

Leisurely Motorcycle Riding: A Phenomenological study of the psychology of leisurely motorcycle riding.

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Abstract

Empirical psychological research has focused studies on helmet usage, the effects of traumatic head injuries, or correlative relationships between riding deaths and helmet laws. What is possibly the first

empirically-based investigation of the psychology of leisurely motorcycle riding; this study establishes a new focus on motorcycle riding. It is rooted in understanding a framework of psychological themes experienced during leisurely riding using a transcendental-phenomenological method. The leisurely riding experience is understood through rich dialogue. The universal themes are analyzed using common domains of psychology. The analysis provides a new understanding of the psychology of motorcycle riding. The final results open avenues for future investigation, such areas as therapeutic riding; reduction of PTSD symptoms, and cognitive/personality traits of riders.

Key Words: Motorcycle; psychology; leisure

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Introduction

The Journal of Motorcycle studies provides one heuristic publication of the influence of motorcycling and sociology in a learning program. Additionally, there are limited studies examining the sociological constraints of leisurely participation and motorcycle riding (Auster, 2001). Heuristic understandings are beneficial to psychology (Gigerenzer, 1991; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2003). However, beyond non-empirical heuristic publications there is an absence of empirical understanding of the psychology of motorcycle riding as a leisure activity.

Motorcycle riding is defined loosely in academia as a leisure activity. On the commercial front, it is marketed as *a way of life* (Strutter, 2010). The field of psychology has focused empirical studies on helmet usage, the effects of traumatic head injuries, and/or correlative relationships between riding deaths and helmet laws (*see* Lin, Tsauo, Hwang, Chen, Tsai, & Chiu, 2004; Houston & Richardson, 2007; Mertz & Weiss, 2008). This study seeks to establish a new dimension of understanding motorcycle riding. Given the lack of available empirical knowledge this study is rooted in understanding the psychological themes of leisurely riding through a phenomenological process.

Qualitative Objectives

This study contributes a new understanding of the individual psychological experience as experienced by cruiser (non-street bikes) riders. Phenomenological studies capture an understanding of shared human experiences (Creswell, 2003). Understanding general psychological themes of riding experience may open the door for further investigation. Such information may help researchers, clinicians, and others better understand motorcycle riders.

The key terms for this study are leisurely and motorcycle. Motorcycle-riding is rather self-explanatory; however, the sample group, and thus term, would be limited to non-commuting riding on cruisers. Cruisers are most commonly associated with Harleys. However, there are other brands of cruisers, all of which have been accepted in this study. Street bikes, such as Ducati, were not included with this specific study.

The reference to non-commuter is necessary to capture the leisurely aspect of riding (see Methods section for further clarification). Every-day riding experiences ought to be subject of a different study.

However, this is not to say riders who commute to work have been excluded. Instead, this investigation focuses on understanding leisurely riding.

Leisure

Leisure has become recognized as a method to control and overcome traumatic emotional experiences (Iwasaki, MacKay, MacTavish, Ristock, & Bartlett 2006; Schneider & WilhelmStanis, 2007) including stressors associated with negative life events (Hutchinson, Loy, Kleiber, & Dattilo, 2002). Leisure lifestyle can relate the marketing of riding as a lifestyle in that it includes activities people express themselves through (Arai, Griffin, Miatello, Greig, 2008). Leisure additionally has been described as pleasant experiences intrinsically motivated and often optional, autonomous, and self-involving (Hood & Carruthers, 2007).

The nature of riding, however, presents both autonomous and group participation in simultaneous situations. Decloe, Kaczynski, and Havitz (2009) report in one investigation that approximately 1/3 of participants studied engaged in leisurely activity alone. While riding is a process between one individual and a mechanized vehicle, there is the opportunity for passengers and group rides as well. Therefore, questions asked related to participants' descriptions of what their leisurely riding experience helps provide an understanding if psychological domains of leisure riding tend to be autonomous, group, or a combination thereof.

Studies examining motivations, or need, theories for leisure are based upon five common themes. "Classical theories basically center around five main explanations: catharsis, compensation, surplus energy, relaxation and task generalization. Each of these theories purports to predict or explain motivation for leisure behavior," (Witt & Bishop, 2009, p. 337). Witt and Bishop focused on highlighting motivations for seeking leisurely experiences. However, motorcycle riding does not appear easily associated with their descriptions. Therefore, establishing an understanding for motivation to ride was a foundational question in this investigation to better relate to these established findings.

Furthermore, the expression and performance of individuals has been a well documented aspect of physical leisurely experiences. Jackson and Eklund (2002) describe situations of optimal physical performance, or flow, as "those moments when everything comes together for the performer" (p. 133). Such experiences are documented to enhance self-esteem and continued participation (Stein, Kimiecik,

Daniels, & Jackson, 1995). Questions for this study were built with the objective of encouraging dialogue related to self-reflection or awareness that occurs when riding to better understand the relationship to leisurely experiences. To this end, a naturalistic approach in the interview process was developed around the following description of leisure: a pleasant, motivated and physical activity fostering self-reflection or self-achievement through autonomous or group experiences.

Methodological Summary

The roots of research methods can be traced to the debates of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Socrates. Empiricists, such as Aristotle and more recently Locke, believed that understanding could only be obtained through strict observation and perception of events (Hunt, 2008). On the other hand, philosophers such as Socrates and Descartes' believed that through rational logical inquiry could the mind and world be understood (Sternberg, 2009). There are benefits and weakness to each. Ultimately, Kant recognized that each method has its purpose at certain times and in certain conditions. While a debate continues as to which process is better – the development of theory through qualitative method, or the empirical testing to determine accuracy of hypothesis to develop theory – they both serve as effective tools in psychology. The following section recognizes the uncommon use of qualitative inquiry in psychology; therefore, more substantive explanation is provided regarding the methodological process for opportunity for replication of the study by others less familiar with qualitative methods.

Methodological description

In qualitative methods, substantial data is collected through observation, survey questions, researcher experience (heuristic design), and/or participant interviews (Creswell, 1998). The objective of phenomenological research is to capture and/or observe human experiences using thick, rich, and descriptive accounts provided by individuals having lived through such events (Creswell, 2003). This study establishes a preliminary understanding of the core experience of leisurely motorcycle riding and is follows principles of maximum variation (see Patton, 2003).

Transcendental studies, defined by Moustakas (1994), take a three-part approach to understanding human phenomenon. This structure follows a rigid pattern through epoch, transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation to capture an understanding of the *how* and *what* of a specific human experience. To this end, participants have been selected based on ownership and use of

cruiser motorcycle riding through personal and professional networking. Moreover, participant testimonies prior to analysis provide the thick and rich basis for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Study Process

Participants volunteered or recommend someone who might be interested in this study. Creswell (2003) indicates that sample groups for a phenomenological study can range from 6 to 10 participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a point of redundancy (saturation) is an ideal target for researchers to select sample size. Six participants contributed to this study over a four month period. One-on-one interviews and journal/written entries provide the descriptions. Redundancy was identified using axial and spatial thematic coding of testimonies. An observation of half of the participants, while riding, was conducted by the researcher furthering understanding.

Data was collected using short interviews with participants using a naturalistic inquiry process (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sub-questions ensured proper dialogue, but the naturalistic approach focused on understanding each unique rider versus a general qualitative questioning processes. Some participants provided written reflections to help develop understanding between oral, written reflections, and observation. Because the subjective nature of leisurely activities reduces the ability for observation of the participants, limited emphasis is placed on observed findings.

Through this process tentative core qualities are presented. A textural process occurs where an illustration is portrayed without the essence of the actual experience (Patton, 2003). This creates a synergistic combination of the data. Interpretation of the experiences occurs by merging oral and written testimonies based on coded core qualities. In a few instances this is supported with textural comments from literary arts.

Minor literary references are incorporated into the thematic coding process. Polkinghorne (1989) indicates that information from literary or artistic experiential situations can provide value in a phenomenological study. This information serves as a guide to creating a relationship between themes in literature and emerging experience described by participants. This provides a natural link between the experiences of actual riders with the descriptions found in literary arts and non-psychological studies.

Psychological domains link core qualities through the analytical process. The first step of analysis in a phenomenological analysis is epoch (Patton, 2003). This is an on-going analytical process requiring the

investigator to consider the material without bias. A heuristic bracketing of the researchers intense experience with the phenomenon was completed to respect this process (omitted from this publication).

The second step is equal value analysis; or, horizontal analysis. Recurring themes are describe based on how and what disciplines psychology help create a relationship between the themes. This is consistent with Douglass' description of identifying invariant themes (see Patton, 2003). The final result of the analysis is a more specific understanding of the psychological domains of leisurely riding experiences.

In the final section, the study is evaluated in relationship to leisure studies and methodological improvements and new opportunities for empirical study. It is important to remember the phenomenological studies provide high-level understanding to be used as frame-work for more specific qualitative and quantitative investigation. Consequently, broad psychological disciplines are applied to the testimonies.

Findings

This section identifies key qualities discovered through the phenomenological process. Namely, core qualities of the riding experience will be established. This information is synthesized into general psychological themes in the next section before the concluding evaluation of the study. Core qualities provide universal structure that defines an experience (see Mustakas, 1994). Therefore, the following general qualities are listed regarding the common characteristics of leisurely riding: Sound of the pipes, community, and loss of thoughts, union of mechanized bike and rider, destination, heightened sensory awareness, relaxation/problem resolution, and the "feeling."

Sound of pipes

Motorcycles are notorious for the noise and sounds made by pipes. The participants commonly noted this in their assessment of leisurely riding experiences. John L. (age 29; fire-fighter; custom bike shop owner) states the most memorable aspect of wanting to learn to ride was "how loud and amazing the pipes sounded." While Chris L. (age 30; salesman; lifelong rider) describes the impact of pipes as influential to "feeling the sound, the thunder, the power... [of the ride]." Andy S. (32; doctoral learner in education) notes how "...Its exciting... there is definitely a relationship between the noise [and riding]." Chris C. (29; Ex-combat Veteran; sales professional) describes how "once the bike is started I enjoy listening to the motor warm up and the pipes open up... [at times I] accelerate hard a few times just to hear

the motor...” The sound of the pipes is considered further in relationship to physiological section of the analysis.

Commitment

Bikers have a strong sense of connection with their bikes. Commitment is expressed in various forms. Neil N. (32; real estate IT manager; new rider) describes riding as “a dream come true...I go out on my bike every chance I have.” For John L. riding involves a mechanical relationship with his bike, too. “At the end of the day, I just love it. I would never give my bike up,” says Chris L. “I tell my wife every week ‘I love my bike’... There is no way I will give up my bike...” says Andy S.

The commitment to the riding experience in the testimonies gives way to the actual experience of riding. “There was a time a few years ago where I was without a bike for the first time since in was 15. I really didn’t think I missed it... when I purchased another one and after my first ride I was really surprised how much I missed it and what it did for me,” writes Jimmy N. (+40; Electrical Engineer/PM; multiple Harley owner). In other words, riders feel a sense of belonging not only to their unique personal desires to ride but also to the machine they chose to operate. This quality is related to the next frequently saturated theme of the leisurely riding experience.

Union of mechanized bike and rider -

“The common part of every ride is that it is you and the bike... It’s just you and that machine,” Chris L. While Neil N. describes a leisurely ride as process “almost becoming one with the bike and events around you, you respond naturally [together]... There is no detaching yourself, your fully engulfed in keeping the rubber-side of the bike down.” It goes deeper, however, the connection: “it’s the mechanical aspect of feeling and fixing and knowing your bike....” states John L.

Chris L. further describes, before you become one with the machine, “you feel her out – am I pushing her to ride? Is she easing into the ride? Is she running rich? Before you know it, it is as though you and the machine are one. There are no more questions, just one sense of being.” Or as Andy describes the experience, “...when I go around windy turns I feel one with it, but when your really leaning into a turn and hugging that bike you feel one not like your just riding something...you feel, see, and hear all at the same time - that can not be created by anything but being on that bike.” Jimmy N. further clarifies the

experiences as being, “Utter oneness with you that provides an incredible recharging of the soul, mind and body that can’t really be explained but needs to be experienced.”

The experiences described by participants of these first two qualities lend themselves to understanding the physical ride. In a sense the descriptions suggest that the immediate exposure to the bike is similar to emotions such as love. While this is a complex reality, the participants indicate frequently that their commitment to their bike creates a dynamic interdependent relationship between individual and machine. The two acting as a single unit in a leisurely ride offers insights into the experience of a specific ride. As literature describes, the rider and bike combine as if an “Organic machine” (Sutherland, 2006) with their de-mechanical ride on “steel horses” – Bon Jovi.

Community of individuals-

Pierce, citing Brown (2006), quotes riding as an experience whereby on “a bike you are in the movie, not just watching it” (p. 10). “I like going alone but it is more fun with a few couple of guys in a group,” says Neil N. Community is summarized by participants through riding as well as the relationship with one’s self. In other words, the leisurely ride allows one “to reconnect in life... with the road, with life, with those you are riding with, to enjoy the weather and deal with the elements. I almost always ride with others... It kind of connects me... not only to nature through a motorized bike, but the history of us who ride... [and] the expansion of small towns... you miss it unless your on a motorcycle...,” says John L. “Personal motivators are always a part of life...to be with friends... [but] the first things that hits me is the people wondering who is this guy driving through their streets, their life... wondering is he the anti-Christ. I mean I like being that piece of horrible in other peoples’ minds..,” describes Chris L.

In other words, riding evokes social community reactions in both riders and observers. “It kind of connects me... connects me not only to nature through a motorized bike, but the history of us who ride... as far as the expansion of small times and the back roads you miss it...” says John L. In observed ridings participants each dawned unique head bandanas, leathers, face coverings (such as bandanas or masks). “There might be misconceptions. People think you must be a bad ass but when you get to know a rider you know that’s not usually the case. I feel like they stereotype us, though I don’t think most fit that,” says Andy. Empirical observation of participants leads one to see riders operating autonomously yet switching lanes, turning, and avoiding obstacles I unplanned synchrony while riding in groups. Andy S. provides a

comprehensive reflection capturing saturated comments from other participants about the unique leisurely aspect of riding as both autonomous while also a social experience:

One of the great things is that when you first get on a bike there is an immediate feeling of brotherhood. Everyone waves at you... specially others on cruisers. There is a sense of community... you feel acceptance because there are others like you there. I mean who doesn't like that? Feeling like others but being a lone rider. But when you get to a place with bikes and put your bike there in line you feel different than everyone else but connected to them. Because you are different – because you ride. [Riders] typically have helmets leathers and even though you look alike your all different. – Andy S.

Destination (unknown/destination unimportant)

The riding experience is defined by the ride and not typically by a pre-planned destination:

Walk[ing] outside... grab the gear (helmet, coat, gloves & water bottle) start it up to warm up and determine what direction to go. [I] have a couple of routes that are anywhere from 25mile to 250 mile runs depending on the day and time allotted. Most all involve trips up the pass or along the water along roads with [a lot] of corners and are mostly quiet back roads with little to no traffic. Destination isn't the key just enjoying the journey. – Jimmy N.

A weekend ride – I typically take back roads without traffic... with windy roads so I can lean into it a bit. A leisurely ride usually takes an hour or two. It's about the ride, and we tend to go to places out there a bit. I really like it is really back country. Little to no traffic, the roads are windy, less houses, more country atmosphere... in fact they all have that... one lane each way roads, slower than main highways, a lot more speed up and slow down, winding, and more feeling of the bike than a straight road.” - Andy.

Riding is about jumping on your bike in the afternoon and just taking off. Maybe you ride to a pub, maybe not anywhere... On my last ride I started the day thinking I need to ride... I left my house... I headed north through side streets and neighborhoods anywhere I could go that wasn't a mainstream of life... Each experience and road is different. Sometimes I choose to ride the road I know then I can focus on other issues at hand other than riding. Other times I don't want to focus on them so I ride roads I don't know – Chris L.

For me, a leisurely ride is like a day like this... [Partially sunny low seventies] in jeans and cruis[ing] the back road... and go to a small town and grab a burger and some beers... yeah that's my kind of leisurely ride. Destination is always optional... I did that the other weekend... hoped on and just went I just kind of went. I would say destination is usually unknown. – Niel.

Most of the time I have a goal to end up somewhere but we avoid the freeway at all costs... back roads when possible... I like to get away... I like the back roads, the best leisure ride is not running into anyone. It is just you and the bike and the elements, if something goes wrong its just up to you. It makes you appreciate more all that is out there. – John.

The riders' descriptions are suggestive of a type of disassociation from regular, busy, and well-traveled roads and life situations. In a sense they describe a ride not by where they end up, but by the process of removing themselves from the complexities of suburban or urban living. Placing themselves into rural settings whereby they may or may not have a specific end in mind for the physical trip. This quality is related to several additional themes. As Chris C. describes, "...relaxed ride where I am not speeding or trying to pass vehicles. I would be simply cruising and enjoying the scenery.... Where I wasn't concerned

about bad traffic conditions, or worries/concerns in life.... when I get back I think about the fun I had..." It is important to note that not one rider described a specific personal needs for an escape or removal from reality, but that the ride provided for such disassociation from general life situations, chores, or mundane conditions. This is considered in more depth in the analysis section.

Heightened sensory awareness

The riders all referenced the influence upon senses. Jimmy N. recounts how leisurely riding requires "...a heightened awareness of what's going around you... [causing] other worries and concerns of the day to drift away even if only for a short while." As Chris C. describes, "... just focus[ing] on riding. It helps me focus my attention and also gives me a chance to slow my mind to enjoy things around me." He goes on to describe how riding forces awareness for safety causing thoughts and concerns to be blocked by the massive influence of sensory stimulus. The integration of loss of thoughts, relaxation, (both explored next) is integrated with several testimonies of heightened sensory awareness:

Enjoy the weather and deal with the elements... scents, smells, the cold spots that you never realize exist when your in a car, your just conscious of why and what's around you, but then other times the elements give you a shiver then when you get back into the sun you feel everything... I mean you feel all of life through your senses... that's why when you ride, especially a really long ride, your waxed... you've taken in so much... - John L.

It [the mind] wanders but takes it all in. You feel like people are looking at you. There might be misconceptions. People think you must be a bad ass but when you get to know a rider you know that's not usually the case. I feel like they stereotype us, though I don't think most fit that. - Andy S.

There is no detaching yourself, your fully engulfed in keeping the rubber-side of the bike down. you don't really have to think about it, but it just happens.. the road, letting go of your thoughts, the process on a bike... you are so involved in the process that you become one with it all to stay alive and sometimes eventually problems at home or work seem easy to resolve. It helps not specifically thinking about everything else because your senses are so in tune with everything else around you.... Neil N.

The participants each individually identified the influence of various senses. In nearly every interview the weather's influence and temperature changes were referenced. In others, breathing, and visual awareness to the safety risks such as noises, road conditions, and other vehicles were also referenced but not nearly to a point of clear saturation. Each, however, directed such comments toward an additional quality resulting from the sensory overload: loss of thoughts.

Loss of thoughts -

"...And your mind wanders" – Bob Segar (*Turn the Page*). The categorical themes presented thus far have been structured not in order of priority or frequency (all achieved levels of saturation), but in

relationship to the process of riding and the naturalistic dialogue associated with exploring the topic (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This category starts a process of interconnecting various qualities thus far. John L. describes riding as “a way of losing your self and of connecting with yourself. It’s a way to leave your worries behind. You just leave it all behind.” While Jimmy N. further describes this experience as, “Being so focused on the task at hand and allowing your mind to free it self of other concerns opens up thoughts and feelings that are there but cluttered due to daily requirements and obligations. Just a simple relaxing ride (meaning not commuting in traffic)...” Chris C. describes a similar experience, “[it] allows me to think about my concerns in a slower more organized way. I’m forced to balance my attention between riding the bike and what is on my mind.”

Other rich descriptions were provided:

It is a time not to think... to take your mind off of stuff... to control your destiny and unknown’s... though it’s not totally in control, it is so different than a car where you are confined. When you get on a bike you control – do I put on a helmet, leathers, a shirt... you define your life at that moment against the elements how you choose to define... When on a cruiser it is not about fear or speed or challenge... it is about you, the machine, the comfort of riding, the experience.... I think that riding a chopper or crotch rocket draws adrenaline and fear but a cruiser is about being out there to let your mind wander and let life wander. The others require so much effort it takes all of your attention and you have to put so much energy into riding and become one whereas with a cruiser you become one very easily by relaxing and letting life run. – Chris L.

Sometimes ideas seem to be solved without thinking. I tend to live in my head and think too much... its my analytical mind. So when I can shut the brain off, things and thoughts just work things out. As soon as you shut off the conscious mind, the unconscious seems to figure out the abstract better, like when you sleep. At least for me, when I have things on my mind. I just hop on the bike and I am so involved with the process I have to shove out the conscious thoughts. And then when a thought does pop into my head it is more clear... I think that’s why it becomes reflective for me when I don’t have to actually reflect. Any excuse I have to get on the bike I go, other than rush hour times.... - Neil N

You think but you don’t think. You have to be aware because people know but don’t care you are there. So you don’t really zone out, you almost become one with everything around you ... you don’t have to think... Just pay attention but let your mind go... There is no detaching yourself, your fully engulfed in keeping the rubber-side of the bike down. You don’t really have to think about it, but it just happens.. the road, letting go of your thoughts, the process on a bike... - John L.

I sit down on the bike I automatically feel different. Whatever stress was going on that week it goes away. I’m sure other guys would say the same. That feeling is kind of the stress melting away,” says Andy. Participants each recounted how leisurely riding leads to a shutting off of the active “mind”. But, the mind is not totally blank according to the interviews. The riders often described this process simultaneously identifying another saturated concept: the influence of sensory stimulus, which seem to take over. – Andy S.

Relaxation and problem resolution

Relaxation and problem solving were a redundant theme richly describes by the participants:

When you are on a bike (verses being in a car) you get hypersensitive to your surroundings, noises, outside temp, other drivers, road condition (pot holes, gravel and so on) the world around you and the moment. It allows your mind and body to focus on so many different stimuli the normally experienced during the day that (just a guess here) that a different part of the brain engages allowing the rest to be idle and thus allowing for more deeper or free thought on other stuff. – Jimmy N.

I just find a quiet back country road and just ride. On the back country road I like to push the bike through sweeping corners, slow down on the straights and take time to smell the air and look at the scenery. I tend to forget about my concerns for a while... Just being able to relax and listen to the sound of the motorcycle, the smell in the air, the people around me, and the feeling of being free. – Chris C.

When I first get on my bike it is more relaxation. My mind kinds of wanders anyway... it's a little bit reflective on the day or whatever is going on in my life. It goes from man this is awesome to hey look at the scenery; I don't seem to think on one thing at one time... it cleared my mind. I thought about the new adventures in life that I am taking – having a kid and committing to a new relationship. And it was refreshing. The moment you stop you enter real life again until you fire that bike up and away you go into your own world again. And sometimes you need an escape from personal issues to channel the energy from it. – Andy S.

It's a way of losing your self and of connecting with yourself. It's a way to leave your worries behind.... Riding recharges your batteries... it connects you with what is out there.... It is being connected and whether I choose to or not think about things on my mind... there is a whole other side where you ride for a week every day when you have nothing but yourself.... It is almost like therapy... the vibrations play a part and you become relaxed and there's nothing but you and the roads... you really think about everything... about yourself.... You lose yourself and not worry, but you seem to find different angles on issues in life – John L.

On the bike and enjoy the weather and you don't have to worry about the dog, or chores, or responsibilities, you don't have to worry about what the wife is doing... I just go... mean the road and nothing else.... You are so involved in the process that you become one with it all to stay alive and sometimes eventually problems at home or work seem easy to resolve. It helps not specifically thinking about everything else because your senses are so in tune with everything else around you.... – Neil N.

The freedom away from everyone else. In sports there is someone to depend on and others depending on you but when you ride it is just you and your machine.... It is a way of being bigger.... After ten or fifteen miles you relax and re-enter your mind again. And then ah... and then it allows you to bring what you want forward. It's like a form of therapy in that maybe I've got something personal to think about... - Chris L.

In summary, riding “allows oneself to freely think without the distractions and ideas, solutions and

options flow easier...to get back to center that is recharging and rejuvenating all at the same time,” writes Jimmy. In a sense the information above accounts for a how the leisurely riding experience leads to a harmony of thoughts through relaxation. Thus far, participants have created a vivid picture whereby a unique interdependent dynamic exists between a rider and the machine. This relationship very immediately heightens senses and awareness in terms of gearing for the ride, riding preparation and even starting the motorcycles.

Through this the rider and machine engage in an interdependent process of communicating the organic components of the machine versus the automatic sensory awareness of the rider in a complex

process of creating a symbiotic relationship. This dynamic relationship seemingly creates a relationship between the two independent objects. The sensory stimuli influences mental blocking of day-to-day worries and the ability for thoughts to explore personal feelings and situations both consciously and unconsciously based on the thick description that participants think without thinking. It should be noted every rider specifically described this process as being unachievable in a car. The result of the various qualities thus far presented lead to the most saturated theme: the feeling.

The Feeling

Definitely I prefer cruisers. Street bikes are fast and high performance. But, to get what I call the 'feeling' on a street bike you have to be riding very fast... to get that feeling... of being one with the bike and road. But with a cruiser you get that feeling anytime, at any speed. Riding a racing bike I feel I have to have a full face helmet and that takes away from the feeling... of the elements but I never have to on a cruiser.... *Recharging*. - John L.

It is definitely not safe... it is fun... It's a dream come true.... (Participant's eyes light up; edt. added) – Neil N.

One word *Freedom*... Utter oneness with yourself that provides an incredible *recharging* of the soul, mind and body that can't really be explained but needs to be experienced. – Jimmy N.

...the independence it brings... and the feeling of being free. – Chris C.

Refreshing. My biggest thing is keep the rubber side down and love what you do... loving life and appreciating life and appreciating you are who you are and go be that person – that's the motorcycle life. At the end of the day you are who you are and just love it. – Chris L

It's the ride along the way. It's the way the bike feels, the way the wind feels, the excitement and release of stress ...It definitely *recharges* and *refuels* you. When I ride and I feel like, 'how am I going to make it another day,' but then I get on a ride and it really does make you *recharge*... Motorcycles are the embodiment of freedom... it leads to that rush. But words can't describe the feeling – Andy S.

The feeling described by the riders in a sense provides a culmination of the various qualities. The participants all referenced the feeling by but from various perspectives of the leisurely ride. In other words, it maintained an equal level of importance as the other qualities. However, the continual reference to the feeling tied to many aspects of the other qualities. This will be considered further in the analysis.

Evaluation and Conclusion

This study presents a portrait of how individuals experience leisurely motorcycle riding. Various themes emerged common of phenomenological study proving understanding of what psychological disciplines are present in riding experience. Drawing from these experiences, indications of what psychological disciplines are related to the leisurely riding experience are established through the analysis.

Now with a more specific understanding of the riding experience, formal theory can be crafted and tested around specific disciplines of psychology and leisurely riding.

In other words, the study provides general descriptions encompassing multiple facets of psychology and leisure theory. One next step would be more rigid qualitative investigation through a grounded methodology. Such an approach would provide data to enhance a specific theory of leisurely riding. For example, through the naturalistic process little specific information was obtained regarding the personal motivations to ride beyond what can be summarized as a desired end-state of mind. Given the absence of a specific index for measuring motivation related to riding, a grounded approach might provide a starting point for the establishment of such an index to better understand those primary personal motivations.

This study was not specific to any population. However, nearly every individual described a sense of therapy or relaxation associated with a leisurely ride. More in depth analysis through structured questions would have help to better understand the therapeutic experience. A phenomenological process is weakened by its broad approach to provide an overall portrait of a human experience. A more specific population study may help link concepts such as use of motorcycle riding as a form of leisurely therapy. This may have implications for populations such as PTSD patients (see Griffin, 2005).

One unique participant to this study presents a further opportunity for exploration into the relationship of riding, PTSD and therapy. Specifically, retired combat veteran Chris C. recounted the struggle of returning home from multiple duties over seas in combat zones until his military commission expired. "I returned home from war again and two weeks later I was out of a job. I had to find my own way back into civilian life for the first time since college. Man, I rode a lot. Just to think and to find a way to relax. It's been a struggle..." This study provides a basis for what occurs in a leisurely riding experience. It has also provided a basis for what psychological disciplines are related to such experiences. Future study ought to consider a more specific population to explore an understanding of experiences such as what Chris C. described. Such an understanding could provide more opportunity for various approaches to better understanding motorcycle riding as therapeutic tool for combat veterans.

Establishing additional empirical research on the use of riding as a therapy could provide beneficial understanding to clinicians. Haskell (2003) describes traumatic events that continue to "exert a

negative effect on thinking... feeling... and behavior long after the event is in the past" (p. 113).

Furthermore, future investigation may also result in more specific recoding of the presented themes in a manner consistent with Griffin's (2005) investigation of leisure and trauma defined earlier. However, leisure may also be a source for repressing and projecting negative feelings, destructive behavior, and thoughts of worthlessness through seemingly healthy activity (Arai, Griffin, Miatello, & Greig, 2008). This study provides a framework to investigate further understanding of the potential duality – positive and negative affective behavior – of riding. Such information may reveal valuable connections for understanding and using riding as positive tool for clients' requiring therapy to overcome negative-affective or traumatic experiences.

Another improvement would be to interview female riders. While women were not intentionally excluded from this experience, an opportunity exists to compare results. This would provide a multi-layered understanding of the experience common to both sexes. Such information may result in an alteration of core themes based on a more holistic understanding of the experience. However, it also leads to rather interesting connections between the existing core qualities and psychology.

An interesting phenomenon was captured by the riders' use of gender-based comments. The reference to a mechanized machine frequently occurred in favor of feminine diction. This supports both core qualities: connection and union with mechanized machine. However, it was not raised to a level of saturation. Moreover, with the absence of female riders being interviewed and the naturalistic interview approach, this occurrence is best addressed for future improvement and research in the following paragraphs as several considerations are currently of great interest in psychological research.

From a psychological perspective these statements could relate to projection of a sexual/organic quality to a non-living being. Freudian theory could be explored in relationship to the relevance of the sexual element of the pleasure principle. While Jungian scholars might seek to investigate the intrinsic earthly connection individual's unconscious male and female personality influences; in this case with male riders, the great mother.

In other words, Jungian theory might suggest the riders possess a feminine side. As we create a bond with the machine through an emotional experience (aptly noted by the participants) the masculine-side would project the feminine out from within and onto the newly established *connection/union*.

Conversely, social psychologists might argue it is a result of mental awareness of control over a "lesser" being. Put another way, the may not stem from a deeper psycho analytical factor but sociological and evolutionary tendencies built within humans (evolutionary social psychology) to cause man to feel power over woman.

It has been generally accepted that men and women differ very much in relationship to expression of anger. In cases of love and infidelity, there are also general differences in that women develop anxiety over men cheating emotionally; whereas men fear physical cheating more than emotional cheating (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Lim, & Hasegawa, 1999). Other studies identify that gender interpretation of sex versus sexual-emotional and the interrelationship between the two constructs causes differences; thus the gender influence (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996). More recent research has investigated the gender difference that is measured in social psychology. A recent study controlling for both gender and situation demonstrates that applied qualitative meanings of is statistically more significant than the gender differences typically demonstrated (Cann, Mangum, & Wells, 2001). The same application of cognitive measurements of applied contextual meaning has also been shown relevant to personality psychology and not just social psychology.

Hyde (2005) presents a gender hypothesis suggesting in relationship to self-esteem that men and women are virtually the same (Bandura, 1994). According to Hyde, effect values of self-esteem measurements indicating men suffer from self-esteem less than women only slightly. This suggests that men at best are slightly less prone to low-self esteem than women. This does not diminish gender-theory, but highlights that men and women are very similar in many regards. The following example notes the difficulty in measuring true causal relationships in psychology

Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2009) further argue the relevance of understanding the differences between sexes both qualitatively and quantitatively as best practiced in testing methods. Ultimately, further investigation of riding separate from leisure but specific to psychological theories could be built from the new understanding of the riders experiences that provide valuable insights to ongoing investigations. The answer to the phenomenon in this situation must be subject to far more rigid dialogue and surveys. For example, comparing personality types to frequencies of gender-based statements could be potentially established to test a hypothesis that the diction is personality driven based on domains of personality or

personality types. It could also be tested by using a survey method to establish frequency of results for whether its just chance that the diction is used. For example, would feminine statements such as I prefer riding my bike leisurely because I like how she handles score higher versus I like how he handles.

An improvement to this study could also occur through the participation of an additional researcher to cross-check the core qualities. While proper coding and processes are followed through this study, secondary analysis of the results could yield additional aspects of psychology that are present in the leisurely riding experience. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of a multitude of non-empirical (heuristic) publications about motorcycle riding could provide a more comprehensive and detailed description of the riding experience beyond these participants. In other words, through a meta-analysis of non-study based descriptions, further context could be created around the specific psychological themes that emerged from the data collected in this study without the extensive interview process of qualitative measures.

Finally, given the vast multiple dimensions presented in the context of this study, future investigation in a multidimensional manner would be helpful. For example, *adrenaline* or *rush* never reached levels close to saturation in the testimonies. However, these might be common assumptions of riding experiences. Cross comparisons between riders and surveys could provide rather interesting and valuable information about the perceptions of both riders and non-riders regarding motivations for leisurely riding. Moreover, it could serve to develop more accurate components of leisurely riding as it relates to clinical needs by comparing data coding with surveyed results from multiple riders through a quantitative analysis of the coded themes.

In summary, this appears to be the first step toward understanding the psychology of a leisurely motorcycle ride. The experience of riding cruisers conforms to multiple aspects of definitions related to leisurely activity. Moreover, the nature of the experience presents several possible aspects of psychology that may influence interaction between psychologists and patients who ride. At minimum, the study provides further evidence of the need for thick, rich, and multidimensional understanding of psychological processes within human experiences.

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