MOTORCYCLE CLUB EXPERIENCES & MOTIVATIONS

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Division of Social Work

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by

Rebecca A. Medina

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MOTORCYCLE CLUB EXPERIENCES & MOTIVATIONS

A Project

by

Rebecca A. Medina

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Robin Kennedy, Ph.D.                    Date

Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

MOTORCYCLE CLUB EXPERIENCES & MOTIVATIONS

by

Rebecca A. Medina

Statement of Problem

Negative imagery portrayed by the media demonizes the biking community and reinvented the biker as a deviant outcast (McDonald-Walker, 2007). Motorcycle riders who wear vests or jackets with a three-piece patch are viewed differently than motorcycle riders that do not wear these patches (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999): they are considered deviant or outlaws by law enforcement and other agencies, and are considered terrorists and gang members (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b; U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council, 2004; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). Two-piece patch holders are normally not viewed as outlaw bikers (Dulaney, 2006). This is a study of what motivates people to join and stay in these motorcycle clubs.

Sources of Data

Twenty-six people were interviewed; five were two-piece patch holders, 18 were
three-piece patch holders, two were three-piece prospective patch holders, and one was a three-piece hang-around. Seven of the participants were female and 19 were male, and they ranged from age 26 to 85, although not all participants disclosed their age. Twenty-two of the participants were interviewed in person, and four returned questionnaires by mail. They were from six counties in California and from one county in Nevada.

Conclusions Reached

People join motorcycle clubs and stay in them for various reasons; however, there are compelling connections and similarities to these motives, such as the gratification of brotherhood/sistership, camaraderie, membership support, and the joy that comes with riding a motorcycle. In conjunction with the positive aspects of riding with a motorcycle club, there are also some negative aspects, such as the time it takes to be in a formal club, the cost of riding a motorcycle, in particular a Harley-Davidson, law enforcement harassment, and societal negative perceptions.

_________________________________________, Committee Chair
Teiahsha Bankhead, Ph.D., LCSW

_________________________________________
Date
DEDICATION

To my mom and dad—I know how lucky I was to have you as my parents.

To Bobby, who made me look at both sides.

To Guy, peace, love, happiness.

To Pearl, Anni, and MariAnna: may you have the determination, courage, and honor of your grandpa Bobby. And yes, Anni, “there is hard times in life”, but don’t let them slow you down.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Bankhead, who helped me every step of the way, and whose encouragement and enthusiasm to explore this topic imparted motivation.

To Dr. O’Keefe, who guided me through the program and inspired me with her kindness, common-sense, and intelligence.

To Dr. Kennedy, who taught me that helping others also involves taking care of myself.
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Chapter 1
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

People have been riding motorcycles in America for over 100 years, and in the early days they were little more than motorized bicycles (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006). Motorcycles were a more affordable mode of transportation than cars up until the mid 1920s when they were no longer considered affordable for most Americans (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006). After the Great Depression only two motorcycle manufacturers were left standing: Indian Motorcycle [sic] Company and the Harley-Davidson Motor Company (Cuff, 2004; Dulaney 2006).

Motorcycle riders came into the spotlight in 1947 when a motorcycle rally was held in Hollister, California on July 4th (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). Life Magazine did a small article on the event using a staged photo of a drunken motorcycle rider sitting on his motorcycle drinking beer with broken beer bottles at his feet (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). The article blew the rally out of proportion, stating there were four thousand members of a motorcycle club that were responsible for a melee in Hollister (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). This article caused turmoil around the country (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). This negative imagery portrayed by the media demonized the biking community and reinvented the biker as a deviant outcast (McDonald-Walker, 2007). Many clubs wanted to distance themselves from this image, while other clubs were basking in it, and this is said to be the birth of outlaw motorcycle clubs (Reynolds, 2000). Up until this time
motorcycle clubs usually just stenciled or embroidered the name of their club on their mechanics overalls or jackets (Dulaney, 2006). These identifiers later changed into the more symbolic and meaningful patches that are seen today (Dulaney, 2006).

Motorcycle riders who wear vests or jackets with a three-piece patch are viewed differently than motorcycle riders that do not wear these patches (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999): they are considered deviant or outlaws by law enforcement and other agencies, and are considered terrorists and gang members (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b; U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council, 2004; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). Two-piece patch holders are normally not viewed as outlaw bikers (Dulaney, 2006).

This researcher became curious about why people join two-piece or three-piece patch clubs because she is married to the president of a three-piece patch club. For eight years she has witnessed him going to meetings and events, watched him organize events, assisted him in doing charity work for the elderly and disadvantaged. She has witnessed him traveling year after year over 500 miles one way to participate in a small town food giveaway, visiting long-term care facilities at Christmas, taking off work to attend biker funerals, and countless hours on the telephone communicating with fellow members.

When her husband first joined his club he was pulled over by law enforcement officers in their county on his motorcycle approximately every-other week for two years, he was also pulled over driving a car, and he was searched many times. Yet, he was never given one ticket for these stops. The researcher was never pulled over driving the same cars
that her husband drove—the brake light/signal light/tags/headlight problems seemed to disappear when she drove. Likewise, he was never pulled over when his grandchildren or wife was with him. The researcher would become upset and even irate when these incidences occurred, but her husband said he had nothing to hide and that was just the way it was. The researcher wanted to find out why a person would take this abuse and harassment when all they had to do was stop wearing a vest with colors. Because the couple was raising young grandchildren shortly after they were married and right before he joined his club, the researcher did not have the opportunity to attend very many functions or associate with the members or their wives frequently. The researcher was sincerely curious about what compelled her husband to stay in such a structured club that demanded so much of his time and demanded so much of his resources.

**Background of the Problem**

Motorcyclists began to organize as early as 1903 when the Federation of American Motorcyclists (FAM) was formed with their intent to improve driving conditions for motorcyclists, and clubs began to formally organize as early as 1935 (Dulaney, 2006). Motorcycle clubs often differ in purpose, some create unity among soldiers (Johnson, 2008); some are faith-based (Johnson, 2008); some are centered around professions such as policemen, firemen, and iron workers (Johnson, 2008); some are actual corporations or enterprises that own businesses and their goal is to make money (Johnson, 2008); some are just interested in partying (Johnson, 2008); some clubs offer reputation, and some clubs offer affiliation to the member, such as brotherhood and a sense of family (Johnson, 2008). As different as these clubs are, they have
commonality, and that is they choose to ride with a specific club for their own reasons, be it reputation, religious purposes, or a vocation alliance. That is what this study seeks to explore. Why ride with a club with a two or three-piece patch?

The end of World War II brought soldiers back to America who needed to find relief from their stress of armed conflict. Many of these soldiers found their civilian life monotonous, they were once regular people who became warriors, but now they were warriors and they could not go back to being regular people (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). Many of these veterans began to seek out each other and would ride motorcycles to obtain relief from their stress (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). The distinction among the one-piece, two-piece, and three-piece patch became symbols became associated with different types of clubs. A one-piece patch is the club’s primary symbol, and people who only wear those they are not considered outlaw motorcyclists. A two-piece patch has the primary symbol of the club and a rocker in the shape of an arc or semi-circle with the club name that is above the central symbol. These members are not considered outlaw motorcyclists. A three-piece patch has both of these rockers plus a bottom rocker in the shape of an arc or semi-circle with the geographic location of the club—they are considered outlaw motorcyclists (Dulaney, 2006). This three-piece patch configuration originated when original outlaw motorcycle clubs seceded from the American Motorcycle Association after 1947. Along with each club having their own distinctive patches, they have established group-specific identities by wearing their club colors, which are unique to each club (Dulaney, 2006).
As motorcycle clubs began defining themselves, law enforcement and other agencies began to keep a close watch on them (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). Although there is no national uniform definition of a gang that is used by all federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, the National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Associations (NAGIA) designates outlaw motorcycle clubs as gangs (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). Further, this agency cites five national motorcycle clubs as outlaw motorcycle gangs, Bandidos [sic], Hells Angels, Mongols, Outlaws, and Sons of Silence, and includes their smaller support clubs in this category (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). The FBI considers outlaw motorcycle groups to be participants in organized crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b), and began using federal racketeering laws to dismantle gangs from the top down. This action includes outlaw motorcycle gangs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has included outlaw motorcycle gangs in the terrorist category, and this includes their support clubs (U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council, 2004).

While law enforcement has made it challenging to ride a motorcycle wearing a three-piece patch, men and women remain in their clubs and others keep joining. Harley-Davidson motorcycles (the motorcycle ridden by most three-piece patch holders) are not cheap to buy nor are they cheap to maintain. As a result, club membership requires time, money, and devotion, and, there is the community perception of lawlessness to contend with.

Statement of the Research Problem

No hypothesis was assumed in this study. Insight was sought in an effort to
understand why people join motorcycle clubs when there are certain law enforcement issues associated with these clubs, negative public perceptions, and the clubs are demanding of time and resources from the individual members.

**Purpose of the Study**

It is important to state what this study is *not* about. The study is not about motorcycle clubs or how they are organized, however, it is necessary to discuss clubs in relationship to their membership. It is not about the rituals or regulations connected with clubs, and it is not about whether or not the club is “deviant” or an “outlaw” club. This study is about the experiences and motivations of members of motorcycle clubs, with particular attention given to why some people chose to join a motorcycle club that wears a three-piece patch, which is considered an “outlaw” club, or a two-piece patch, which is generally not considered an “outlaw” club, rather than riding alone or in a group that does not wear these types of patches. Not everyone who rides a motorcycle can join a two-piece or three-piece patch club, and not every motorcycle rider wants to. The purpose of this study is to find the underlying motivation that compels a person to go this route of club membership. A secondary purpose of this study is to determine the similarities or differences in the memberships as individuals. Just as there must be differences in the individuals, there must also be some common experiences and motivations that bind them together.

**Theoretical Framework**

The systems theory is an appropriate theoretical orientation for this research study because it stresses the importance of understanding individuals in the context of their
surroundings that influence their development. This theory believes that to bring about an individual’s change it is necessary to pay attention to how the individual’s personality has been affected by his or her gender-role socialization, culture, family, and other systems (Corey, 2009). A characteristic of a system is that all of its parts are involved in transactions, and there is interdependence between systems and their component parts. That is to say, members of the system influence and are influenced by every other member of the system. Therefore, what affects a particular system affects the whole network of systems to some extent. A second characteristic of systems thinking is that the system as a whole is greater than the sum of its component parts or subsystems. Finally, a third characteristic of systems thinking is that systems are constantly exchanging information with other systems. Power structure, roles, and communication patterns are the dynamic process of the system, and members are influenced by transactions in the larger social environment (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen, 2010). A theory derived from the systems theory is the chaos theory, which also fits this study (Hudson, 2000).

Central to the chaos theory is the study of nonlinearity or curvilinear relationships, which is much more common than linear relationships, and represent the nonproportional relation between cause and effect (Hudson, 2000). An example of this is exemplified by the adage of the “straw that broke the camel’s back” (Hudson, 2000). Linear relationships have a proportional relation between cause and effect (Hudson, 2000). For example, cut twice as much from the welfare budget and twice the number of recipients will be dropped (Hudson, 2000). The chaos theory, however, shows that many
complex adaptive systems rarely establish equilibrium, although there is a type of order, but they never exactly repeat themselves (Hudson, 2000). Examples of such systems include weather, stock market behavior, and many social systems (Hudson, 2000). The “edge of chaos” is regarded by many as a state in complex adaptive systems that is maximally conducive to creativity and problem solving (Packard, 1988). Richards (1996) argued that the ability to function at the edge of chaos was one of the most important conditions for creativity and effective problem solving. The chaos theory has been applied in other fields such as decision making and organizational behavior (Michaels, 1989; Smithson, 1997) and group process (Lichtenberg & Knox, 1991). The chaos theory can also be used to describe social phenomena and to generate hypotheses concerning the dynamics of social processes, and should be seen as complementing and building on general systems theory, rather than replacing it (Hudson, 2000).

**Definition of Terms**

*Club colors:* These are specific designs and colors that are unique to different clubs, and include the insignia, situated in the center on the back of the vest, the club name, situated above the club insignia, and the geographic location of the club, situated below the insignia. These are all affixed to a vest that is usually made of leather, and the vests are usually affixed with an embroidered patch (Dulaney, 2006). The back of the vest is a space dedicated to the organization, and the motorcycle club dictates what symbols are worn and their precise location on the vests, and there are no individual or personal symbols (Dulaney, 2006). The clubs usually have one person that sews on the patches that knows the exact and precise location of each patch. The front of the vest,
however, is an individually-defined space, where the individual can chose the majority of symbols displayed (Dulaney, 2006). The front of the vest not only presents a patch that indicates the position of the member in the club, such as president, it might also accommodate several different artifacts, such as pins from motorcycle runs attended or patches honoring a deceased member. The club colors are forbidden to even touch the ground or to be desecrated in any way (Dulaney, 2006). The colors are worn at all times at events.

**Club symbol or logo:** This is the large patch worn in the middle of the back of the vest which incorporates the clubs’ insignia and also displays the club-specific colors associated with that club (Dulaney, 2006).

**Rocker:** This is a patch in the shape of an arch or semi-circle situated above or below the club symbol or insignia (Dulaney, 2006). If the rocker is above the central patch, it will denote the club name, and if the rocker is below the central patch, it will state the geographic area of the club (Dulaney, 2006).

**One-piece patch:** A single patch sewn or embroidered on a vest or jacket that contains the club’s symbol or insignia and club name (Dulaney, 2006). The patch does not usually designate a geographic location (Dulaney, 2006). Such a club is often chartered by the American Motorcyclist Association, and can usually be described as a family oriented clubs (Dulaney, 2006). A non-outlaw motorcycle club.

**Two-piece patch:** Two separate pieces of cloth or embroidery, one of which is the club symbol or insignia and the other is in the shape of an arc or semi-circle situated above the club symbol or below it (Dulaney, 2006). If the rocker is above the central
patch, it will denote the club name, and if the rocker is below the central patch, it will state the geographical area while the central patch will then contain the club name (Dulaney, 2006). Although the line of demarcation is somewhat blurred as to outlaw and non-outlaw, a two-piece patch is generally considered a non-outlaw club (Dulaney, 2006). For this study it is considered a non-outlaw club.

**Three-piece patch:** Three separate pieces of cloth or embroidery, one of which is the club symbol, the other is in the shape of an arc or semi-circle situated above the club symbol and displays the club name, and the third patch in the arc or semi-circle displays the geographic area of operation of the club and sits under the club symbol (Dulaney, 2006). They have more status than the one- or two-piece patch clubs. This is considered an outlaw motorcycle club.

**Prospect or prospective member:** This is a person that wishes to join a particular club. When they are allowed to be a prospect, they wear a “prospect” patch on their vest. According to Dulaney (2006), prospects are assigned chores or mundane missions, but the overarching purpose is education of what is happening at the moment, or it may be to test the prospect’s ability to pay attention to detail. Dulaney (2006) further noted that quite often prospects are assigned to accompany patch-holders wherever they go at events or outings for protection. Perhaps the ultimate function of prospecting is the creation of a sense of organizational identity, that is, prospects must learn to think of themselves as a vital part of a whole and not as individuals, thereby developing organizational identity (Dulaney, 2006). This process usually takes from six months to a year, depending on the club and the prospect (Dulaney, 2006).
**Patch holder:** This term is used when referring to full members of motorcycle clubs, that is, those members who have earned the right to wear all of the patches of the club on their vest.

**Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs:** These are motorcycle clubs that do not hold American Motorcyclist Association charters, which are the vast majority of motorcycle clubs in America (Dulaney, 2005). This does not mean the club or membership operates outside of conventional laws. However, this is where the terminology seems to encounter a gray area, and outlaw motorcycle clubs will be called outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) if law enforcement designates them as an OMG (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). For example, the National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Associations (NAGIA) designates outlaw motorcycle clubs, specifically, Bandidos [sic], Hells Angels, Mongols, Outlaws, and Sons of Silence, and their smaller support clubs, as gangs (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009), and further state that their support clubs’ members conduct criminal activities in support of the larger OMGs. The U. S. Homeland Security Advisory Council (2004) has gone even further by stating that outlaw motorcycle gangs are included in the terrorist category. Yet, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1999), there is no single, universally accepted, definition of terrorism. Terrorism is defined in the *Code of Federal Regulations* as “…the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives”, 28 C.F.R. section 0.85 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). Local law enforcement in a rural mountain town has used this statute to pull over this researcher’s
husband because he was wearing his motorcycle club vest. When asked why he was pulled over, the law enforcement officer simply said that he did not have to have a reason because he was considered a terrorist. There are even differences in opinion of what an outlaw motorcycle club is within the membership of those who wear a three-piece patch, which ranges from simply not belonging to the AMA, to being different from the rest of the riding population with more purpose and dedication to riding with reference to brotherhood/sisterhood affiliation.

**One Percenters:** The symbol of a one-percenter is the diamond-shaped patch with “One Percenter” or “1%er” embroidered in the center, and is worn on the three-piece patch holder members’ vests only, and is considered to be the elite and are of the highest status in the motorcycle club system (Dulaney, 2006). This patch conveys status and dominance over other clubs (Dulaney, 2006). For example, if a new motorcycle club wishes to establish a chapter it is done only with the express consent of the One Percenters in that area (Dulaney, 2006). This patch is worn by clubs other than the five mentioned above as “outlaw gangs”.

**Support Clubs:** A support club is under the jurisdiction of another more dominant club. There is a hierarchal standing and a support club is subordinate to the dominant, more powerful club. Support club members may or may not display the “1%er” patch on their vests. Although these clubs are not considered to be in the “top five”, which are the Bandidos [sic], Hells Angels, Mongols, Outlaws, and Sons of Silence, the National Alliance of Gangs includes their smaller support clubs in this category of “outlaw club” and designates them as outlaw gangs (National Gang
Intelligence Center, 2009). These support clubs may or may not wear the “1%er” patch.

Assumptions

One assumption of this study is that participants gave an accurate report of their experiences and thoughts, and these experiences and thoughts are authentic. It is also assumed that the participants were forthcoming and did not withhold crucial information, and that they did not bias their responses in a way that would only reflect positively on club membership.

Justification

Social workers have a National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics which includes recognizing the importance of human relationships and that these relationships are important vehicles for change (National Association of Social Workers, 2008); understanding culture and its function in human behavior and society and recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures, and commitment to the pursuit of social justice (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). The study of motorcycle members’ experiences and motivations is important for social work because it is also the study of group dynamics, how the members communicate with each other, how they show respect for each other, and how they share information and manage conflict (Cartwright, 1951). These are all important areas of study for advancing the values of social work because, motorcycle club members belong to organizations that are highly structured and they are chosen to join the club. It is a chosen “family” and lifestyle. Each club can be likened to a community or cultural group that has its rules and guidelines, and, importantly, brotherhood and sisterhood that transcends the individual.
By studying motorcycle club members social workers may alleviate or at least acknowledge biases that have existed toward this group and social workers might adjust their acceptance levels towards other groups that present differently. Social injustice does not just transpire only on the downtrodden or the poor or the weak, but it can target any group or person when that group or person is judged on hearsay or their presentation or preconceived notions. It may also be beneficial for social workers to consider that there are many kinds of therapy, and not all productive therapy takes place in a clinical setting. If, however, a motorcycle club member becomes a client of a therapist, perhaps this study can give insight to the motorcycle club member’s values and beliefs, which in turn will give the therapist an awareness of the client’s differences and sameness.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that not all of the participants were interviewed in person, that is, some filled out the questionnaire and mailed it back to the researcher. This did not allow for follow-up questions or clarifications of answers as all of the questionnaires were anonymous. It also did not allow for the observation of body language, intonation, or facial expressions. Another limitation is that this study is not random. The participants were recruited by the researcher’s husband because that is the only way the researcher could gain access to participants. Although the inside recruiter basically determined who would be invited into the study, it was decided beforehand that he would not just pick those closest to him, but would ask others he did not know quite as well. This study does not explore the inner workings of a motorcycle club, the recruitment of members, or club politics or policies. These matters were beyond the
scope of this study. This study did determine common threads among motorcycle club members that traversed race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and education, such as the heartfelt belief in brotherhood and sisterhood, and the importance of honor and commitment.
Social Capital and Social Networks

Definition of Social Capital

Social capital is something that evolves from trust an individual receives by being a member of a group when the individual and the group trust each other. Portes (1998) maintained that social capital is not a new idea and that involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for an individual. Portes (1998) further argued that the term social capital merely evoked an insight present since the beginnings of the discipline of sociology. The term social capital initially appeared in community studies, highlighting the central importance of the networks of strong, crosscutting personal relationships developed over time that provide the basis for trust, cooperation and collection in communities (Jacobs, 1993). On the other hand, Coleman (1988) stated that social capital can be defined by its function, which is a variety of entities with two elements in common; the elements all consist of some aspect of social structures, and the elements facilitate certain action of actors within the structure. That is, the social structures of the group or community dictate or direct the behavior of the individual, which benefits the group.

Social capital can be understood through relationships that are mutually beneficial; the relationship works for both of the actors or the group of actors. It is a form or method of survival and has been practiced before there was language; people living before the development of language had to develop relationships of trust to help
one another survive and the results of co-survival created and deepened the trust. Putnam (1995) defined social capital as features of social life such as networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together and more effectively to pursue shared objectives, that is, social capital refers to our relations with one another. Generally speaking, the theory of social capital presumes that the more we connect with other people the more we trust them, and consequently the more we trust people the more we connect with them. Therefore, if actors connect in a fruitful manner with one person, they are building social capital, and if they connect in a network of people in a fruitful manner, they are accumulating social capital.

Bourdieu, (1986) went further in his definition of social capital by giving status or reputation that results from membership in specific networks or groups, and, when membership is controlled social status is increased because the membership is regulated and not just anyone can become a member. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the sum of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a secure network of more or less established relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition. He asserted that the advantages that accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the cohesion that makes the advantages possible. He went on to argue that the central proposition of social capital theory is that networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs, provide their members with collectively owned capital or a credential, which entitles them to credit. Bourdieu, (1986) maintained that the volume of social capital possessed depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of economic capital, cultural capital, or
symbolic capital possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected. That is, social capital is never completely independent from cultural or economic capital because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgement presumes the acceptance of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, significant social capital in the form of social status or reputation can result from membership in specific networks, particularly those in which membership is relatively restricted (as cited in Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, social capital can be derived from circumstances or networks an actor happens to be in, such as a family or school, and the feelings resulting from these networks that the actor interprets create friendship or respect that allow the actors to act together more successfully. However, when membership is controlled in an organization considerable social capital, in the shape of social status, is obtained due to this limitation. Whether a network by circumstance or a network by limitation, social capital comes down to relationships with one another, trust, and connections with others (Putnam, 1995).

**Definition of Human Capital**

Social capital is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action whereas human capital is created by changing persons so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways, and human capital is embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual (Coleman 1988, 1990). Social capital is less tangible than human capital because it exemplifies the relations among persons. Social capital facilitates productive activity. For example, a group
whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking those relationships and trust (Coleman 1988, 1990). That is, human capital can be measured, such as a new skill acquired can be measured by tests or increased or decreased productivity. For example, a state-required contractor’s test measures the knowledge of a person wishing to become a licensed contractor, just as data can measure the increase or decrease of accident losses in a factory after educational training has been provided to increase awareness of accident prevention.

**Definition of Social Networks**

Social capital and human capital are the benefits or results derived from relationships such as social stature acquired from the relationship, or skills acquired from the relationship (Coleman, 1988). Social networks, however, have been defined as a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons, with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behavior of the persons involved (Mitchell, 1969). This social network approach views organizations in society as a system of objects joined by various relationships (Tichy, Tushman & Fombrun, 1979). Furthermore, the relationships that link the people are by definition single-stranded relationships, those which contain only one focus of interaction, such as employer and employee and other categories such as socio-economic status or gender can be ignored, or relationships may be multiplex or multi-stranded or many-stranded which involves the co-existence of several different normative elements in a social relationship and therefore binds people together in many different ways creating
a stronger relationships (Mitchell, 1969). The strength of these relationships is indicated by the degree to which individuals honor obligations or forego personal costs to carry out obligations (Mitchell, 1969), or by the number of contacts the individuals have with each other (Tichy, Tushman & Fombrun, 1979).

The social network perspective views organizations as consisting of social units with relatively stable patterns of relationships over time, and networks have three sets of properties. First is transactional content: the type of information that is exchanged when two people are linked, such as the exchange of affect (liking, friendship), the exchange of influence or power, the exchange of information, and the exchange of goods or services (Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979; Katz & Tushman, 1977). Second is the nature of the links, the strength and qualitative nature of the relation between pairs of individuals, such as to what degree individuals honor obligations or forego personal costs to carry out obligations (Mitchell, 1969), and reciprocity (the degree to which individuals report the same or similar intensities with each other), clarity of expectations (the degree to which individuals agree about appropriate behavior in their relations to one another), and multiplexity (identifies the degree to which a pair is linked by multiple roles), (Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979). And third is structural characteristics, the overall pattern of relationships between the system’s actors, such as the external network (the external domains that links the individual to others), total internal network (describes how the individuals that make up a network are linked), (Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979), and clusters within the network, which defines areas of the network where the individuals are more closely linked to each other than they are to the rest of the network (Boissevain,
1974), and individuals as special nodes within the network, where not all individuals are equally important in social networks. There are key nodes that link a focal unit to other areas within the organization, such as a liaison, and there are key nodes that link to areas outside of the organization, commonly called gatekeepers (Schwartz & Jacobson, 1977; Tushman, 1977).

Thus, social networks have intangible aspects to them such as the exchange of friendship or the exchange of power. Power, according to Cromwell and Olsen (1975), refers to that aspect of social relations dealing with influence and control. That is, it is the potential ability of a person to change or control the behavior of others, therefore, the social network may change the person. Social networks have tangible components, such as the exchange of the goods or services that can be seen or touched. However, the largest components of social networks cannot be given a monetary value, like a good or service, but rather are matters that perfect the relationship of the actors by defining their roles, behaviors, and expectations. According to Parks (1924) when these roles in social order are threatened, rather than economic interests being threatened, prejudice seems to arise as a type of spontaneous conservation to preserve the social order and the social distances upon which that particular social order rests. An example of a role in social order being threatened could be when a woman wants to join an all-male club: there is no monetary gain or loss involved, but rather a bias keeping the social order the same by not wanting nor allowing the woman to join the club.

**Social Structure, Self-Esteem, and the Consequences of Choices**

*Social Structure can Influence Self-Esteem*
Within a given social structure is the opportunity for an individual to behave in meaningful and significant ways, and the results effect the self-esteem of the individual. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) argue self-evaluations are also formed through the experience of producing effects upon the world. By focusing upon efficacious action as a source of self-esteem, social-structural conditions can shape possibilities for individuals to act efficaciously and therefore feelings of self-esteem are enhanced. Efficacy-based self-esteem depends upon an individual’s opportunity to engage in efficacious action. Various social structural conditions enable and constrain an individual’s opportunity for engaging in efficacious action; the actions that these conditions make possible must also be perceived and evaluated in particular ways in order to contribute to self-esteem. Also, other structural conditions such as belief systems, may affect the formation of efficacy-based self-esteem by influencing perceptions and evaluations. When considering the meaning that individuals attach to their action in situations where individuals are striving to realize their goals, we are attempting to demonstrate the dependence of efficacy-based self-esteem upon social-structural conditions. Therefore, there is a link of efficacy-based self-esteem to social structure via consideration of (1) the contexts of action (the nature of the social contexts within which individuals function), (2) the meaning of action (involves the perceptions of self-as-cause, and also involves the differential valuation of contexts of action), and (3) the unintended consequences of action (these may be unexpected positive or negative outcomes of an action). That is, the way an actor feels about himself or herself is shaped by experiences the actor has in making an impact on the rest of the world. In order to be able to make an impact on the rest of the world, an
actor must have the opportunity to participate in actions that will be perceived as meaningful.

**Choices and Guided Choices**

Fox (1971) stated that men [sic] make themselves through their own choices, by making decisions and accepting responsibility for what they choose, and this is a process of self-determination and growth. That is, actors assign meaning to themselves in the view of the world by the choices they make and how they take responsibility for these choices. Choices that people make, however, are heavily influenced by outside sources, such as television, the internet, and other media. Austin, Gagné and Orend (2010) point out that there is a culture industry which is made up of the media, manufacturers, marketing agencies, and advertisers, and they appropriate ideas and material cultural products that arise from grassroots society. These products are then sold to the public under powerful marketing strategies designed to convince potential buyers that the product will make their lives better, more complete, and meaningful. Consumers are told they can achieve new identities with these products. Such is the case, as noted by Schouten and McAlexander (1995), where Harley Davidson’s response to the outlaw biker image has been not to fight or shy away from this outlaw subculture, but rather to expropriate certain symbols of it and employ the product design. They embraced the outlaw image because it presented unique marketing opportunities. For example, where a chopper-style Harley-Davidson was once only a creation of motorcycle mechanics, it is now available from the Harley-Davison showroom floor—they took the “bad-boy” image and mass produced it for profit (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Thus, Harley-
Davidson linked an image of a group, the outlaw motorcycle clubs, that portrayed the rebel or outlaw with marketability and profitability by offering merchandise to the masses that may make the purchasers feel like nonconformists. When, in actuality, they are merely a part of a huge consumer group created by an image that produces profit.

**Group Dynamics and Group Thinking**

*Definition of a group*

According to Forsyth (2010), defining a group is difficult and theorists do not agree on the terminology. Some theorists stress the importance of communication between members (Forsyth, 2010); others emphasize the role played by mutual dependence (Forsyth, 2010), and others suggest that a shared purpose or goal is what turns an aggregate of individuals into a bona fide group (Forsyth, 2010). Most theorists would agree, however, that a group requires two people, and you cannot be a group until you join with another person. Groups connect people to one another and when there is a link or connection to one another a group is formed. Thus, a group is two or more individuals who are connected by and within social relationships (Forsyth, 2010). Therefore, a group, not unlike a social network, has to have at least two people who have formed some kind of relationship with each other (Forsythe, 2010). For example, two people who get together to help each other with their studies have formed a “study group” because their purpose to learn forms their relationship of teacher/student, or student/teacher, depending upon who is teaching and who is learning during the group session.

*Definition of Group Dynamics*
Cartwright’s (1951) explanation of group dynamics refers to the forces operating in groups, and the practical application of group dynamics consists of the utilization of knowledge about these forces for the achievement of some purpose. Thus, group dynamics is what is going on within the group, how the individuals communicate with one another, how they show respect for one another, how they share information, and how they manage conflict.

**Definition of Groupthink**

Groupthink is a model that maintains that pressures for uniformity and loyalty can build up within groups to the point where they interfere with both cognitive efficiency and moral judgment (Tetlock, Peterson, McGuire, Chang & Feld, 1992). Groupthink, according to Janis, (1971) is a model of thinking that people engage in when concurrence-seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive in-group that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action. Janis (1971) further stated that groupthink arises when the members of decision-making groups become motivated to avoid being too harsh in their judgments of their leaders’ or their colleagues’ ideas. Janis (1971) also suggested that the more cohesive the group, the greater the inner compulsion on each individual to avoid creating disunity, which inclines him or her to believe in the soundness of whatever proposals are promoted by the leader or by a majority of the group’s members. Janis (1971) did note that not all cohesive groups suffer from groupthink.

Callaway, Marriott and Esser (1985) found that with respect to groups composed of highly dominant members higher quality decisions were made, there was an exhibited
lower state of anxiety, they took more time to reach a decision, and there was the report of having more group influence on the other members. That is, even though decision time was lengthened due to the group containing dominant members, the decisions resulting were superior. There are, however, some ways to avoid the deficiencies of groupthink.

In recognizing these shortcomings in groupthink, Janis (1989) later argued that a leader should put certain questions on the agenda and give them careful consideration otherwise the success of the new policy decision may be in jeopardy. For example, the questions may include: how can failure to implement the decision be prevented? How is the decision monitored to make sure it is carried out the way it was intended? What part of the decision might be seen as unfeasible or a violation of organizational norms? Can the decision or plans be modified to overcome the anticipated objections? Who is most likely to oppose the decision, and, can there be trade-offs in order to gain acceptance of the key points of the decision? As Janis (1989) noted, addressing these questions would probably not be an easy task for the leader, as the questions would induce the group to continue deliberating about some of the subtle obstacles to successful implementation. These suggestions or criticisms may be met with psychological resistance from the implementers, as they may be concerned about loss of prestige from acknowledging planning errors from lower-echelon personnel. Therefore, addressing certain questions before a decision is made may result in not only a better understanding of the proposed policy to the organization, but may prepare the organization for problems that might arise in the future and how to anticipate and prepare for these problems. However, careful
consideration of the problem or question is not the only matter that needs to be cogitated, but how the individual if fused to the organization has to be considered.

**Identity Fusion and Social Identity**

*Identity Fusion or One with the Group*

When a person belongs to a group how they view their identity as connected to this group determines their commitment and dedication to the group. Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales and Hixon (2010) describe identity fusion as a feeling of oneness with the group that induces people to tether their feelings of personal agency to the group. That is, when actors feel that they are a part of a group they will give their support to that group. Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales and Huici (2009) concluded that the personal and social self in fused persons may energize and direct group-related behavior. However, a study conducted by Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez and Swann (2011) revealed that when people are ostracized, that is, when they are rejected and excluded by a group, they may either withdraw or engage in compensatory activities designed to reaffirm their social identity as a group member. The authors argue that individual differences in identity fusion (defined as an index of familial orientation toward the group) would moderate the tendency for people to display compensatory activities. The results of the study showed that irrevocable ostracism increased endorsement of extreme pro-group actions such as fighting and dying for the group among fused persons but not among non-fused persons. That is, if a person has fused with a group so that his or her identity is one with the group and is subsequently ostracized from the group, that actor is more likely to advocate for and exhibit extreme pro-group actions such as fighting for the group, more so than a
member who is not fused with the group.

In examining the nature of identity fusion, a study conducted by Gómez, et al. (2011), sought to determine what fusion is and the arbitrating mechanisms that lead fused individuals to make extraordinary sacrifices for their group. The authors were guided by the assumption that fusion emphasizes the extent to which people develop relational ties to the group, and from there they designed a measure to capture feelings of connectedness and reciprocal strength with the group. It was shown that feelings of agency and invulnerability mediated the effects of fusion on extreme behavior. That is, when an actor feels they are one with the organization, they perceive themselves to be safe and secure and this fusion of identity with the organization motivates altruistic extreme behavior on the part of the actor. When this identity fusion is forming for a member, there are other members of the group that are the prime examples of the group, or the ones to emulate or aspire to as they are the group prototypes.

**Group Prototypes**

Prototypes of an organization or group are members that best embody or represent the group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Prototypes are an ideal abstraction of group features. Prototypes embody all attributes that characterize groups and differentiate them from other groups, such as their beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. A main characteristic of a prototype is that they maximize similarities within the group and differences between groups, thereby defining groups as distinct entities. Because of the consensual nature of prototypes, they furnish moral support and consensual validation for one’s self-concept and consequent cognitions and behaviors. The feelings people have
for one another within a group, such as cohesion and solidarity, hinge on the perceived group proto-typicality of others (Hogg & Terry, 2000). That is, whatever the essence of the group elements are that makes that group different from other groups is the prototype of that group because it captures the idealization of the group and shows the differentness from other groups: this creates unity and camaraderie in the group. For example, one motorcycle group may present themselves as a Christian group that rides to raise money for charities, thus their prototype is different from another motorcycle club that presents itself as consisting of war veterans. Still other motorcycle groups may have a rougher or more severe image and reputation and may be considered gangs due to this image.

**Motorcycle Gang or Motorcycle Club?**

*Definition of a Gang*

According to the National Gang Threat Summary (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009) one of the greatest impediments to the collection of accurate gang-related data is the lack of a national uniform definition of a gang used by all federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. For the purpose of their assessment, the National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Associations (NAGIA) used the following definition, a gang is a group or association of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name who individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. The report further states outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) pose a threat to public safety in local communities in which these gangs operate because of their wide-ranging criminal activity, propensity to use violence, and their ability to counter law enforcement efforts (National Gang Intelligence Center,
OMGs maintain a strong centralized leadership and local law enforcement agencies estimated in June of 2008 that there were between 280 and 520 OMGs operating at the national, regional, and local levels (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). Of these, more than 20,000 people have been identified as validated OMG members. OMGs, the report states, also maintain criminal networks of regional and local motorcycle clubs, commonly referred to as “support clubs”, which are smaller gangs whose members regularly associate with or are friends of one of the national-level gangs (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). According to this report, the Hells Angeles is the largest OMG with 2000 to 2500 members belonging to more than 250 chapters in the United States and 26 foreign countries on 6 continents (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). The Bandidos [sic] has 2,000 to 2,500 members in the United States and its members are found in 13 other countries (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). The Mongols, the Outlaws Motorcycle Club and Sons of Silence are also identified as OMGs (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

Therefore, since the definition of a gang is so loosely constructed, it gives law enforcement officers a great deal of latitude when responding to a group of three or more people. For example, if the three people are wearing clothes with the same symbols they can be considered a gang, such as motorcycle riders wearing their club vests, or three people wearing the same style of clothing such as baggy pants.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was experiencing unprecedented success against organized crime, such as convictions of the heads of the five Mafia families in New York City, resulting in breaking the mob’s
stranglehold on the shipping industry with 100 convictions. From 1981 to 1987 more than 1,000 Mafia members and associates were convicted which decimated the hierarchies of crime families in several major cities in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008a). According to an FBI report entitled “The FBI A Centennial History, 1908-2008” the FBI also disrupted the activities of other organized criminal groups, such as the outlaw motorcycle group the Hells Angels (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b). By the 1990s the FBI had established anti-gang squads in several field offices and had started using the same federal racketeering laws that proved successful in the fight against organized crime to dismantle gangs from the top down, and this included outlaw motorcycle gangs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b). Motorcycle clubs have also been a focus for other government agencies. In notes from a meeting conducted by the U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council (2004), it stated that local officials asked for the names of terrorists groups in communities so they could add them up and use them to balance how their funds were going to be allocated. It stated that some communities put down motorcycle gangs as terrorist groups whereas other communities only considered groups like Al Qaeda in the category of terrorist groups. Therefore, the distribution of funds appears to play a part in how groups are classified. The FBI describes terrorism as either domestic or international, depending on the origin, membership base, and objectives of the group members. According to the FBI, domestic terrorism is the unlawful use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without foreign direction (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). The activity is committed against persons or
property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999). These definitions of terrorism by Homeland Security and the FBI created more room to broaden their nets regarding individuals or groups that might not have been classified as terrorists before, such as motorcycle clubs, and give them authority to detain these individuals as terrorists.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security focuses on the illicit drug trade as well as securing the nation from other threats (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security report entitled *Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement Fiscal Year 2010 Annual Report* states that illicit drugs are the most significant form of contraband smuggled across the U.S.-Canada border, and ethnically-based organized crime groups and outlaw motorcycle gangs dominate the illicit drug production and trafficking from inside Canada (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011). Other reports state members of motorcycle gangs were indicted for crimes including attempted murder, kidnapping, assault, robbery, narcotics distribution, and other crimes (U.S. Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Virginia, 2010; U.S. Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Missouri, 2011; U.S. Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Virginia, 2011). Thus, the *National Gang Threat Assessment, 2009* (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009) has grouped five separate motorcycle clubs, the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, the Outlaws Motorcycle Club, the Bandidos [sic] Motorcycle Club, the Mongols Motorcycle Club, and the Sons of Silence Motorcycle Club as gangs because in each club the members wear the same vests that have the same
symbols on them, and have consequently labeled them as crime-based. If other motorcycle clubs are considered support clubs they too are considered outlaw motorcycle gangs also, but just not in the same ranking as the four major clubs (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

Definition of Motorcycle Clubs

The definition of motorcycle clubs by Barker and Human (2009) is ambiguous at best, in that they argue motorcycle clubs can be broadly classified as conventional and deviant or norm-violating clubs. The authors discuss how conventional clubs have members that represent all races and sexes, and ride all makes of motorcycles, and behave according to the norms of society, joining together based on their common interest in motorcycles. Deviant club members, the authors maintain, engage in non-conformist behavior, including anti-social and criminal behavior, and these deviant clubs are all of one race, sex or sexual orientation, or they are the clubs labeled as one percenters (by others and by themselves) and outlaw motorcycle clubs/gangs. The authors argue that the big four OMGs are the Hells Angels MC, the Outlaws MC, the Bandidos [sic] MC, and the Pagans MC, and they are all known for their criminal activities and violence toward each other. The authors also present that since there is such limited scholarly research on these deviant groups it is suggested that further research be conducted. This study makes an argument for further study. The study’s two categories of conventional motorcycle clubs or deviant, norm-violating clubs is so ambiguous that it does not offer any insight into the diversity of motorcycle clubs. Although a motorcycle club of today may be a highly evolved organization or it may
separate itself from other motorcycle clubs by its rules or behaviors, motorcycle riding began simply as a cheap mode of transportation (Cuff, 2004; Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney 2006). Early motorcycle clubs were a means of being around people with similar histories and interests (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003).

**Motorcycle Club History**

*Motorcycles as Cheap Transportation*

In 1901 Hendee and Hedstrom began production of America’s first reliable, mass-produced motorcycle and began selling them to the general public under the company name of Indian Motocycle [sic] Company, and the Harley-Davidson Motor Company was formed two years later—the only two motorcycle companies to survive the Great Depression (Cuff, 2004; Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney 2006). Motorcycles were originally little more than motorized bicycles and were relatively affordable for most Americans, especially when compared to the cost of automobiles. However, by the mid-1920s, motorcycles could no longer be considered affordable modes of transportation for the average American. The cost of a small Harley or Indian was about $275, a full sized was about $375, and the price of a Model T Ford was only $545 (Cuff, 2004; Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006). In 1903 the Federation of American Motorcyclists (FAM) was formed with their focus being on improving the driving conditions for motorcyclists. A motorcycle club that still exists today first appeared in 1935, known then as the McCook Outlaws and is now known as the Outlaws Motorcycle Club. They purport to be one of the largest motorcycle clubs worldwide (Outlaws Motorcycle Club, n.d.). Although the Outlaws Motorcycle Club originally dates back to 1935, they have endured name
changes. An all-female club known as “The Motormaids” has maintained an American Motorcyclist Association club charter for more than 60 years (their charter was granted in 1940), and has maintained a singular identity and overall governing structure since its inception. This may make them the oldest established motorcycle club in the world, older even than the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club which formed in 1947 and has also maintained their original organizational identity (Barger, et al., 2000 as cited in Dulaney, 2006). Although motorcycles began as a cheap mode of transportation, there was a definite change in the character of motorcycle riders after World War II, and not simply because of the economy of automobile transportation.

*End of World War II and a Surge of Veterans on Motorcycles*

The end of World War II saw young men returning home from combat in droves, and many found the transition back to a peaceful civilian life monotonous, and many of these returning veterans would ride motorcycles in order to facilitate much needed relief from the stress of armed conflict (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). Many World War II veterans had formed strong bonds with one another—relationships that transcended wartime, and they would seek out one another to be around kindred spirits (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). Combat veterans were regular people who became warriors, and often it is not possible for warriors to become regular people again; there is no going back. However, the perception of motorcycle clubs began to morph due to the media coverage of the biker rally held July 4, 1947, in Hollister, California. *Life* magazine did a small article on the July 4th event using a staged photo of a drunken motorcycle rider sitting on his motorcycle drinking a beer with broken beer
bottles at his feet (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). The article claimed that four thousand members of a motorcycle club were responsible for a melee in Hollister, blowing the event out of proportion, and the story caused turmoil around the country (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). The event was actually a Gypsy Tour AMA-sanctioned race that was staged at various locations across America and was considered to be the premier motorcycle racing event of the time (Dulaney, 2005). In attendance at this event in Hollister were members of various motorcycle clubs, including the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington (POBOB) and the Boozefighters Motorcycle Clubs (Dulaney, 2005). The exuberance of the racing event, fueled by a number of drunken non-motorcycle club members, spilled over into the town of Hollister where motorcycle riders, club members and non-club members, raced their bikes through the streets (Hollister, 2005). As stated above, Life magazine used a staged photo shot by Barney Peterson, a San Francisco Chronicle photographer, depicting a drunken biker learning atop a Harley Davidson motorcycle surrounded by broken beer bottles, holding a beer in each hand with club insignia prominently displayed for the camera—and thus—America’s eye (Reynolds, 2000) Although the San Francisco Chronicle did not use any imagery in their story, they used words such as “terrorism” and “pandemonium” to exaggerate the event (Reynolds, 2000). This article, however, did little to stir up citizens of the region, as at this time there were local labor strikes resulting in deaths, so this simply was not news (Dulaney, 2006). The Life magazine article, however, with its imagery and words claiming that there were four thousand members of a motorcycle club that were responsible for a melee in Hollister did create turmoil (Dulaney, 2006). The
negative imagery portrayed by the media demonized the biking community and portrayed the biker as deviant outcast (McDonald-Walker, 2007). Many mainstream motorcyclists and motorcycling organizations were attempting to distance themselves from the myth that Hollister was seized by motorcycle riders in 1947, while other clubs were basking in it, and that is said to be the birth of outlaw motorcycle clubs (Reynolds, 2000). The clubs themselves seek to be viewed as one-of-a-kind and separated from other motorcycle riders, as Ralph “Sonny” Barger once stated that the big difference between the Hell’s Angels and the rest of the motorcycle world is their bikes and the way they ride. Riding is a serious business to the Hell’s Angels, and their bikes represent and extension of their bodies (Barger, et al., 2000). Some of the men’s motorcycle clubs have distanced themselves from each other for various reasons, yet women’s motorcycle clubs, although not as well-known as the men’s clubs, have overcome their own obstacles, as do women who ride motorcycles. Women have had to contend with normative control, which is a nonactive, nonviolent form of social control, and is a product of cultural norms, values, and beliefs, brought on by a patriarchal social structure and male-biased cultural beliefs (Gagné, 1992). When women ride motorcycles they transform gendered leisure space and renegotiate the gendered meanings of leisure and also challenge gendered power relations (Koskela, 1977). As Gagné, and Austin (2010) noted, it was ultimately up to women to resist beliefs and overcome barriers, but it was typically men who first recognized the ability of women to challenge gender barriers in riding.

**Women Who Ride Motorcycles**

Women ride motorcycles for the same reasons as men, it provides them with an
adventurous stimulus and airborne sensation, and gives them a sense of camaraderie with others who share their similar passion (Conner, 2009). According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, (as cited in Ellis 2006), about 18 percent of all riders are women, and one in ten bike owners in American are women.

Gagné and Austin, (2010) noted that although men played a key role in helping women learn to ride motorcycles, the women seldom understood the gendered aspects of space, travel, and handling heavy machinery. To address these fears, these women often sought the support of their peers in spaces organized by and for women (Gagné & Austin, 2010). These peer groups were a cloistered environment that provided a safe space in which these women could discuss leisure constraints, reassess their fears, learn new skills, and devise strategies to expand their involvement in and satisfaction derived from riding. Also, women-centered space allowed women to see their potential in the experiences of others. In the process of listening to one another’s concerns and learning how they had mastered difficult skills, faced their fears, and overcome numerous constraints, women’s consciousness of their own abilities were expanded. Therefore, rather than understanding themselves through hegemonic ideas and stereotypes, women could see what they were capable of accomplishing (Gagné & Austin, 2010).

Gagné and Austin, (2010), go on to say that women who downplayed gender and worked to fit in the culture typically found men in the touring community to be welcoming and supportive. These women motorcycle riders challenged sexist and sexualized stereotypes and avoided giving the impression that they were more interested in making a feminist statement than a real commitment to learning difficult skills (Gagné,
& Austin, 2010). They wanted to be known for their riding abilities and did not want people to think they had something to prove. The women in Gagné, and Austin’s (2010) study found that riding a motorcycle gave them an opportunity to become more fully aware of themselves and their capabilities, to face their fear, challenge other’s ideas about them and share their experiences dealing with gender specific issues. Gagné and Austin (2010) also noted that the greatest source of empowerment for the women in the study was learning to be in tune with themselves and to trust their own ways of being and understanding the world. Finally, Gagné, and Austin (2010) argued that it was important for women motorcycle riders to find other women riders to reinforce their identity, share experiences, and, although they did not want to be known as women riders, most looked to other women for a crucial source of support. From these shared experiences and comparable identities a unique bonding condition can develop which goes beyond ordinary friendship or gender sameness, a bonding condition that fosters putting another ahead of your needs or desires.

Brotherhood, the True Meaning

The concept of brotherhood is not new. The Free and Accepted Masons of Michigan, originally founded in 1827, state that they are no different yesterday, today and tomorrow, and their members are brothers all, and their history is just as much a family tree as a listing of historical events one might find in a club’s written timeline (Dykhouse, 2012). Brotherhood was a part of this organization’s values and beliefs and contained in the written history.

The ideology of brotherhood is not less significant today than it was over 100
years ago, and applies to motorcycle club members as well. When asked “why do men join motorcycle clubs?” Johnson (2008) found that men joined a club because that club offered a specific purpose, such as some clubs create unity among soldiers; some are faith-based; some are centered around professions such as policemen, firemen and iron workers; some motorcycle clubs are actual corporations or enterprises that own businesses and their goal is to make money; some clubs are just interested in partying; some clubs offer reputation, and some motorcycle clubs offer something that they are wanting such as brotherhood and a sense of family.

Culture

What are Differences Among a One-Piece Patch, Two-Piece Patch and a Three-Piece Patch?

According to Dulaney (2006), two-piece patch motorcycle clubs distinguish themselves from one-piece clubs by using either a top rocker or bottom rocker. The two-piece patch clubs may separate the name of their club from the remaining symbols through the use of a top rocker, which is a piece of cloth or embroidery cut and sewn in the shape of an arc or semi-circle, which is located above the club’s primary set of symbols and displays the club’s name (Dulaney, 2006). Dulaney (2006) further states that two-piece patch clubs are primarily non-outlaw motorcycle clubs and the three-piece patch clubs distinguished themselves by using both a top and bottom rocker as well as a “center island” that contains only the club’s primary symbols. This three-piece configuration originated when original outlaw motorcycle clubs seceded from the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) sometime after July 1947. Within the three-
piece patch outlaw motorcycle clubs exists the elite of the motorcycle club system, the
two percenters (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006), where the demands of the organization
are superior to the needs of the individual which includes the individual’s family and
occupation (Dulaney, 2005).

Motorcycle clubs establish and maintain a hierarchical system through the use of
symbols and establish group-specific identities through the wearing of club colors, which
are unique to each motorcycle club (Dulaney, 2006). These colors usually consist of an
embroidered patch or patches sewn on the back of a vest. One-percent motorcycle clubs
have the most status, three-piece patch clubs enjoy more respect and status than do two-
piece and one-piece clubs. Thus, the general term “patch-holder” is used when referring
to full members of motorcycle clubs (Dulaney, 2006). These patches declare who the
rider affiliates with and also the status of the rider.

Cultural Identity in a Motorcycle Club

Members of a motorcycle club understand that they are a part of a collective and
that in order for club members to contribute to the creation of their system they must
ensure conformity of individuals (Dulaney, 2006). Part of the conformity is the wearing
of the club colors or patches which are usually sewn on a vest, and are placed in precise
locations on the back of the vest, but colors may also include other patches on other parts
of the vest (Dulaney, 2006). These vest symbols indicate a hierarchal standing within the
club and within other clubs by the placement of the patches (Dulaney, 2006). For
example, a president’s patch will be worn in a more prominent and physically higher
location on a vest than the sergeant-at-arms (Dulaney, 2006). A standard part of
motorcycle club culture is that of the position of a prospective member as compared to fully-patched members of the club or any other similar club (Dulaney, 2006).

Prospective club members are taught the value of humility and without humility there can be no functional collective social system, therefore prospective members do not initiate conversation with fully-patched members and they do as they are instructed (Dulaney, 2006). To a club, humility teaches that one’s actions are no more valuable, or are just as valuable, as the actions of others in the social system (Dulaney, 2006).

**Summary**

Bourdieu (1986), stated that social capital is created when membership is controlled social status is increased because the membership is regulated and not just anyone can become a member. He asserted that the advantages that accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the cohesion that makes the advantages possible. Social status is obtained due to these limitations. As reported by Dulaney (2006), one-percent motorcycle clubs have the most status of motorcycle clubs, and in turn the three-piece patch clubs have more respect and status than do two- and one-piece patch clubs. Therefore, the one-percent clubs hold the most social capital in the motorcycle club culture. These one-percenter are perhaps the prototypes of motorcycle clubs. Hogg and Terry (2000) noted that whatever the essence of the group elements are that makes that group different from other groups is the prototype of that group, because it captures the idealization of the group and shows the differences. The hierarchical system through the use of patches is understood by those who wear them, but the public does not necessarily understand the differences in status. This literature focuses on the club status and
individual status, but not what makes the person decide to join such a club.

Austin, Gagné, and Orend (2010) point out that there is a culture industry which is made up of the media, manufacturers, marketing agencies, and advertisers, and they appropriate ideas and material cultural products that arise from grassroots society. These products are then sold to the public under powerful marketing strategies designed to convince potential buyers that the product will make their lives better, more complete, and meaningful. The literature points out an example of this, which is Harley-Davidson taking the “bad boy” image of the chopper-style motorcycle and mass producing it for profit (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). This is an example of a cultural image used for profit, but no context is given to the individuals that make up this culture. That is, they are all lumped into one category, the “one-percenters” or outlaws.

There is literature covering outlaw motorcycle clubs by the U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council (2004), where it is stated that some communities added motorcycle gangs to their lists of terrorists groups. The FBI has reports on the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b), and the National Gang Intelligence Center (2009), published a report on validated Outlaw Motorcycle Gang members. The literature does not, however, discuss why a person joins a two- or three-piece motorcycle club, or why they stay in the club. Again, the individuals are lumped into the outlaw category, assuming that each member is the same as the next.

This study fills the gap in literature by uncovering what motivates a person to go through the rigors required to be accepted into a two- or three-piece patch club, and explores the personal reasons why they stay in the club.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

The design of the study includes a qualitative, exploratory approach. The study tries to understand the experiences and viewpoints of the participants by way of an individual interview and personal narrative (Royse, 1999). This study used mostly open-ended questions with some closed-ended questions to gain demographic information. Also, to make sure the interviewees were representative of their groups, members from different motorcycle clubs were interviewed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). An interview was conducted with participants via a face-to-face interview and some questionnaires were handed out in person by the researcher and the researcher’s husband and returned by mail. It was not always possible for the researcher to meet with the participants or to personally give them the questionnaire to fill out due to event restrictions: that is, the researcher’s husband felt there were some events the researcher should not attend. This was not a matter of control, but rather a safety issue and the researcher did not inquire any further as to the reasons. Therefore, the sampling was not random, but a sampling of convenience.

The interviews and returned questionnaires provided the researcher a better understanding of the club members’ motives for participation and their perceptions of what it means to be a two-piece or three-piece patch holder.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, two-piece and three-piece patch holder motorcycle
club members, three-piece prospective club members, and three-piece hang-arounds” were sampled as the research subjects as the researcher is examining motivations of joining and staying in these clubs. Permission was obtained from California’s large and powerful dominant motorcycle club for this study: however, under the condition that there were no releases signed by any member of any club interviewed, and limitations were placed on which clubs could be interviewed. These clubs were not listed or named for the researcher, but rather the researcher’s husband had the understanding of who could and who could not be interviewed. Thus, the population for this sampling was reduced in number by this restriction.

Although incentives of soft drinks and snacks were offered for these interviews, not one club member would accept the incentive. When the interviews were conducted the participants were verbally told that their participation was voluntarily, they could stop the interview at any time, and they did not have to answer any question if they did not want to answer it.

Instrumentation

The researcher could not find any questionnaires previously used by researchers that addressed this study topic, therefore an original set of questions was developed by the researcher. The instrument was constructed of 21 questions, with the majority of them open-ended, and demographic questions that were closed-ended. Several of the questions centered on the status connected with belonging to a club that wears a two- or a three-piece patch. That is, the status the participant felt he or she had, and the actual status of the club as compared to other motorcycle riders that do not wear these patches.
This status, for three-piece patch holders also involves not only the perceived outlaw image by society, but the outlaw image as defined by law enforcement, and how the participant perceives and receives this outlaw image. Along that same vein, questions were queried regarding the participants’ personal views on belonging to a two- or three-piece patch club and how it affected them on several other levels, such as their family life, personal life outside of the family, and money and time involved being in such clubs. Finally, a set of questions focused on group and organizational subjects, such as the participants’ opinion of the importance of membership communication and strong leadership.

**Data Gathering Procedures**

The data gathering procedures included interviewing participants face-to-face and hand delivering questionnaires by the researcher and the researcher’s husband to participants that were returned via mail. The mailed questionnaires also contained a cover sheet introducing the researcher and the project, and a list of mental health agencies, and was accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope with only the researcher’s name and address in both the sender and receiver positions to preserve confidentiality. The majority of the in-person interviews were conducted at motorcycle club events that were open to the public, specifically fund raising events. Although open to the public, the researcher noted that almost every person in attendance had a two- or three-piece patch, with the majority having three-piece patches. The researcher only noted one motorcycle rider that did not wear a vest with patches. The researcher’s husband made the introduction to the prospective interviewee, making it clear that this
was voluntary, and the researcher then explained the purpose of the interview. All of the people approached in this manner agreed to be interviewed. The researcher requested that the participant decide where to conduct the interview, and they all chose open areas that were relatively quiet and private. Two of the interviews were conducted in the motorcycle club members’ clubhouse at their request, with the researcher’s husband discreetly keeping out of earshot. Five interviews were conducted as a group in a local restaurant, at the request of the club members as this was their usual getting-together time and the researcher would have more people to interview than if she tried to catch them not working. Even though the restaurant was busy, the waitresses knew this club and did not try to hurry them along. It was a rather noisy atmosphere, but doable and private enough to obtain fruitful information. Most of the individual person-to-person interviews were completed in about 45 minutes to an hour, depending on what the participant wanted to expound upon, and five interviews that were conducted at one time in the restaurant and lasted over two hours. The questionnaires received in the mail took approximately two hours each to transcribe, which was similar in time spent on transcribing each interview conducted in person.

**Data Analysis**

Complete data analysis was compiled at the conclusion of all of the interviews by looking for common themes, listing findings, and also a discussion of what the researcher thought was missing in the responses.
**Protection of Human Subjects**

The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects from the Division of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento approved this study as minimal risk. The approval number is 11-12-055.

Informed consent was attained by the researcher by reading the consent form to the participants if an interview was conducted, and each participant was asked if they wanted a copy of this script (see Appendix A). The script identified the researcher and the purpose of the study and why it is an important study. The interview process was explained (the researcher would ask questions and the answers would be recorded on a disposable drive only). Participants were advised that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to answer.

If the questionnaires were completed by mail, the same script that the researcher read to the face-to-face participants was read, with a note that this was voluntary and the participant did not have to answer any question they did not want to answer.

The participants’ rights to privacy and safety were protected by not using any individual or club names or identifiers on the questionnaires. There were no health risks greater than those the participants encounter each day as they were not asked to ingest anything or take any medications. To alleviate any potential risk of psychological disturbance or emotional stress from the study questions, each participant was given a referral list for counseling services (see Appendix C).
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the 26 interviews with motorcycle club members, prospects, and hang-arounds discussed earlier in this manuscript. A sample of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix B. Twenty-one questions were presented either in person or were completed by the participant and returned by mail. Twenty-two people where asked to interview face-to-face, and twenty-two complied, with a success rate of 100%. Eight questionnaires were given to people to fill out and return by mail, and four complied with a 50% success rate. The questionnaire contained one question about demographics, which included such information as age, marital status, ethnic identity, employment, income, county of residence, and education level achieved. Other questions centered around the meaning of riding with a motorcycle club whose members wear a two- or three-piece patch, such as, why not ride with a club that does not wear a patch; how does being in a club affect your personal and family life; what does the club status mean to you, and, the importance of organizational communication and leadership. There was one question left open for the responder to add anything that they thought the researcher left out or should know. The data was analyzed for themes, which will be presented here in narrative explanations and graphs. The demographics of the participants will be presented first. Next a presentation of themes from the open-ended interview questions will follow and a summary of important findings will conclude the chapter.
Demographics

The researcher was able to obtain a total of 26 responses from motorcycle club members in this qualitative research study, five were two-piece patch holders, 18 were three-piece patch holders, two were three-piece prospective patch holders, and one was a three-piece hang-around. Percentages shown are just valid percentages as not all participants chose to disclose their demographics, and some disclosed portions of their demographics. Twenty-two of the participants were interviewed in person, and four returned questionnaires by mail.
Figure 1. Ages

Ages ranged from 26 to 85, with a mean age of 47.43, a median age of 49.

Twelve participants declined to disclose their age.
As to marital status, five were married, two were single, four were in a committed relationship, one was widowed, two were divorced, and twelve did not disclose.
The salaries ranged from $30,000 per year to $125,000 per year, close to the median income for the counties of their residences, which household incomes ranged from $47,462 to $86,850, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2012). Two of the participants had high school diplomas only; six had a community college degree or some college, one had a Bachelors degree, and one had a Masters degree, and twelve did not disclose. The participants were from six different California counties and one participant was from a Nevada county. The counties ranged in population from smallest populated county with a population under 56,000 to urban counties, with the largest having a population of over 1,700,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The smallest county in the study had a population of 90.8% white persons, and 11.3% Hispanic people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and this was similar to that county’s club demographics of seven persons white (87.5%), and one Hispanic (12.5%).
The participants worked in a variety of vocations, such as skilled trades, 49%, transportation, 9%, and professionals, 21%. Twenty-one percent of the participants were retired. None were unemployed. The professional category included teaching, nursing, and the mortgage industry; skilled trades included mechanic, carpenter, metal working, utility worker, janitor, and body arts practitioner; transportation included public transportation and state transportation worker; and the retired vocations included professional, skilled labor, and skilled trades.
Findings of Interviews

When asked why ride motorcycles with a group that wears a two- or three-piece patch rather than just riding with another group, the responses were as follows:

The prevalent themes why people rode in a club with two- or three-piece patches were centered on safety, trustworthiness, extended family, brotherhood/sistership, support, and giving back to the community.

For example, when people are in a two- or three-piece patch club, there is a process to be admitted to the club which takes anywhere from six months to a year of prospecting. During this time the members get to know the prospective member’s riding capabilities, as well as their attitudes and beliefs. As one participant said, “riding side-by-side takes skill and can be dangerous if the other person’s skill level is not known, and when riding with informal groups a person never knows who they will be riding next to. In the club you know what to expect [because you have been riding with the person next to you for some time].” Also, a subject that came up frequently was that of brotherhood and sistership and the acquiring of an extended family. Whether the member had a very strong and active family life or came from a troubled family life background, they referred to other club members as “family”, “brother”, or “sister”, and recounted how they could count on and trust the other members to help them in time of need. As one person noted “you can call anyone for help, and everyone responds. It’s a close-knit family. You drop what you are doing to help your member. Our wives have a list of the members’ phone numbers for assistance.” “It’s about personal values of trust; comrades as opposed to strangers.” Another participant said “[I ride in a club] because brotherhood
is equal to family, even though they are not blood, there is love, caring, and they back me up and are supportive.” One person summed it up by stating “[the] other members in my club are my family, my brothers. Of course I have their support.”

There was the desire to be a part of a social group, to not be lonely. Some of the quotes were “The club gives me someone to ride with”; “I would get lonely riding alone”, and “riding alone is boring.” Another person put it, “in life, you are lucky if you have five friends. Through this club I have another five friends.” Being around people that the rider felt comfortable with and trusted was important and expressed as “camaraderie and brotherhood of having a club and like-minded members riding with you”; “I grew up in “group” settings, that is, [grew up with] “homeboys”, and now that my kids are grown up, I’m back in the “group”. It’s in me. When I was a hang-around [just riding with the club, not a member or a prospect] I felt like I was 20 again, energized. I’m a people person.”

As another person put it, “I have many reasons for riding with a club opposed to solo or with a group that does not don the 2 or 3 patch attire. I feel today’s world has made the motorcycle subculture more socially acceptable, and less taboo. Media portrayals of motorcycle clubs have helped to increase the trend as well. For me, riding is my life. I live for the ride, not the trend. Although motorcycle culture has become far more popular and acceptable, the strict standards of the 2 or 3 patch club have withstood the test of time and been upheld. By being in an organization like a 2 or 3 patch club, I have the ability to bring positive changes to my community with people who share the same passion for riding as me, and the confidence knowing they possess the same virtues
I do. A person’s integrity is tested during a strict prospectship before becoming a member. Clubs that do not carry the 2 or 3 patch do not have these kinds of prospectships. Because of this, the quality of an individual cannot be accurately determined. It is by what you have sacrificed and how hard you have worked that your measure of a person is determined in a club.”

This pride and resolve was observed in all of the interviews, and one participant expressed her allegiance in more sacrificial terms. She stated that she found the militant style of the club fulfilling as she was raised in a “weak” biological family and the club provided not only structure but presented her with the opportunity to form strong familial bonds with the membership. When talking about her club, she said she “would risk getting arrested for a sister or a brother; there would be no hesitation, no thought, just action.” As she put it, “family, brotherhood, sistership is a benefit of the patches, it’s a second family, but you get to choose. You choose [her emphasis] to have these friends, these sisters.” The theme of giving back to the community came up several times as to why people joined a two- or three-piece patch club. As one person said “we, in a small way, try to give back to the community we are a part of [by hosting charitable events].”

Another participant, a teacher, noted that if she no longer was in a club she would find another community organization to belong to as giving back was important to her. One participant 55, said “my reasons for riding with a club as opposed to riding alone are: first is that it is a brotherhood, an extended family, and all the things that go with it. Second is that my club has a long and rich history behind it and it’s an honor to be part of that history. Third is that we do in a small way try and give back to the community we
are a part of."

When asked what were the unique characteristics or meanings of a two- or three-piece patch, and what did the status of the club mean to you as an individual, the responses were as follows:

There were common themes, such as in wearing a two- or three-piece patch represents carrying on a certain lifestyle and more commitment than those that do not wear these patches, and with these patches comes respect. It also signifies trust, loyalty, and honor in belonging to such a club, and knowing that you are riding with people with the same or similar values and beliefs. Also, there was the misconception or stereotyping that all three-piece patch holders are “1%ers” and/or ride outside of the law.

As an example, a participant said “when one goes through the process (prospecting) of earning the right of passage (patch out) it’s an accomplishment no less than climbing Mount Everest. The hard work, the sweat, the blood, the sleepless nights and the time away from your loved ones, it [is] a big sacrifice and it doesn’t come easy, so giving it up for some is just as hard if not harder.” Another member put it this way, “look it is not just a membership it is a brotherhood, a family. Moreover a lifestyle, or you might say a life choice. It takes a great deal of time, effort, and commands a level of commitment that most are simply not capable of. It is not for everyone. It does say something about the man, tho [sic], mostly it says that he is a man of honor, worthy of trust and respect. And, make no mistake, also fear.” Another person, a veteran, stated that “the club status for me is that elevated position that this is a serious lifestyle and we take it as such. We are hassled more by the cops, and by other clubs [because of the
three-piece patch].” Along that line, another young rider of a newly formed club stated that “part of the recognition is kind of cool, but the police hassle is a pain in the ass. They harass, pull us over, much more than when we just rode around as a group of guys in flannel [shirts].” Several felt that because they wear a patch, they are all grouped together and that they are stereotyped. For example, one member said that people would believe that he was a member of a large and powerful motorcycle club in California, yet the name of his club, a different club, was clearly stated on the patch. Another member felt that “the media had too much control over most people and they have skewed views on motorcycle riders.” Another member was introspective about his thoughts on being considered a part of an outlaw motorcycle club. “What does it mean to be an outlaw? Does it mean I disregard any and all laws of society and live well outside the boundaries of authority? For me, I find being considered an outlaw somewhat acceptable because in a society with an ever-increasing government control over our lives and liberties, I choose to disagree with society’s direction and maintain the liberties I have while I have them. I do not buy into propaganda created to steer people into the same direction without a fight, I choose to be analytical and logical and keep an open mind when articulating the politics of today’s society. Above all, I choose to not give up my freedom without a fight, whereas others may lie down and be submissive. That is how I feel I fit the definition of outlaw.” Another participant stated “I have not encountered mistreatment due to my patch, never been mistreated by the cops. I have been pulled over many times, but never given a ticket. However, she did remember a time in Alaska when a “yuppie woman” looked at her and asked her why didn’t she get a job? She
stated that she “actually receives more prejudice from 1-piece patch holders who could not get into a 3-piece patch club than any other group of people.” Another participant talked about the stereotypical biker, that is, a person that lives outside of the law and the conventional norms, and noted “we are all working people with jobs and families who love to ride Harleys.” Another participant, who is higher up on the chain of command, said he has been pulled over many, many times in his own community and searched, and law enforcement has said that he can be considered a terrorist. He stated “I was worried was when they had me face-down on the ground and I thought I might break dentures in my vest pocket.” He stated the pull-overs were a nuisance but he had nothing to hide, and further commented the pull-overs have slowed down over the years. One rider said that she has never experienced anything except hugs from fellow bikers, except sometimes when in public places has been asked to leave because of the club colors, and not because of her behavior. Another participant stated that “the three-piece patch is carrying on a certain lifestyle that has been around almost 70 years, since World War II, and we are continuing a unique lifestyle.” Another participant, when commenting on the significance of a two- or three-piece patch stated that “motorcycle clubs that don the two- or three-[piece] patch are unique in the fact that they are a strict fraternity of individuals that share common goals and a common passion. They strive to separate themselves from the rest of society by upholding core virtues and mutual respect.” Another motorcycle rider found this to be true, and the first words that came to mind for her were “respect, chivalry. You don’t see people now-a-days with this kind of respect. In all of the events I’ve been to, I’ve had only one man [show disrespect by touching me
inappropriately]. [The president of the women’s club] talked to him, and his president talked to him, and he apologized. That is the only time anyone has ever been disrespectful to me in any way [at a motorcycle club event].” Another participant did not fully understand what a three-piece patch meant, until her club became converted from a one-piece to a three-piece patch, but she not only learned to appreciate the differences, she later started a new three-piece patch club. As she states, “I love motorcycles. When I was 40, I bought a Yamaha. I had no one to ride with, so I found a club in the newspaper. It was a 1 piece family club. That club went from a one-piece patch to a three-piece patch without even consulting the other members. I didn’t know the meaning of a three-piece; it’s different. Friendship, community, I’m part of a family, in the loose sense of the word. It is a place of belonging, and beyond just riding a motorcycle. Being in a club and riding a Harley can be expensive, but it is more than just a side-line activity, it’s a lifestyle.” If, for some reason a member could not ride a motorcycle any more, most of the members agreed that it would have a huge effect if they could no longer ride a motorcycle, but most said they would not quit the club. “My enthusiasm in my club is definitely tied to riding my bike and being an active member, but my passion exists inside me. I am an integral part of my club and have responsibility for it. I do not believe I will ever not ride. If I were to become handicapped, then I would seek the technology out there to make riding possible again,” One man said, “the love for the brotherhood never dies.” A woman rider said that she would be done with the club, but would join another club to stay involved with the community. She said, however, she would still donate to her sisters’ club. The researcher was aware of members who had lost a leg and learned to
ride again with a prosthesis, and another member, after suffering a stroke, had his motorcycle altered so he could ride again.

*When asked how riding a Harley and being in a motorcycle club related to their family life and their personal life outside of their family life, the responses were:*

Most of the participants mentioned that being in a club took a great deal of time and money, as riding a Harley can be expensive and unreliable, yet it is its own subculture, and going to the events and meetings can be expensive. Most participants acknowledged that it took them away from their family, but some incorporated their family into the club. When it came to giving up their job for the club, the responses were mixed. Four said they would not quit their jobs, five said yes, they would quit their job, and three said maybe. Of the four that said they would not quit their jobs, three said they would seek legal action, and one said that family and job came first. Of the five that said yes, they would quit their job for the club, one person said “yes, without question.” To validate one participant’s loyalty to his club, he stated “I would sacrifice my personal welfare for the club’s welfare.”

One participant, 85 and a widower, thought the notion that motorcycle riding might separate the rider from family put it this way (his tone of voice indicated the question was inconsequential) “my last ride was to Sturgis with my wife. [Motorcycle riding] did not separate our family. My daughter rode behind me since she was four [she is now in her 40s and rides a Harley].” Another participant, 39 and in a long-term relationship, said “families are important. We [club members] get along, and family is incorporated.” A 39 year old divorced rider with five children stated that “my family is involved as much
as I am [in the club].” One participant stated that he was in a motorcycle accident, and then lost his job, and although he spends a lot of time with the club, every weekend, his wife often goes with him. However, he stated “his family has been neglected due to the time required [to be in the club].” Other participants recognized that in their lives the club took time away from their personal and family lives, and one participant concurred that being in a club takes a lot of time, and he joined after his children were grown. He stated that “my wife gets a little perturbed sometimes, and he has to balance his time.” Another rider said that “a motorcycle club can monopolize your life. You have to be with someone who understands.” One woman has been married 38 years, has five grandchildren and her husband has been in a club for many years, so she was aware of the time involved in joining a club. She is now a prospect because “I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself.” Another participant acknowledged that she loves to ride and that it does take a lot of her time. Her mother, 81, lives with her and she also supports her disabled brother, and stated that “family life comes first.” She went on to say that the new club she was in took a lot of her time, and when she was gone her mom missed her, but her family obligations came first.

All of the participants interviewed rode Harleys, except two sometimes rode a Triumph motorcycle but also had Harleys. One participant recognized that status of riding a Harley by stating “riding a Harley is more of a cult status just like Hot Rods [have their own cult status]. Believe me, Harley’s are not the best performance machines but they sound so unique and sexy.” Another participant stated “I ride a Harley because I love the freedom of having control.” But, even though a Harley is not known for
reliability, there are other benefits of riding a Harley; as one participant said “tiny women ride Harleys. Harley gets it with women. I love the feel, the sound of a Harley, [but what] attracted me was the support you get for breakdowns all over the United States. You can get a dependable bike, or you can get a Harley, with good social support, and support on the road. If you breakdown, another Harley rider will stop and help, even if they are not on their bike.” One member reinforced that philosophy of road support by recounting that “I broke down on the 680 and my wife and grandkids were behind me in our car. By the time she got out of the car to see what was wrong another club’s member saw me, and turned around. He called a prospect and he picked up my bike and took it to his home, fixed it, and drove it [over 200 miles] to my home the next day, with someone following him to give him a ride back. The whole time I was never alone during the breakdown, even though I said I would wait for the prospect with my wife, he [the other clubs’ member] would not leave us.” This example explains why one participant said “part of being in the club is the brotherhood of riding together and breaking down together.” Riding a Harley is a common denominator, because, as one participant said, “[you ride] the same type of motorcycle, [it] gives you something to talk about.” However, riding a Harley seems to go beyond just something in common, it is associated with passion and commitment; as one participant said, “you don’t find too many people with “Honda” tattooed on their arms.” Riding a Harley can also be a family tradition. As one participant said, “my bio-family brought me into the Harley life. My uncles, everyone rode Harleys, and I’m now riding my mom’s Harley.” Only three participants were ambivalent about Harleys: one said she “liked to ride any bike”, and two said they
rode a Triumph and a Harley.

When questioned if there was equality for men and women when it came to riding a Harley, the responses were:

The common thread was it was not if a man or a woman was riding a Harley, it was how they rode the motorcycle. A common theme was not so much man vs. woman, but had more to do with marketing and culturally accepted norms.

One felt “Harley is behind on the power curve and they are trying to catch up with women in this.” One rider acknowledged that “there are more men Harley riders than women, but I don’t know why.” Another rider tied it into marking; “I believe the marketing for Harleys has been historically and presently geared towards men because men make up the majority of the demographic that buy the product, similar to how beauty and skin products are always geared towards women, because of the very small demographic of men that use such products. One can describe a Harley as a loud, obnoxious heavy machine that takes an aggressive personality to control safely, versus a passive personality. There is no forgiveness when harnessing a machine with that kind of power, so you must show aggression and strength on the road. These qualities can be attributed to men because they portray masculinity. A girl of smaller build who does not actively work out and use her muscles, who has a soft spoken passive personality, would have a harder time operating a Harley. Since many women in today’s society strive to fit a certain appearance and take a certain role, being a Harley rider normally does not fall within the realm of femininity that society dictates. Harley has expanded its line of motorcycles to include bikes better built for smaller frame people to ride and control so
the demographic is changing. Another person felt that “anyone who can afford one can have one, male or female.” Another participant approached the subject a little more pragmatically; “hell I don’t care if women ride Harleys; as long as they ride they aren’t driving cars talking on cell phones or texting. Motorcycle riding wouldn’t be as dangerous if everybody rode a bike and there were no cars.” A woman rider said that “riding a Harley does separate the men from the boys, but women get just as much respect as the men.” A president of a club said that “when questioned if ethnicity had a bearing on why they chose their particular club their responses were as follows:

Ethnicity was not an important issue with the participants that were interviewed. Joining a particular club had to do with the club’s core values and the individuals in the club, not the ethnicity of the individuals. However, some clubs’ members noted that demographics came into play on the ethnicity of the members of a club, that is, in some of the members’ communities the population was overwhelming white, and so was their particular motorcycle club. Although the members are chosen to join, no club mentioned a mandatory racial or ethnic exclusivity.

For example, one participant said he joined his club because he agreed with its morals, but he noted there is no discrimination in his club. A different club’s member said, when asked if ethnicity made a difference in his club, he stated “no, we value members for who they are not what they are.” A newly-formed club in a predominately white county stated “ethnicity had nothing to do with our group; demographics of the
foothills [where we live] are white. Another member from this club stated “we started this club from the beginning. Race and ethnicity had nothing to do with us. [I] did not choose this to escape a race or not include a race. Race is not a factor.” (It is noted here that the predominant club which has jurisdiction over this newly-formed club has a president that is a minority.) Another, larger club that encompasses several counties with membership had more diversity in their club. As one participant put it, “the ethnicities of my club members vary. We are a self-described mixed race club, and care more about the core qualities of an individual than the ethnic background. Another member of this club, from a different county, said that he was not prejudiced, and “skin or ethnicity does not have an impact on my decision to join a motorcycle club I value and respect.” A person in this same club said “yes and no [ethnicity had some bearing on why I chose my particular club], it’s the same in public life; you have a mix of people suited toward your beliefs and interests, more like yourself. You wouldn’t choose to be around people that didn’t like your or want you around, would you?” Another club interviewed had members that were white, African American, and Mexican, and she stated “it’s not an issue. The only requirement is that a person has to be a woman.” That was also the position from a different club’s member, as she said “we have African American, Mexican, Korean, and white, just people. You could have been born a man, but you need to be a woman at the time you join [that is all we require].” To establish what was important to one member she stated, when asked if ethnicity played a part in choosing her club, she said “all colors, all ethnicities, Lesbian, Gay, hetero was not important, it is more about riding than the little things.”
Some of the questions asked if being in a club had taught the member anything about organizational leadership or organizational communication. The responses were as follows:

Comments on these subjects came up before the questions were asked as communication and leadership appeared to be an intrinsic component to a club’s existence. Respect for another person’s opinions was a theme as was taking care to communicate and how communication was carried out. The importance of leadership skills were acknowledged and overlapped with communication skills.

One participant noted that “you have to communicate. Easier said than done. You have to do it. Can show you how small the world really is.” Another person noted that “my club has terrible communication. In my job [employment] communication is important, so I have tried to get communication a little better, but [they] are just Type A people who talk over each other. But, the level of trust supersedes communication.” The importance of communication was reiterated by another member: “My motorcycle club has taught me that communication is by far the most important quality to possess. To convey your meaning and mind to another person is very important. Problems arise in mistranslation.” Members understand the club is like any other organization or group when it comes to communication, and, as one member put it “never assume and take second hand information, get the details from the source itself.” In motorcycle riding, communication is paramount, as one person said “[communication] is the same as with any organization, such as work, family; the left-hand has to know what the right hand is doing or it could cost someone their life.” Another member noted that “you have to be
son the same page, then we can communicate. That’s why a year of prospecting is good, because you get to know that person, and find out if they think the way you think, understand each other.” Some members included communication in the capacity of societal mindfulness, stating “communication is a life lesson, not a club lesson,” and another person’s reflection that “it is one of the most important things in any relationship.” Communication within a club and across lines of different clubs is vital in conflict resolution that is amenable to everyone involved. One participant learned that when she had a problem with another club’s member disrespecting her, the problem was settled by expeditious and truthful communication. She reported the issue to the president of the club she hung around and that president in turn communicated the issue to the other club’s president. This resulted in communicating to the other member why his actions were considered disrespectful and settling the issue, thus avoiding further conflict and hard feelings. The hang-around felt she was disrespected as a person and disrespected as a motorcycle club hang-around. She also noted that in the scores of events she had attended with this particular motorcycle club as a hang-around, she had never encountered this problem before or since. Like other organizations, when the mores of the organization are not observed, the member has to be informed. Leadership was viewed thoughtfully by one member by stating “we are all leaders at different times.” Most, however, referred to their officers when responding to this question. One person noted “my club has taught me that leadership is a dangerous thing to have if in the wrong hands. Leadership should never be about power. We believe that although we have a hierarchy within our club, everyone’s voice can be heard and
Another person stated that “especially with [the] type of people generally in [motorcycle] clubs, you have to have a strong leader. Charismatic, social, intelligent.”

Another member of a newly formed club, but had been in other clubs, stated “leadership if tough. Have to be strong. They have to have respect for you [the leader], and some fear. Have to have strong, reliable leaders. Have to be elastic & firms.” Finally, one member noted “leaders are naturally born; the cream always rises to the top. This too is a life lesson.”

Some of the questions had to do with what kept a person in a motorcycle club, and had they been in any types of clubs before. The responses were:

A word that came up over and over was brotherhood or sistership when talking about why a person was in a motorcycle club. Along with this were the themes of pride, honor, respect and purpose. Belonging to other types of clubs did not appear to be a precursor to joining a motorcycle club, and there was no particular theme in this area, as some had been in clubs prior to joining a motorcycle club, but many had not been in a formal club.

One member stated “the camaraderie of the men is an inspiration to remain in the club, and it’s like a family, only a family you get to choose. One member stated “there is definitely a level of support I feel as a club member that I would not get anywhere else. We are a tightly bound fraternity, and work hard to be there for one another.” The level of support given a member was brought up frequently, such as, “it’s an extended family in which I have a lot of brothers who support and stand with me through life’s challenges”, and “…there is support from my brothers, my extended family. You
wouldn’t receive the same [support] if you [were] not a family member.” It was indicated that a motorcycle club was meaningful and important to the member in many different spheres, which may indicate why members stay so long. For example, one participant said “to remain active for so long it becomes a lifestyle. “If something is good, why give it up? It’s a good support system to get help through hard times.” Along that line, another member noted “I think being in a club is more than just a part time job—it becomes your life. As difficult as it is, it becomes harder to leave.” Family and brotherhood was brought up as a reason why people stay in motorcycle clubs. One rider said “family, brotherhood, sistership, it’s a second family, but you get to choose. You choose to have these friends, these sisters.” One rider noted staying in a motorcycle club happens because of the “love it brings them, and they,[the riders] simply love the life. Finally, one member summed it up by stating “for members to stay for decades I believe the positive club direction and possible direct control they have within the club inspires them to stay. It is like a work of art they help shape over time…a constant dedication for some, being in a club is like watching a child grow. You have the ability to offer guidance and direction, and see what blossoms out of your efforts.”

As to previously belong to other clubs, some had been in other conventional clubs, such as Future Farmers of America, gun clubs, high school Hot Rot Club, Boy Scouts, and some had not been in any clubs growing up. There was no connection with having been in clubs previously to joining a motorcycle club that wears a two- or three-piece patch. Of the twelve that answered four said that they never been in a formal club before, and eight were in a variety of clubs, from a gun club to a teacher’s sorority. One
participant said that when he was a senior in high school a Hot Rod club took him on as a mascot, and “that started me being in a really good club. When I graduated from high school, the whole group came to the graduation, honked and blew their horns for me.”

This level of feeling important was echoed when another participant, who was in various clubs throughout high school, said “I feel a sense of self-worth when I stay active.” Two other participants identified being in the military as past participation in a club or group, but neither expounded on this. The implication the researcher received was equating the military experience of structure and strict guidelines to that of the motorcycle club.

*When asked if they would get a club tattoo:*

This question did not have a common cord and did not generate interest compared to some of the other questions. For those that responded in a way that could be counted, threes said yes they would get a club tattoo, two said no, and three said maybe. Other described what a club tattoo signified to them. One person said that a tattoo in their club was not mandatory, and some have them. He said he had one, and he “has faith in our group and club. I would never feel like I made a mistake being in this club.” Two other members thought tattoos “showed dedication” and “showed pride.” Another person recognized that a club tattoo was a huge commitment, but also “not that big of a deal for me. [Having a tattoo is a huge commitment, but so is being in a club.” Another person articulated the circumstances under which he would get a club tattoo, by saying “I can definitely see myself getting a club tattoo, when I earn the right. I feel tattoos tell the story of who you are, where you have been and what you are about. Therefore, getting a club tattoo is only right.”
When asked how they relieved stress in their lives, and would they seek professional counseling, the answers were:

The common theme was motorcycle riding was their stress reliever, and professional therapy would not be sought because they had the support of their club to assist them in times of need.

For example, some reported being in their club helped their stress level, and several noted membership helped them with their symptoms of depression. One person said he was diagnosed with depression and the Veterans Administration suggested medication. He took the medications, which did not help. He was retired he had no one to talk to, and joining his club has provided him with companionship and his depression is gone. Another person said that his wife has had a stroke, “and the club is the only thing [he] gets out and does.” Regarding seeking professional counseling, most responded they would not seek therapy, and two people said they would seek counseling if only to keep their marriage together. Along that line another person said “I did use a marriage counselor therapist when I was going through my divorce, but never again their full of [expletive] and assume too much. My club brothers often were there for me.”

Along this vein of club members being important support contributors, one person noted “I am not sure on this one. I believe the best therapist or counselor is the one inside you. We can overcome anything on our own as hard as it may be sometimes. What also helps is having positivity around you; a position my club brothers and family fulfill.” One person appeared to gain from the club what might be similar in experience to counseling, when she said “the club makes me think more about my (bio) family. Everywhere you
go with the club other clubs’ members are giving you hugs, and are interested in you. It
makes me think more about hugging my mom and sister, and actually telling them that I
love them. Not taking them [their love] for granted.”

Participant Observations

The interviews obtained by the researcher were conducted at four motorcycle
events, a restaurant, and a motorcycle club’s club house. For each interview the
researcher offered the participant a soda and snack, and each time the participant refused,
and one group interviewed insisted on purchasing the researcher a refreshment. The
researcher was treated with respect not only in demeanor, but with language that was
used. That is, if a participant used a word or phrase that he or she deemed inappropriate,
they apologized immediately. When the interviews were held at motorcycle events, the
researcher and participants would have to find a quiet place to conduct the interview. Not
one participant, man or woman, allowed the researcher to carry her own chair to the
interview site, or to return the chair. The participants made sure the researcher had shade
to sit in, yet the member was always wearing a leather vest that was indeed hot. The
researcher interpreted these behaviors not only as very respectful, but as gallant, almost
from a time past. The participants, to the person, approached the interview openly,
seriously, and with respect. And with this openness their passion came through. As the
interviews progressed and the participant became more comfortable, their passion for
their club, the membership, and motorcycle riding came to the surface. Not only did the
tone of voice imply great fervency, but also conveyed intense commitment. This
commitment extended not only to their own membership, but to other clubs, and to their
community. The support they received from each other brought to mind an experience of
the researcher’s family: over 50 years ago the researcher’s parents bought a small house
in the Midwest that was not inhabitable, and had no inside facilities. Friends and family
arrived with hammers, wood, food, paint, wallpaper, and scrub buckets. They cleaned,
repaired, and wallpapered the inside, painted the outside, and built a new outhouse. This
was not unusual, it was something that people did; it was community. That is the feeling
this researcher had with the motorcycle club members: community, brotherhood, and
sistership being played out, not talked about, but something that was happening and they
were a part of it. Something that used to be common-place or usual, but now is
something that is studied because it is so unusual.

Summary

Motorcycle clubs are tightly-knit organizations that place a high regard on
brotherhood and sistership, which involve many factors such as trust, loyalty, support,
communication, and honor. It is acknowledged that riding in a motorcycle club takes a
great deal of dedication, involvement, and sacrifice. Club members interviewed
expressed deep levels of commitment to their club and to the concepts of
brotherhood/sistership. Their beliefs in honor and trust were synonymous with these
concepts of brotherhood/sistership. Partly due to the ordeal of prospecting that they
completed they were proud to wear their colors, and they were proud for other reasons,
such as the core values of their club and the support and respect of the members. Being a
motorcycle club member is something that is difficult to achieve and therefore coveted by
members who do achieve it and by those that could not achieve this goal. Along with this
status comes the public perception that all motorcycle riders that wear two- or three-piece patches are operating outside of the law, and this can be problematic at times, such as being stopped by law enforcement officers frequently. To some members this is just the price you pay for wear “colors”, but other members try to change this perception as not all motorcycle club members ride outside of the laws. Other negative aspects of belonging to a motorcycle club that wears a two- or three-piece patch were acknowledged, such the time involved that centered on the club, the expenses entailed maintaining a motorcycle, and attending meetings and events. However, it was agreed that the positive aspects of being a club member outweighed the negative aspects. The support, camaraderie, feeling of family, and honor derived from membership made any unfavorable aspects tolerable.
Chapter 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

The literature reviewed suggests that there are various reasons for joining motorcycle clubs. Johnson (2008) noted that two of the reasons people joined motorcycle clubs were that some clubs offer reputation, and some clubs offer affiliation to the member; such as brotherhood and a sense of family, and Dulaney (2005), Dulaney (2006), and Wood (2003) said early motorcycle clubs were a means of being around people with similar interests and histories. Organized motorcycle clubs became more usual after World War II, as veterans rode motorcycles with other veterans to obtain release from their stress of coming home after the war (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). The motorcycle club perception was forever changed on July 4, 1947, the day a motorcycle event was held in Hollister, California. This was a Gypsy Tour American Motorcycle Association (AMA)-sanctioned race and was considered to be the premier motorcycle event of its time. Media coverage distorted the event, and the AMA distanced itself from some motorcycle clubs, and those motorcycle clubs dropped from the AMA. *Life* magazine did a small article on the event, using a staged photo of a drunken man sitting on his motorcycle drinking beer, with broken bottles at his feet, claiming there were four thousand members of a motorcycle club responsible for a melee in Hollister, thus blowing the event out of proportion (Dulaney, 2005; Dulaney, 2006; Wood, 2003). In its newspaper article on this story, the *San Francisco Chronicle* did not use photo imagery, but rather used written words to create an illustration of deviance,
such as “terrorism” and “pandemonium” to exaggerate the event (Reynolds, 2000). This negative imagery by the media demonized the biking community and portrayed the biker as deviant outcast (McDonald-Walker, 2007). The negative imagery of the deviant biker appears to be in force today.

The findings in this study found that the members are harassed more when they are on their motorcycles by law enforcement agencies, and, because of their patches, they are stereotyped. That is, anyone who rode a motorcycle with patches on their vest was the same as “1%ers” and a gang member. Law enforcement perpetuates the myth that all motorcycle club members are the same. For example, the National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Association designates outlaw motorcycle clubs as gangs, and they cite five national motorcycle clubs in this category: the Bandidos [sic], Hells Angels, Mongols, Outlaws, and Sons of Silence, and they include their smaller support clubs in this category, which included 21 of the participants in this study. Also, outlaw motorcycle gangs and their support clubs are included in the terrorist category (U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council, 2004). These were just some of the negative cultural aspects of belonging to a motorcycle club, and there were other reasons that were on a different personal level.

Members interviewed agreed that riding a motorcycle, especially a Harley-Davidson, is expensive, and belonging to a club can be expensive. Belonging to a club also takes up a lot of the members’ time, and sometimes their families do not appreciate this time taken away from them. Although the members recognize these negative attributes of riding with a motorcycle club, they accept them and even try to change the
perceptions. For example, all of the motorcycle clubs interviewed supported their communities and held charitable events for them. There are, however, aspects of belonging to a motorcycle club that make the hassles, frustrations, and costs worthwhile, and that was summed us a brotherhood and sistership.

Brotherhood/sistership were terms used frequently by the participants in this study to explain their attachment and commitment to their club, which is their system of involvement. Motorcycle clubs are like other systems, in that, according to Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen (2010), other systems are involved in transactions, and there is interdependence between systems and their component parts, and power structure, roles, and communication patterns are the dynamic process of the system and members are influenced by transactions in the larger social environment. Motorcycle clubs members interviewed acknowledged the importance of communication, and in fact, one participant noted that his club “taught me that communication is by far the most important quality to possess. To convey your meaning and mind to another person is very important. Problems arise in mistranslation.” The concept of brotherhood/sistership also encompassed trust, honor, loyalty, support, and all wrapped around the clubs’ colors, which is something they chose to participate in. The clubs’ colors varied by club that was interviewed, and some members were two-piece patch holders, and some members were three-piece patch holders or those wishing to become three-piece patch holders. As Dulaney (2006) noted these club colors establish group-specific identities which denotes the hierarchical standing of the club. The participants interviewed associated club colors, not just their own club colors, with respect,
friendship, and community. The motivation for membership in this study was about relationships. At the events the researcher attended relationships being maintained were observed; that is, club members greeted each other from their own club with a hug, normally shoulder-to-shoulder, and greeted members from different clubs in the same manner. Mitchell (1969) said that the strength of relationships is indicated by the degree to which individuals honor obligations or forego personal costs to carry out obligations. This was true for motorcycle club members also. As one person put it “when one goes through the process (prospecting) of earning the right of passage (patch out) it’s an accomplishment no less than climbing Mount Everest. The hard work, the sweat, the blood, the sleepless nights and the time away from your loved one, it [is] a big sacrifice and it doesn’t come easy…” Another participant said “…it takes a great deal of time, effort, and commands a level of commitment that most are simply not capable of. It is not for everyone. It does say something about the man, tho [sic], mostly it says that he is a man of honor, worthy of trust and respect.” This trust and honor was reiterated throughout the interviews, as was the closeness of the membership and how they rely on each other for support. According to Putnam (1995) the more we connect with other people the more we trust them, and consequently the more we trust other people the more we connect with them. As more than one participant said, the club was family or like a family that you got to choose.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The study of motorcycle members’ experiences and motivations for joining a motorcycle club is important for social work because it is also the study of group
dynamics, social justice, culture, relationships, commitment, status, communication, conflict management, and powerful camaraderie. However, there is little scholarly work done on these subjects, and any of them would be useful as a study for social work.

**Implications for Future Research**

It is recommended that in future studies, as was the case in this study, that the researchers offer full disclosure about their endeavors and do not try to get information that is in any way covert. The motorcycle clubs’ members have a core value of respect, and to be anything other than respectful to them would produce a flawed study.

**Conclusion and Summary**

People join motorcycle clubs and stay in them for various reasons; however, there are robust connections and similarities to these motives, such as the gratification of brotherhood/sistership, camaraderie, member support, and the joy that comes with riding a motorcycle. In conjunction with the positive aspects of riding with a motorcycle club, are also some negative aspects, such as the time it takes to be in a formal club, the cost of riding a motorcycle, in particular a Harley-Davidson, law enforcement harassment, and societal negative perceptions. The researcher observed that members of motorcycle clubs are highly dedicated to their clubs and memberships, and they have certain core values that are intrinsic to the group, such as trust, honor, and respect, and they are passionate about these core values.
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research Entitled:

Exploring the Experiences of Men and Women Who Belong to a Motorcycle Club
that Wears a Three-Piece or Two-Piece Patch, and What Motivates Them to
Remain in these Clubs

Conducted by Rebecca Medina, MSW II Student
California State University, Sacramento
Division of Social Work

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Rebecca (Beki) Medina, a Masters student in the Social Work Division at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of men and women who belong to a motorcycle club who wear a three-piece or a two-piece patch, and what motivates them to remain in the club. This study is important because although there have been studies conducted on three-piece and two-piece patch motorcycle clubs, there are few studies performed on the members of these clubs. This study is also important because it will examine the group experience and bonds created by this experience, thereby giving insight to committed individuals of motorcycle clubs, their values and beliefs, and their culture.
You will be given a set of questions and will be asked to respond verbally to each question, and notes will be taken by the researcher which will be later compiled into a report.

There are minimal risks, and no risks are known to exist that would not exist ordinarily to participants.

Inducement for you to participate in this study is a free soft drink and snack.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential and anonymous. No individual names will be used, no identifiers will be used, nor will any club names be used. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. The data from this interview will be transcribed onto a stick drive only, not a hard drive, and after the report has been written and turned in to California State University, Sacramento, the notes will be destroyed by fire and the stick drive containing the data will be destroyed and observed by the researcher’s husband.

I understand that by answering the questions asked by the researcher I am agreeing to this interview.

Read to Participant by Rebecca A. Medina
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Participants in the Study Entitled:

Exploring the Experiences & Motivations of Motorcycle Club Members

Research Conducted by Rebecca Medina, MSW II Student,
California State University, Sacramento

Social Work Division

1. A lot of time and money is devoted to being a motorcycle club member. What is your reason for riding with a club as opposed to riding a motorcycle alone or with a group that does not wear a three-piece or two-piece patch?
2. Describe the meaning or unique characteristic of motorcycle clubs whose members wear two- or three-piece patch.
3. It has been stated that riding a Harley separates the men from the boys and it separates the men from women. Tell me your opinion of being a Harley rider/club member as it relates to your family life.
4. How does riding a Harley/belonging to a motorcycle club affect your personal life (other than your family life)?
5. The marketing for Harley Davidsons has been almost exclusively geared toward men. What are your thoughts on equality as far as riding a Harley goes?
6. Riding as a club member has evolved into its own subculture, and there is quite often a view that all three-piece patched-up motorcycle riders are of the same mold:
outlaws. What have been your experiences along this line, and do you ever try to change this view?

7. Motorcycle riders wearing a three-piece or two-piece patch may get noticed more than motorcycle riders who wear no patches. What does this club status mean to you?

8. Each club has some sort of status, and each individual has some sort of status. What does your status in your club mean to you on a personal level?

9. The ethnicity of motorcycle groups can vary and even change over time. Did the ethnicity of your group have a bearing on why you chose that particular group? Can you please explain?

10. The ages of club members can vary a great deal—from someone in their 20’s to someone in their 80’s with over 50 years of membership. What do you believe has inspired a person to remain an active member in a motorcycle club for so long?

11. Did you belong to any other clubs or organizations as a child or as an adult? Would you please explain the type of club or organization?

12. To get a better picture of a club member, would you please tell me the following information about yourself:

   a) Age
   b) Marital status
   c) Ethnic identity
   d) Children and ages, if applicable
   e) Grandchildren
   f) Usual type of employment
g) Retired or disabled
h) Annual household income
i) County of Residence
j) Education level achieved

13. Getting a club tattoo is a huge commitment. Can you see yourself getting a club tattoo, and if so, what would inspire you to do so?

14. If push came to shove would you put your club’s welfare above your personal welfare? For example, if your boss said to give up your club in order to keep your job, would you do that?

15. Not just anyone can join and maintain membership in a three-piece or two-piece patch motorcycle club. Is there a level of support with the group that you feel you receive that you would not receive if you were not a member?

16. In order for an organization to remain effective and cohesive it has to have good communication. What has being a member of a motorcycle club taught you about communication?

17. An organization also has to have strong and trustworthy leadership. What has being a club member of a motorcycle group taught you about leadership?

18. Life in general can be stressful, and people have different ways of coping. What is your socially acceptable “go-to” stress reliever?

19. Would there be an occasion you would use a professional therapist or counselor if you were overwhelmed by stress, anxiety, or depression? Please explain.
20. It takes a great deal of skill and awareness to ride a motorcycle. If you were not able to ride your Harley any more, how would this affect your club enthusiasm?

21. Is there anything you would like to add that I may have not asked that would better explain your interest in belonging to a club that wears a three-piece or two-piece patch?

Thank you for your participation in this study.
APPENDIX C

Referral List

Researcher: Rebecca A. Medina

Study: Exploring the Experiences & Motivations of Motorcycle Club Members

Referral List to be given to Participants:

- Tuolumne County Behavioral Health: (209) 533-7000
- Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services: 1-(888) 376-6246
- San Joaquin County Mental Health Services, Crisis Clinic: (209) 468-8686
- Santa Clara County Mental Health Department: 1-(800) 704-0900
- Calaveras County Mental Health Program: (209) 754-6525
- Calaveras County Crisis Number: (209) 754-3239
- Amador County Behavioral Health: 1-(888) 310-6555
- Contra Costa Health Services, Mental Health Division: (925) 957-5150
References


Parks, R. E. (1924). The concept of social distance as applied to the study of racial attitudes and racial relations. *Journal of Applied Sociology, 8*, 339-344.


