually got to the station, it was a single, unmanned platform on which I stood alone feeling just as vulnerable as I had earlier, if not more so. The late running train to Preston eventually arrived and was packed with commuters heading home. I struggled to get a seat but was grateful for the company all the same.

Ultimately, my confidence as a tall, white man meant that the extent to which these concerns affected my performance was limited. As an experienced hitch-hiker, not being in control of whom I was travelling with and where they might be taking me was a concern that I had already resolved. My discomfort at the prospect of facing these situations when ride-sharing was more of a moral concern that Blablacar presented itself as a means through which these potential issues could be avoided, yet the rating and feedback system central to this claim seemed to fall short. Despite my relative confidence, there were several tasks that I introduced to my enactment of shared travel in response to my recognition of these risks, most of which I had carried over from hitch-hiking. I bought a cheap mobile phone that I would carry on my person as a second phone when sharing a trip. I would avoid ride-sharing after dark wherever possible. I learnt to size up a driver who was picking me up, particularly if I hadn't had much interaction before we travelled. If a driver seemed untrustworthy, I knew from hitch-hiking not to put my bags in the boot while they were in the car, and had a plan to feign illness to avoid having to travel if for any reason I decided I should not travel. Likewise, other ride-sharers I met described being wary of sharing rides with those without past feedback. Participant Y recalled checking social media to work out whether someone they planned to share a ride with was genuine.

Like other ride-sharers I spoke with, it was through experiences such as these that I also learned to pay more attention to the places that I agreed to meet drivers. When I was travelling to or from Lancaster, or from places with which I was equally familiar, this was less of a concern and I would usually have more of an input into choosing the specific location anyway. On other occasions, before agreeing on a pick-up location I would check on Google Maps to make sure meeting spots were suitable. I would also try and negotiate with the driver to get them to meet me in reasonably public places. Participants G and H described identifying railway stations and cafes as good meeting points on a similar basis. If I was planning to chain multiple shared trips together, I would make sure that this happened somewhere that I could take public transport to avoid getting stranded if the second driver were to cancel or not show up.

6.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have reflected on participants' experiences of learning to develop their engagement with ride-sharing in ways that account for key aspects of the practice - namely, economics, social dynamics, and safety - in terms of the significance each of these holds for participants as individuals and as members of a community of practice. I argue that this involves learning what is and isn't effective in meeting one's own needs and, simultaneously, accommodating the needs of the other. Yet, as I have shown, how and when these needs are expressed and asserted is not always straightforward, and responsive flexibility appears a key aspect of many 'successful' experiences. Underlying this chapter and, indeed, this thesis, is the recurrent observation that ride-sharing is a dynamic, heterogeneous practice. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the scheme functions by attempting to accommodate this heterogeneity, yet, as we learned in Chapter 5, limits and gaps remain. In this chapter, I have highlighted the ways in which participants learn to work around limits and in these gaps.

The various ways in which ride-sharers learned to make ride-sharing work was influenced by the interactions of the kind discussed in Chapter 5 with other practitioners. These processes of circulation are important in seeding an understanding of the different ways of doing that are possible. As they become more adept, practitioners also carry with them a broader understanding of the configurations of performance that are possible based on their various past experiences. These past experiences were made diverse through the different circumstances in which they took place, including (but not limited to) the people with whom they shared the journey, the route they travelled and the availability of certain resources at the moment of enactment. For example, a ride-sharer offering lifts to people attending a music festival might have experienced a car full of passengers keen on socialising and carrying a lot of luggage and fairly relaxed about their time of arrival. Another journey might then involve commuting between cities with a single passenger happily sitting in silence or listening to the radio, but requiring drop-off at a specific location before a certain time. These examples are purposefully painted with broad contrasting strokes, but more nuanced distinctions, such as how different performances are culturally situated, are also important.

Learning to make ride-sharing work then involves working out the ways in which this knowledge can be usefully applied to performance within the specific circumstances and moments based on their preferred outcomes. As well as acquisition, application of knowledge is an important aspect of learning, and the analysis demonstrates that the distinction between these two processes is also not always as straightforward as it might seem.

In talking about their practice, interview participants frequently referred to specific journeys (or attempted journeys) that had been instrumental in shaping their career as a ride-sharer. Whether the outcome of these performances was perceived as positive or negative determined the ways in which they impacted performances going forward. This was connected to the established expectations of the practitioner, as well as their specific needs. The needs of the practitioner were themselves observed to develop and evolve as practitioners' experience grew, further influencing the ways in which performances are configured. As Participant P puts it, “you work out over experience as to how you want to do your ride to make it as enjoyable as possible.” Practitioners with less experience were more likely to experience performance outcomes that were less aligned with their expectations, leading to negative perceptions. Common pitfalls were observed into which practitioners with less experience were liable to fall, such as being overly flexible when negotiating pick-up/drop-off locations and times. At the same time, more experienced practitioners were observed to have a more established sense of expectation.

In describing the ways in which ride-sharers were observed to make ride-sharing work, I draw attention to examples of ride-sharers introducing novel ways of doing the tasks that make up the practice to their performances in order to experiment with different possible configurations. This experimentation is presented as a process whereby ride-sharing practitioners actively seek knowledge of possible and probable circumstances, configurations, and their consequences on the outcomes of performance. The intentionality that differentiates experimentational and incidental learning is derived from a desire to improve. The notion of reflexivity implies a sense of self-improvement that in turn implies a relative sense of value associated with performance, connected to the meanings participants attach to the outcomes of ride-sharing. A ‘good’ performance for some practitioners might involve ensuring they arrive at their destination on time. For others, it might be reducing the amount of time they put into planning and arranging their trip. Reflexivity was particularly prevalent in more experienced practitioners, suggesting that it is influential in enabling practitioners to sustain performances over time. Persistence was also associated with the observation that more experienced ride-sharers demonstrated adaptability that enabled their commitment over time. It is notable that those practitioners committed to the faithful reproduction of ride-sharing are also those practitioners most responsible for its evolution through the adaptations that they initiate.

The observations of the different ways in which ride-sharers learn how to ‘make ride-sharing work’ present learning as a non-linear process that incorporates a complex network of interdependences, providing some indication of how early career practitioners are able to undertake performances despite the lack of knowledge that learning through experience affords. For example, my own transition from novice to adept ride-sharer drew at various points from my past experience as a hitch-hiker. This was a particular connection that was common to several interview participants, suggesting that ride-sharing as a social practice re-appropriated elements of hitch-hiking as what Shove and Pantzar (2005) call a 'proto-practice'. The chapter highlights the significance of this connection between hitch-hiking and ride-sharing in terms of meaning, via the romanticisation of hitch-hiking as an enlightening experience but also through associations of risk and danger.

The distinction between the different ways in which drivers and passengers make ride-sharing work as presented in this chapter are starkly contrasted. In actuality there are certainly occasions on which drivers were observed to focus on maximising the chances of attracting a passenger without much consideration of this as a means to make more money. Equally, there were plenty of instances of passengers whose principal intention was to find the cheapest possible way of getting from A to B. What I argue is that these aspects of ride-sharing have particular significance to these roles that gain importance when reflecting on the longevity of their commitment to performance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Since the earliest days of this project, my intentions for both my research and analysis have been guided by a key understanding developed through my engagement with mobilities and practice theories: Namely, that many prior studies of transport have been “asking the wrong sort of question,” (Marsden 2019:3). As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, this awareness has led me to approach the subject of ride-sharing in the UK not with the question of ‘Why *don’t* many people in the UK ride-share?”, but, instead, by trying to understand more about how people *do* engage in the practice.

What this revealed, in the course of my fieldwork, and what I have conveyed in the chapters of this thesis, are some of the social, cultural, and affective aspects of ride-sharing. What emerges is a picture of situated, collaborative practice in which practitioners navigate procedural and relational complexities, often in situations that directly challenge or highlight the gaps in the scheme’s governance. For a majority of practitioners, this is an infrequent undertaking, and an engagement that doesn’t persist past a handful of trips. For a committed minority, however, the practice of ride-sharing is one that has become incorporated into their wider mobility practices, and their lives more generally. In this thesis, I have explored the practice as it is enacted by practitioners at either end of this spectrum, and points in between.

Throughout this research project, I have attended to the question of how learning and knowledge sit within the practice of organised ride-sharing. This has been developed through my analytical focus on how research participants come to know how to make ride-sharing ‘work for them’. As is well established in practice-focused literature, prescriptive forms of learning based on the idea of humans as vessels waiting to be filled with propositional knowledge is outdated, and the significance of situated learning is now widely accepted. My research examines Blablacar’s attempts to standardise knowledge on ride-sharing. Yet, I also suggest that Blablacar has attempted to embed flexibility into the advice they provide and the rules and processes they enforce. One of the claims I make here is that the existence of both standardisation and flexibility in forms of practice enables organised ride-sharing to perpetuate. On the other hand, I also wish to emphasise notions of the ‘right way’ of doing ride-sharing, including the ‘right configuration of power between driver and passengers’, that remain attached to the scheme’s underlying prescriptive ideals of correct performance.

The first of my research questions asked, ‘How do participants come to know how to practice organised ride-sharing?’ In addressing this question, I examined specific ways of doing ridesharing promoted by Blablacar via its online platform. I observed that these influenced practitioner’s ideas of how to engage in ridesharing and, as such, what constitutes good practice. Yet, in shifting my attention between online and offline engagements in practice, I have revealed the limits of the scheme’s reach beyond the platform, and the points at which its influence to attach meaning to specific configurations of practice is challenged. Here, my research has engaged with the second question of this thesis: ‘What are the different meanings attached to sharing a ride?’ In doing so, I have not only considered the meanings themselves but also their sources, contestations, and the ways in which they distribute authority and power.

This research has revealed that one of the main understandings that people develop is that ride-sharing has to be negotiated, both in terms of its procedural aspects and the wider concept of what ‘sharing’ means in the context of the practice. This includes the potential for tensions between transactional and altruistic aspects of ride-sharing, which, as examples in this thesis have illustrated, play out in everyday interactions between drivers, passengers, and the scheme. Yet, the commodification of organised ride-sharing nonetheless remains limited, at least in the context of relationships between drivers and passengers. The scheme’s governance of online negotiations limits excessive profiteering, yet the ways in which this is discouraged in the course of offline enactments are more subtle. My claim, in this case, is that the meanings attached to ride-sharing *as a relational practice* make it more than simply a case of paying for a ride. In short, this thesis argues that the seat in the car can’t be extracted from the social context. But what the seat *is,* is negotiated in practice. In part, these negotiations relate to the ordinarily private domain of the car as a quasi-public space in ride-sharing, which, again, is a potential site of tension.

The issue of contested meanings brings me to my third question, which asks: ‘What is negotiated by ride-sharers when they come together to share a journey, and how are these negotiations enabled?’ Throughout the thesis emerges an understanding that ride-sharing, as a collaborative practice, is inherently relational. When two people's lives "hang together" (Schatzki 1996:188) in a practice, the sometimes-uneasy relationship between enablement and dependency - collaboration enables both parties to expand their practice, but also makes them, to some extent, reliant on the other. This reliance arguably brings with it both responsibility and power, distributed, to some extent, between the positions of 'driver' and 'passenger'. Hence, my final research question asked: What is the significance of the differences in roles between 'driver' and 'passenger in organised ride-sharing, beyond who is 'in control' of the vehicle? This question led me to consider how these roles are established and differentiated through practitioners' engagement with the online platform. Further, I ask how these positions and the relationship between them are subsequently reshaped and reconstituted in the course of practice, particularly at times when the practice shifts. Afterall, as Schatzki (2002) observes, "a position's meanings can [...] evolve along with changes in practices," (p.197). The analytical chapters in this thesis have presented specific examples and reflections in response to these four questions. In the remainder of this conclusion, I review and draw together overarching themes emerging from my research and pose further questions raised by my findings.

One of the dominant themes that has emerged in response to the above questions is what constitutes a 'good' performance of ride-sharing practice. This leads to the further questions of who or what shapes situated understandings of the 'good', and how these are distributed through practice. Implicit in the latter questions is the subject of power, in the sense of who or what holds power to influence how virtue is attributed to specific forms of practice. Arguably, most significant among these is Blablacar and, specifically, their online platform. Here, the scheme claims that all people need to do is "Scroll, click, tap, and go!" Yet, the promise that "Booking a ride has never been easier," arguably relates to a streamlined enactment of the practice that relies on practitioners doing ride-sharing in a particularly standardised way. My experiences both on- and off-line suggested that this was not always - or, even, often - the way that the practice played out. Moreover, the quirks and idiosyncrasies of particular enactments were not necessarily aspects of practice that the scheme was able - or, perhaps, willing - to deal with. In promoting and enabling a streamlined, standardised, and, in many ways, pared down configuration of the booking process, Blablacar's approach raises the question of from whom booking a ride has been made easy: practitioner or scheme provider?

The scheme's standardisation is also presented as a means to create trust and reliability in the practice. In many regards, standardisation is sold as being to the advantage of the user. It is also the means by which Blablacar has become a multi-billion-dollar global presence. And, in part, this standardisation has involved streamlining the practice in a way that serves to further separate and differentiate between the positions of driver and passenger - and the practices of driving and passengering - not least via the distribution of responsibility and power. Yet, while the scheme structures and separates, ride-sharing is, in many ways, a practice that troubles conceptual and practical boundaries between positions and forms.

The scheme's guides on "How to be a Good…." assign particular ways of performing the roles of driver and passenger. Both guides confer significant moral value on enactments that take account of the needs of one's collaborators, specifically in terms of what passengers and drivers 'owe' to one another. As in many other situated, relational practices, individuals' performances are inextricably tied to those of other practitioners, often in other positions. In Schatzki's terms, one person becomes "the object of another's life conditions" (Schatzki 1996:188). The point to note here is that this sort of situated relating is not well-suited to evaluation against abstract notions of specific actions being 'right' or 'good'. Rather, "local solutions to specific problems need to be worked out," Mol et al. (2010: 13). And while such conditions "may involve 'justice' [....] other norms (fairness, kindness, compassion, generosity) may be equally, or more, important – and not in a foundational way, but as orientations among others." (ibid.). Rather than offering prescriptive solutions to specific ruptures in the flow of offline practice, Blablacar's guidance prescribes more generalised ways-of-being-in-relation that prioritise attending carefully and thoughtfully to the others' needs. This form of practice-based sociality brings with it a responsibility for the wellbeing of the other, and, hence, an obligation to "do things well" becomes part of the ethos of practice. Thus, "Being a Good Driver" and "Being a Good Passenger" involves doing ride-sharing in a way that enables the procedural flow of the practice, but also - and at the same time - is a means of attending to the well-being of the other. Hence, we might say to do ride-sharing well involves careful practice - care for both other practitioners and for the procedural process. To use Lambek's (2010) terms, 'taking care' becomes a "felicity condition" of the practice of ride-sharing.

As Mol et al. (2010) note, fundamental to careful engagement in practice is the ability to 'tinker' in one's performance in efforts to accommodate the specifics of the situation. Yet, the ability to 'tinker' or improvise in practice requires a degree of agency on the part of the practitioner: the ability to make choices about the specific form of one's engagement in any particular context (see Laidlaw, 2013). The fact that "any exercise of judgment presupposes some measure of freedom" (Lambek 2010: drawing on Laidlaw [pers. Comm.,]) brings us back to the question of power, and to Zigon's (2009) observation that "Those governed by an institution may not always follow its claimed morality to the letter. Those who don't are not always punished or reprimanded – often it is not even noticed," (p. 258). What my review of the scheme's rules and practices suggests is that it's governance strategies are very much based on an understanding of the limits of its institutional reach. Hence, rather than aim to enforce a set of hard rules that span and regulate the entirety of ride-sharing practice, Blablacar seems to instead accept the inevitability of situated reconfigurations of offline practice, many of which they tacitly accept will contravene their own directives.

In practice theories, the attention to the situated nature of practice leads to a recognition that, as Ingold describes: "Cultural knowledge, rather than being imported into the settings of practical activity, is constituted within these settings through the development of specific dispositions and sensibilities that lead people to orient themselves in relation to their environment and to attend to its features in the particular ways that they do," (Ingold 2000:153). In applying a practice-focused lens to the scheme's engagement with rules and regulations, it becomes apparent that the way in which these are configured seems to take account of the fact that developing ways of knowing in the course of situated practice involves learning how things are done in the specific context of that practice. Likewise, the scheme's approach emphasises that learning how something should be done involves learning what it means to do it well. In celebrating sustained, successful engagement in ride-sharing as a positive attribute, the scheme's messaging, thus, draws a link between virtuosity - as in, the skilled execution of practice - and virtue - as in, moral righteousness.

The overall point I wish to make in raising the subject of ethics is that there are lots of points in this thesis that link to an ethics of good practice in which people are trying to figure out and reconcile the best way to do things within specific social and material contexts. And what emerges from this is evidence that what is in a specific context may not relate to externally imposed standards. In Mol et al.'s (2010) terms, "The good is not something to pass a judgement on, in general terms and from the outside, but something to do, in practice," (p: 13). For, "While a practice's actions [...] do exhibit regularities," a practice "also embraces, irregular, unique, and constantly changing doings/sayings, tasks, and projects," (Schatzki 2002:74), troubling attempts to standardise what counts as good or successful enactment.

In the case of Blablacar, the standardisation of practice and the enforcement of rules was most successful in the case of practitioners' online performance. Offline, the scheme's reach was limited although, at times, it was still felt. Notably, some practitioners carried the scheme's rules with them into particular aspects of practice. For example, Participant P was cautious not to 'overcharge' passengers lest his incomings should surpass the limits set by the scheme. Yet, as was revealed in the section on "Making Ride-Sharing Pay," many other practitioners explicitly reject these limits on the grounds that they did not account for the specifics of enactments. What is of interest here is, in Schatzki's (2002) terms, how the platform informs the "teleoaffective structure" of the practice. That is, how it informs the range of potential ways of doing a practice based on what is prescribed or accepted. Schatzki's understanding that every practice comprises an indefinite range of ways of doing that are "... either ones that participants ought to realise or ones that it is acceptable for them to do so," (p: 80) brings me squarely back to questions of morality and ethics.

Once again, the point here is that my research emphasises that '... virtues do not depend on a specific morality but on a particular form of engagement in practice' (Fassin, 2014). On the topic of fees and payment, in particular, it became clear that situated notions of oughtness and acceptability influenced what practitioners expected or were willing to accommodate. By-and-large, passengers seemed content to pay an extra few pounds if it meant a driver was then willing to undertake an extended detour to a more convenient drop-off point. Yet what was not so clear was whether it was acceptable for drivers to levy extra charges to account for disruptive circumstances beyond the passengers' control. Here, a competing "oughts" would often emerge: the driver ought to be compensated for their time/fuel/inconvenience, while the passenger ought to be transported to a safe drop-off point without having to pay extra for disruptive circumstances outwith their control. And, while it was at these moments of rupture that recourse to the rules of the scheme was most evident, it was also at these moments that it became evident that the scheme provided principles of engagement, rather than rules to determine the proper course of action. It became clear in these instances that there might be no easy resolve, raising the question of "how different goods might coexist in a given, specific, local practice" (Mol et al 2010:13).

Why Schatzki differentiates formalised rules from teleoaffective structures of a practice. Formalised rules enabled the standardisation of (aspects of) a practice, and enabled it to connect with other practices. Yet, there are also rules "in the Wittgensteinian sense: a generalizable procedure, the knowledge of "how to go on" in a particular context, according to our previous experiences in society," (Citta et al. 2019: 2, drawing on Wittgenstein 1953).

For some drivers, for instance, the trade-off between - as they described it - the comfort and ease of solo travel and the financial remuneration to be had from carrying passengers simply didn't balance out when the latter involved detours and increased journey times. In these circumstances, re-configuration (i.e., charging additional fees) became necessary to make ride-sharing worth the driver's while. Thus, practitioners' offline engagements in the practice didn't always involve money in a way that Blablacar decreed they ought to or deemed acceptable. Yet practitioners' themselves were nonetheless able to reconcile additional monetary exchanges with their own situated understandings of good practice. Inherent in these re-configurations was the question of whether Blablacar's fees sufficed, even if Blablacar didn't want (to know about) this question being raised between drivers and passengers.

The issue of fees brings me to reflect on the question of commodification, specifically the commodification of space in a car. In policy-focused discourse, ride-sharing is often talked about in terms of surplus or excess, the notion being that empty seats represent an untapped resource to be utilised in efforts to reduce energy demand. Yet, my research demonstrated that, for a driver, giving up an empty seat in their car didn't only involve giving up otherwise-empty space: Doing so also meant giving up many of the liberties afforded to them as a solo driver, and assuming a range of obligations.

Perhaps, then, if we are to ask the question of 'why is the resource of spare seats not being used?' one answer might be 'Because you can't just open the door and let people in.' That is to say, a multitude of factors over and above the availability of space need to be accounted for when a paying stranger enters the car. After all, as Sharp (2000) observes, "Commodities often are not simply things-in-and of-themselves, or objects whose worth lies merely in their exchange value. Rather, as Mauss argued, exchange goods are frequently entangled in a host of meanings framed by socio-political concerns, and thus they are symbolically charged by their sociality as well as by their links to hierarchy and power," (Sharp, 2000:291, drawing on Mauss, 1967). What I have illustrated in this thesis is how the social, material, economic, and - above all - relational meanings attached to organised ride-sharing all contribute to the fact that an empty seat in a moving car is far from "simply a thing in-and-of" itself.

Organised ride-sharing has not become a widely established practice in the UK as it has in Mainland Europe and other regions. Nonetheless, this thesis enabled me to engage with a range of active practitioners - some highly committed, others not so - who were continually learning to negotiate the situated meanings in which the social and material elements of ride-sharing were entangled. Yet, even during the relatively brief duration of this study, the practice has been subject to substantial disruption and reconfiguration in ways that increase uncertainty about the future forms the practice will take. And while the rapid, ongoing emergence of digital technologies is continually enabling new developments in mobile practices, the nature of ride-sharing raises the question of if and how "relational epistemologies [can] survive side by side with high-tech ways of living?" (Clammer et al. 2004 p.19). There is no doubt that digital technologies and services such as the Blablacar platform, do, in many ways, make booking a ride "easier than ever". Yet, the flexibility afforded by such services also increases the wider options available to practitioners and, in doing so, reduces compatibility, as people are able to make increasingly specific choices about the form of their enactments of practice.

Most significantly, since my fieldwork ended in 2019, the global Coronavirus pandemic has, for long periods, made travelling in a car with a stranger a virtual impossibility. In the UK, the pandemic had a disruptive impact on everyday practices, and the dynamics of mobility shifted with people discouraged from leaving their homes and local areas. The situation was profoundly disruptive to ride-sharing, with the UK Government prohibiting shared travel under most circumstances. More generally, the threat of coronavirus fundamentally changed established forms of sociality. As of writing, the lasting impacts of these disruptions remains unclear, yet, what can be said with certainty is that the pandemic has added a further element of uncertainty to travelling with strangers. More hopefully, increasing public awareness of - and pressure to respond to - the reality of climate change has contributed to increasingly lively discussions about carbon reduction in a post-covid world. With the forthcoming COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, attention is being focused on sustainable mobilities, and ride-sharing is once again on the political agenda. In terms of this thesis, one thing of interest at this current moment is the apparent resilience of the practice, and the familiarity of forms in which organised ride-sharing appears to be re-emerging. What remains to be seen is how and to what extent the practice will be reconfigured in the months and years to come.

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Appendix I - Outline of Online Data Collection

The design of the Blablacar platform is such that one is able to search for listings, view the profiles of the driver who posts a listing, view the feedback they have received, view the profiles of those leaving feedback, and so forth. This process of exploring the website was crucial in providing access to profiles and feedback from ride-sharing passengers as well as drivers.

Although the analysis of the profile and feedback datasets was not dependent on identifying users as drivers or passengers, I felt it appropriate to obtain a reasonably even distribution within the sample., I obtained a dataset of 200 profiles and 200 pieces of individual journey feedback of which it could be reasonably inferred that 100 were likely to come from users with some experience as drivers and 100 as passengers.

Within these datasets, the following information was collected:

Driver and passenger profiles

- Accompanying text
- Number of trips undertaken (feedback received)
- Account creation date (mm/yyyy)
- Total journeys listed
- Car model and make included?

Journey listings

- Text accompanying listing
- Start and end locations
- Pick-up points
- Departure time

Whether a profile picture had been uploaded

Preferences regarding: smoking, pets, music, talkativity, 3 in-the-back, instant booking

Feedback and ratings

Feedback rating

Accompanying text

Data collection from online resources involved collecting a sample of driver and passenger profiles from the Blablacar UK website, available at www.blablacar.co.uk. The data collected was publicly available on these sites at the time of accessing

Data collection was manual, with information from profiles, driver listings, and feedback and ratings systematically obtained by myself and recorded in a number of Excel spreadsheets.

While developing a basic algorithm that could skim this data automatically would also have been possible, this process is specifically prohibited in the terms of use of the Blablacar website. Given the data is not intended to be used for the purpose of any statistical analysis, manual acquisition was considered adequate, as the time taken to collect the data was relatively low.

All data collected was obtained from the publicly accessible sections of the ride-sharing websites. In accordance with the terms and conditions outlined by Blablacar and Liftshare, no data was obtained through pages accessed by registering as a member. No data will be obtained for persons under the age of 18, as said persons are restricted from registering with the named schemes.

In accordance with the remit of the research, data was only retrieved from ride-share users advertising journeys in the UK, identifiable through the language used in text entries.

Searches will be conducted for journeys advertised from popular ride-sharing locations across the UK, based on observations from the initial phases of data collection. Although this limits the inclusion of journeys undertaken in less-populous areas of the UK, the nature of the research dictates that this will not detrimentally affect the capacity for suitable conclusions to be drawn. These locations include London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton, Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow. Drivers advertising journeys posted to/from these locations over a two-week period in February 2020 will be identified and the data listed above collated for subsequent analysis. This period of time has been chosen as it represents the typical time preceding travel that journeys are advertised, based on participant interviews.

The intention in collecting this data is to obtain a size of sample is large enough to provide enough relevant observations to support analysis from data that reflects the general population of ride-sharers in the UK, rather than to obtain a representative sample. Throughout data collection, duplicate datum will be identified and removed based on profile creation dates, number of journeys listed, and written biographical data. Should further data be deemed necessary, further locations within the UK will be identified and data obtained as above.

Data from ride-sharers with passenger experience will be collected through the same mechanism outlined above. Where the option for passengers to advertise journeys is not available, profiles will be identified through the feedback users have provided on driver's profiles with whom they have shared previous journeys. To obtain a good spread of data, a maximum of five profiles will be obtained from each driver. As this data is not temporally bounded, the size of this sample will be equal to that of the drivers.

In undertaking analysis of this data, a number of limitations will be taken into consideration. The capacity for comparisons to be drawn between data from drivers and passengers is limited by the different collection methods. Passenger data collected from driver's feedback limits the passenger dataset to passengers who have successfully undertaken a journey. Furthermore, overlap between the datasets is expected, as ride-sharing as a driver and passenger are not mutually exclusive. Data available publicly from the three different source schemes is not uniform, and thus any statistical analysis undertaken must take this into account.

When drivers advertise space in the vehicle for passengers through Blablacar, they are given the option to provide additional information to appear with their journey listing. Browsing through the listings, I identified that this provided a rich body of evident that related to ways in which practitioners of ride-sharing had tailored their performances to suit their specific circumstances. This was relevant to the research for two main reasons. First, it served to describe the aspects of ride-sharing that were flexible in their configuration. Second, the profiles represented a means by which new ways of doing were able to spread between practitioners.

The website suggests the following text as an example of what might be written:

> “Hello! I’m going to visit my family. I travel with a cat and I have a lot of space in the boot!”

Scheme users are able to include a passage of text in their user profile, which can be accessed by other users when rides are listed or requests to travel are made. This data was collected in a similar manner to that listed above.

The website provides the following prompts for users inputting text:

> “Introduce yourself to other members
>
> What are your interests?
>
> Is there anywhere you travel regularly?
>
> Why should people travel with you?”

Users are also asked not to include their phone number, Facebook account details, or details about specific rides. Text must be between 8 and 500 characters in length. The text must be approved by a site administrator before being uploaded.

The third phase of data collection will involve obtaining profile information from members without their knowledge. Having reviewed guidance from the Association of Internet Researchers, I have concluded that, although there is an expectation on the part of the members that their information will be viewed by like-minded members, they will be expecting strangers to view their information and so it is not private.

Furthermore, the data is publicly available in that membership of said schemes is not a prerequisite for obtaining access. The data source restricts data collection from individuals under the age of 18, and the subject matter of the user profiles is not deemed to be sensitive. The datasets collected will not be made public, and any qualitative data will be suitably paraphrased and anonymised.

Appendix II - Participant Invitation Letter

DEMAND Centre
FASS Building
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YD
www.demand.ac.uk
tel. +44 (0)1524 510862

Dear ride-sharer,

I am writing to you as either an occasional or regular user of some form of ride-sharing system (sometimes called carpooling or car-sharing). I am a PhD student at Lancaster University, and am collecting data on ride-sharing for my research. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview that will support this research. In the interview we will discuss how you first came to participate in ride-sharing, what your experiences have been, how and why you use particular ride-sharing opportunities and how your participation has changed over time. Hopefully you will find this discussion interesting. Interviewing will take place between (*study period*) at a location convenient to you and will last about an hour. All participants are being offered a £15 Amazon voucher to compensate for their time.

If you are interested in participating, or for further information, please contact me at i.goddard@lancaster.ac.uk, or via telephone on ############

Many thanks,

Iain Goddard

PhD Researcher, Lancaster University

Appendix III- Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Emergence and Development of Formal Ride-sharing Practices following recent advances in communication technology

Name of Researchers: Iain Goddard Email: i.goddard@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of commencement of the study my data will be removed. ☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable. ☐
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent. ☐
5. I understand that interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. ☐
6. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant Date Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher ________________________ **Date** __________ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

Appendix IV- Participant Information Sheet

DEMAND Centre
FASS Building
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YD
www.demand.ac.uk
tel. +44 (0)1524 510862

Participant information sheet

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the emergence and development of ride-sharing (also called carpooling or car-sharing).

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

The study is focused on how ride-sharing has developed at a time when opportunities for participation have been evolving significantly with the introduction of the smartphone and new ride-sharing schemes being set up. The research aims to find out about the different ways in which ride-sharing is being undertaken and to understand people's experiences as participants and how these have changed.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am trying to build an in-depth understanding of the different ways in which people undertake ride-sharing and I want to access a diversity of different peoples experiences I am interested in both regular users as well as people who have only occasionally ride-shared

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve a single interview lasting approximately one hour, conducted at a location and time of your choosing. During this interview, we will discuss your own experiences with ride-sharing, both now and in the past.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences of using ride-sharing services. Your insights will contribute to our understanding of an alternative transport method that could have an important role in addressing transport problems in the future. As a further incentive for participation, you will be offered a £15 Amazon gift voucher, received upon completion of the interview.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are not likely to be any significant disadvantages or risks to taking part, although arranging and taking part in the interview will involve your time.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to decline to answer any questions, or to stop the interview at any time, or to withdraw at any time prior to or during the interview and up to two weeks after, without giving any reason.

What if I change my mind?

As explained above, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you want to withdraw I will extract any data you contributed to the study and destroy it. Should you wish to do withdraw, you should contact me as soon as possible by email at i.goddard@lancaster.ac.uk or by telephoning the DEMAND Centre on 01524 510862.

Data means the information, views, ideas, etc. that you and other participants will have shared with me. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the study.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview, only the researcher conducting this study will have access to the audio recording of the data, and any other information you share directly. The researcher will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is, it will not be shared with others. I will anonymise any audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that I remove any personal information. After the interview, a written transcript will be made. The researcher will listen to the recording of the interview and produce a written record of what has been said, ensuring to anonymise this record so that any personal information about you is removed.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. Any hard copies of data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet. Data that can identify you will be kept separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic).

In accordance with University guidelines, the researcher will keep a digital copy of the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

The researcher will use the data you have shared for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and any associated journal article publications. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences. When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. When doing so, I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself by email at i.goddard@lancaster.ac.uk or by telephoning the DEMAND Centre on 01524 510862 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, standard rates apply).

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Professor Gordon Walker

(g.p.walker@lancaster.ac.uk)

Lead Project Supervisor

Professor Philip Barker (p.barker@lancaster.ac.uk)

Director