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Interpreting Motorcycling Through its Embodiment in Life Story Narratives

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With the increasing goal of contemporary consumer research to understand the actual life experiences of consumers, the need for more qualitative approaches becomes essential in acquiring data and answering questions typically overlooked by traditional quantitative-based techniques. Therefore, the use of detailed open-ended interviewing and the collection of narratives are proposed in opposition to positivist social science. Motorcyclist life story narratives are explored in demonstrating how narrative approaches assist in understanding voluntary risk-taking. The paper's findings suggest a positive outlook for the high-risk performer, rather than possessing a stable or fixed 'risk-taking personality type,' participants are seen as culturally informed actors. The manner by which motorcyclists engage with their activity in an ongoing reflexive manner offers an opportunity for those wishing to promote alternative aspirations for motorcyclists. Therefore, marketing campaigns can encourage participants' to focus on competence, wisdom and safety rather than excitement, performance and speed.

Introduction

The study aims to understand voluntary risk-taking through its embodiment in motorcycling participants' life story narratives. Traditionally, quantitative studies have suggested an essentialist view of the high-risk performer, having a biologically pre-determined, underlying identity which causes participants to engage with their chosen activity in a consistent, determined manner such as Freud (1925) and Kretschmer (1936), or Balint's (1959) thrill seeking behaviour. However, perhaps such findings relying on more remote, empirical procedures are a consequence of chosen research methodology, as quantitative measures seldom portray the high-risk performers' actual life

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experiences. A more uplifting and optimistic outlook for the high-risk performer is depicted in studying voluntary risk-taking through its embodiment in life story narratives. Rather than possessing a stable or fixed 'risk-taking personality type,' as traditional studies have indicated, participants are seen as culturally informed actors, engaging in their chosen activity in an ongoing, reflexive manner.

The opportunity exists for marketing campaigners who aim to promote alternative aspirations for motorcyclists, to exploit a more dynamic portrayal of the high-risk performer in the context of rider education programmes emphasising the idea of the 'safe rider'. Participants can therefore be encouraged to approve of this perspective, focusing on competence, wisdom and safety rather than excitement, performance and speed. In line with a contemporary heightened concern for transformative consumer research (or TCR), the study's findings seek to improve human welfare and the quality of individual's lives.

The aim of the paper is to revisit traditional, quantitative methods in consumer research and to explore the need for more qualitative approaches in acquiring data and answering questions that cannot be answered through traditional quantitative-based techniques. The authors propose the use of detailed open-ended interviewing and the collection of narratives in opposition to traditional quantitative based studies as a goal of contemporary consumer research.

Traditional Quantitative Based Studies

Consumer behaviour and marketing are witnessing a reorientation in the study of consumer's experiences with a particular emphasis on transformative consumer research concerned with improving human welfare and the quality of individual lives. Traditionally however, marketing and consumer research has been impelled by the theoretical and substantive interest of academics that, taken up with reliability, validity and truthfulness, have left little room for the stories consumers have to tell of their own lives and experiences. Indeed, current UK government sponsored motorcycling related research, similarly reflects a deterministic view of voluntary risk-taking, with past behaviour used as the most consistent, strong and significant predictor of rider intentions (Anon. 2004). According to this perspective, riders who have engaged in particular behaviours in the past also are more likely to intend do so in the future.

Such studies therefore, suggest an essentialist view of the high-risk performer, having a fixed, underlying identity, which causes the participant to engage with their chosen activity in a consistent, determined manner. However, perhaps such findings are a consequence of research methodology,

as quantifiable measures seldom portray the high-risk performers' actual life experiences. In a typical 'objective', questionnaire process, participants are asked to respond to categories of pre-coded, fixed-choice survey instruments. Typically they are not directly consulted as standardized assessment protocols do not allow participants to characterize the experiences in their own terms, through their own stories. In objective assessment, participants are mainly passive objects of measurement if they participate at all. This often yields superficial findings as researchers are unable to understand participants' own representations of their worlds. Quantifiable methods may not sufficiently represent the participants' experiences as when participants are given the opportunity to discuss their lives in their own words, accounts can be strikingly different (Gubrium and Holstein 1995).

Departing from traditional methods for understanding consumers, interpretivists seek to develop insights and perspectives that are impossible through positivistic, quantitative type approaches such as Fishbein's (1983) study of attitudes. In order to understand participants' own lives, interpretive practice focuses on the activities through which people understand, organize, and represent experience. An interpretivist perspective assumes that the individual's experiences do not submit to experimental, statistical, comparative, or causal control and manipulation. Such an approach is emic or idiographic, which means that every interactional text is unique and shaped by the individuals who create it. Thus interpretivists seek to study experience from within, capturing the meanings and experiences of individuals.

If we aggregate people, treating diversity as error variance, in search for what is common to all, we often learn about what is true of no-one in particular.

(Josselson and Lieblich 1995 p.32).

Leiblich, Rivka, and Zilber (1998) argue that interpretivists, rather than seeking validity, are concerned with listening to what participants have to say. Respondent's accounts in which they have their own authoritative stories to tell, are treated as actively constituting, rather than just reflecting, the realities of their worlds. Contemporary interpretivists such as Riessman (1993), Leiblich (1998) and Denzin (2001), are concerned with capturing the individual's point of view and gathering the stories people tell about their experiences. Thus the lives of ordinary men and women play a central role in the research texts that are created.

Narrative as an Interpretive Tool of Human Inquiry

The study of narratives that is inherently interdisciplinary extends the interpretive turn in the social sciences uninterested in realist assumptions of measuring observable behaviour, to instead being concerned with the way in

which people construct meanings about their experiences in the world they live out. In line with an interpretivist/constructionist perspective, discursive accounts such as Denzin (2001) and Pitts (2003) emphasise the active nature of narrative in identity construction. As Mead (1934) suggests, everything about the human being is considered a process, rather than stable or fixed. Therefore people are always undergoing change through interaction. What individuals do in any situation is primarily a result of what is going on in that situation, and not some attitude taught long ago. Consequently, a more dynamic actor is perceived, rather than one who possesses attitudes that are usually regarded as fixed and difficult to change as part of one's personality. The human being is emergent, always changing as he or she deals with situations encountered. So although it seems as if individuals have a unified self, Burr (1995) points out this not a result of an underlying identity, but rather this coherency is provided by memory which allows individuals to look back on experiences, selecting those that hang together in a narrative framework. What is thought of as personality is rather an effort of memory and individual's search for meaning and pattern in experiences (McAdams 1993).

Gergen and Gergen (1984) and Sarbin (1986) interpretivist/constructionist narrative scholars, argue that the main way individuals come to experience themselves and impose structure on experiences, is by casting it into narrative form. Sarbin (1986) takes the position that narrative is the organising principle for our psychology, present in all facets of daily life, in dreams, rememberings, plans and accounts. He argues that when individuals remember things they do not recount a list of unconnected events and images but rather they recount it as a story. Sarbin, who argues for the persuasiveness of narrative, explains that as an acquired ability, individuals gradually adopt plot structures in story telling in order to represent themselves to others, that human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures. From an interpretivist/constructionist narrative perspective, people's psychology is not structured by intra-psychic forces, but rather individuals have accounts and theories in which self is given shape by an individual's ability to think of things in terms of stories or narrative. Stories however, do not mirror reality but are used to construct compelling accounts which are multi-layered involving the historical and interactional moment of the telling. As Milnes (2003) argues, individual's accounts are not reflective of some objective reality, but rather the subjects actively construct their accounts. Thus, in crafting narratives individuals engage in much smoothing. For example, individuals do not recount their entire experience but rather selectively tell about what is included in the story and what is left out.

Stories aren't about fact, they are not merely chronicles written to report exactly what transpired and what time. They are less about facts and more about meanings. In the subjective and embellished telling of the past, the past is constructed. (McAdams 1993 p.28).

Narratives as Culturally Shaped

Taking an interpretivist/constructionist perspective to narrative as Burr (1995) indicates, individuals come to experience the world through the vantage point or perspective available to them in discourses, along with the concepts, images, metaphors, and ways of speaking the vantage point furnishes. Hence as Denzin (2001) argues, interpretive practices are connected to local systems of cultural discourse which individuals draw on in creating their tales. As Chase (1995) explains, what narrators accomplish with their stories is culturally shaped. A key analytic term guiding narrative studies of interpretive practice then is local culture or the locally shared meanings and interpretive vocabularies that participants in relatively circumscribed communities use to construct the content and shape their lives (Gubrium and Holstein 1995). Local culture does not so much determine participants' biographical work as it provides circumstantially recognisable and accountable interpretive resources for constructing and understanding lives. For example, Denzin cites Psathas's (1995) method of instance, where each instance of phenomena is an occurrence that evidences the operation of a set of cultural understandings currently available for use by cultural members.

Methodological Procedures

Exploring Motorcyclists' Life Story Narratives

Thirty-three motorcyclists were gathered in a variety of contemporary motorcyclist enclaves² by snowball effect where a representative individual from the population was selected randomly from each enclave and provided referrals to other participants within the setting. As the snowball method was utilised, the group reflects a non-probability sample with low external validity which traditionally makes generalisability difficult. However, following interpretive research conventions, this problematises the social scientific language of proof, validity or other terms that insist that there is a singularly valid way to understand social phenomena (Pitts 2003). The aim then, was not to attain a statistically representative sample, but rather an in-

² As contemporary consumption spaces, enclaves are host to unique cultural configurations based on consumer goods and involving symbolic practices Maffesoli (1988) Shields (1992) Belk (1998).

depth insight into the experience of motorcyclists in order to observe their shared cultural understandings. However, although thirty-three respondents were initially interviewed, it was decided within the limited space of the article, that it would be impossible to present a comprehensive analysis of all thirty-three biographies. Therefore three accounts were chosen with the aim of highlighting variety in motorcycling participant's biographies. In addition, as participants were met in the settings in which they naturally congregate, thick, descriptive field notes were extracted from these sites as recommended by Merleau-Ponty (1973) and Denzin (1997). This enabled further indispensable contextual information to be collected enabling the understanding of participants' lives and experiences which are both contextually grounded as well as highly individualised.

Denzin's (1989) method for interpreting life stories was also utilised, focusing on key turning points in participants motorcycling careers, what Denzin refers to as locating epiphanies. This approach is what Taylor and Bogdan (1998) describe as life histories, "the important events and experiences in a person's life," told in ways that capture "the person's own feelings, views, and perspectives." (p. 143). Exploiting this method entailed the gathering of stories specifically focusing on biographically meaningful events or moments in subjects' lives. Further, it is argued by Marshall and Rossman (1995) that gathering individual biographies is particularly useful for gaining an insider's view of a culture under study.

One understands a culture through the history of one person's development or life within it.
(Marshall and Rossman 1995 p.88).

The rationale for adopting this perspective comes from Celsi, Rose and Leigh's (1993) previous research on sky-diving, suggesting that researchers, rather than making overriding generalisations about risk-taking behaviour should rather isolate key variables that contribute to high-risk performers various pathways, or what Schouten and McAlexander (1995) have described as motorcyclist career paths.

Appropriation of Riding Style

In exploring motorcyclists' engagement with their activity, turning points in participants motorcycling careers have been examined. Contrary to previous research that suggests motorcyclists' behaviour as fixed and unchanging, close examination of participants' experiences suggest a less deterministic view of high-risk behaviour. Rather, participants appear to commonly adapt their motorcycling engagement according to personal experience, interpersonal influence or dominant community ideology enforced by the specialist press. The research approach, by which riding engagement is

understood over participants' motorcycling careers, is through exploring appropriation of 'riding style.' Generally speaking, within the motorcycling community there are two major riding styles to which participants may subscribe; the currently dominant 'performance riding style' as demonstrated by professional racers, versus the 'minimum visual fuss, maximum smoothness approach' typically practiced by advanced, expert motorcyclists.

The Rise of Fast, Performance Riding

The rise in popularity of fast, performance style motorcycling came about in the early 1980's, and since then sports motorcycling has defined a new era in British motorcycling. Indeed, the lure of high performance aspects of motorcycling is reflected in the sales of super-sports motorcycles. Market data revealed by the Motorcycle Industry Association suggests that supersport, race-replica type motorcycles remain the dominant class within the UK motorcycle market. Therefore due of the performance of modern machinery, many motorcyclists wear full leathers in race-replica style. Further, the scenario of the supersport motorcycling is regularly represented within the specialist press and practiced within a variety of motorcyclist enclaves such as motorcyclist cafés and motorcycle track days. Participants at such venues subscribe to the view that appropriate motorcycling style encompasses fast, competitive riding accompanied by appropriate display of riding skills that often includes stunting.

Motorcycling Participant Profiles

Motorcycling participants vary in their choice of riding style. There are those bikers whom have adopted the police riding style, which is similar to that of the IAM (The Institute of Advanced Motorcyclists), appropriating a responsible and safe riding style; and those that prefer fast, performance riding similar to that of professional racers. In exploring the riding style of motorcycling participants, Patrick, whom appears to aspire to the dominant discourses associated with performance motorcycling and fast riding experiences, is considered first, followed by those whom currently have adopted a more responsible riding style, such as participants Harry and James.

Patrick's Profile

Patrick, aged twenty-eight, first became involved in motorcycling as a teenager when he rode his friend's 50cc off road bike around in local fields. Then at sixteen years, he started working and bought a 125cc moped which he later sold when he gained a car license at seventeen. It was not until some

of his friends bought motorcycles that Patrick, at the age of twenty-two, became interested in motorcycling again. He is unmarried and has since been riding for six years and currently owns a Yamaha R6 sports motorcycle (600cc engine capacity). However, Patrick has recently considered getting a new Honda Fireblade or a Yamaha R1 like his friends who own 1000cc supersports bikes;

The next step is that I want one a bit bigger.

I first met Patrick at a motorcycling café in Sherburn; he was discussing motorcycle stunts such as 'wheelies' and 'stoppies' with his friend Ewan. Unsurprisingly both men were wearing colourful race-replica leathers, however, I noticed that Patrick's knee sliders were particularly worn, which his friend Ewan was quick to point out;

Just look at your knee sliders, you'll have to get steel plates on them, he added pointing to his friend worn down knee sliders.

Patrick is particularly enthusiastic about performance motorcycling and aspires to perfect motorcycle stunts such as those frequently displayed by other bikers at the venue. Patrick consequently admits to reading articles on how to stunt; that is how to do 'wheelies' and 'stoppies' properly;

I read articles in magazines on how easy it is to do it, but in real life it's not that easy.

Participating in stunt riding, Patrick says that he commonly does 'stoppies' coming up to junctions just to 'show off,' and particularly chases the edge around corners, in attempt to 'get a knee down.'

When I first got a knee down I did it all the time.

Patrick's concern with ability testing and skill improvement is further reflected in his recent participation in track days. Indeed, the first track day that Patrick participated in was an important event or turning point in Patrick's motorcycling career. Patrick reportedly, really 'pushing his ability limits,' crashed at Cadwell Park race circuit breaking his ankle. He had never previously had an accident riding on the road;

I thought I'm going to show everybody how good I am, going as hard as I dare, as much as my mind would let me.

After the event Patrick says that he no longer pushes his performance limits on track days but rather 'saves' his fast, performance riding for the roads;

But ever since I'd come off that first track day, it was always in the back of my mind and it was the first time I had ever come off a big bike but it didn't affect my road biking because that's what I had done on the track, so I kept it to the track.

Therefore it appears that Patrick, by rationalising his accident, 'keeping it to the track,' is more able to manage his anxieties when participating in fast competitive group riding on the roads, where he says that he rides '100%' to keep up with his friends. Similarly, Brannigan and McDougall (1983) also indicate the manner by which hang-gliders rationalise their activity as a means of managing their tension with the sport. Indeed professional racers also reportedly rationalise their activity, where a common means by which motorcycle racers come to terms with crashes is by rationalising or working out the cause of an accident so that it doesn't take away their confidence. However, although Patrick strives to rationalise his track day crash so that it doesn't affect his road riding, he admits later in his account, that ever since the accident the crash has always been on the back of his mind;

It's too dangerous on the roads really; you just got to think you could lose your life or your license. You think about it all the time. You go a bit stupid then you go steady then faster then slow, its one of those things that happen on the bikes, it's freedom, you forget everything.

Patrick's account demonstrates the ongoing reflexive nature of motorcycling participation. Patrick, who is particularly enthusiastic about stunt and performance motorcycling, appears to aspire to the dominant discourses associated with sports motorcycling and fast riding experiences. Although performing stunts, group riding, as well as participating in track days are part of Patrick's motorcycling repertoire. Nevertheless his ongoing participation in motorcycling involves reflexive thoughts about safety, cognitive activity that is influenced by his track day accident.

Harry's Profile

I first met Harry with his friend Doug in a local motorcycle shop. Both men were wearing race-replica leathers and looking around the clothing section of the store. It was during an initial conversation that Harry mentioned that his riding style had recently changed since meeting Doug. In a later phone interview I asked Harry about this;

Interviewer

I remember when I met you, you said that your riding style had changed when you met Doug, what did you mean?

Harry

Oh, I've gone from a complete idiot, bending the needle on the rev to the red line to going nice and steady...My wife still doesn't believe me because she's been on the back when I've been doing daft speeds. It's about having a good laugh now and nice scenery.

Harry met Doug through work, and Doug, who is part of a larger group of touring motorcyclists, introduced Harry to the group and since riding with them, Harry says he now rides 'much steadier;'

It's good though because you know you're not going to get out there and push it so much that you take bends at 140mph, thinking, am I going to make this?

Touring with Doug and his friends has therefore, significantly impacted upon Harry's riding style as he recounts his first experience riding with the group;

Interviewer

Can you think of a perfect ride?

Harry

Yes, the one in Wales. It was the first weekend I went out with the guys; I was like 'wow.' It was the first time I went from daft riding to sensible riding. I'll always remember that...I think I was in shock really. I was just getting to grips with going steady. When we first set off I was riding like an idiot, but then I couldn't go anywhere so I just had a whole change. Also, I know I'm going to come back in one piece.

Harry, now age forty is married but has no children. He first got into motorcycling when he was a teenager when he used to ride off road bikes with his friends in fields. It wasn't until Harry turned sixteen that his dad took him to buy his first road bike, a Yamaha 50cc. His brother, also a motorcyclist, owns a BMW 1150cc Roadster, which Harry likes but says that he is not 'old enough yet' to become a BMW motorcycle rider.

BMW's are for old men, but since my brother's got one, a Roadster, I've been looking at them more. I do like them, but my friends would take the mickey something rotten if I got one."

Although Harry does not see himself owning a BMW, he is selling his current sports bike, a Yamaha YZF 750cc (with a full racing system exhaust), to get a Fazer 1000cc sports tourer, the same motorcycle that Doug owns;

Interviewer

Doesn't Doug have a Fazer?

Harry

Yeah. But because I have a 750 pure sports bike right now, going to a 600 sit up and beg wouldn't be right, so I've decided to get the Fazer 1000.

Harry, re-positioning himself within his current riding group's standards and riding styles, says the Fazer will be better suited for touring as the 'Yamaha 750 is knackered his back.' However, there appears to be a tension, between Harry's adoption of his current touring groups riding style versus his liking for fast, performance riding;

I used to ride mad, fully concentrating all the time, but where's the fun in that, you don't see anything. It's done me good meeting Doug. Sometimes though, if I'm on my own, I do daft speeds.

Harry therefore, sometimes struggles to stay within his new groups' normative standards and is sometimes tempted to 'go daft speeds,' of which he says Doug calls him a 'cowboy' for wanting to 'have the odd blast.'

Before, I used to push it all the time, but if you think about it, it's dangerous and there aren't really many roads that you can do high speeds on, I was even doing it on small roads. I do it now sometimes...I told Doug when we were last out, I might just be blasting off a few times.

Harry's touring group, concerned with slower speeds and motorcycle touring, avoid fast, competitive riding this includes non participation in motorcycle track days. Harry also subscribes to this pattern; however, although he does not actually participate in track days he sometimes takes time off work to experience them as a spectator;

I'm not interested in track days really, but I love to go and watch them. Sometimes I take a day off work and just go and watch them at Oulton.

Again Harry's account further reinforces the reflexive nature of motorcycle participation. As a turning point in Harry's motorcycling career, his first experience touring was a significant moment for Harry as it particularly impacted on his riding outlook, which he describes as the first time that he went from 'daft' to 'sensible riding.' Therefore, although Harry's previous involvement in motorcycling was primarily based upon fast, performance riding, since meeting Doug and participating in touring, Harry currently aims to conform with his immediate touring group's standards, as even his

new liking for touring type motorcycles demonstrates. Harry's introduction to Doug has therefore opened up a 'whole new world' to him, realising that he can now actually look forward confidently to 'getting home in one piece.'

James' Profile

I met James at a bike show where he was manning a stand advertising advanced rider training. James, age fifty-two and currently an advanced riding instructor, first got into motorcycling as a teenager when he used to own an off road motorcycle, a Triumph Tiger Cub 200cc. When James turned seventeen years however, he got a car because he says that 'girls sat better in cars.' It was not until he was aged twenty that he got back into off road motorcycling when he joined the army. Then, at the age of thirty-two, James passed his road test and bought a Yamaha XJ 900cc. It was also during this time period that two of his friends died motorcycling and he decided to quit biking altogether, which was further reinforced by the fact that he had recently married and acquired children.

After dropping out of biking for a few years following friends' deaths, James was prompted to take up motorcycling again after seeing other motorcyclists out on the roads during the summer. However in order to manage his anxieties over the safety of the activity due to his friend's deaths, James decided to participate in advanced rider training, which he claims has enabled him to ride more safely and anticipate potential dangers and hazards;

Most bikers claim that cars are to blame, but most of it is bad riding. Doing advanced car driving has really helped and even more doing advanced riding, then you're more able to anticipate things.

Becoming a trained rider has consequently enabled James to continue biking despite his underlying doubts over personal safety;

Yes once, I almost hit a car head on, after I pulled over and was physically sick. But that was before I took advanced rider training; I would be able to avoid that accident if it happened now.

Accidents which occurred before training are seemingly rationalised by James, hence present risks are now seen as 'avoidable,' attributing accidents to rider error, something which, with good training can be avoided. As a turning point in James' motorcycling career, his friend's deaths have been an impetus for James's participation in advanced rider training. This has resulted in his current adoption of a safe and responsible riding style which is further demonstrated by his comparison between riders that treat biking 'as a sport' verses those who use it 'sensibly for transport.'

That's the great confusion is people see it as a sport, but the emphasis should be on transport on public roads not sport and performance, all you have to do is read Bike magazine and it's all about performance and sports biking.

James positions himself as one who 'takes biking seriously,' treating motorcycling as a mode of transport rather than a sport, 'just to get a buzz.' Interestingly, James' bi-polar view of motorcycling has physically manifested in his current ownership of two different style bikes; the first a touring motorcycle, 'the Pan which is good for carrying shopping' and the second a sports tourer, a Fazer, which is 'just for fun.'

Interviewer

Which bike do you like best?"

James

Well, they've both got different functions. I can balance better on the Pan (Pan European) and it's good for carrying shopping. The Fazer is just for fun, the thing is a lot of people just have them for a ride out in a sunny afternoon, they treat them (bikes) as a sport, even mentally they are not in their right mind. You see these guys out, on a Sunday, it's just a sport to them. I get a buzz as well, but I don't treat it as a sport first and foremost. It's a balance in your mind, you have to balance it.

However, although James is a strong advocate of advanced rider training similar to both Patrick and Howard, James also appears to struggle with wanting to be 'sensible' versus 'having fun.'

It's the danger element that gives you a high out of it and you can't get that to the same degree if your not pushing the parameters too far. For me now though, if my heart is beating too much it's not been a good ride. If you go on a bend too fast or you misjudge it you get anxious. You get a thrill though if you take a corner fast and really well, you've got to be careful of adrenaline.

Predominantly though, James aims to put safety first, arguing that doing things sensibly and safely is a priority;

The competitiveness for us (James and his friends) is about doing things quick but safe. Doing something stupid isn't anything to brag about. It's all about safety first and then speed. The emphasis is on safety first. Speed isn't the issue for us; it's about the positioning on the road, 'was I riding to the best standard?' We don't say 'oh did I squeeze through there well.' The competitiveness is, 'have I made the best progress?' We're very critical of each other; we're looking to improve standards all the time. People think we're old and stay but we enjoy speed as well. We like to go fast, but safe fast.

For James and his immediate friends a core element of motorcycling is skill acquisition and improving riding standards with a focus on going fast but safe. He comments, 'doing something stupid isn't anything to brag about, and 'we don't say, oh did I squeeze through there well?' In addition, James asserts that for the purpose of improving riding skills he would participate in a track day;

Interviewer

Are there any times you really push yourself?"

James

*Yes, I like to see how far I can go. You need to know your limits to drive safely, like on a bend or a round about, it helps you to ride within your abilities, so in order to do that you need to explore yourself and the bike. That's the thing that's brilliant about track days is you find out what you can do and what the bike can do. If you go out with good bikers you can learn from them. If you fall off it ***** hurts so you should push yourself, but build up to it sensibly, for example to learn the line to take.*

As a significant moment in James motorcycling career, the death of two friends has contributed to his participation in advanced rider training and the adoption a safer, more careful, riding style. Measuring himself up to the IAM standards has therefore enabled James to manage his anxieties over participation, attributing accidents to 'rider error.' Although training has contributed to James safety conscious riding style, which is further reinforced by the fact that he has not had any accidents since participation in IAM. Although, James like Patrick and Harry, still battles with the lure of fast riding and thrill-seeking 'adrenaline.' Indeed skill advancement is highly valued by James and his friends and for this reason motorcycle track days possess appeal. Nevertheless James holds that safety comes before speed and therefore maintains that skill improvement should be done sensibly, by 'building up to it slowly.'

Conclusion

Motorcycling as an Ongoing Process of Negotiation

Exploring narrative accounts demonstrates how motorcyclists, rather than having an obdurate or invariable approach to their activity, continually reflect on their ongoing riding engagement. For example, reflexive thoughts on safety issues brought on by a recent near miss or accident may significantly influence participation. However, it appears that safety conscious thoughts do not influence the entirety of a ride but intrude on the experience intermittently as the rider experiences a tension between the thrill

and acceleration experienced in 'pushing their performance limits' versus reflecting on issues of personal competence and safety. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) describes this reflexive process as a 'feedback loop,' which is regulated by differential control versus fear signals of varying intensities that continually operates throughout high-risk experience. Some participants appear to think about safety more than others; such as riding instructor James, having participated in advanced rider training, prescribes a more careful and safe riding style;

My heart beating fast was the goal of a ride but now I know better. James

In addition due to the reflexive ongoing nature of the activity, being able to rationalise the anxieties involved is, therefore, important for motorcycling participation. Motorcyclists appear to rationalise their activity in a variety of ways. Patrick for example, no longer pushes his performance abilities on track days since his recent accident but rather feels more confident to participate in fast competitive riding on the roads with his friends. James on the other hand, rationalises fears associated with motorcycling by having become a 'trained rider' and thereby attributes accidents to 'rider error,' something which trained riders can avoid.

Although past experiences contribute to motorcycling engagement, the past does not necessarily determine future participation, but is seen to enter the present situation with a new realisation and consideration. As Denzin (1997) suggests, people position themselves within their current situation according to their immediate group's standards as well as through wider discourses in general. Interpersonal influences are fundamental to shaping motorcyclists perspectives and riding style. For example, Patrick in positioning himself within his local group's standards participates in competitive group riding, track days and stunting display. Harry on the other hand, has revised his riding style based on his current touring group's more responsible riding standards, as does James and his friends with their focus on safety first in motorcycling.

It is suggested therefore, that contemporary consumer research concerned with improving human welfare and the quality of individual's lives, employ more qualitative methods of research in order to acquire data and to answer questions that cannot be answered through more quantitative-based techniques. Through the use of detailed open-ended interviewing and the collection of narratives, voluntary risk-taking is interpreted through its embodiment in specific life stories. The findings suggest that participants, rather than having stable and fixed personality types as traditional studies have indicated, rather adopt their understandings based on past experience as well as by interpersonal influence. Participants are seen to be culturally

informed. Similarly previous studies have pointed out the importance of examining risk-taking behaviour as a process of acquisition versus personality type. For example, Celsi, Rose and Leigh (1993) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995) have indicated the manner by which high-risk performers gradually assume the ideology of their immediate subculture. However, rather than making overriding generalisations about risk-taking behaviour, the current study, through the use of narrative biographies, has adopted a more emic or idiographic approach. In order to study experience from within, the researchers have sought to capture the meanings and experiences of particular motorcyclists.

The value of 'respondent near' interpretive findings portrays a more optimistic outlook for high-risk performers and for those wishing to promote alternative aspirations for participants in high-risk activities. Due to the manner by which participants engage with their activity in an ongoing, reflexive manner, the opportunity exists for marketing campaigns to function as a tool for changing motorcyclists standpoints, imparting fresh meanings and re-directing motorcyclists with alternative aspirations for personal development within long term, sustainable motorcycling careers.

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