Bumper Stickers, Etc. What’s the Point?¹

More and more, people are utilizing their vehicles to advertise, show support, or unveil their beliefs on a myriad of topics. From bumper stickers to window decals to vanity license plates to magnets, vehicles are becoming more than just a quick and convenient mode of transport. But what do these things displayed prominently on the vehicle say about the driver? Are we quick to impose judgment on this person, or do these things cause us to think at a deeper level?

As you walk around town, through parking lots, travelling from here to there, I want you to find 20 to 25 vehicles that have been adorned with a bumper sticker, window decal, vanity license plate, magnet, etc. Take note (or a picture!) not only of what each says, but also the make and model of the vehicle that it was on, whether or not there were other stickers, etc. on the vehicle, what the driver looked like (if you caught sight of them), and where you found this particular vehicle. For example: “Coexist”—Toyota Prius—Parking lot outside of Panera Bread at the Pittsburgh Mills—Did not see driver.

After you have compiled your information, I want for you to look for trends. What did people show support for? What were they advertising? What personal beliefs were they revealing? Is there a correlation between certain vehicles and the stickers, etc. that they were littered with? If you actually saw the driver, what did the “look” like? What can you infer about the driver based on this information? What does all of this say about the people in the area(s) where you conducted your research?

In addition to paying mind and formulating responses to the questions above, I also want you to bring what you believe to be your “Top 5” to class to be add to our discussion. Also, if you have your own vehicle and have decorated it in the sense that we have spoken about above, please be willing to share with the rest of us what you are displaying and why!

***I am asking that you NOT conduct your research while operating a moving vehicle, as that would be extremely dangerous. If you want to take to the road for this, perhaps

¹ An activity developed by Adam Rossi and presented at the Pitt Sociology for Social Studies Fall Workshop, October 21st, 2014.
a friend or family member would be willing to get behind the wheel while you take notes from the passenger seat.***