

CPYU Trend Alert:

Ghost Ride the Whip by Chris Wagner

Last winter, CPYU reported on the dangers of teens and driving. Unfortunately, since that article was written, a new craze is sweeping through youth culture that brings further danger to inexperienced and impulsive teens with a set of car keys. The latest high-risk activity on four wheels is called "ghost riding the whip," or just "ghost riding." "Whip" is a slang term for car. The term ghost is used because nobody is behind the wheel of the car during the stunt, giving the appearance that a ghost is driving. To perform a ghost ride, a driver will put his car in neutral (or leave it in drive for higher-risk), open his door, exit the vehicle and begin dancing while the car is moving. To achieve a higher thrill, they will climb on the moving vehicle and dance on the hood, trunk or even roof of the car - all with nobody behind the wheel.

Some officials consider ghost riding the newest form of "car surfing," which has been around for decades. However, "car surfing" usually involves a driver behind the wheel and a passenger "surfing" the car, often at high speeds. The term ghost riding is believed to have been coined by San Francisco Bay area rapper Mac Dre, who was influential in starting the Hyphy culture. Hyphy, which can also be used to describe the style of music associated with the movement, is a lifestyle embraced by many young people from the Bay Area. It's characterized by high-energy dancing and partying, and a lack of inhibitions. Hyphy is considered similar to the Crunk culture popular in the South, though the musical style is said to be different. Though not condoned by everyone in the Hyphy culture, alcohol and drugs - especially ecstasy - often are involved. When a person has reached the hyper state from which the movement derives its name, they are said to be "going hyphy," "going dumb" or "getting stupid."

Ghost riding the whip is considered one of the purest and highest forms of "going hyphy." At first, this dangerous activity was confined mostly to the Bay Area. In fact, in the city of Stockton, California, ghost riding and related activities have led to at least eight deaths. In 2006, Bay Area rapper E-40 released the song and video "Tell Me When to Go" from his *My Ghetto Report Card* album. "Tell Me When to Go" is a song celebrating the hyphy lifestyle. It is E-40's mention of the phrase "ghost ride the whip," along with the visuals found in the music video, that has launched ghost riding from subculture experience to pop culture phenomenon.

The video features clips of people from the Bay Area ghost riding on crowded and busy streets. Imitators from across the country are now joining the ghost riding revolution. Helping create the buzz for this growing trend is none other than the popular viral video website YouTube. In case you're not familiar, YouTube.com is currently one of the most popular destinations on the entire Internet. Not only can E-40's music video be found on the site, but a search for "ghost riding" or "ghost ride the whip" will return thousands of results of home videos from users filming their own ghost riding experiences. Most of these videos feature "Tell Me When to Go" as background music. The song has been dubbed the official ghost riding anthem. The majority of those participating in ghost riding activities are teens, college students and young adults - and most of them are male. The videos showcase teens dancing outside their moving cars, jumping on their hoods, climbing through sun-roofs, and then jumping back inside and hitting the brakes. As expected, sometimes the brakes do not get reached in time.

Taking the time to watch a few of these videos will be alarming and eye opening. CPYU recommends that you take the time to watch a few to more fully understand the trend and its dangers. Words do not give some of the videos justice. Here's a little more of what CPYU has discovered about ghost riding after watching multiple videos and doing some research:

- Ghost riding is often done in groups. For teens, part of the excitement is the shared experience with friends. Dancing on top of your moving car by yourself may give you an adrenaline rush, but interviews with teens immersed in the trend reveal that ghost riding is more fun with lots of people. It creates a party atmosphere on wheels. Though ghost riding is considered spontaneous, these large group efforts are often detailed and choreographed.
- No place is off limits. Some videos show teens ghost riding in an empty parking lot or dead-end street where risk of injuring non-participants is limited. However, busy city streets, highways, school parking lots and residential roads are also popular destinations for ghost riders. Several examples show cars going off the road, hitting utility poles, or coming dangerously close to oncoming vehicles or nearby pedestrians. A ghost rider from Arizona says "We don't ghost ride on a dead end...If you ride where no one can see you, there's no point in ghost riding."

- The Hyphy movement is also known for sideshows (or sydeshows) in which crowds of people gather together to showcase their ghost riding abilities and other car-related stunts. Other stunts include figure eights, peel-outs, and "gas-brake dippin'" or "yokin'," which Wikipedia defines as "driving while quickly alternating between stomping on the gas and the brake."
- Though ghost riders are predominantly male, females are often on the "sidelines" cheering and offering encouragement. Guys see this as a way to show off and impress girls. Unfortunately, for girls seeking guys who take high risks, it works.
- The most common reported injury related to ghost riding is head trauma. Obviously, it doesn't take much to lose your balance, slip off the trunk, hood or roof of your car, and hit your head on the ground. Many other injuries can also occur.
- Fines, citations and punishments for this activity vary from state to state, but can be justifiably harsh. However, police and other officials are still very unaware of this movement. Police departments that are aware of ghost riding are beginning to train their officers to look for this kind of activity.
- In October of 2006, the Intelligence Group's Trendcentral newsletter reported on the sweeping popularity of ghost riding and how the viral video world feeds the growing hazard. "In addition to the participants' obvious penchant for risk-taking, the trend also speaks to the Internet 'one-upmanship' phenomenon: people are watching 'ghost riding' videos and thinking they can do it better, so they then go out and film their own (and post it online), thus breeding a pattern for dangerous behavior in a way that was not previously possible." Teens may be tempted to out-do their friends and counterparts they watch online, leading to more and more dangerous ghost riding stunts.

This should serve as a call to parents to be more diligent in modeling good driving habits and actively monitoring teen drivers. Even parents of teens without a license should be concerned as they may be tempted to participate when receiving a ride from other teens. Pay close attention to the music your teen is listening to. Browse their CD collection or MP3 files with your eyes open for E-40. It appears the likelihood of your teen being involved in ghost riding is significantly higher if they regularly listen to E-40's song "Tell Me When to Go."

The ideals of the Hyphy movement must also be spoken against. Hyphy culture celebrates a reckless abandon free from the cares of what the world thinks. It also celebrates the use of drugs and alcohol. God has clearly set standards of right and wrong. Parents must instill the truth to their teens that moral behavior does not depend on the situation, nor does it change with attitudes and emotions. God's word and his expectations of us are unchanging.

Sit down with your teen and watch a few ghost riding videos on YouTube.com or another online video site. Use the opportunity to discuss the risks involved. Some videos, including one titled "Ghost Riding Gone Wrong," will clearly show the inherent dangers. Make sure your teen understands all the parties at risk, including themselves and their friends, but also innocent bystanders and other drivers and passengers as well. A realistic understanding of the risks will help discourage them from participating.

The adrenaline rush and excitement of ghost riding is what draws teens to this activity. The risk-assessment portion of their brains has not yet been fully developed. For this reason teens fail to see the danger they put themselves in. They are also neglecting to see the harm they could cause to others. Due to their nature, teens will still be enticed by high-risk activities. That is why it is so important they find other interests and hobbies to safely express their infatuation with extreme behavior. Team sports, outdoor adventure and other high-energy activities are great ways to fulfill a teen's fondness for thrills in a safe environment.

God has provided teens with the precious gift of life. Helping our teens understand the value God places on human life will discourage them from putting themselves and others at risk. Now is the time to warn our teens about the dangers of ghost riding.

**For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the
Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at
www.cpyu.org.**