Life at the Edge:

A Phenomenological Examination of the Communal, Embodied and Material Dimensions of High-Speed Motorcycling

A thesis presented

By

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Life at the Edge:  
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Abstract

This thesis begins by introducing the concept of experience and delineating its place within the discourses of marketing. To reach a more holistic appreciation of high-speed motorcycling, I situate this study within the experiential domain of Consumer Culture Theory. I take a look back at some of the foundational theories that have influenced the development of this experiential domain in CCT. We learn about how these theories have used to illuminate consumers immersions in extraordinary and high-risk leisure experiences. In chapter two, I focus on the context of motorcycling and provide an outline of academic understandings of motorcycling culture. This outline demonstrates that academic understandings of this culture are predominantly grounded in North-American perspectives of history, media, popular culture and technological advancement. These accounts are invariably influenced by the mythologised image of the outlaw biker. In turning back to CCT research, we see that representations of this leisure activity are also dominated by this stereotypical representation. This study starts out by attempting to broaden our understanding of motorcycling culture by investigating the lived experiences of a group of Irish high-speed motorcyclists. In combination, Merleau Ponty’s (1962) and Crossley’s (2001) work on embodiment and Pink’s (2009) approach to sensory ethnography provides a novel way of conceptualising the motorcycling body and also an innovative means of addressing motorcyclists’ embodied experiences. We reach an understanding of motorcycling that is grounded in bodily experiences of emotions and sensations. This body is a source of knowledge, it acts instinctually, it seeks spontaneity but most importantly it is central to the consuming experience. We also identify the emerging significance of the embodied relationships that develop between these riders and their motorcycles. This assemblage signals a dynamic and interactive relationship between the consuming subject and the consumption object (Dant 2004). In this assemblage we witness the consuming objects boundaries emerging through its interactions with the rider. These findings demonstrate that the connection between consumers and consumption object is forged through a combination of bodily knowledge and sensory perception. This understanding highlights the active role of the consumption object in terms of influencing consumption patterns and practices.
Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is entirely my own work and it is not copied or plagiarised from other sources.

Signed: _______________________ Date: ___________________

Stephen Murphy
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Finally, to Kate and my family I wish to offer my sincere thanks for offering your love and support. I’m pretty sure I didn't always make it easy!
My Thoughts for Today

Remember life is not always as it seems looking from the outside in,
and sometimes people including me,
until my illness,
think that life is about money, big houses and fast cars.
Well let me tell you it’s not.
Life is about living with your own inner happiness,
whether it be from your job,
or your family life,
or simply your well being and peace of mind.
Let life take its own course,
one day at a time and remember most of all,
you only get one chance,
so try and not have any regrets,
I have learned so much in the last seven months,
nothing is more important than life itself,
as long as you try and not hurt anybody even oneself.

This poem was taken from Maria’s diary, which was written on the 23rd of September 1997
Table of Contents

LIFE AT THE EDGE:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE COMMUNAL, EMBODIED AND MATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF HIGH-SPEED MOTORCYCLING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: CONSUMING EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 20 YEARS OF INTERPRETIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 CONSUMING EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 Defining Experience</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 The Experiential Perspective in CCT</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 EXPERIENCE IN CCT</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 Foundational Theories</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 Extraordinary Consumption Experience</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3 Consuming the Experience of Risk</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 ROMANTIC ROOTS OF EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.1 A More Humble View of the Concept of Experience</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: MOTORCYCLING CULTURE: THE LOOMING OUTLAW</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 THE EVOLUTION OF MOTORCYCLING CULTURE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 SUBCULTURES OF CONSUMPTION: THE LURE OF THE OUTLAW</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 HDSC Structure</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 HDSC Ethos</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 Identity Construction within the HDSC</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 REFLECTION ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NEW BIKERS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 MULTIPLE FEMININITIES IN A HYPER-MASCUINE SUBCULTURE: A RE-ENQUIRY OF THE HDSC</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 MOVING BEYOND THE OUTLAW: ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF MOTORCYCLING IN CCT</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.8 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.2 ONTOLOGY, AXIOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY
   3.2.1 Ontological Assumptions
   3.2.2 Axiological Assumptions
   3.2.3 Epistemological Assumptions
   3.2.4 Developing a Standpoint for this Research

3.3 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ROUTE TO EXPERIENCE

3.4 ETHNOGRAPHY
   3.4.1 Ethnography in Consumer Research
   3.4.2 Rethinking Ethnography Through The Senses: A Way to Embodied Practice

3.5 A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO INTERVIEWING

3.6 THE RESEARCH JOURNEY
   3.6.1 Sampling Procedures and Strategy
   3.6.2 Locating the Group: Participant Profiles
   3.6.3 Data Collection

3.7 THE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION PROCESS: PRODUCING MEANINGFUL DATA
   3.7.1 Coding and Interpretation of Interviews
   3.7.2 Interpreting and Representing Sensory Knowing

3.8 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 4: THE MOTORCYCLING COMMUNITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE WITHIN THE MOTORCYCLING COMMUNITY

4.3 FOSTERING COMMUNITY

4.4 IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY: LEARNING TO KEEP UP

4.5 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5: BODIES FOR HIGH-SPEED MOTORCYCLING

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.2 ACCESSING THE MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE OF HIGH-SPEED MOTORCYCLING
   5.2.1 Cold Winter Mornings: The Hard Miles
   5.2.2 Learning to Speed

5.3 THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF HIGH-SPEED MOTORCYCLING: SKILLS, SENSATIONS AND EMOTIONS AT THE EDGE
   5.3.1 High-Speed Motorcycling: Developing an Awareness of the Body
5.3.2 High-Speed Motorcycling Skills: Getting Your Knee Down, Cornering and Wheelies

5.3.3 High-Speed Motorcycling: Sensation & Emotion Seeking

5.4 Conclusion

CHAPTER 6: THE MATERIAL OF HIGH-SPEED MOTORCYCLING

6.1 Introduction

6.2 The Emotional Connection to Motorcycles

   6.2.1 Starting out Small: Riding to the Limit
   6.2.2 250’s for Keeping Up
   6.2.3 Settling Down at the Top

6.3 Hands on Work: Maintaining, Modifying, and Repairing Motorcycles

   6.3.1 Maintaining Motorcycles
   6.3.2 Modifying Motorcycles
   6.3.3 Repairing Motorcycles

6.4 Conclusion

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

7.2 An Alternative Understanding of Motorcycling Culture: Identity, Communitas, and Authenticity

   7.2.1 Contributions to Understandings of Motorcycling Culture in CCT

7.3 The Embodied Experiences of High Speed Motorcycling

   7.3.1 Sensory Ethnographic Accounts: An Introduction to the Multi-Sensory Nature of High-Speed Motorcycling.
   7.3.2 Narrative Accounts: Skills, Sensations and Emotions in the High-Speed Motorcycling Experience
   7.3.3 Contributions to Understandings of Embodied Experience in CCT

7.4 The Stuff of High-Speed Motorcycling

   7.4.1 Assembling and Structuring the Embodied Experience of High-Speed Motorcycling
   7.4.2 Feeling Motorcycling in the Hands
   7.4.3 Contributions to Understandings of Materiality in CCT

7.5 Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

7.6 Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY
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Chapter 1: Consuming Experience

A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way.

Mark Twain

Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.

Douglas Adams

1.1 Introduction

Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) seminal paper was instrumental in placing experience at the centre of marketing’s lexicon. By the end of the 1990s, the concept of experience had become the basis for an entire managerial approach (Carù and Cova 2007). Proponents of the experience economy declared that experiences were just as important as products and services (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Pine and Gilmore (1999) forecasted that, in the experience economy, the future success of companies would be invariably tied to their capacity to stage experiences. More specifically, success in the experience economy is dependent on the company’s ability to stage sensual and memorable experiences that resonate with consumers. To be successful in the experience economy, companies must facilitate consumers’ immersions into the thematized world of the constructed experience. The consumer becomes an actor on a stage and importantly space must be allowed for this actor to improvise parts of his or her performance (Pine and Gilmore 1999). This all-encompassing view of the experience economy is perhaps best exemplified in what Baudrillard (2001) would describe as the “hyper real world” of theme parks and adult playgrounds such as Las Vegas and Macau. These examples are useful because they illustrate the spectacular, and give us a clear sense of the extraordinary in consumers’ experiences (Carù and Cova 2007). But we can see how the notion of the spectacular is also employed in retail stores such as Nike Town and the Apple Store, and in food chains like Planet Hollywood and McDonalds.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue that the most successful companies will be those that can facilitate consumers to participate in the construction of their own unique experiences within these thematized worlds. To achieve this end, companies must first facilitate consumers in immersing themselves into the experience. By stimulating the consumers’ senses and also appealing to their emotions companies can facilitate immersion. Pine and Gilmore (1999) offer some advice for managers that seek to embrace the turn to the experience economy:
theme the experience, harmonise impressions with cues, eliminate negative cues, mix in memorabilia, and engage all of the senses. In his ardent promotion of the concept of experiential marketing, Schmitt (1999) pushes very similar ideas about the centrality of experience in this new age of marketing. In reimagining marketers as experience providers, Schmitt (1999) proposes five strategic marketing modules for the experiential marketer. These modules encompass assessing and managing the consumer’s environment in terms of sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences, behaviour experiences, and social identity experiences. Schmitt (1999) envisages that the right mix of these modules will create an unforgettable experience, which he proposes is essential in terms of appealing to the desires of the postmodern consumer. Schmitt (1999, p.53) outlines that the ‘ultimate goal of experiential marketing is to create holistic experiences that integrate holistic experiences into a meaningful Gestalt’.

By shifting the focus from products and services to transformational experience, the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999) and experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999, 2000) both offer companies the promise of increased profits (Carù and Cova 2003). The adoption of these concepts highlights the influence of corporations and marketers in terms of their efforts to structure the nature of consuming experiences. It is clear from this brief review that both the experience economy and experiential marketing promote an understanding of the consumption experience that is unique, intense, and memorable. Carù and Cova (2003) caution that we are again failing to contain the concept of experience. They subsequently argue that we are fast losing a grasp of a core understanding of the meaning of experience and at times the concept is defined in ideological terms. For this reason, I aim to take a step back and contemplate the development of the experiential perspective in consumer research. To meet this aim, I will address its founding research, major contributions within CCT emerging from this perspective, and I will also examine a body of research that has critically appraised its development.

I begin by tracing the development of CCT and describe how it draws from a diverse range of theoretical perspectives on consumption and marketplace behaviour to ‘address the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption’ (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.868). I will then move towards situating this work within the disciplinary boundary of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and more specifically within the experiential domain. Second, I will concentrate on explicating the development of the experiential perspective (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Third, I will briefly outline the foundational theories that have guided empirical investigations of consumption experiences. I will then closely examine how the experiential perspective has contributed to an understanding of
extraordinary and high-risk consumption experiences. Fourth, I turn to more current debates in CCT that critically evaluate the development of the experiential perspective by tracing connections back to the Romantic ethos of the eighteenth Century. This exercise is valuable because it illuminates the ideology upon which the experiential perspective is predominantly based. Next, I will address recent calls for a more humble understanding of experience in consumer research. Finally, I will conclude by outlining how this understanding of the experiential perspective can be used to orientate this research.

1.2 20 years of Interpretive Consumer Research

In 2005 a seminal piece by Arnould and Thompson reflected upon the previous twenty years of interpretive consumer research. Arnould and Thompson noted how interpretive consumer research had played a pivotal role in addressing the previously overlooked socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption. In outlining the boundaries of the newly termed Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Arnould and Thompson specify that CCT focuses upon the ‘dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings’ (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.868). Consumer culture theorists work in everyday consumption contexts in an effort to elicit an appreciation of the cultural complexity of consumption. It is essential to note that CCT does not represent a unified theory or singular way of studying consumption. Rather it encompasses a multitude of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to shed light on consumption phenomena. Commentators such as Belk (1986; 1987b) and Holbrook (1982) caution researchers to be wary of directly seeking managerial links in consumer research as oftentimes this impedes researching the full experiential and socio-cultural aspects of consumption.

To provide clarity on the aims of the CCT project, Arnould and Thompson (2005) looked to the previous twenty years of interpretive consumer research to identify key research questions and areas of theoretical interest. Based on this synthesis, they outline four research programmes for CCT.

The first domain of CCT examines the prevailing use of consumption to create identity. Increasingly, identity projects are tied to the consumption of goods and services. Consumers develop and maintain their identities through symbolic use of possessions (Wattanasuwan 2005). However, consumers use consumption not only to preserve and cultivate identities, but also as a means of undertaking identity change (Kates 2002). CCT’s second domain examines
the intersection of culture and the marketplace. Commonly these are self-selective, distinctive communities that generate feelings of solidarity based on a shared consumption activity (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). The third domain of CCT explores the influence of social and institutional structures such as gender (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), ethnicity (Belk 1992), class (Allen 2002) and community upon consumption choices. Importantly, CCT examines links between these structures and consumers’ thoughts, feelings and actions. The fourth and final domain examines the power relationship between the mass media and consumers. At stake here is the consumer’s ability to understand the power structures at play in a consumer society, and their ability to decode media communications. This domain references a debate about whether consumers are to be regarded as ‘interpretive agents’ or ‘passive dupes’ (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.875).

These four domains demonstrate the types of issues and concerns that CCT research attempts to tackle – ‘specific CCT studies address various aspects of each, and hence they are not neatly typologised’ (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871). Traditionally, CCT research has tended to emphasise the productive nature of consumption. In doing so it underlines the active role of the consumer in the production and transformation of meaning in consumption (McCracken 1986, Holt 2002). The implementation of a CCT framework illuminates the influence of advertising in the commodification of identity. On this basis CCT encourages us to explore the paradox between the active identity work of empowered consumers and the identity scripts that companies offer through consumption (Kozinets 2001; Belk 2003). This of course brings into question the notion of consumer liberty. Are consumers really free if their freedom to choose is confined to the offerings of the marketplace (Holt 2002). Critics of CCT (e.g. Graeber 2011), question if this emphasis on identity work and active consumption serves a purpose beyond fulfilling the objectives of a neo-liberal capitalist economy.

The concept of consumer culture relies upon marketing systems that induce/create desire for consumer goods. Central to the prevalence of a consumer culture is the capacity of individuals to express themselves through consumption in a free marketplace. Consumer cultures are dependent upon interconnected images, objects and texts. Individuals create their own identities and social groups around shared meanings and practices, which they express through their consumption choices. CCT places these understandings within a view of the world as increasingly interconnected by the ever-expanding reach of global media and transnational capital. Moreover, these globalised forces increasingly infiltrate localised cultures. In this vein, ‘consumer culture and the marketplace ideologies it conveys – frames consumers’ horizons of conceivable action, feeling and thought, making certain patterns of
behaviour and sense making seem more likely than others’ (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.869). Importantly, CCT adopts a ‘distributed view of cultural meaning’ (Hannerz, 1992, p.16), which views everyday life as a fluid process, which encompasses an amalgamation and fragmentation of dominant and sub cultures. This dynamic view of culture has been illustrated and substantiated through numerous theoretical pieces (see Murray and Ozanne 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Cova 1997; Karababa and Ger 2011) and further substantiated through a range of empirical projects (see Cova 2001; Kozinets 2001; Kates 2002; Martin and Schouten 2006). Further studies illustrate how consumer cultures are shaped and modified through the influence of cultural myths (Belk and Tumbat 2005), narratives (McAlexander et al. 2002) and ideologies (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Kates 2002) and are situated within varying socioeconomic conditions (Hill and Stamey 1990; Hill 1991) and marketplace systems (McCracken 1986; Arnould 1989; Joy 2001; Belk 2003; Karababa and Ger 2011). Early interpretive consumer researchers adopted an experiential perspective to gain access to these phenomena. The aim was to get ‘close to the lived realities of the consumer to extract the universe of meanings applied and constructed during the consumption processes’ (Askegaard and Linnet 2011, p.385).

1.3 Consuming Experience

1.3.1 Defining Experience

In 1982 Holbrook and Hirschman’s seminal paper introduced the concept of experience to the discipline of consumer research. In the time that has passed the experiential perspective has had a formative impact both in marketing (Schmitt 1999; La Salle and Britton 2003) and consumer behaviour (Addis and Holbrook 2001). It has even been argued that we live in an economy that is founded upon experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999). But before we trace through the foundations and contributions of the experiential turn, there is a need to contemplate and grasp what exactly we mean when we talk of experience (Walls et al. 2011; Carù and Cova 2003).

The anthropological turn to experience was championed by the work of Victor Turner. Turner was motivated by a ‘lifelong rebellion against structural-functional orthodoxy, with its closed static model social systems’ (Babcock 1984, p.462, cited in Turner and Bruner 1986). Turner was inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey’s (1976) work which focused on experience and particularly on the concept of Erlebnis (that which has been lived through). Dilthey (1976, p.161) argued that ‘reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience’. In this
sense experience exists before the subject’s perception of reality. Anthropologists of experience are concerned with the ways in which culture structures these experiences. Bruner (1986) argues that the stuff of experience is not just data or cognitions; it also includes images and impressions. The anthropologists of experience re-evaluate the prioritisation given to words and language by opening up the remit of enquiry to include these images and impressions. The turn to experience is marked by a shift away from the concept of behaviour. Behaviour indicates a distant observer surveying the routinised actions of another, while experiences are a much more personal affair, through which agents have scope to shape their own course and actions. This understanding points to the individuality of experience, which presents a challenge in terms of our ability to really understand the experiences of others. For Dilthey, interpretation of cultural expressions presents the best way forward in terms of extending understandings beyond the individual basis of experience. For Turner (1982, p.17) these expressions are made up of the experiences of others and as such they are ‘the crystallised secretions of once living human experience’. In essence the anthropology of experience is about capturing and understanding these cultural expressions of experience. This objective can only be reached by mining the depths of human subjectivity. For Bruner (1986, p.6) the critical distinction here is between ‘reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated)’.

In psychology and sociology, experience is comprised of both subjective and objective activities that are directed towards individual development (Carù and Cova 2003). In this sense, the development of individual subjectivity is important because it provides a sense of continuity and connectedness across a range of often disparate and unconnected experiences. From this vantage point everyday life is regarded as an arena to create and live experiences. This idea replaces previous notions that framed everyday life in terms of social action organised around the enactment of social roles. Liberated from the constraints of prescribed social roles, the individual is free to construct a sense of identity through experience. On the surface this change may seem like progress, but critics propose that the pressure to create the self is equally, if not more, alienating (Carù and Cova 2003; Jantzen et al. 2012). From this perspective, experiences that break away from the typically mundane sense of the everyday are considered particularly influential in contributing to the construction of individual subjectivities.

While there is no singular definition of experience in consumer research, the most prevalent conceptualisations of experience are derived from a combination of these anthropological, sociological and psychological understandings. Having sketched the theoretical foundations
of the experiential perspective, I will now move to delineate the major works that paved the way for a host of experientially focused research in consumer research.

1.3.2 The Experiential Perspective in CCT

Set against the backdrop of the prevailing information-processing (IP) model of consumer behaviour, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) propose the need to shift towards an understanding of consumer behaviour that can recognise and accommodate the experiential aspects of consumption. They argue that the rational focus of the IP model makes it ill equipped to elucidate consumption phenomena that are more playful, sensual, emotional and aesthetic in nature. Highlighting shortcomings in the discipline’s understanding of areas such as leisure and hobbies, and the arts and entertainment, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) put forth a convincing argument regarding the burgeoning need to shift towards an experiential view of consumption that is built upon the “3Fs” (fantasy, feeling, and fun). In later work, the 3Fs were extended to include the “4Es” which are experience, entertainment, exhibitionism, and evangelising (Holbrook 2000). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p.132) contend that the experiential perspective is ‘phenomenological in spirit and regards consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and aesthetic criteria’. The experiential perspective also calls for a greater understanding of the role of ‘multi-sensory psychophysical relationships’ in consumption experiences (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982 p.134).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) emphasise the significance of the symbolic meanings that surround consumption. They contend that areas such as the arts and leisure provide a fertile ground for this type of enquiry because participating consumers typically display high levels of engagement. This is helpful because it allows them to provide rich and meaningful articulations of their experiences. With the experiential perspective, primary process thinking is orientated towards the pleasure principle. For Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p.135) ‘primary process thinking involves a task definition orientated toward hedonic response and is “primary” in the sense that it harkens back to the way a baby pursues immediate pleasure or gratification’. This is an understanding of consumption as a pleasurable experience that is grounded in fantasies (day-dreams and imagination), feelings (sensory and emotional) and fun (excitement, enjoyment etc.).

In a more practically orientated account of the experiential perspective, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982, p.92) explain that the multi-sensory approach to experience is grounded in a
variety of sensory modalities that include ‘tastes, sounds, scents, tactile impressions and visual images’. Further explicating the experiential perspective, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) offer a nuanced interpretation of consumers’ responses to multi-sensory stimuli by highlighting the distinction between afferent and efferent responses. They contend that consumers do not only respond to sensory stimulation by encoding sensory inputs (afferent), but rather they also respond to stimuli by producing internal multi-sensory images (efferent). This distinction is important because it highlights the active role of consumers in the construction of consuming experiences. Consumers do not only receive multi-sensory experiences; but rather they also respond and react to these experiences, which places interaction at the centre of the experiential perspective (Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

Typically efferent responses are derived from multi-sensory memories of previous experience or else they are the product of imagination and fantasy. On this basis, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982, p.93) contend that multisensory imagery should be considered on a ‘continuum from purely historic recollections to complete fantasy’. Holbrook and Schindler (1996) examine the role of nostalgia in consumption experience and in doing so add the cognitive activity of reminiscence to our understanding of hedonic consumption behaviour. This contribution adds some complexity to the understanding that consumers continuously desire novelty.

By way of addressing this connection between fantasy and history, Chronis (2005) explores the socially constructed nature of tourism imaginaries in the context of the Gettysburg civil war site. Similar to examples found in retail (Maclaran 2003), stock shows (Peñaloza 2001) and museums (Grayson and Mairtec 2004), Gettysburg is revealed as a site where reality becomes blended with fantasy. Chronis (2005, p.1797) conceptualises tourism imaginaries as ‘products of a tension between the correctness of a destination’s materiality and the elusiveness of its narrative construction: between place and story’. In a further study, Chronis and Hampton (2008) highlight the importance of authenticity and its function as a foundation to guide consumers’ imaginings in the context of hedonic consumption experiences. In this context, a sense of authenticity is important in terms of directing consumers imagined fantasies to a sense of a legendary past.

Through their examination of consumers’ phenomenological accounts, Jenkins et al. (2011) provide a nuanced account of imagination and its role in consumer culture. They contend that consumers share common culturally constituted desires, which play a role in structuring their imagined futures. These accounts demonstrate the prevalence of consumers’ desires for happiness, love, and meaningful relationships, while also demonstrating that oftentimes these imaginings supersede material desires and fantasies. On this basis Jenkins et al. (2011, p.261)
contend that ‘previous narratives of consumer imagination have neglected individuals’ autonomy in both removing consumer practices and positioning social relationships as more important’.

In culminating insights gained from this review of the development of the experiential perspective it is clear to see that consumption experiences extend beyond the pre- and post-purchase activities proposed by the IP models of consumer behaviour. In making this turn to experience we begin to recognise that a range of additional experiences also impact upon consumers’ choices and consumption patterns. Addressing this point, Arnould et al. (2002) provide an understanding of consumption experience that is extended into four distinct phases:

- Pre – consumption experience: searching, planning, daydreaming, foreseeing, and imagining.
- Purchase experience: choice, payment, packaging, and service/environment encounter.
- Core consumption experience: sensation, satiety, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, irritation/flow, and transformation.
- Remembered consumption experience and nostalgia experience: stories, arguments with friends, and classification of memories.

From this perspective consumption experiences are no longer reducible to the service encounter at the point of sale. Recognising the significance of the experiential perspective, marketers began to embrace the onrushing tide of consumer subjectivity (Addis and Holbrook 2001). They could no longer rely on communicating the functional value of their service offerings and products (Carù and Cova 2003). Today’s ‘Millennial consumers’ seek a range of experiences that stimulate their senses and emotions, making them memorable and extraordinary in the sense that they break away from the mundane sense of the everyday (Holbrook 2000).

In tracing through the development of the experiential perspective in CCT, we can see that this turn offers a useful counterpoint to the utilitarian view of consumption proposed by the IP model. This perspective embraces consumers’ individual subjectivities in an effort to turn attention to the more hedonistic nature of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Leaving behind notions of utility maximisation, the experiential perspective explores consumers’ quests for hedonistic gratification in real consumption contexts (Richins 1997). Consumption of this nature is embodied in sensual and emotional experiences that contribute to the formation of the self. In essence, the experiential perspective is a phenomenological turn that holistically embraces the consuming experience.
The phenomenologist . . . accepts, as the subject-matter of his inquiry, all data of experience . . . Colours and sounds are data; so are impressions of distance and duration; so are feelings of attraction and repulsion; so are yearnings and fears, ecstasies and disillusionments … These are data, given in experience, to be accepted as such and wondered about

(MacLeod 1964, p. 51 cited in Holbrook and Hirschman 1982)

The experiential perspective is an important offering in consumer research because it opened up experience as a worthy topic of enquiry for consumer researchers (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Experientially focused research has contributed significant insight into the symbolic aspects of consumption. A multitude of research studies document how consumers attach symbolic meanings to consumption objects and experiences (Holt 1997; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Murray 2002). Belk’s (1989) seminal piece demonstrates some of the processes that consumers employ to imbue meaning upon their possessions for the purpose of extending the self. In particular Belk’s (1989) research points to phenomena such as vicarious consumption, gift giving, product disposition and disuse to highlight the importance of the extended self in terms of creating meaning in everyday life.

Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) synthesis demonstrates how the experiential perspective contributed to the founding pillars of the CCT project: namely identity projects (Belk 1988; Holt 2002; Murray 2002), marketplace cultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Cova 1997; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002), the socio-historic patterning of consumption (Holt 1997; Allen 2002), and mass-mediated market place ideologies and consumers interpretive strategies (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Murray and Ozanne 1991; Murray 2002). But before tracing through the most relevant contributions from the experiential perspective, I will take a step back and briefly outline some of the foundational theories that have informed consumer researchers.

1.4 Experience in CCT

1.4.1 Foundational Theories

Consumer researchers have drawn from a multitude of sources to conceptualise a range of divergent consumption experiences. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) flow theory has proved to be a
popular choice for those seeking to explicate consumption experiences that involve complete immersion.

Figure 1. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) experience typology

As illustrated in Figure 1, flow states are experienced when people are completely immersed in challenging tasks that require high levels of individual skill exertion. During flow, participants experience a highly focused state of consciousness and commonly report losing an awareness of the passing of time (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Arnould and Price (1993) identify similarities between flow, peak experience (Maslow 1964), and epiphanic experience (Denzin 1992). Maslow’s (1964) theory served to dismantle the notion that sacred or self-actualising experiences belong exclusively to the realm of religion. Maslow (1959, p. 44-45) defined peak experiences as ‘some of these basic cognitive happenings in the B-love experience, the parental experience, the mystic or oceanic, or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, certain forms of athletic fulfilment’.

In a further typology of experience, Denzin (1992, p.26) offers us the concept of epiphanic experiences. Epiphanies are moments of realisation that cannot be contained in our sense of the ordinary everyday. These moments burst from the seams of routine and in doing so spur
on significant redefinitions of the self. In this sense, epiphanic experiences are conceived as major turning points that invariably leave a mark on our lives. Denzin (1992, p.83) draws attention to four types of epiphanic experience:

The major upheaval, which changes a life for ever (e.g. a man kills his wife); the cumulative, which refers to the final buildup of a crisis in a person’s life (e.g. a battered woman finally leaves home); the illuminative moment, in which the underlying existential structures of a relationship or situation are revealed (e.g. the family holiday dinner depicted in John Huston’s 1987 film ‘The Dead’, taken from Joyce’s ‘The Dubliners’); and the relived moment, wherein the person, after an event occurs, comes to define it in consequential terms (e.g. a widowed spouse gradually comes to feel free from a loved one’s presence in their life).

From these examples we can appreciate that epiphanies occur as moments of realisation, which arise in crisis or desperation. In a sense, these moments of epiphany surface when people face their greatest challenges and consequently make sense of such experiences. These moments are important because they give meaning to people’s worlds and their sense of place within them.

Abrahams (1986) rebalances the focus of experiential enquiry somewhat with an offering that outlines the concept of extraordinary experience in relation to ordinary experiences. He contends that researchers of experience should begin by detailing the sensory and emotional experiences that are most common in the ebb and flow of people’s everyday lives. For Abrahams (1986) the extraordinary should be reached through an understanding that also encompasses the ordinary. Abraham (1986, p. 70) is most concerned with an understanding of experiences that is ultimately communal.

Our great discovery is not that everyone has experiences that are both unique and typical, but that everyone does seem to have a way of organising these doings so they may be shared.

Working from a similarly anthropological stance, Turner (1986) draws upon Dilthey’s (1976) distinction between “mere experience” and “an experience”. He contends that “mere experiences” are experiences that are passively consumed, for the most part; they pass without drawing attention or notice. Alternatively, “an experience” is an event that marks a noticeable departure from the monotony of mere experience. These experiences make up what Dilthey (1976, p.210) referred to as the “structure of experience”, which alludes to the temporal nature of experience.

Each of us has had certain “experiences” which have been formative and transformative, that is, distinguishable, isolable sequences of external events and internal responses to them such as initiations into new life ways (going to school, first job, joining the army, entering the marital status), love affairs, being caught up in some mode of what Emile Durkheim called “social
Turner contends that these experiences ‘erupt from or disrupt’ mere experiences in bursts of ‘pain or pleasure’ (Turner and Bruner 1986, p.36). Experiences of this nature have an evocative quality in so much as they stir up both conscious and unconscious feelings and memories. These past memories and feelings shape momentary interpretations of the present experience. In these moments, the subject’s attention is directed towards meaning and sensemaking, as efforts are directed towards unravelling and making sense of the present. For Turner (1986) undertaking this process is what transforms “mere experience” into “an experience”. In this regard, we begin to understand how experiences are made meaningful and also how these meaningful experiences contribute to the construction of subjectivities. It is from Turner, that consumer researchers draw when they speak of the distinction between mundane and extraordinary consumption experiences.

As we learned in the introduction to this chapter, proponents of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998) and experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999, 2000) were quick to pick and choose concepts from these foundational typologies of experience. In particular the concept of extraordinary experience has become foundational to both Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt’s (1999) vision of how the marketplace should be organised. We know that the marketplace has placed an emphasis on the production of ludic, sensual, and emotional experiences that rupture from the so-called monotony of ordinary everyday experience. Even at the most basic level, aesthetic and sensory considerations are increasingly employed to attempt to make the most basic transaction memorable. Thompson (2000) contends that the process of “retail re-enchantment” serves to compartmentalise daily life into a series of banal micro-pleasures derived from in store shopping experiences. In this sense, the marketplace has adapted to create offerings that seek to elicit internal pleasures (Jantzen et al. 2012). Consumer researchers have also charted the commodification of experience provided by flagship stores (Kozinets et al. 2004), museums (Joy and Sherry 2003; Goulding 2000, 1999), and servicescapes (Sherry 1998). Extraordinary consumption experiences of this nature involve total immersion into thematised hyper real worlds. Having briefly sketched out the theoretical foundations of experience, I will now trace how these concepts have been employed by consumer researchers to contribute to our understanding of consumer culture.
1.4.2 Extraordinary Consumption Experience

Within CCT extraordinary consumption experiences are understood as a hedonic activity that are characterised as intense, enjoyable, and potentially transformational (Tumbat and Belk 2011). As we learned in our review of the foundational theories of experience, extraordinary experiences are distinct from flow experiences, peak experiences, and epiphanic experience in the sense that they are ultimately motivated by a desire for interpersonal interaction (Abrahams 1986). Classical sociological perspectives highlight the loss of agency brought about by the inherent focus on specialisation and rationalisation in post-industrial society (Durkheim 1893/1985, Marx 1867/1946). In this context of disenchantment and alienation, consumers seek out extraordinary consumption experiences because of their hedonic qualities and transformative potential. In this regard, it is generally posited that a sense of dissatisfaction with the mundane and routine nature of everyday life fuels this desire to seek out the extraordinary (Campbell 1987). For Firat and Venkatesh (1995), these postmodern consumers are seeking to reconnect with a sense of the passion, excitement, magic, and mystery that has seemingly been drained out of everyday life. The search for extraordinary experience encompasses a turn away from the bureaucratic, institutionalised, and regulated structure of corporate/urban living (Ritzer 1999, de Certeau 1984).

Arnould and Price (1993) explore the commercial dimension of extraordinary consumption experiences through their investigation of river rafting. They delve into this phenomenon by investigating the lived experience of consumers and river rafting guides. Drawing upon Turner and Bruner (1986), their opening premise is that consumers increasingly seek leisure experiences that allow them to escape the mundane nature of everyday life. Arnould and Price (1993) report that extraordinary consumption provides a means for consumers to momentarily transcend the stresses and strains of life in a capitalist system. Their research uncovers the role of the naturalistic setting, the tour guides, and other consumers as a resource which consumers draw upon in constructing personal narratives of their extraordinary consumption experiences. In particular, the ‘guide is an impresario who facilitates the enactment of vaguely familiar cultural scripts, helping participants to transform experiences into treasured, culturally constructed memories of personal growth, challenges overcome, teamwork, and perseverance’ (Arnould and Price 1993, p. 25). Extraordinary consumption experiences are capable of transcending the commercial because consumers can experience real, although temporal, bonds of friendship and connection with nature (Abrahams 1986). These connections are important and distinct from other consumption experiences because they
allow the consumer to transcend the focus on the individualised self (Belk et al. 1989), which seems so prevalent in consumer society.

Drawing upon Maslow’s (1964) concept of peak performances, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) flow, and Abrahams’ (1986) extraordinary experiences, Arnould and Price (1993, p.25) contend that ‘certain qualities unify these experiences, including the merging of action and awareness, attention or clear focus, personal integration, personal control, awareness of power, joy and valuing, and a spontaneous (uninhibited) letting-be of process’. Furthermore, consumers report that memories of these experiences reside beyond those of ordinary consumption experiences, although the specifics of the experience can be difficult to articulate in words. Arnould and Price’s (1993) river rafters report a ‘magical experience’, which is created because of the unique coming together of the natural environment, the tutelage of the group guide, and the solidarity of new and old friendships.

Against the backdrop of these magical consumption experiences Arnould and Price (1993) argue the ineffectiveness of more traditional choice and satisfaction models (Fiebelkorn 1985, Oliver and DeSarbo 1988) in understanding this type of consumer behaviour. Such models assume that consumer satisfaction is a function of the gap between consumer perceptions of how a good/service should perform contrasted with its actual performance. This assumption is problematic when examining extraordinary consumption because it assumes that consumer expectations must exist. The emotional responses that a consumer hopes to derive from such experiences are difficult, even for them, to predict. Their emotional responses are subjective (Denzin 1983) and, therefore, different depending on the context and the individual. Furthermore, the cultural scripts that loosely shape these experiences are intentionally vague. This is important for the authenticity of the experience and it allows each consumer to feel that they are experiencing a unique encounter with the unknown. A closely defined cultural script would clearly establish these experiences as another pre-packaged commodity provided by the marketplace, thus eroding the magic of the experience.

Spontaneity distinguishes extraordinary events from everyday routines and contributes to the perception of the event as extraordinary. (Arnould and Price 1993, p.26)

Spontaneity encourages the consumer to experience being in the moment, which again affords the consumer the opportunity to temporarily transcend the self. These developments in the way we understand consumption experiences make it difficult to avoid the criticisms made in relation to the traditional utility maximising choice models of consumer behaviour. From this
review we can identify a number of important themes that help to create river rafting as an extraordinary consumption experience: the sense of magic and connection with nature, personal transcendence, and most importantly the development of *communitas*.

We see similar themes emerging in Belk and Costa’s (1998) account of the so-called Mountain Men community. In this context community life is built upon re-enactments of the oftentimes *imagined* history of the American mountain man. The community relies heavily upon a nostalgic view of America’s past and archetypal heroic figures such as the mythic frontiersman, the rugged and brave romantic hero, and the strong silent man that rejects domesticity in order to return to nature. For community members these myths and cultural narratives provide a structure, which aids them in constructing an extraordinary consumption experience that allows them to connect with their romantic notions of the simplicity of the past. For Belk and Costa (1998, p.219) ‘invented traditions that invoke and draw on a nostalgic and mythical past help convey modern mountain men to a fantastic time and space, representing escape from everyday reality and a corresponding unreal experience’. Mountain man re-enactments can be seen as a rejection of notions of civilised culture, in favour of a return to more primitive ways of life. The experience of a time and place separated from everyday reality leads to a sense of *communitas*, which enables the community to discard traditional social identities and their corresponding hierarchies (Turner 1969). Interestingly the community has developed an accommodating view of authenticity, which is more related to the logics of the contemporary marketplace than the documented accounts of the historical mountain man. Poignantly, Belk and Costa (1998, p.232) identify that historical facts are ‘routinely violated in the names of “authenticity”, comfort, or expediency, [in this sense] rendezvous participants join in what might be thought of as the social construction of unreality’.

Kozinets’ (2001) study of the extraordinary Burning Man festival focuses explicitly on the notion of consumers’ desires to escape conformity, commercialism, and ultimately the marketplace. At the Burning Man festival consumers attempt to create communal experiences that re-enchant their social world. In Kozinets’ (2001) account the festival is best exemplified as a rejection of the individualistic logics of the marketplace. Similar to Belk and Costa’s (1998) mountain men, festivalgoers engage in co-operative and creative production in an effort to solidify a community that stands as an expression of their disdain for the individualist logics of the market. In this regard we can identify that this community is motivated by the desire to escape the structuring forces of society (Turner 1986). But paradoxically, Kozinets (2001, p.36) identifies that participation is to a large extent guided by the desire to differentiate the self from other participants. In this regard, festivalgoers
willingly subject themselves to the ‘market’s sign games and social logics’. Drawing upon Turner’s (1982) antistructure concept, Kozinets (2001) argues that the feeling of escape is often enough to liberate individual creativity and remove restriction, which enables consumers to experience personal transcendence.

As we have seen in this review, consumers’ attempts to break out of the restrictive, mundane, and routine sense of everyday life is well documented in CCT. From this review we can also identify a number of shared themes within this research agenda. These themes reverberate around tensions in dualisms such as: nature and culture, authentic and commercial, freedom and restriction, community and the individual, and the ordinary and extraordinary. Perhaps, most striking is the similarity across contexts in terms of efforts to develop a sense of communitas that transcends standard societal structures (Abrahams 1986; Turner 1969). Within these communities consumers experience co-operation, shared goals, a sense of the sacred, while also regaining some of the magic that is missing in everyday life.

**1.4.3 Consuming the Experience of Risk**

Further building upon the experiential turn in consumer research, Celsi et al. (1993) focus their attention on skydiving as a high-risk leisure experience. Celsi et al. (1993) illustrate the growing popularity of high-risk leisure activities: skydiving, Base-jumping, white-water rafting, surfing, canoeing, and kayaking. There has also been a widening of the demographics of people engaging in high-risk leisure pursuits. Between 1985 and 1993, the United States Parachute Association reported a 65% increase in the number of females sky-diving. The increased popularity of high-risk leisure activities has created a vibrant marketplace in terms of the service experience (Arnould and Price 1993), equipment, clothing and apparel, and media publications. Celsi et al. (1993) report that the zeitgeist of the 1990s encouraged people to push themselves and their boundaries further than they had in the past.

Whether one is an actual participant, or an individual living vicariously with consumer goods as lifestyle props, the style and colour of high-risk sports have become a badge of our times. We are all admonished to ‘just do it’, and ‘play hard’ for ‘life is short’. (Celsi et al. 1993, p.2)

Primarily, Celsi et al. (1993) are interested in the motivating factors that influence people to voluntarily take part in high-risk activities. Accordingly, they look to the lived experience of people that engage in these activities. In terms of the motivating factors driving high-risk leisure consumption they contend that through mediatisation consumers are now more aware than ever before of the possibilities that leisure activities can offer. The media asks consumers
to demand more of themselves in terms of what can be achieved. Media messages promote
the notion that transcendental experiences (Belk et al. 1989) can be accessed through high-
risk leisure activities. Furthermore, Celsi et al. (1993) argue that post-industrial specialisation
leads to a detachment from work-based activity and the corresponding identities that such
activity creates. Their findings suggest that this predicament need not lead to an Orwellian
disenchantment with work; rather for the post-industrial worker, work opens up the
possibilities of what can be achieved through their leisure pursuits and working life becomes
a means to an end.

Findings on the motivational factors involved in high-risk leisure consumption reveal a
‘dynamic process of motivational change as individuals participate in high-risk activities’
(Celsi et al. 1993, p.10). Normative factors such as curiosity, desire for excitement/adrenaline
rushes, social pressure, a general sense of adventure, and interpersonal factors (Holbrook and
Hirschman 1982) influence first time jumpers. Findings suggest that interpersonal factors
have an important motivating influence in-group situations. Celsi et al. (1993, p.10) draw
upon the influence of Myers and Lamm’s (1976) concept of group polarisation; ‘a
phenomenon in which there is a change from a modestly positive attitude to a very positive
one in the presence of peers’. The willingness to accept risk appears greater in group
situations. However, the motivations for continued participation in high-risk activities differ
significantly from the normative factors involved in early stage participation. They find
continued participation in high-risk activities is motivated by a number of factors. First, self-
efficacy is the desire to develop the skills and competencies that one requires to be considered
competent at a given task or activity. Importantly, in this instance it is not just the
development of particular skills that is important, it is also about social recognition that these
skills have been acquired. For mid-level jumpers mastery of the art of skydiving becomes an
important motivating factor. On attaining mastery of sky-diving one of their participants
states (Celsi et al. 1993, p.11):

It just seems to get better as it goes, because you do get more relaxed and fear subsides. You
realise that there are all these challenges that you haven’t met yet and that there’s so much more
that you can do and learn.

This continuous raising of the bar of expectation during the career of a skydiver is important
because it establishes a clear path of development, which helps to maintain the motivation of
more established participants. Celsi et al. (1993) identify a number of intrinsic and extrinsic
factors, which further influence continued participation. In terms of the influence of identity
Celsi et al. (1993) contend that we arrive at our adult identities as a consequence of
circumstance, as opposed to individual choice. Identities are traditionally assigned to
individuals on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, occupation etc. However, in a consumer culture, consumption choices present consumers with an avenue to construct new identities and possibly even transcend the traditional identities that have been assigned. High-risk leisure consumption is useful in this regard because the identities that are formed through participation are clearly distinct from traditional identities. For Celsi et al. (1993, p.11) ‘high-risk activities provide a well-defined context for personal change, as well as a clear-cut means, to organise a new and sometimes central, identity’. In terms of identity then, high-risk activities encompass a clearly defined cultural script, which touches on dimensions such as: rights of passage, rewards of privilege, and status attainable through effort. The desire for mastery is primarily motivated by desire to create a credible identity amongst peers.

The path to achievement is carefully scripted with well-understood benchmarks for evaluation of performance. These new life tasks are closely linked to participants’ cognitive representations of the possible selves they seek. Thus, the promise of a new identity also provides a powerful motive for a commitment to mastery of high-risk activities.

(Celsi et al., 1993, p.11)

Celsi et al. (1993) report that the motivating factors for continued participation in high-risk activities become increasingly abstract and are often focused on the notion of transcending the mundane in the everyday. To address the motivating factors within individual experiences Celsi et al. (1993) draw upon Csikszentmihalyi’s (1974) concept of flow experience. Flow experiences involve total absorption; ‘as such flow is a phenomenological state where self awareness, behaviour and context form a unitised singular experience’ (Celsi et al. 1993, p.11). During flow experiences, participants ‘flow’ from task to task without ‘conscious intervention’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1974, p.58). Participants commonly report that their cognitive appreciation of the passing of time is lost during flow experience. Flow experiences are transcendent in the sense that participants are unconstrained, temporarily, by convention or self-awareness. Csikszentmihalyi (1974) argues that once the realisation of flow is experienced, participants maintain the urge to replicate and re-experience flow. Flow experiences are most likely to be found when an activity or challenge pushes participants to the limit of their skills and abilities. Therefore, an important characteristic of flow is the harmony between participants’ abilities and skills and the challenges that the activity presents.

The dramatic act of skydiving, or any other high-risk sport, is a ‘set piece’ that is enacted on a specified stage with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. The time, location, and players are carefully selected. Goals and outcomes are defined and agreed on. The script is rehearsed, with the tacit understanding that the truly able will be capable of ‘ad-libbing’ when necessary.

(Celsi et al., 1993, p.12)
Communitas is also proposed as a motivating factor for continued participation in high-risk activity; ‘a sense of community that transcends typical social norms and conventions’ (Celsi et al., 1993, p.12). Communitas overcomes the labelling identities that are traditionally assigned by society. Through communitas people from all walks of life can experience the bond of camaraderie through shared experience of their activity and/or liminal states that transcend the mundane in the everyday (Belk et al. 1989).

In summary, Celsi et al.’s (1993) study offers empirical insight into the evolving nature of sky divers’ motivations as they progress through their careers. In particular the desire for self-efficacy is framed around the abstract goal of identity formation – ‘the trajectory of change for the efficacy motives also ends with a type of transcendence, the partial abandonment of an old self’ (Celsi et al. 1993, p.15). As such the paper is illuminated with individual experiences of identity formation and enculturation into community groups. Arnould and Price (1993) and Celsi et al. (1993) both invoke flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) to theorise the extraordinary experience enjoyed by skydivers and white water rafters. Flow theory directs attention to the individual’s psychological experience of extraordinary experiences.

In combination our review of the extraordinary consumption experiences literature (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001) and Celsi et al.’s (1993) research on high-risk experiences provides significant insight into the hedonic nature of experiential consumption. These studies empirically demonstrate how the marketplace adapts to enable consumers to pursue joy and pleasure as legitimate ends in their leisure activities (Jantzen et al. 2012). The tension between Turner’s (1969,1974) concept of structure and antistructure is pervasive in these accounts in terms of efforts to create a sense of communitas that transcends societal structures (Tumbat and Belk 2011). Having reached this understanding, it seems pertinent to take a slightly more critical stance in terms of evaluating CCT’s focus on the extraordinary in experience.

1.5 Romantic Roots of Experience

Drawing upon the work of Campbell (1987), Holbrook (1997) argues that the roots of the experiential shift in consumer society can be traced back to the Romantic ethos of the eighteenth century. This Romantic spirit embraced notions of personal development and fulfilment as important social values that were grounded in a celebration of ‘subjective intuitions, personal revelations and introspective insights’ (Holbrook 1997, p. 97). The
Romantic ethos was typified by the notion that the self must be developed so that it can be elevated to a height whereby it becomes a subject worthy of understanding and reflection. The success of capitalism, and its imperatives for mass production, unquestionably relied upon the development of a mass culture of consumption. Campbell (1987) convincingly argues that the spirit of consumerism, so pervasive in today’s society, is linked to a reawakening of the romantic spirit of the eighteenth century.

Through Campbell (1987) and Holbrook’s (1997) work, we see pertinent connections between the hedonic values of the Romantic period and today’s consumer society. Campbell (1987, p.69) argues that the hedonic values of the Romantic period are most clearly evident in the prevailing notion that to lead a meaningful life one must squeeze ‘as much of the quality of pleasure as one can from the sensations which one actually experiences during the course and process of living’. This viewpoint was epitomised in the spirit of eighteenth century Western Europe, which emphasised ‘change, diversity, individuality, and imagination’ (Campbell 1987, p.181). The emergence of these cultural values coincided with a growing sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the world, which Campbell (ibid) characterises as a ‘restless anxiety in the face of life’. In an effort to enact cultural change, the Romantics embraced a turn towards the irrational, evidenced in the increasing value attributed to ideals of curiosity, imagination, and mysticism. Of these values, imagination was unquestionably held in the highest regard. Imagination became tied to notions of beauty and pleasure and on this basis it became the most highly regarded character trait of the period. Campbell (1987, p.193) argues that:

The imagination and the experiencing of pleasure became largely commensurate … the Romantic … had an ideal sensitivity to pleasure, and indicated this fact by the spontaneity and intensity of his emotions.

In this sense we can see that the Romantic period represents a turn away from the rational values of the Enlightenment, towards an ethos that embraced the intrinsic values of pleasure. By tracing the concept of experience back to the Romantic period, we begin to recognise a convergence between Romanticism, hedonism, and modern consumerism and the shared pursuit of pleasure resulting from ‘the imaginative evocation of emotional experience’. Also identifying this convergence, Jantzen et al. (2012, p.7) contend that ‘a dramatic growth in the wealth of many ordinary citizens of the Western world during the last century has promoted the appetite for hedonic consumption by enhancing the opportunities for acquiring experiential goods’. In a similar manner to the period that embraced the Romantic ethos, the 1960s period is well documented as a time of social change. This period is marked by the advancement of a youth culture that feverishly sought liberation from the hegemonic order.
The youth movement brought to the fore notions of heterogeneity (Holbrook 1997) and the idea that individuals had the right to pursue their own desires and longings (Jantzen et al. 2012). Once appropriated by the marketplace, these ideals became the foundation for the development of (post)modern consumerism (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001) and the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

For the most part, Holbrook (1997) agrees with Campbell’s thesis that modern consumerism is conjoined with a reawakening of the Romantic spirit, but he questions the degree of its impact. He argues that although consumption is guided by the Romantic ethos it is also influenced by more classical ideals. Holbrook proposes that ‘both reasons and emotions, both actions and reactions-coexist within the typical consumption experience and pervade the behaviour of the typical consumer so that they tend always to be mingled (i.e., compresent) in a kind of “mixed bag,” their relative dominance being a question of degree rather than kind’ (1997, p.102). On this basis Holbrook (1997) argues that the Romantic ethos offers us insight into how consumption experiences are cultivated and enriched as opposed to answering the question of why people consume. Importantly, we see some consensus in terms of the value of highlighting the influence of the romantic period on today’s consumer society. But the distinction raised by Holbrook (1997) is an important one, which is perhaps indicative of the way that consumption experiences have been framed in consumer research. Our review of the consumer research literature serves to demonstrate that the attention of consumer researchers has predominantly been focused on extraordinary consumption experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001). Illustrating the Romantic ethos at work, these studies highlight the transformative nature of consuming experiences but perhaps this is offered at the expense of the ordinary. It is worth recalling that Abrahams (1986) outlined that an understanding of the extraordinary should be reached through an understanding that also considered the ordinary. In this regard, Holbrook’s reaction to Campbell is salient because it reminds us that consumer research should go further than a Romanticised celebration of the quests of heroic consumers.

By way of addressing these points, Abrahams (1986) reminds us that the concept of experience is itself codified – the valuing of experience for its own sake is a particularly North American phenomenon. Moreover, identifying, capturing, and reporting extraordinary experiences can be problematic because of the researcher’s tendency to extract these experiences from their place in the flow of everyday life. Abrahams (1986) contends that we must not unwittingly be drawn only to the hedonistic and the pursuit of experiences that stimulate high-states of arousal. We should not gloss over everyday experiences such as boredom, weariness, and apathy in our attempts to understand the transformative nature of
experiences (Abrahams 1986). The cultural significance of boredom is related to a specific ‘emotional regime in which its dichotomies between boredom/excitement and apathy/engagement, for instance are salient structuring features’ (Jantzen et al. 2012, p.5). Abrahams’ (1986) argument is not that we should shy away from examining the transformative nature of experience; rather his is a call to embrace the flexibility of the concept of experience in order to combine the ordinary and the extraordinary. In this vein, an understanding of culture emerges when an understanding of intense experiences is situated within the flow of everyday life.

An anthropology of experience might well begin by noting the range of expressive means and affects, techniques and sentiments—that is, the most common and ordinary activities in the flow of life of the group under observation. And it might then provide a calendar for the events that are already set aside as extraordinary. Finally, an anthropology of experience might look for the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist; how convention permits the framing and stylising of activities, calls to attention the participants, and encourages a spelling out of the meanings and feelings carried within these activities. Because any anthropology of experience is going to be initially attracted to the display events of the group, the preparations for these activities will be as significant as the means and messages carried within the event itself.

(Abrahams 1986, p.70)

Abrahams contends that North American culture in particular has taken on a unique fascination with this notion of the individual in constant development. From the analysis provided here, we can surmise that this is an indication that North American culture is deeply rooted in the Romantic ethos of the eighteenth century. Encompassed within this cult of the individual, is an infatuation with newness and an aversion to boredom. From this perspective it could be argued that these factors contribute to engagement in extraordinary and risky leisure practices. As Western society becomes more affluent, the fear of threats such as famine and starvation subsides, and this creates the stability necessary for the pursuit of happiness (Jantzen et al. 2012). As everyday life is increasingly rendered comfortable and safe, people turn to leisure as a means of transforming the self through the experiences that leisure provides:

The risk-free long-term projection, with the assurance that nothing will ever change and that all surprises are excluded, generates boredom and indifference, in the absence of hurdles which give individuals the chance to measure themselves against their existence.

(Le Breton, 2002 p.130 cited in Carù and Cova 2003)

1.5.1 A More Humble View of the Concept of Experience

Carù and Cova (2003) also draw the conclusion that our understanding of experience in consumer research is limited by the dominance of a culturally biased North American
understanding of consumption experience that is steeped in the Romantic ethos. In an effort to deconstruct this Americanised understanding of experience, Carù and Cova (2003) argue that there is a need to move beyond an understanding of experience that is formulated solely in relation to the offerings of the marketplace.

It is clear why the Arnould and Price text on the experience of river rafting inspired many researchers working on experience in marketing, researchers who, as they have gone along, have tended to replace the concept of ‘experience’ with that of ‘extraordinary experience’ or ‘flow experience’, as every experience has to be extraordinary (LaSalle and Britton, 2003) and the immersion into this flow experience is the reference concept.

(Carù and Cova 2003, p. 275)

To reach a more humble understanding of the concept of experience, Carù and Cova (2003) draw upon the typology of consumption experience offered by Edgell et al. (1997). This conceptualisation is offered on the basis that our understanding of the provision of experience must be extended beyond the functions of the marketplace. Edgell et al. (1997) demonstrate that a range of providers that include the market, the state, the family, and the community also facilitate consumption experiences (see Figure 2). The marketplace connects consumers to bring together consumer experiences. The state brings together citizens in experiences of citizenship. Experiences of family are brought together through family ties, while experiences of friendship are brought together through bonds of kinship. One of the primary purposes of outlining this typology is to reinstatethe point that social relations play an important role in facilitating consumption experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of provision</th>
<th>Access conditions/social relations</th>
<th>Manner of delivery</th>
<th>Social context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Price/exchange</td>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>Consumer with other consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Need/right</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Citizens/users with other citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Family/obligation</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Members of the family with other members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Network/reciprocity</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Friends or neighbours with other friends or neighbours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. The Conditions of Consumption Experience (sourced in Carù and Cova 2003)
A second purpose of this conceptualisation is to limit the boundaries of the consumer experience in consumer research. Edgell et al. (1997) apply their typology to elucidate a distinction between the consumer experience and the consumption experience. By way of illustrating this distinction, Carù and Cova (2003) demonstrate that all consumption experiences are not necessarily tied to marketplace relations, which demonstrates the inadequacies of labelling all consumption experiences as consumer experiences.

The consumption experience of a meal at a friend’s house is linked to a sphere outside the market, even if products from the market may be consumed. In the same way, the communal consumption of a self-produced show is outside the notion of a consumer experience (consider, for example, the experiences at the Burning Man Festival, Kozinets, 2002).

(Carù and Cova 2003, p.276)

Working with this typology, Carù and Cova (2003) reason that this dining experience should be labelled a communal consumption experience, as opposed to a shared consumer experience. This distinction is significant in so much as it rejects the pervasive interests of experiential marketers (Schmitt 1999), who attempt to label experiences of this nature purely in terms of the individual self-gratifying consumer. In a similar manner the sociologists of consumption have argued that ‘social relations shape the experience of consuming’ (Edgell et al. p. 5). This is an important distinction when we consider that ‘marketing is only interested in the specific social context of the market, in which the individual is a consumer living experiences with suppliers and other consumers’ (Carù and Cova 2003, p.276). To limit the boundaries of consumer experience, Carù and Cova (2003) adopt Bagozzi’s (1974) concept of marketing as exchange, and argue that without exchange there cannot be a consumer experience. In this way, they are successful in separating consumer experience from consumption experience. The third point that becomes clear when experience are labelled in this way, is that it is inadequate to blanket all consuming experiences as extraordinary. Carù and Cova (2003) remind us that, even in marketing, the vast majority of companies fail to live up to the lofty pretentions put forward by experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999) and the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

Drawing upon the work of European scholars (e.g. Schlegel and Bruckner 2000; Cassano 2001), Carù and Cova (2003) contend that the experiential perspective should not fall into the trap of creating research that simply perpetuates the romanticised notion that happiness can only be found through intense states of arousal. This trap can be avoided when researchers embrace the notion that consumers’ everyday lives are made up of experiences of varying intensity:
Life must have empty days; at all costs, the different intensities of existence must be preserved, so as at least to benefit from the pleasure of change. True life is not absent, it is intermittent, a flash (splash) in the greyness for which we preserve a moving nostalgia.

(Schlegel and Bruckner 2000, p.141 cited in Carù and Cova 2003)

As a discipline CCT must become more reflective and demonstrate a capability to look beyond the dominant ideology that permeates consumer culture (Cassano 2001). To achieve this end, we must not overlook the pauses and seemingly dull moments that exist before and after the euphoric and the extraordinary. This shift also requires that we do not automatically evaluate and describe the everyday lives of consumers using the very same discourses that underpin experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999) and the experiential economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Carù and Cova (2003) convincingly argue that these discourses are attempting to eradicate the value of the notion of contemplative time (Manzini 2001) in contemporary society. The devaluing of contemplative time results in a society where time is accelerated - to be fulfilled each living moment must be saturated in intense experience.

Every minute is saturated with activity; we ‘need’ to do something, and ever more quickly, in order to have the impression, or illusion, of doing more. The experiences proposed by the market do no more than compensate this loss; they are remedies offered by the market to treat the illness that it itself has caused: the disappearance of the contemplative time. They give a passing illusion of well-being to those who can pay, i.e. the consumers. For the others, those without the means to consume, the only possibility is a generalised feeling of malaise (Rifkin, 2000).

(Carù and Cova 2003, p.280)

By not overlooking the significance of contemplative time, it becomes possible to recognise a greater diversity of consuming experiences (or even diversity within the same consuming experience). In this regard, Le Breton (2001, p.150) points to the meditative practice of walking as a ‘poor art, a doing nothing full of things, the sweet ebb back of our minimum life’. Through this practice consumers gain the opportunity to reflect, to feel, to experience stillness and even possibly contemplate the trappings of a society that continually urges us to seek more. In this regard we can recognise the limitations of labelling all experiences as consumer experiences.

1.6 Conclusion

Through this review of the experiential turn, we have arrived at a point where we can clearly understand the development of the experiential perspective in CCT and acknowledge its
advantages in terms of overcoming some of the significant limitations of the IP model of consumer behaviour. In this regard, we have seen how the experiential perspective has contributed to our understanding of identity projects, marketplace cultures, the socio-historic patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies. In this chapter, we also delved into the concept of experience by detailing the influence of anthropological, sociological and psychological conceptualisations of experience. We noted that the development of the anthropology of experience is important because it allows us to move beyond notions of behaviour. By examining cultural expressions of experience, anthropologists attempt to move beyond individualised understandings. From psychology and sociology, we learned that experiences are important in terms of the construction of subjectivities. In this regard, transformational experiences are particularly influential in terms of efforts to construct a coherent sense of self over time.

In consumer research, the experiential perspective has brought attention to the symbolic, hedonic, and sensory qualities of consumption. In this regard, we can recognise that consumption can be engaged in for its own sake and sometimes consumption is about fantasy, feelings, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Moreover, the experiential perspective is particularly apt when it comes to examining the fields of leisure and the arts. This route to experience is provided through the subjective accounts of participants who describe their lived experiences of located consumption contexts. Phenomenological accounts are further supplemented by the subjective interpretations of the researcher operating in the lived in world.

In this chapter, we also identified a range of experience typologies that have been used to explicate experience in consumer research. Returning to the CCT literature, we then documented how these theories have been employed to illuminate consumers’ immersions in extraordinary (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001) and high-risk leisure experiences (Celsi et al. 1993). These studies indicate that high-intensity consumption experiences are important in consumer society because they offer escape from the routine and mundane nature of everyday life. Moreover, these experiences are also significant in terms of the construction of individual identities and marketplace cultures. In combination these studies highlight the significance of notions of authenticity in these consumption experiences. Moreover, they illustrate the levels of communitas that transcend ordinary bonds of kinship, which reportedly explains the participants’ tendency to sacralise the experience. Shared experiential themes emerging from these papers include communitas, a return to nature, authenticity, personal development, and a sense of sacredness and magic. In the CCT
literature these themes are reported as ‘deeply frustrated values that American consumers seek and prize’ (Arnould and Price 1993, p. 41).

Careful analysis allowed us to trace to the foundations of these shared experiential themes back to the Romantic ethos of the eighteenth century. Here we see connections between the Romantic period and (post)modern consumer culture in terms of the prioritisation of the notion of the individual constructed through experience (Campbell 1987; Holbrook 1997). We also learned that living up to this ideal is far from an easy task in today’s consumer society (Carù and Cova 2003). This understanding allows us to reflect upon the Romantic tendencies of the postmodern consumer. But importantly we can also now critically evaluate how this ethos has itself permeated the CCT discipline. Armed with this understanding, it becomes possible to also look at and beyond the extraordinary in an effort to further our understanding of the gamut of consumer experiences.

The search for authentic experience represents a significant obstacle for the (post)modern consumer. In this vein, we come to recognise the place of extraordinary experience, particularly those that offer high-states of arousal and the promise of transformation. But Abrahams (1986) and Carù and Cova’s (2003) work, in particular, has reminded us not to lose sight of the ordinary altogether. Extraordinary experiences are only made so because of their place in the ebb and flow of people’s everyday lives. Upon reflection, it seems that the experiential perspective in CCT has been dominated by this Romantic-Americanised view of the extraordinary. We can also see that the nature of America’s individualistic consumer society, with its emphasis on constant development, creates a penchant for newness that is accompanied by a fear of boredom. The result is intense pressure, to be interesting, novel, and somehow more authentic. But this is a difficult task when the individual lives in an intensely commodified world that rarely allows space for spontaneous actions. In this setting, we can begin to appreciate that the consumption of risk could be appealing in so much as it presents a route to meaningful experience. Speaking to this point Jantzen et al. (2012, p. 5) contend that ‘consumer culture theorists have often discussed the importance of excitement, gratification, and wonder in structuring aspects of consumption experience. Excitement and wonder are relevant to a wide range of consumption situations, with obvious examples including extreme tourism and spectacular events, recreational drug consumption, clubbing, and gaming’.

So in this chapter, we have seen that the experiential perspective is particularly useful when it comes to examining hedonic leisure pursuits. Our literature review demonstrates the significance of leisure in terms of the intensity of the experience and also its capacity to break out of the mundane ebb and flow of everyday life. With regards to leisure experiences of this
nature, the CCT literature in particular, highlights the importance of authenticity, personal
development, and community. Our review has allowed us to identify the Romantic roots of
these values, and also their particular pertinence in American consumer society. In the next
chapter, we will narrow the focus of enquiry somewhat by focusing on motorcycling as a
particular consumption context that is suitable for experientially focused research. We will
pay particular attention to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of the American
Harley Davidson subculture because it provides a rich contextualisation of the lived
experience of a particular group of motorcycling enthusiasts. Moreover, it is a suitable
starting point for delving further into experiential themes such as community, identity
formation, and authenticity.
Chapter 2: Motorcycling Culture: The Looming Outlaw

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by providing a brief outline of the development of motorcycling culture from the 1920s to the present day. Academic accounts of this culture and its history are predominantly grounded in Anglo-American perspectives of history, media, popular culture and technological advancement. This account will serve to contextualise the development of understandings of the motorcyclist as rebel and outlaw. We will examine the role of the media in terms of propagating this stereotype. We will also identify influential artifacts from popular culture and examine their role in mythologising varying images and representations of motorcycling. In turning attention to British youth culture, we will see how British youths’ interpreted aspects of North American motorcycling iconography, in order to appropriate their own distinct aesthetic styles. We will also examine the role of motorcycling manufacturers and their efforts to mould their own representations of motorcycling, with the intention of broadening their target market. Finally, we will look beyond North America and Britain to briefly grasp a more globalised appreciation of motorcycling. The aim here is to develop an understanding of motorcycling culture that will serve us in our future analysis.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will focus on providing a review of consumer research related to the topic of motorcycling. I will pay particular attention to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) seminal research on the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption. This piece warrants significant detailing because it offers a rich contextualisation and insight into life within a particular subgroup of motorcycling enthusiasts. I aim to illustrate that the lure of the outlaw has resulted in a partial understanding of motorcycling identity, community, and also notions of authenticity within CCT. This is significant because, for the most part, it remains the definitive representation of motorcycling culture and identity within CCT. In this regard, it offers a foundation in terms of orientating the overall focus and aims of this research. I will also address more recent research that has questioned the hegemonic underpinnings of Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) work. These critiques sparked a re-enquiry into the Harley Davidson community, examined through the lived experiences of female participants (Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006). Following on from this, I will address CCT research that focuses on speed and issues of road safety in motorcycling (Haigh and Crowther 2005; Murphy and Patterson 2011). In concluding, I will outline the primary aim of this research and also detail a number of specific research questions that will orientate the research in terms of achieving this aim.
2.2 The Evolution of Motorcycling Culture

At the turn of the twentieth century, the motorcycle was introduced to America, along with a call that invited the leisure classes to embrace the spirit of adventure. In the 1920s, motorcycling provided the rich and affluent with an opportunity to engage in risk. Henry Ford’s assembly line production method brought about a dramatic reduction in the cost of the automobile for consumers. Due to its relative inexpensiveness, comfort, and convenience, the Model-T quickly became the most popular means of personal mobility. The success of the expanding automobile industry meant that the motorcycle was recognized more as a mode of leisure as opposed to a means of transport (Austin et al. 2010). When World War II broke out, the US army commissioned American manufacturers Indian Motorcycles and Harley Davidson to produce a large number of motorcycles. These motorcycles were used as reconnaissance vehicles, ambulances, and also for the transportation of communications (Osgerby 2005). For survival, wartime motorcyclists depended not only on their own riding skills but also on the reliability of their machines – ‘just as men had bonded over bullets’, they also developed affective relationships with their machines’ (Maynard 2008, p.42).

After World War II, a significant proportion of American soldiers returned home and found that they were ill prepared for the banality of civilian life (Phillips 2005; Austin et al. 2010). When they left for war, America had functioned as a producer culture, in which men were taught to derive pleasure from identifying with objects of their own making. After returning home, ‘male veterans flocked to the new corporations and service industries where, faceless and product-less, they found it difficult to locate that identity’ (Smith 1992, p.324). Some of these disillusioned, veterans began to return to motorcycling in order to reinstate a sense of adventure and danger in their lives. It is within this context that the motorcycle, as an object of culture, first came to represent escape and freedom (Osgerby 2005). Many of these veterans used motorcycling as a means of resisting the resounding calls to domesticity (Austin et al. 2010).

In resisting the pressures to conform to the emerging consumerist view of American life, groups of men sought an alternative lifestyle in which they could re-establish some of the values that they experienced in army life. Perhaps most significantly, motorcycling opened up an avenue to reconnect with like-minded individuals (Maynard 2008). A motorcycling subculture began to emerge as a means of overcoming the ‘pervasive sense of isolation and meaninglessness’, that these men experienced upon returning from war (Burstyn 1999,
To suit the practical requirements of their pursuits, the subculture adopted a uniform that consisted of black leather jackets, blue jeans, boots, which were to be worn with a swagger to match. For the most part, society recognised these motorcyclists as law-abiding citizens, but by the middle of the 1950s circumstances changed and they came to be characterised as deviant outlaws (Austin et al. 2010).

The paranoia that ensued during the Cold War period resulted in a waning tolerance for dissension of any kind (Phillips 2005; Maynard 2008; Austin et al. 2010). Perhaps more than any other, the infamous events that occurred in the Californian town of Hollister in 1947 had a formative impact upon motorcycling culture. Hollister had a longstanding relationship with motorcyclists and regularly hosted racing events. But in 1947, ‘anywhere from several thousand to a hundred thousand bikers reportedly rode to town, overwhelming the six-member police force, and began to carouse’ (Phillips 2005 n.p). As the sanctioned races took place, motorcyclists took over the main thoroughfare and spontaneous drag races broke out. The Hollister police enlisted the assistance of California’s highway patrol. The city was shutdown and the police used gas guns to shepherd the unruly motorcyclists to one section of the city. Over fifty motorcyclists were arrested and the city was left in shock, but the events did not initially receive widespread media coverage (Phillips 2005).

Figure 3. ‘Cyclist Holiday’ *Life*, 1947
The *San Francisco Chronicle* got wind of the events and ran with the story. This story was subsequently picked up by *Life* magazine and this time it was accompanied by an image of a drunken man on a motorcycle with the caption ‘Cyclists Holiday’ (see Figure 3). This photograph was printed alongside an image of a mannequin wearing an ape mask sitting in a barber’s chair, along with the caption ‘Barber’s Holiday’. ‘The obvious implication was that bikers were simian creatures who engaged in loutish, animalistic behaviour – instinct run wild’ (Alford and Ferriss 2008, p.90). The image of the drunken motorcyclist was accompanied by a scathing editorial that condemned all of the motorcyclists for their loutish and deviant behaviour. Scholars of motorcycling culture (Phillips 2005; Alford and Ferriss 2008; Maynard; Austin *et al.* 2010) appear to be unequivocal in the understanding that the publicity surrounding this story instilled a belief in the American public that motorcyclists presented ‘a threat to their conservative post-war way of life, [which] initiated a stereotype that continued into the twenty-first century’ (Austin *et al.* 2010, p.947).

The *Life* story provoked outrage within the motorcycling subculture. The American Motorcycling Association released a statement condemning the events at Hollister and argued that these misfits represented just ‘one percent of the total number of motorcyclists’ (cited in Phillips 2005 n.p.). This statement created a schism within the motorcycling subculture between those that agreed and those that fervently opposed the statement. ‘Motorcyclists that felt disenfranchised from North American society at large and disparaged by other motorcyclists [w]ould rally around the one-percenter label and form a new brotherhood’ (Maynard 2008 p, 51).

![Figure 4. Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (1954)](image-url)
The events from this infamous weekend in Hollister provided the inspiration for the 1954 film *The Wild One*. *The Wild One* was the first, in a series of films that depicted the biker as the modern working class expression of the Wild West outlaw. Marlon Brando, starring as Johnny Strabler, became the epitome of Middle America’s fears about youth culture because he rejected their mainstream values in his search for pleasure, excitement, danger, and adventure (Phillips 2005). The film resonated with the American public’s fears about Cold War Communism and also growing national concerns related to juvenile delinquency (Maynard 2008). But the film also gained a cult following because it celebrated non-conformity and rebellion at a time when dissension was generally discouraged in America. Brando’s character clearly rejected the American ideals of ‘economic prosperity and capitalism’ (Phillips 2005, n.p.). In this regard, his character is representative of the beginnings of the youth culture’s dissension, which eventually came to a head in the 1960s. The commercial success of this film influenced a flurry of subsequent Hollywood productions that attempted to profit from the youth cultures fascination with the outlaw motorcyclist (*The Black Rider* 1954; *Motorcycle Gang* 1957; *The Hot Angel* 1958). This mythologised image of the rebel motorcyclist also began to make an impact within Britain’s burgeoning youth culture.

As the British economy began to recover in the post-war period, employment rates started to rise and British youths began finding their way into work. For the first time, these youths had a disposable income and spare time that they could devote to leisure pursuits. During this period British youth culture continued to define itself in terms of class based distinctions, which manifested itself into two distinct groups – office workers and manual/mechanical labourers (Alford and Ferriss 2008). The motorcycle was central in the evolution of two distinct youth subcultures, which would become known as the Mods and the Rockers.

Office workers, with middle class aspirations and sensibilities, began to use their disposable incomes to create an aesthetic style that would become known as the Modern look. This style was built upon a meticulous attention to details of fashion, neatness and dapper European-styled suits. This style enabled the aspiring Mods to smoothly transition between activities of work and leisure (Hebdige 1979). This Mod aesthetic influenced their choice of motorcycle, which were predominantly Italian designed scooters produced by Lambretta and Vespa. The mods thought of these scooters as ‘neat, clean and stylishly European, the ideal choice for mobility, plus its step-through design and wide fairing provided protection for clothing and shoes’ (Alford and Ferriss 2008, p.80). The Mods spent large proportions of their disposable incomes
on modifying and individualising their scooters in order to outwardly display their penchant for the Modern aesthetic (Hebdige 1979).

Alternatively, the Rockers’ embraced a style and approach to motorcycling that was more akin to the mythologised image of the North American outlaw. In relative terms to the Mods, the Rockers classified themselves as real bikers. Primarily they rode motorcycles produced by British manufacturers such as Triumph Engineering, Norton and BSA Motorcycles. In contrast to the Mods, who primarily modified for stylistic purposes, the Rockers modified their motorcycles to improve performance capabilities. The Rockers used their mechanical know-how to increase the speed of their motorcycles in order to intensify the experience of motorcycling. The Rockers adopted an aggressive riding style through which they could openly display their riding skills and bravery (Alford and Ferriss 2008). A recoded statement from a Rocker in 1964 proclaimed, ‘I’m a Rocker because I ride a motorcycle. To be a Rocker, you’ve got to have a bike and a leather jacket with a studded belt, jeans and high topped racing boots’ (Stuart 1987, p.59). In a similar manner to the events in Hollister, The Mods and the Rockers infamously clashed in Brighton over the Whitsun holiday in 1964. This presented the British media with an opportunity to confirm public fears regarding these emerging youth subcultures. Once again, the media propagated the notion that motorcycling culture was ‘somehow synonymous with moral defectiveness and a national problem’ (Alford and Ferriss 2008, p.83). The events at Brighton provided the inspiration for the 1979 film Quadrophenia, which would become a cult classic with this generation of British youths.
By the start of the 1960s, motorcycle manufacturers began to recognise that their commercial success was hampered by the public’s perception of the motorcyclist as outlaw. Honda was the first company to challenge this stereotype. In 1960 they launched an advertising campaign, which was entitled ‘You meet the nicest people on a Honda’ (see Figure 6). The advertising campaign employed a series of images of young couples, parents and children, and other so called ‘respectable members’ of society, riding the newly released Honda Supercub for recreation. Honda did not make reference to the word motorcycle in this campaign because they wanted to avoid the negative connotations. The campaign was successful and Honda began creating a new market segment that was far removed from the Outlaw mythos (Austin et al. 2010). The campaign helped to move representations of motorcycling beyond the stereotype of the outlaw. With this campaign, Honda managed to successfully reframe motorcycling as an affordable and convenient mode of transport. This development was instrumental in terms of positioning the motorcycle as a viable means of transport for the masses.

Between 1960 and 1970, the profile of people riding motorcycles changed drastically as the number of motorcycle riders grew from 575,000 to almost three million in America (Maxwell 1998). Scholars of motorcycling culture, regard the 1970s as a period of significant transition in so much as the American public began to accept motorcycling as a socially acceptable activity. The 1974 film *Easy Rider* provided a new cultural reference point, which
encompassed a transition ‘from a no-holds barred imagery of the violent biker to the free-spirited rider more intent on self-actualization and indulgence than on bringing violence to small-town America’ (Austin et al. 2010, p.953). This transition helped to open up the space for the emergence of a much large motorcycling market. Manufacturers began to develop a variety of cultural scripts, which provided the growing consumer society with directions on how they could embrace motorcycling in a myriad of new ways.

By 2008, global sales of motorcycles had reached 38.5 million units, over eighty five per cent of which were registered in Asia’s developing economies. The majority of these sales consisted of inexpensive, low powered motorcycles. In many Asian countries, there are now more motorcycles registered for use on public roads than automobiles (Pinch and Reimer 2012). Similarly, in western contexts we have witnessed a steady increase in sales of low powered motorcycles because they provide an inexpensive and convenient means of negotiating traffic congested cities (Pinch and Reimer 2012).

In India the motorcycle is as significant as a symbol of social status as it is a means of transportation. It is significant in the sense that it serves as a marker of distinction for those who possess the resources to consume (Varman and Belk 2008). Because of the large increase in uptake, motorcycling related fatalities are of growing concern in the East (Conrad et al. 1996). This problem is compounded by the relative lack of compliance with regulations related to the wearing of protective headgear (ibid). In India it is common for young boys as young as eight to ride motorcycles on public roads. Chandrasekar et al. (2007) examined this, often times over looked, population of school kids riding motorcycles in the Indian city of Yamunanagar. Chandrasekar et al. (2007) study revealed an appetite for sensation seeking, which manifested itself in aggressive styles of riding. In particular, they found that these young motorcyclists were more likely to engage in risky behaviour when they were experiencing feelings of anger. They found a strong correlation between feelings of anger and a loss of concentration, control over the motorcycle and instances of risk.

Motorcycle manufacturers have continued to design new styles of motorcycles, while their marketing departments construct visions of the identities and practices that pertain to them. One striking example of this is the popular TV series The Long Way Round, which followed Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman on their BMWs as they travelled around the world. This extended BMW advertisement helped to mediate a particularised motorcycling identity that was constructed around notions of exploration and adventure. The popularity of the series, contributed to BMW’s recent success as a market leader in the off/road adventurer niche of the motorcycle marketplace (Pinch and Reimer 2012).
2.3 Subcultures of Consumption: The Lure of the Outlaw

Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of the new bikers is an important study for this project because it demonstrates that motorcycling is a context that can be mined to further our understanding of consumers’ leisure experiences. Schouten and McAlexander’s study demonstrated that motorcycling culture provides a worthy topic of enquiry within the broader context of consumer behaviour. Their study provides a rich contextualisation of the social dynamics of everyday life within a particular community of motorcycling enthusiasts. Although twenty years have passed since this research was published it unquestionably remains the definitive representation of motorcycling culture and identity within the discourses of CCT. In this sense, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) study can become an important point of reference for situating future arguments.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) argue that representations of motorcycling culture, both academic and popular, have for too long focused on notions of the motorcyclist as outlaw. They set about adding a new dimension to our understanding of motorcycling culture by focusing attention on a particular community of motorcycle enthusiasts that organise around their shared commitment to the Harley Davidson brand of motorcycles. They coin the term subculture of consumption to describe this collective as ‘a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity’ (ibid, p.43). Central to the formation of this concept is the notion that
consumption provides consumers with a means of escaping the traditional identities assigned to people by society (ethnicity, race, occupation etc.). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) organise their findings into four major community orientated themes: structure, ethos, identity transformation, and the role of marketing in organising the subculture.

2.3.1 HDSC Structure

Within the HDSC, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) identify a range of distinct subgroups that manage to combine their shared commitment to the Harley Davidson brand with a variety of exterior interests and perspectives (Vietnam veterans, alcoholic support groups, born-again Christian chapters, and Dykes on bikes). Interestingly, they also identify the role of Harley Davidson Inc. in facilitating the formation of social connections between customers that are organised around the brand. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) describe how group membership cuts across social categories, while individual chapters tend towards homogeneity. In illustrating this point they identify a number of chapters that illustrate this tendency towards homogeneity: Rich Urban Bikers (RUBies), Suburban Weekend Riders (SEWERS), Retired Idiots on Tour (RIOTS), Aspiring Hard Ass Bikers (AHABS). Similar to outlaw motorcycle groups, these subgroups also take on a formalised hierarchical structure. In-group status is achieved on the basis of ‘seniority, participation and leadership in group activities, riding expertise and experience, Harley-specific knowledge and so forth - in short, the results of an individual’s commitment to the group’s consumption values (ibid, p. 49).

Similar to outlaw groups, in-group status within the HDSC is achieved through overt displays of commitment to the sub-groups ethos. Typically, members display commitment to the group by adorning themselves with a range of cultural symbols, which include tattoos, back patches, pins, and badges. Within the group, status is displayed through the use of badges that symbolise each member’s position within the group. The formation of riders on group rides also serve as a means of displaying the internal hierarchy of the group. Members with official positions such as president or road captain ride at the head of the group and the more senior members follow them, while newcomers and prospective members ride at the back of the group. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) also identify the existence of a loose hierarchy between subgroups such as the RUBies, SEWERS, and RIOTS. This hierarchy is most prevalent when subgroup members come into contact with each other on the road. The formation of a hierarchical structure across subgroupings demonstrates the centrality of the notion of authenticity within the HDSC. Status is conferred on the basis of perceived levels of authenticity. Within the context of the HDSC, the notion of authenticity is primarily derived
from representations of the motorcyclist as outlaw. Subgroups that display greater levels of commitment to the outlaw identity and ideology are held in higher esteem than groupings that are identified more as enthusiasts. Outlaw motorcyclists identify themselves as 1%ers, because they see themselves as the 1% that are willing to display complete commitment to this ethos. In the eyes of the outlaw, all other motorcyclists are regarded as pretenders.

Within the HDSC, structure is maintained through practices of boundary maintenance. Similar to outlaw groups, aspiring members within the HDSC most often serve a period of probation, which is typically referred to as “prospecting”. This probationary period encompasses a feeling out process whereby the group takes time to evaluate the suitability of aspiring members. Barriers to community access serve to create another subgrouping of enthusiasts that Schouten and McAlexander describe as “wanna-bees”. Wanna-bees display commitment to the Harley Davidson brand through the consumption of Harley paraphernalia and merchandise, but importantly they will remain on the periphery of the community unless they purchase a Harley Davidson motorcycle. In this regard we can see how access to the HDSC is dependent upon very specific consumption choices. However, it also is important to recognise the significance of the role played by wanna-bees in terms of affirming the status of soft-core members within the overall structure.

2.3.2 HDSC Ethos

The entire existence of the HDSC can largely be accredited to the fact that a large number of motorcyclists find, embodied within the shell of the Harley Davidson motorcycle, a unique set of values that resonate with their own ideas about the world. The values that are found in the HDSC ethos have an effect on every aspect of the biker’s life. The HDSC ethos encompasses social, political, and spiritual values and standpoints. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) delve into the religious dimensions and core values of the HDSC.

In detailing the religious dimensions of community life, Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p.50) describe participation as ‘a sacred domain within the everyday life of the Harley Owner…[it is] a sanctuary in which to experience temporary transformation…The Harley consumption experience has a spirituality derived in part from a sense of a transcendental departure from the mundane’. Religiosity is evidenced in the reverence displayed to the Harley Davidson motorcycle itself. Adherence to strict rituals around motorcycle maintenance and cleaning evidences these claims. The strength of the bond shared between members suggests notions of a brotherhood founded in ‘a community of shared belief,
purpose and experience’ (*ibid*). This bond is propagated further by a sense of otherness that is derived from notions of the HDSC as oppositional to mainstream cultural values.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) identify three core values within the HDSC: personal freedom, American heritage, and machismo. Personal Freedom is split into two different sub-sections; ‘liberation’ i.e. freedom from and ‘license’ i.e. freedom to. Liberation is this instance is generally regarded to mean freedom from confinement (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, p.51). For members of the HDSC confinement is symbolised by the automobile (inside which the driver is trapped), contrasted with the freedom experienced whilst driving a motorcycle. The American eagle, which is predominant in much of Harley Davidson’s imagery, is a symbol of this freedom. The licence part of personal freedom promotes notions of individual agentic action. In the HDSC, motorcyclists are encouraged to express their individual liberty. This can mean ignoring any legislation that limits their personal freedom (e.g. refusal to wear the correct protective helmet).

American heritage and patriotism is an extremely important value within the HDSC. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) contend that the focus on heritage is most likely derived from a nostalgic view of the past, which the Harley Davidson brand perpetuates with their choice of imagery, symbolism and also the discourses that they draw upon. This nostalgic view of the past is predicated on the idea that the modernisation of society has brought with it a sense of loss in relation to notions such as community, solidarity, empathy, and closeness to nature. Harley Davidson draws upon a vision of freedom that emanates from the frontiersman of the Wild West. In drawing upon the frontiersman, Harley Davidson promotes a quintessentially American vision of individual freedom that is independent, masculine, and often heroic. This notion is commoditised through the use of Western symbols and motifs in Harley Davidson’s accessories and clothing. The extent of this patriotism and the way that it is expressed varies among the different subgroups. Individuals overtly display their patriotic values through the use of license plates, customised paint jobs and American flags.

Machismo is a prevalent, although often unspoken theme in the HDSC. Many HDSC members feel that their way of life underpins the way that ‘real men should act’ (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, p.54). This theme is exemplified in the popular Harley Davidson slogan t-shirt that proclaims ‘Real Men Wear Black’ (*ibid*). Comparisons can be made between the manliness of the actual Harley Davidson bike, which is supposedly the ‘biggest’, ‘heaviest’, and ‘loudest’ bike and the stereotype of the large, big bellied, tattooed, bearded, loud bikers that often ride them (*ibid*). In this analysis it is apparent that females, for the most part, are subjected to peripheral roles in this male dominated subculture. It is quite common in
Outlaw clubs for women to be regarded as ‘the property of one or more of the men’ (Hooper and Moore 1990, p.61).

2.3.3 Identity Construction within the HDSC

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) describe a gradual process of transformation in which newcomers set about constructing a sense of self that will provide them with credibility within the HDSC. This process can begin with a feeling out process in which aspirants evaluate the desirability of undertaking this project of self-transformation. Purchasing a Harley is the crucial step that aspiring members must undertake if they are to move forward with this transformation. At this point, due to their lack of insider knowledge, newcomers frame notions of their biker identity in relation to the transition from non-biker to biker. To those outside the HDSC, these aspiring members take on the appearance of fully-fledged members.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) propose that learning to perform for the audience is an important step in transforming the self. They argue that these performances are based on activities of “impression management”, which see consumption choices dictated by the perceived expectations of the audience (clothing, accessories, customisation etc.). The expectations that they perceive are typically framed in relation to the dominant outlaw representation. Because of their lack of insider understanding, at this point, newcomers are particularly susceptible to the marketing efforts of the Harley brand. Harley Davidson ensure that marketplace offerings serve to inculcate newcomers to the way of the brand and its ethos. Once the aspiring member is comfortable in their ability to credibly perform the biker identity to outsiders, they begin to shift their efforts towards achieving in-group status. Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p.56) outline that this transition is reliant upon the newcomer developing an appreciation of the symbolic value of their consumption choices, ‘the motorcyclist accumulates specialised possessions that both demonstrate and increase commitment to motorcycling and the Harley Davidson brand’. From this analysis we can see that, in the HDSC, internal status and feelings of authenticity to a large extent rely upon internalising the motorcycling ethos through symbolic consumption choices.

Many years have passed since the ethnography of the new bikers and in this time motorcycle culture, like most other cultures, has changed. A basic understanding of this culture would suggest that it seems less overtly deviant and countercultural. The success of Japanese motorcycle manufacturers has brought with it a host of new meanings which has loosened the
dependence on the Americanised notion of frontiersman freedom. In this regard, it seems timely to return to motorcycle culture to examine how notions of identity and community have developed since Schouten and McAlexander’s ethnography.

2.4 Reflection on the Ethnography of the New Bikers

From my own interpretation, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) arrive at this monolithic structure because they fail to question or problematise the notion of authenticity within motorcycling culture. Because of this oversight, it seems predetermined that authenticity continues to be framed in relative terms to the outlaw. It is interesting to think about how notions of authenticity may evolve, change, or completely deviate as cultural values move away from the outlaw identity. Although Schouten and McAlexander (1995) set out to deepen our understanding of motorcycling identity and community in many ways it seems likely that their study may have had quite the opposite effect. Within CCT, our understanding of motorcycling identity and community continue to be shaped by the looming presence of the outlaw. Many years have passed since the ethnography of the new bikers and in this time motorcycle culture, like most other cultures, has changed. A basic understanding of this culture would suggest that it seems less overtly deviant and countercultural. The success of Japanese motorcycle manufacturers has brought with it a host of new meanings which has loosened the dependence on the Americanised notion of frontiersman freedom. In this regard, it seems timely to return to motorcycle culture to examine how notions of identity and community have developed since Schouten and McAlexander’s ethnography.

2.5 Multiple Femininities in a Hyper-Masculine Subculture: A Re-enquiry of the HDSC

Although Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) research sparked further advancements in terms of our understanding of the communal dynamics of consumption, the research was also the subject of some stringent criticism. Thompson (2002) in particular, critiqued Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) representation of women within the HDSC. He questioned the authors’ lack of critical reflection in terms of the way they presented the role of women as sexualised objects that were nothing more than adornments of male status. Thompson (2002, p.144) argues that a focus on the lived experiences of female bikers, within the HDSC, would undoubtedly result in the emergence ‘of noteworthy interpretive differences’ with regards to the core themes that emerge in the original study. Critically reflective inquiry of this nature
requires that the researchers’ identify the taken for granted assumptions that underpinned their original work.

Accepting this challenge, Martin, Schouten and McAlexander (2006) set about re-evaluating the foundations and findings of the original HDSC study. They accept that the original paper represented ‘the most dominant voice of the dominant members’ (Martin et al. 2006, p.174). They acknowledged that they failed to recognise the ways in which the discipline of consumer research is itself gendered. Adopting a variety of feminist lenses, they returned to the HDSC to investigate the lived experiences of female participants. Acknowledging their failure to look beyond the dominant hyper-masculine viewpoint, they turned their attention to the understanding of authenticity and commitment that emerged in the original study. As Thompson (2002) prophesised their re-enquiry demonstrated a range of feminine subjectivities that challenge the dominating voice. Interestingly, they found that feminised notions of authenticity and commitment remain linked to the outlaw mythos.

Despite changes in the motorcycling landscape, the outlaw mythos remains foundational. The allure of the outlaw club is part of the fun of motorcycling for some women riders, although not the majority of women we encountered. While some women riders may have an interest in joining outlaw clubs, they are not full members, participating only as men allow. (Martin et al. 2006, p.178)

In this regard, hyper-masculinity remains the dominant backdrop against which female performances are staged. The misogynistic norms of outlaw motorcycle clubs prevent female participants from gaining full access. But the transition from pillion passenger to the front seat is the most significant development in terms of the advancement of women’s positioning within the structure of the HDSC. This transition allowed female participants to challenge their prescribed gender roles within the subculture. Martin et al. (2006) contended that female riders’ socialisation into the subculture predominantly follows one of a number of prescribed paths, each of which is defined in relation to its orientation to men. The paths of socialisation that they outline are: riding with boys, riding against boys, riding for boys, and riding beside boys. With regards to initial motivations, Martin et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of established female riders in terms of inspiring others to move up to the front seat. Although questions of status remained tied to judgements of authenticity and competency, negotiating these issues are evidently more nuanced and complicated for female bikers. In this regard we start to see a departure from the dominance of the stereotypical outlaw identity witnessed in the original study. In general female riders tend to be more supportive in terms of offering encouragement to novice and aspiring female riders. This supportive atmosphere represents a clear distinction from the strict boundary maintenance practices identified in the original
study. In accessing the lived experiences of female riders, Martin et al. (2006) identify noteworthy interpretive differences in terms of the group dynamics and participants’ experiences of all-female group rides. Symbolically the move to the front seat is regarded as an important forward step for women in the community and also for feminist ideals. Although female riders are generally more supportive, they do chastise established female riders when they forego their independence by reverting back to the passenger seat of their partner’s motorcycle. Unfortunately female riders, regardless of their skill levels, commitment, or competency remain in subordinate positions to their male partners. This was particularly noticeable with regards to the differences between male and female partners’ choices of motorcycle. Without exception, Martin et al. (2006) found that male riders had bigger, more powerful, and more expensive motorcycles than their female partners.

Martin et al. (2006) report the emergence of an alternative understanding of the biker ethos when it is examined through the lived experiences of female riders. The original study framed freedom using the notions of license from and license to in relation to the removal of constraint but re-enquiry demonstrated that female riders experience different forms of constraint. For female riders, freedom is based around notions of overcoming the constraints of gendered cultural scripts. For female riders, motorcycling provides the opportunity to take time out from the constraints of social roles. Female riders articulate a much more sensual understanding of the motorcycling experience, they take the time to feel the air, smell the grass, and appreciate the passing scenery. In this sense they give much greater credence to the kinaesthetic and visual aspects of the experience (Martin et al. 2006). For female riders, taking control of the motorcycle allows them to express a greater degree of agency in relation to their own bodies, in the sense that it allows them to self manage the risks involved in the pursuit. Moreover, female riders articulated that motorcycling allows them to express freedom over their bodies in terms of owning their own sexuality. Riding as passenger on a partner’s bike leaves little doubt about their sexual orientation and attachment – ‘in contrast, a woman riding her own motorcycle creates ambiguity about her sexual orientation and her attachment. This ambiguity is a great source of power. It is the power to be sexual actors as opposed to sexual objects’ (Martin et al. 2006, p.186).

In terms of addressing the question of how female riders negotiate life in a culture steeped in hyper-masculinise ideals, perhaps surprisingly, the Martin et al. (2006) study demonstrates that female riders are in fact drawn to motorcycling because of its masculine ideals. Motorcycling culture is a stage upon which female participants resist aspects of male dominance. In other ways it presents opportunities to co-opt aspects of this hyper-masculine culture, which become useful in terms of reconstructing personalised visions of femininity.
Mastering the motorcycle is a striking example of this sequence because it is regarded as a predominantly masculine endeavour. In this sense, mastery allows female riders to co-opt masculine ideals, which can then be used to challenge traditional notions of femininity. Within motorcycling culture, we witness the emergence of modes of femininity that resist the bounds of conformity. For Martin et al. (2006, p.189), ‘the motorcycle is a rolling celebration of self, and it is the anvil on which they fashion new, more complex, and more powerful femininities’.

2.6 Moving Beyond the Outlaw: Alternative Understandings of Motorcycling in CCT

Within CCT, Haigh and Crowther (2005) were the first to look beyond the outlaw mythos in an effort to extend our understanding of motorcycling culture. In doing so they draw our attention to the growing popularity of performance styles of motorcycling in Britain. The increasing uptake of this particular style of motorcycling is evidenced by the dominance of sales of super-sport styles of motorcycles in the UK market (Haigh and Crowther 2005). Drawing upon previous research by Celsi et al. (1993), they frame motorcycling as a high-risk leisure pursuit. Haigh and Crowther’s (2005, p.555) aim is to ‘understand voluntary risk through its embodiment in motorcycling participant’s life story narratives’. Findings from this study indicate the fluid nature of motorcyclists’ perceptions and attitudes toward risk. By analysing narratives obtained from riders at different stages of their career, Haigh and Crowther (2005, p.556) demonstrate how more experienced riders evolve from an understanding of motorcycling rooted in ‘excitement, performance, and speed’ to a more sensible approach to motorcycling that is focused on ‘competence, wisdom and safety’. On this basis, the authors describe motorcycling as a process of continuous negotiation that plays out over the entire career of the motorcyclist. They identify a tension between the motorcyclists’ desire to experience the thrill and danger of motorcycling versus more reflective considerations of personal safety. Life story narratives evidence a variety of tactics in terms of motorcyclists’ attempts to rationalise the risk involved in this high-risk leisure pursuit. Riders commonly rationalise previous mishaps and accidents on the basis that subsequent rider training would allow them to overcome similar obstacles if they arose again in the future. In light of this view of motorcycling as a continuous process of negotiation, Haigh and Crowther (2005) call for future road safety marketing campaigns to communicate a vision of motorcycling that is rooted in competence, wisdom, and safety.
In a precursor to this research project, Murphy and Patterson (2011) expand upon Haigh and Crowther’s (2005) work by drawing further attention to motorcyclists’ attempts to manage the risk involved in high-speed motorcycling. This research addresses the question of why motorcyclists continue to engage in this particular style of motorcycling in light of the worrying statistics associated with this behaviour. Highlighting the autotelic qualities of motorcycling, we framed motorcycling as an experiential practice rooted in ‘intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and pleasure’ (Murphy and Patterson 2011, p.1329). Drawing upon Lyng’s (1990, p.871) theory of edgework, we also argued that motorcycling ‘involves not only activity specific skill but also a general ability to maintain control of a situation that verges on complete chaos’. Participants’ narrative accounts highlighted a tendency to engage in similarly risky practices in other areas of their lives. To make sense of the participants’ desires to break out of the mundane and restrictive sense of the everyday, we employed Turner’s (1976) distinction between the institutional and the impulsive self. Narrative accounts demonstrated the centrality of the impulsive self in terms of participants’ attempts to construct their motorcycling identities. During edgework practices, motorcyclists become ‘expressive, instantaneous, and self directed’ (Murphy and Patterson 2011, p. 1337). In this regard, we were able to highlight the shortcomings of road safety campaigns that focused on communicating rational messages derived from statistical analysis. In contrast to Haigh and Crowther (2005), we recommended that future road safety communications should appeal to the impulsive self that comes to the forefront in high-speed motorcycling pursuits.

2.7 Conclusion

In analysing the development of motorcycling culture, we have been able to place this cultural evolution within the context of society. In this regard, we have seen how global political events and cultural values shaped the development of motorcycling culture. This culture has undeniably been shaped within the broader context of North American culture. In this setting, we traced the development of the rebellious outlaw motorcyclist. We also learned about the role of the media and popular culture in terms of propagating a variety of mythologised images of the motorcyclist, which have been influential in shaping public opinion in different ways at different times. But perhaps most significantly, we have seen a rich culture that encompasses diversity and variation across the globe in relation to the meanings of motorcycling. Despite its prevalence as a social phenomenon, academic interest in motorcycling culture and its participants has remained minimal (Maxwell 1998). For the most part, academics have employed subcultural approaches to examine the ways in which groups of outlaw motorcyclists organise to oppose mainstream values (Hooper and Moore
1983; Quinn 1983; Harris 1985). But like most cultures, motorcycling continues to be more
dynamic than the representations that have so far attempted to define it.

According to Ross (1981), cultural biases “are fostered through cultural stereotypes . . . reducing
all people of a given culture to one mold and . . . disregarding the uniqueness and variability of
individuals within that culture” (p. 5). By contrast, even in subcultures, such as a motorcycle
club, members may share common core beliefs but personal experiences and values continue to
shape individual choices.

(Shabanowitz 2013, n.p)

By tracing our way through the motorcycling research in CCT, we have been able to identify
the relevance of this research context in terms its applicability to the experiential perspective.
Previous research has identified the prevalence of experientially-focused themes such as
identity, community, transcendence, and authenticity in the motorcycling context. Our
detailed review and subsequent analysis of Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography
has allowed us to identify its shortcomings in terms of the underpinning assumptions that
guided this work. In this regard, the authors’ lack of critical reflection resulted in an
understanding of motorcycling that was rooted in the uncontested voices of the so-called
dominant majority. Similar to previous studies on outlaw groups, Schouten and
McAlexander’s (1995) research reinforced the notion that motorcycling communities are built
upon strict hierarchical structures, which forgo the potential for contestation and exceptions to
the rule. Moreover, their failure to critically appraise the concept of authenticity resulted in
the evocation of a monolithic subculture that continually tended towards homogeneity.

Martin et al.’s (2006) re-enquiry of the HDSC, examined through the lived experiences of
female participants was successful in righting some of the wrongs of the previous study. In
this regard, they offered a more nuanced understanding of the concept of authenticity and also
briefly pointed to the more sensual and kinaesthetic qualities that motorcycling can provide.
But perhaps due to their choice of research context, this re-enquiry was again greatly
influenced by the looming presence of the outlaw mythos. In a time when motorcycling
culture had changed drastically, it would perhaps have been more fitting to investigate the
lived experience of female riders within a different community of motorcyclists. But it must
also be acknowledged that this offering earnestly embraced the challenge (Thompson 2002)
and spirit of re-enquiry. From this analysis, we can now clearly identify a gap in the literature
in terms of using this research to offer an understanding of motorcycling culture that is not
solely reliant on the outlaw mythos. We can also appreciate the significance of ‘interpretive
difference’ in terms of adding to our understanding of particular consumption contexts
(Thompson 2002).
In this chapter, we also gained insight into the increasing popularity of super-sport styles of motorcycles and a variety of accompanying styles of motorcycling (Haigh and Crowther 2005; Murphy and Patterson 2011). Ireland in particular has a rich vein of history associated with this particular form of motorcycling. The island of Ireland has produced more than its fair share of world champion racers. Perhaps most notable are the Dunlop brothers Robert and Joey, who, between them, have won 29 Isle of Man TT titles, 28 North West 200 races, and five World Motorcycle Championships (Brady 2014). Both of these riders died racing motorcycles, but their legacy continues to inspire new generations of Irish road racers and also leisure riders with a penchant for speed. The next generation of Dunlops, William and Michael, are continuing in the same vein. Between them, they have already secured 11 Isle of Man TT titles and 8 wins at the North Western 200 (Lindsay 2015). In 2014, the story of the Dunlop family and their obsession with motorcycles and speed was the subject of the popular documentary film *Road. Road* (2014) is part of an emerging genre of documentary films that has delved into the world of motorcycles, speed, adrenaline, and competition (e.g. Faster 2003; Faster and Faster 2004; Fastest 2011; TT: Closer to the Edge 2011; Charge 2011; Hitting the Apex 2015). But noticeably, academic understanding of this particular subgroup lags behind its representation in popular culture. Sales figures from 2014 indicate that sport and super-sport models were the number one seller in the UK market, while Harley Davidson did not figure in the top ten manufacturers in terms of sales (MIA 2014). In these regards we can see that there is a rich culture and industry of motorcycling, which thus far has remained unexamined in CCT.

### 2.8 Research Aim and Questions

Based on the understanding developed in these two opening chapters, the primary aim of this research is to use a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of motorcyclists within the context of a particular subgroup within the motorcycling community. From our review of both the experiential perspective and motorcycling-related literature, a number of pertinent research question emerge. However the approach of phenomenological enquiry, with a critical focus on the lived experiences of participants, must also allow space for the emergence of themes as they surface in our investigations. Therefore our research investigation will address the following questions, while also examining thematic commonality across descriptive experiences of motorcycling emerging from this first-person-perspective dialogue with this particular sample.
• How do previously identified concepts of motorcycling culture such as Identity, Communitas, and Authenticity feature within this group of motorcyclists?
• What is the nature of the experiences that this group of motorcyclist seek through motorcycling? To what extent do multi-sensory qualities feature/resonate within these experiences?
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In their seminal paper Hudson and Ozanne (1988, p.508) use the term methodology to refer to ‘how one answers research questions. Methodology includes not only data gathering techniques, but also research design, setting, subjects, analysis reporting’. Hudson and Ozanne (1988) outline the distinction between interpretive and positivist research by drawing upon conflicting standpoints with regards to the assumptions that each make in relation to ontological, axiological, and epistemological issues. The purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the basic assumptions that researchers make when conducting research. These fundamental assumptions vary depending on the approach that a researcher chooses to employ. My intention for the first section of this chapter is to demonstrate some clarity of thought across three key areas; my approach to epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions. The aim here is to develop a standpoint that will inform my methodological choices. The second aim for this chapter is to develop an understanding of the most appropriate methods for answering the research questions posed in the previous chapter. In addressing this aim, a number of important questions guide the structure of this chapter. First, what methodological tools and research practices will enable us to gain access to the culture that surrounds the motorcycling community? Second, how can we tap into the participants’ experiences of life within this community? Third, what methodological tools are best suited to developing an understanding of the participants’ experiences of the multi-sensory nature of high-speed motorcycling? Fourth, what procedures are most appropriate in terms of making sense of the data collected in the field?

This chapter begins with a review of the major ontological, axiological and epistemological assumptions with the aim of developing a standpoint on these important issues. Section 3.3 further develops this standpoint by situating this research within an existentialist phenomenological view of the world. In section 3.4, I outline the suitability of adopting an ethnographic approach in order to understand the motorcycling community and its culture. This review traces the development of ethnography and its subsequent adoption in consumer research. Next I introduce a sensory ethnographic approach and argue its advantages in terms of overcoming the methodological challenges involved in addressing the multi-sensory nature of high-speed motorcycling. In section 3.5, I outline the benefits of adopting a narrative based approach when interviewing high-speed motorcyclists. Section 3.6 details procedural issues
related to the data set such as: sampling strategy, data collection, and coding and interpretation. In concluding I will outline the structure of the remaining chapters.

3.2 Ontology, Axiology and Epistemology

3.2.1 Ontological Assumptions

Interpretivists adopt a position that rejects the notion that an objective notion of reality exists. Furthermore they reject the notion that this reality can be taken from its natural setting by the social scientist and recreated in a laboratory. Instead reality is viewed as a phenomenon that is socially constructed. Theories and methodologies are simply instruments, which help us to make sense of the world. Because interpretivists maintain that ‘all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations’ (Berger and Luckman 1967, p.3) it is clear that multiple forms of reality can co-exist independently, because of alternative contexts and differing individual and group perceptions. Based on these assumptions it is evident that the combination of knowledge can never result in the production of an objective reality – the truth. Interpretive assumptions regarding the ever-evolving nature of social life ensure that complete representation of an objective reality can never be obtained. In this sense ‘social life is more than the sum of its parts’ (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.509).

Interpretivist views of reality are always derived within particular systems of meaning. These systems of meaning only exist in relation to other systems of meaning (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In this sense, the meanings produced by individuals and social groups are derived directly from the contexts in which they occur. Individuals thus create meaning in specific contexts. Following these assumptions the interpretivist cannot separate phenomena from natural settings in the same way as the positivist. In terms of the nature of social beings interpretivists make the assumption that human behaviour is voluntaristic (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). This assumption upholds a fluid conceptualisation of human behaviour, which sees social life as created through the process of interaction between individuals and groups. The essential point here is that social actors play an active part in the construction of meaning and are therefore active in creating their sense of reality. For Blumer (1969, p.15) it ‘means that the human individual confronts a world that he must interpret in order to act instead of an environment to which he responds because of his organisation’.
3.2.2 Axiological Assumptions

The fundamental objective of interpretive research is to reach an understanding of human behaviour. Because the search for understanding is a continuous process, it can never result in a definitive understanding. For the interpretivist, social life is a continuous process that remains in flux. Accordingly, interpretivists can only offer an interpretation as opposed to the interpretation (Denzin 1984). Definitive interpretations of phenomena are never reached. For the interpretivist an understanding of social behaviour cannot be reached without trying to understand the symbolic world of social actors. Elliot and Elliot (2003, p.216) declare that ‘no adequate knowledge of social behaviour can be developed without an understanding of the symbolic world of the subjects of study, seeing the world through their eyes and using their shared meanings, the empathetic process of verstehen’. The researcher should adopt an empathetic stance, which encourages them to see things from the perspective of their participants. For Hudson and Ozanne (1988), verstehen is the essential component that separates the physical sciences from human science. Application of verstehen affords the researcher the opportunity to connect with the important human aspects of participants’ lives. For Hudson and Ozanne (1998) this means that ‘motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences are time and context bound’. By taking these steps interpretive researchers engage in what Geertz (1973) labels as thick description. The distinction between the general and the particular is essentially what distinguishes positivism from interpretivism (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

3.2.3 Epistemological Assumptions

The focus of interpretive research is directed towards the particular, phenomena examined in specific contexts and moments in time. Interpretivists propose the subjective nature of their engagements with participants. Because of its very nature, subjective accounts cannot be untangled from the particular context and time in which they occur. On this basis interpretivists do not try to stretch their findings about phenomena to a generalisable level.

3.2.4 Developing a Standpoint for this Research

It is clear to see from this account that interpretivists look to the particular without trying to stretch the generalisable. To be successful in this pursuit, interpretivists must contextualise phenomena as much as possible. Therefore phenomena become more and
more complex as additional layers of detail are added to the picture. Through this process of ‘thick description’ the interpretivist moves forward towards a particularised account. Because of this focus it is often difficult for interpretivist research to make generalisable statements (Anderson 1982). Interpretivists view the ‘world as being so complex and changing that it is impossible to distinguish a cause from an effect’ (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.512). Interpretivists therefore emphasise the indistinguishable, recursive relationship between cause and effect (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The view that the world is complex and voluntaristic is therefore a fundamental assumption of interpretivism.

Having reviewed the core tenets of interpretivism, I am firm in my belief that my own worldview is accommodated comfortably within this perspective. I believe that reality is socially constructed and therefore always context bound. Owing to the socially constructed view of human nature, I believe that researchers must engage in the social world that they hope to understand. On this basis knowledge is inextricably intertwined with context and time. Therefore the scope for generalisation is inherently limited. I adopt the interpretivists’ relativistic stance that an ‘individual’s capabilities emerge from the combination and interaction of individual-level capacities and the individual’s relative position vis-à-vis social structures that provide reasons and resources for particular behaviours’ (Smith and Seward 2009, p. 213). Crucially, this conception of society is predicated upon a contextual notion of causality that is flexible enough to incorporate both individual and social causes into social analysis (Smith and Seward 2009, p. 213). In this regard, participants hold an understanding of their lived experience of phenomena and it is the job of the researcher to access, and interpret how these lived experiences are also shaped by the structuring affect of society. On this basis, the researcher can make relevant connections between data and theory. I believe that one of the most pressing challenges for the researcher is to represent participants and their experiences in ways that stay true to the main tenets of the interpretive approach.

3.3 The Phenomenological Route to Experience

Following Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) lead, Thomspn et al. (1989) further bolster the call to place experience at the centre of consumer research. For Thompson et al. (1989) existential phenomenology provides the best way forward in terms of gaining access to these lived experiences. The authors report that existential phenomenology ‘is a contextually based, holistic psychology that views human beings in non-dualistic terms and seeks to attain first-person descriptions of experience’ (Thomspn et al. 1989, p.136). This experientially focused perspective places attention on the everyday lives of people as
they live in the world. Accordingly, this position adheres to the stance that consumer researchers should not separate consumers from their environments. The goal for the existential phenomenologist is to illuminate consumers’ experiences as they are lived in the world. For the most part existential phenomenology can be considered a descriptive endeavour that aims to shed light on the life worlds of individuals. As such the primary aim is to describe human experience as it is lived. The experiential turn encompasses the postmodern tendency to refute all totalising claims regarding science’s capacity to provide absolute knowledge of social life. In contrast the experiential turn embraces the notion of the located researcher that creates wholly subjective accounts and interpretations of the world (Askegaard and Linnet 2011).

Figure 8. Pattern

Thompson et al. (1989) elucidate the main tenets of existential phenomenology using the metaphors of pattern, figure/ground, and seeing. A pattern is described as a ‘segregated perceptual whole that emerges from a context. While being perceptually distinguishable, a pattern does not exist as a complete and separate entity from its surrounding context’ (Thompson et al. 1989, p.135). The phenomenologist adheres to a similarly contextualist view of the world. Phenomenologists do not extract subjects from their environment for the purposes of observation or statistical reduction. Phenomenology seeks an understanding of experience as it is lived in the world, or what Heidegger (1962) referred to as being in the world. This understanding can only be reached through exploration of experience that occurs in the lived world, which the phenomenologists refer to as the life-world (Lebenswelt). Phenomenologists seek an understanding of subjective consciousness as it emerges in the life-world.
The metaphor of figure and ground is exemplified in a range of well-known images that appear as optical illusions to the viewer. Figure 9 serves as a useful illustration of the figure/ground metaphor because it demonstrates how perception of an object can shift depending on the perspective of the observer. This image can be perceived as a young woman or an old woman depending on the viewer’s perception of the image. If we first perceive the image as a young woman, then we can acknowledge that certain parts of the image become figural while the rest of the image recedes to the ground. If our perception of the image changes such that we see the old woman, then the figure/ground elements reverse in terms of how we perceive them. In relation to an understanding of experience, this example demonstrates that our perspective, or way of seeing things, has an impact in terms of what is perceived as figure and what recedes to (back)ground. Through this metaphor, Thompson et al. (1989) develop three important points. The first point that they raise is that experience must be understood as a dynamic process. In the life-world, perception can shift from moment to moment depending on events, which suggests that the object of our attention becomes figural while everything else recedes to ground. The second point that Thompson et al. (1989) deduce from this example is that although certain objects of experience may appear as figural, they do not exist in isolation or independently of ground. This indicates that neither figure nor ground cause the other. The third point raised is that ‘all modes of human experience, such as thinking, feeling,
knowing, imagining, and remembering, are viewed as intentional phenomena, that is, as having some focus towards which the experience is directed’ (Thompson et al. 1989, p.136). In culmination, these points indicate that human experience is neither purely subjective nor purely objective in nature. From this understanding we can deduce that experience is more than an internal phenomenon, while also acknowledging that experience does not exist independently of the subject. In this sense, for the existential phenomenologist, experience is best understood in the context of the lived experience of the life-world.

Finally, Thompson et al. (1989) extrapolate the seeing metaphor explaining that existential phenomenology makes a clear distinction between reflected and unreflected modes of human experience. Here the authors make reference to the use of existential phenomenology in clinical therapy practice. In this setting, phenomenological therapists reframe phenomena typically classified as unconscious using the terms reflected and unreflected experience. In doing so the therapist clearly situates the client’s difficulties in the present life world, as opposed to a past event that evades the conscious present. This reframing exercise moves away from the notion of unconscious repression, by arguing that repression is actually a conscious decision – ‘the memory that is lost is only lost in so far as it belongs to a reason of my life that I refuse’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962). On this basis, the individual is encouraged to see the patterns of their experience, in order to realise the patterns of their repression.

The essence of our being is the pre-reflective (un-reflected) experience of being thrown into a situation of action without the opportunity or need to disengage and function as detached observers. Reflection and abstraction are important phenomena, but they are not the basis of our everyday action.


The connection between reflected and unreflected consciousness is analogous to that of figure and ground. Through reflection the object of attention emerges from the ground of unreflected experience. In a research setting, this point is important because the research interview presents participants with an opportunity to reflect upon previously unreflected experience. Importantly, through reflection participants gain an opportunity to realise patterns in their previously unreflected experience.

The work of Thompson et al. (1989) is equally significant in the sense that it delved further into the concept of experience; their journey brought awareness of the underpinning assumptions that are foundational for researchers of experience. From this review, we can see
that existential-phenomenology provides a means of ensuring that the experiences of our participants remain central in this research.

### 3.4 Ethnography

The discipline of ethnology developed in the late 19th Century as a reaction to traditional anthropology, which at that time held a physical and biological focus. In these early stages, before the ethnographic method had been developed, ethnologists investigated foreign cultures through the investigation of material objects, native art, official archives, statistics, and the first-hand accounts of explorers and travellers. Early ethnologists believed that these pursuits could lead to an objective description of foreign cultures (Gobo 2008). Although the discipline and its methodology developed gradually, Bronislaw K. Malinowski is attributed with providing the first systematic account of the ethnographic method. Malinowski’s method was positioned as a turn away from the dominant ‘desk anthropology’ which concentrated solely on the investigation of secondary sources. Malinowski proposed an emic-orientated approach, which aimed to engage with natives to understand their social rules, customs and meanings, and how they made sense of their world. Malinowski’s (1922, p.25) goal was to ‘grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of the world’.

In the 1920s the ethnographic method was beginning to find its way into other disciplines, particularly sociology and psychology. While anthropology had traditionally concentrated upon the investigation of ‘exotic’ foreign cultures, its methods and approaches were beginning to be applied in research contexts much closer to home. This new applied anthropology, which would later be defined as Human Relations, turned its attentions towards industrial workplace cultures in America and Britain, thus ending anthropology’s exclusive relationship with the exotic. Ethnography as a method is primarily concerned with observation. Observation can be divided into two types, participant observation and non-participant observation. Non-participant observation requires the researcher to stay removed from the context that they investigate. The non-participant researcher must not directly engage with participants as engagement is viewed as interference, which may influence the behaviour of the participants.

Participant observation requires the researcher to immerse themselves into the world of the people that they are trying to investigate. Through immersion, ethnographers gain an appreciation of the everyday lives of the people that they engage with. The goal for participant observations is to understand how people make meaning in their lives.
Researchers must take part in social life, focusing their attention upon the social rules, rituals, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and the social practices that make up everyday life in the context that is under investigation. By engaging in social life through participant observation the ethnographer acknowledges and attempts to overcome the dilemma of the gap between the attitudes of the participants and their actual behaviour. A study by La Pierre (1934) illustrates that there is little correlation between people’s attitudes and their behaviours so to put it simply, participant observation allows the researcher to address the divide between what people say they do and what they actually do in practice.

Schutz (1944) likens the role of the participant observer to that of the stranger who arrives in a foreign land. The stranger, in a new land cannot engage in social life in the same way as locals. To the stranger everything is foreign, different. She does not understand the underlying social dynamics and accordingly she cannot share in the taken for granted nature of everyday life in the way that locals do. This position awards the stranger a distinct advantage because they can use this position to question the things that others around them take for granted. Schutz (1944, p.502) declares that the stranger must endeavour to approach the group ‘as a new comer in the true meaning of the term’. The stranger must acknowledge that her conditioning effects her interpretations. The stranger must be cognisant that she makes sense of this new land in terms of her own life experiences. Her life history and experiences are a frame of reference, which guides and shapes her interpretations about this new land.

For the approaching stranger, however, the pattern of the approached group does not guarantee an objective chance but rather a pure subjective likelihood which has to be checked step by step, that is he has to make sure that the solutions suggested by the new scheme will also produce the desired effect for him in his special position as outsider and newcomer who has not brought with his grasp the whole system of the cultural pattern but who is rather puzzled by its inconsistency, incoherence and lack of clarity

(Schutz, 1944, p.506)

The stranger must be careful to remember that the individual and groups that they survey share different histories than her own. Their shared histories create a common bond, which equates to a frame of reference which foregrounds the taken for granted nature of daily life. The stranger must use this position to question the things that social actors find unquestionable. The participant observer must maintain the cognitive status of a stranger and therefore treat the patterning of their new culture as a site for continuous exploration.

Finding a definitive definition of the term ethnography is difficult. Ethnography has become a major ‘buzz word’ in the social sciences. Ethnography in a pure sense has perhaps become diluted as it has been applied across a broad spectrum of disciplines.
Some propose that ethnography is a philosophical paradigm that requires complete commitment, while others see it as a tool to be used in circumstances when it is deemed appropriate. When we try to define ethnography we must begin the process of classification, which in turn attempts to order our view of reality. In this sense the classification that we produce also creates the order that it classifies. The classifications that we produce can never provide a definitive view of reality. Rather, through social consensus we agree upon a set of views that outline our view of reality. This view of reality should be used as a heuristic tool to guide us in the practical application of our research methodologies (Gobo 2008). In adopting a standpoint on these issues we must acknowledge that whatever our choice we always simplify reality. We place our gaze in one direction at the expense of another. Our choices become the foundations of truth upon which we build our epistemological and ontological positions. These choices shape our research at the most fundamental level. These choices influence the aspects of social phenomena that we choose to focus our attention upon, which consequently influences the aspects that we choose to ignore.

Gobo (2008) explains that ethnography is not a mere method; he draws upon Thomas Kuhn’s concept of the paradigm to explicate ethnography as a methodology. Consequently, Gobo adopts the position that ethnography is not simply a set of procedures to follow, but rather these procedures are used because they are conjoined with certain ways of seeing the world. In this sense our choice of methodology is linked to our theoretical position regarding the way we see the world. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.107) define the paradigm as:

a set of basic beliefs…it defines for its holder the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith; there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness. If there were, philosophical debates…would have been resolved millennia ago.

3.4.1 Ethnography in Consumer Research

Over the past number of decades, consumer research has become increasingly orientated towards the everyday lives of consumers (Arnould and Thompson 2005). As consumer researchers begin to embrace ‘the messy contextual details of consumer life’ (Holt 1997, p.344), we must look to adopt methodological approaches that are matched to this agenda (Holbrook 1995). In making the movement from anthropology to consumer research the fundamental principles and objectives of ethnographic pursuits remain unchanged.
Through the empathetic process of *verstehen*, consumer researchers seek to understand the life world of participants, and the social interactions that they encounter (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). As consumer ethnographers we must often look beyond what people say, and instead seek to understand ‘the shared system of meanings we call culture’ (Goulding 2005, p.298).

Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) outline four principles to guide market-orientated ethnographic pursuits. First, data is always collected in localised natural settings. Second, consumer researchers must immerse themselves in these localised settings and participate in the culture of the consumers. Third, the interpretations produced by the consumer ethnographer should seem credible to those being studied. Fourth, multiple data sources should be used to provide multiple perspectives on the practices of the culture. Moreover, those seeking to adopt an ethnographic approach to consumer-related projects can draw upon a well-established body of work that addresses ethnography both in terms of theory and practice (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Fellman 1999; Peñaloza 2001; Elliot and Elliot 2003). Ethnography has received attention by those tracing its rise in popularity (Brown 1998), while others have called for a deeper reflection on the incorporation of ethnography in consumer research (Brownlie 1997). The method of ethnography has received some innovative alterations, as it is adapted to meet the challenges of understanding consumer culture. Kozinets (2002) proposes the concept of *netnography* which aims to explore online consumer cultures based on the fundamental principles of ethnography. In terms of application, the consumer research literature offers a body of work that clearly demonstrates the value of ethnographic pursuits in developing an understanding of consumers and consumption phenomena (Hill and Stamey 1990; Hill 1991; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001; Goulding *et al.* 2009; Canniford and Shankar 2013).

Norman K. Denzin (2001) argues that it is essential to continue to build upon this solid foundation by now adopting a more critical approach to ethnography in consumer research. Accordingly, consumer researchers should take on the responsibility of highlighting the structural apparatuses that maintain the nexus between production and consumption of commodities. For Denzin (2001, p.325) ‘the moral ethnographer becomes visible in the text, disclosing, illuminating and criticising the conditions of constraint and commodification that operate at specific points in these circuits’. For this approach to work in consumer research the ethnographer must continuously seek to understand and throw light on the structures and systems that serve to subjugate individuals and groups in society. This type of consumer research is fundamentally driven by the need to uncover
the processes that serve to maintain inequality and discrimination in a given culture. Inspired by liberation theology and neo-Marxists approaches to community development (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000), Denzin (2001, p.326) calls for a collaborative approach that would see consumer researchers and consumers join together in a ‘moral dialogue’ for the purpose of opening up a new project in consumer research directed towards ‘an emancipatory, dialectical and transformative commitment to community action’.

3.4.2 Rethinking Ethnography Through The Senses: A Way to Embodied Practice

Researchers using ethnography in consumer research have tended to predominantly focus their attention upon the senses of sight and sound, which occurs at the expense of the other senses (Valtonen et al. 2013). The prioritising of vision and hearing over the other senses could be interpreted as a reflection of the audio-visual emphasis that is so dominant within Western thought (Firat 1995). Bourdieu (1997, p.23) writes about ‘the intellectualist divorce without equivalent in any of the great civilizations: a divorce between the intellect, seen as superior, and the body, seen as inferior’. Valtonen et al. (2013) purports that we could develop a deeper understanding of consumer culture by tuning in to all of our senses during our ethnographic work. By incorporating the entire sensory domain into our ethnographic pursuits we become methodologically equipped to further develop our understanding of the multi-sensory elements of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Joy and Sherry 2003).

Addressing this imbalance in the way we prioritise the senses in our research is also important when we consider the significance of the senses in consuming experiences. In addressing this point, Sarah Pink (2009 p.1) calls for sensory ethnography to be recognised as an emerging field of study that is situated within the ‘multisensoriality of experience perception, knowing and practice’. Primarily, Pink is concerned with how sensory experiences contribute to everyday life and also how sensory experiences influence ethnographers in the field. Pink’s (2009) sensory ethnography is fundamentally built around the notion that the senses are interconnected and interrelated. The ethnographer operates in social situations in the material world. By reflexively engaging in this world, the sensory ethnographer can develop an embodied understanding of the research context and its phenomena. By engaging in this way, we gain the opportunity to understand the ‘experiences, memories, and imaginations’ of our group of high-speed motorcyclists. As ethnographers we cannot rely on imitation alone, we must delve deeper, to develop an embodied sense of knowing.
One of the tasks of the reflexive sensory ethnographer is thus to develop an awareness of how she or he becomes involved in not only participating in other people’s practices, but also in anticipating her or his own co-involvement in the constitution of places, and to identify the points of intervention of her or his own intentionality and subjectivity.

(Pink 2009, p.43)

To develop an embodied sense of knowing we must confront the dialectic between mind and body. To conceive of bodily sensations as a phenomenon that can be rationalised through the mind is to fall prey to the sensation/intellect divide. The first step in overcoming this divide is to acknowledge the body as a source of knowledge. This is important because it allows us to avoid positioning the mind as the master of the body.

The purpose is thus to avoid objectifying the body through the reflections of the mind (Csordas 1990, p.36). For Downey the concept of embodied knowing is a biological process that is about much more than ‘stored information’. ‘The body is the human organism, as the process of embodiment is one and the same as the development of that organism in its environment’ (Ingold 1998 cited in Downey 2007, p. 223). In building upon this work, Pink (2009) positions embodiment as central to the way that humans forge connections in their environment. Accordingly, the senses should not be broken down into separate elements, rather they should be considered in unity and as part of a biological process. Reports from neuroscience support the view on the interrelatedness of the senses.

Our phenomenological experience is not of disjointed sensory sensations but is instead of a coherent multisensory world, where sounds, smells, tastes, lights and touches amalgamate. What we perceive or where we perceive it to be located in space is a product of inputs from different sensory modalities that combine, substitute, or integrate.

(Newell and Shams 2007, p.1415)

For many scholars of the senses (Ingold, 2000; Geurts 2002; Downey 2007) bodily knowledge is gained through ‘social, participatory, and embodied practices’ (Pink 2009, p.34). It is not just the job of the sensory ethnographer to learn to do as practitioners do, rather we must stay one step removed and consider how learning is facilitated in relation to mind, body and material environment:

Knowing in practice involves an interaction between the local and the global’ (Wenger 1998, p.141) thus offering a connection between the idea that our emplacement and direct relationship with a sensory, material and social environment is made meaningful in relationships with the politics of space, including the wider (global) discourses and power relations that are also entangled in the local places where ethnographers know their practices.

(Pink 2009, p.35)
This body of work amounts to a call for a sensory approach to ethnography that explores the development of embodied knowledge through practical engagements with the social and material world (Pink 2009).

3.5 A Narrative Approach to Interviewing

Insights into experience may be accessed through narrative interviews that treat participants as ‘culturally informed actors, engaging in their chosen activity in an on-going, reflexive manner’ (Haigh and Crowther 2005). Narratives can, in their most basic understanding, be described as temporal stories (Berger, 1997). They describe a unique occurrence of events that take place over a certain time period (Bruner 1991, p.6). They are not necessarily grounded in fact and therefore do not purport to be factual descriptions. Rather they are a representation of experiences that are encoded with both symbolism and meaning (McAdams and Ochberg 1988). The creation of a story consequently is in and of itself a symbolic process. The stories we tell about our lives allow us to construct the experiences we live through (Schiffrin 1996) and offer a method of understanding these experiences and communicating them to others (Bruner 1990). By studying motorcyclists’ narratives we can gain an insight into the culture surrounding high-speed motorcycling. To do this we must pay specific attention to ‘the way that individuals recount their histories – what they emphasise or leave out; their roles as heroes, villains, or victims in the plot; their self talk; the way they talk about others’ (Stern et al 1998, p.199).

Interpretive researchers employing a narrative approach quite often fail to fully engage with interview techniques and methods. Researchers commonly fall into the trap of engaging in casual conversation, which is inadequate when searching to extract a narrative response from a participant. To avoid this pitfall I adopted an interview strategy that aims to evoke a biographical narrative response from the participant. This process starts with a single question that aims to solicit a narrative response. During this process the researchers ‘interventions are kept to a minimum and drained of any particular content, for as long as possible you give up control, refuse to take up offers of partial control and maintain the maximum of power asymmetry against yourself’ (Wengraf 2001, p. 113). This technique ensures that the participant constructs their biographical narrative alone. To ensure the participants’ representations of reality are obtained they must not be aided by the researcher during the process. The researcher must focus on ‘self-restraint, note-taking, active listening with non-directional prompts but never probes’ (ibid).
After this process a second session follows in a similar manner but this time the researcher focuses on topics arising from session one. These topics are reframed as questions, which once again aim to induce a biographical narrative response from participants. The questions can become more specific but they are always based on topics already raised by the participant and also framed in terms of the language that has already been used by the participant. Where necessary, a final sub-session can be utilised after preliminary analysis of the first two has been conducted.

3.6 The Research Journey

3.6.1 Sampling Procedures and Strategy

This research was carried out in Waterford, which is the self-proclaimed ‘biking capital of Ireland’. Waterford is home to a diversity of motorcycling clubs and groups that embrace a variety of understandings of motorcycling. These groups include outlaw clubs, Harley enthusiasts, scooter aficionados, a road-racing club and also a Ministry of Christian bikers. These different groups contribute to a thriving motorcycling scene, which for the purposes of this project becomes a rich context for investigation. In light of the particular research questions posed, I decided to focus on a particular informal group of motorcyclists that is active within this broader community.

As teenagers these aspiring motorcyclists came together to share their enthusiasm for motorcycling. Importantly, the group share a particular understanding of motorcycling that primarily revolves around their shared pursuit of the speed experience. In terms of addressing the research questions, this group provide access to this particular understanding of motorcycling. Thus, the decision to focus on this group presents an opportunity to extend our understanding of this leisure pursuit in a way that does not rely solely upon the outlaw mythos (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Martin, Schouten and McAlexander 2006). In this way, it becomes possible to access alternative understandings of motorcycling identity, community, and authenticity. On this basis, this group facilitates us in drawing out interesting comparisons in relation to previous understandings of motorcycling culture within consumer research. This understanding provides the primary rationale for choosing to build this research around this particular group of motorcycling enthusiasts. This group has been in existence for over ten years, so there is a history and a depth to their stories. This history presents an opportunity to trace the development of the group through the individual careers
of its members. In this way, the group provides us with access to a rich vein of narratives that
detail the trials and tribulations encompassed in the everyday lives of high-speed
motorcyclists.

3.6.2 Locating the Group: Participant Profiles

Leon’s Profile
Leon, aged, twenty-eight, had his first experience of riding a motorcycle at the age of twelve.
After riding around the fields on his friend’s 50cc scrambler, he knew that he was hooked.
Before he was old enough to purchase his own motorcycle, Leon was already hanging around
in the group trying to take up every opportunity to ride motorcycles. After selling a few
prized possessions and saving all of his wages from a part time job at a petrol station, Leon
purchased his first motorcycle at the age of seventeen. Within the group, Leon is known for
his persistence in pushing himself and his motorcycles to the limit. This driving style has
resulted in numerous crashes and more near misses than he can recall. He has since completed
advanced rider training and claims that he has adopted a safer approach to riding over the last
few years. Having worked for a number of years in the construction industry, Leon went back
to college to train as a graphic designer. For his sins, Leon has been my brother for the past
twenty-eight years and he is the primary reason that I chose to examine high-speed
motorcycling. Throughout this research Leon has been instrumental in terms of providing
access to the group and also in terms of facilitating my immersion into the community. He
presently rides a Honda VTR100 Firestorm.

Michael’s Profile
Michael was a friend of Leon and Tom in secondary school. His interest in motorcycles began
to develop when they bought their first bikes. Michael’s mother was adamant that he would
never ride a motorcycle because she felt that they are simply too dangerous. Because of this,
he spent nearly a year biding his time as a back seat passenger. By repeatedly swearing that
he would be careful on the bike, Michael eventually wore his mother down. When he turned
seventeen he bought a Honda NS1 and he set about learning to keep up with the rest of the
group. After becoming tired of that bike he followed the emerging group trend of upgrading
to a Honda CBR250. Michael passed the test for his full license on the CBR. After this he
took part in an advanced rider-training course, which he claims helped him to develop a
stronger awareness of how to control the motorcycle and also how to ride defensively on the
road. Michael hopes to undertake further advanced training in the future. Michael works as a
machine operator at a local pharmaceutical factory, but he likes the thought of one day
becoming a riding instructor. Michael participated in this research by providing me with a number of informal riding lessons on the road.

John’s Profile
Like many of the other participants, John was born into a motorcycling family. He grew up hearing stories about his fathers and uncles adventures on motorcycles. John first learned how to ride on a 50cc scooter. He felt that the time spent on the scooter was valuable because it provided a good base for learning to read the road and also for developing perception skills. After feeling like he had gone as far as he could with the scooter, John went looking for something a bit faster. John ended up buying Eoin’s TDR125, in the knowledge that it was one of the fastest 125cc bikes on the market. After making friends with Eoin, John started to become active in the group, joining in on group rides and garage meet ups. Although he envisaged speed pursuits, in reality John spent most of his time trying to fix the TDR125 after the engine blew up. After eventually getting it back running, he quickly sold it and used the money to buy a Honda Hornet 250cc. It was on this motorcycle, that John gained the opportunity to really experience speed. John has aspirations of buying a bigger bike, but for the moment he’s content on the Hornet.

Eoin’s Profile
Eoin’s love affair with motorcycles began at a very young age. By the time he was eight, Eoin was riding a Honda 50 with his friends around fields close to his home. By the age of twelve, Eoin already had his own 100cc motorcycle, which he was not allowed to drive on public roads. By the age of 14 he had moved up to a Honda NSR125, which is an extremely powerful motorcycle for any child. Eoin has always been attracted to the freedom that motorcycling brings. For Eoin the freedom to get out on the road is also the freedom to leave everything else behind. With encouragement and help from his father, Eoin developed an interest in the mechanical side of motorcycling from a very young age. Eoin takes great pride in being self-sufficient and he is now capable of competently maintaining his own motorcycles. He enjoys the challenge of problem solving. The enormous garage at the side of Eoin’s house often served as a workshop for the group. Stocked with the necessary tools and a kettle, the garage provided the perfect place for the group to come together to work on and talk about bikes. Eoin’s father was regularly called upon when the group encountered difficulties in overcoming mechanical problems. Eoin is 28 and he has a master’s degree in engineering and he currently works for an engineering company in the gas industry. Eoin still lives at home with his parents because he’s not sure he could survive away from the garage.
**Paddy’s Profile**

Even within the group, Paddy is known for his intense obsession with all things motorcycling. It is safe to say that Paddy eats, sleeps, and breathes motorcycling. A rich vein of motorcycling heritage runs through his family. Paddy got his first taste of motorcycling at the age of 10 or 11, while riding his brother’s trials bike on an off-road track. As a kid, he travelled with his uncle and brother to road racing competitions all around Ireland. He is still an avid fan of all forms of motorcycle racing and he maintains that seeing Joey Dunlop in action remains one of his fondest memories. At the age of seventeen, Paddy got his first job so that he could save up to buy his first motorcycle. He recalls that when his friends were spending money drinking and doing all the other things that teenagers do, he stayed at home so that he could save his money and put it into motorcycling. Over the years Paddy has worked his way up through the different categories of motorcycles and currently he rides a Yamaha R1 Superbike. He works as a toolmaker in a manufacturing plant in Waterford. His partner recently gave birth to his first son. For Paddy, the significance of the responsibility of becoming a father has brought on a moral dilemma in terms of continuing to ride motorcycles. While contemplating the magnitude of this decision, he rides on.

**Jimmy’s Profile**

When he was in school, Jimmy worked a part time job to get a scooter so that he could have some independence. In the beginning the buzz for Jimmy was just being able to get himself from A to B. He remembers feeling like he didn’t want to be left behind when the rest of the group started getting proper motorcycles. He couldn’t wait to leave school so that he could start earning enough money to buy a proper bike. At just 16, Jimmy left school and he began serving his time as a carpenter with his uncle. Soon after he bought his first bike, which was an Aprilia RS 125. But before long, this bike blew up and he was forced to fork out more money to buy a Honda NS1. Jimmy recalls the difficulties that he experienced in terms of learning to keep up with the rest of the group. He hadn’t received any formal training, so he ended up relying on the rest of the group to bring him up to speed. He’s pretty certain that this is not the best method of rider training. During the recession, Jimmy found himself out of work for long periods, he retrained as an electrician and he currently lives and works in Waterford. He currently rides a GSXR1000.

**Tom’s Profile**

Tom developed an interest in mechanical things from a very young age and it was not long before he came to think of the motorcycle as the ultimate mechanical thing. Tom is a cousin of Leon’s and they have always been close friends. As school kids they both worked the same part-time job and saved their wages to buy the same model of motorcycle. The participants
first started hanging around as a group at this time. Motorcycles were a popular choice of transport amongst the students but the group were drawn together because of their particular approach to motorcycling. They considered themselves to be serious motorcyclists and they were already planning to remain motorcyclists long into the future. From the outset, the group considered motorcycling to about much more than transport. In particular, Tom was drawn to the practical work of maintaining and modifying his motorcycles. His father had been a motorcyclist and he helped Tom to refine his practical skills. These skills are a resource that is regularly called upon by the group. Within the group, Tom is also known for his capacity to devise innovative ways of modifying motorcycles. After a few years of riding the Honda NS1, Tom followed the rest of the group in upgrading to a 250cc motorcycle. Tom admittedly found this transition difficult because he felt guilty about replacing his previous motorcycle. When the construction industry collapsed, like many others from this generation, Tom was forced to emigrate to Australia to find work. He currently lives in Sydney, where he works as an electrician. He has since bought a Kawasaki 650RN and he continues to ride.

Dave’s Profile
Dave and Eoin grew up together on the outskirts of Waterford city and they have been close friends since primary school. As youngsters, they both learned to ride motorcycles in the fields close to their houses. When Dave got his first bike for the road he seldom went anywhere without Eoin on the back. Dave’s first bike was a Yamaha RXS100, but Dave saw himself as more of a sports bike man and at the first opportunity he upgraded to a Kawasaki Ninja R250. Dave is known for taking chances on the bike and he has experienced more crashes and close calls than he cares to remember. Dave and Eoin still love to ride the country roads close to their homes, which they claim to know like the back of their hands. In his spare time Dave likes to attend road-racing events and he dreams of one day getting himself to the Isle of Man TT festival. After a period of unemployment, Dave recently found work in a local pharmaceutical factory. As a result he feels that his chances of turning this dream into a reality are vastly improving. Dave has a full licence and currently rides a Suzuki GSXR600.

Hugh’s Profile
At fifty-four, Hugh is the oldest member of the group. Hugh met Leon while filling up his bike at a petrol station in Waterford. They spent neatly half an hour chatting about their motorcycles before deciding to go for a ride together. Leon introduced Hugh to the rest of the lads and since then he has become an important member of the group. For Hugh, motorcycling is first and foremost about freedom. Whether riding as part of the group or on his own, he loves the freedom of getting out on the open road. Out of the entire group, Hugh
perhaps has the most sensible approach to riding. He admits that this wasn't always the case
and in his younger years he had his fair share of crashes. Based on these experiences he now
feels more content to ride within his limits. Hugh works as an instructor in metal fabrication,
so he has been a good addition to the group in terms of improving the group’s overall
capacities for maintenance and repair work.

Kevin’s Profile
At forty-five, Kevin has been involved in Motorcycling for over thirty years. His father was a
motorcyclist and a keen motorcycle-racing enthusiast. He brought Kevin along to races all
over the country in 80s. He remembers, when he was about fifteen, being mesmerised when
he saw a racer popping a wheelie coming down the home straight at Mondello. He distinctly
recalls that this was the moment that he knew for sure that he wanted to ride motorcycles.
Kevin started doing track days when he was eighteen on his Honda CBX250 road bike. Kevin
has always been attracted to speed. But now he prefers to stick to the track when it comes to
‘driving it on’. After completing a number of advanced rider training courses, Kevin was
approved by the RSA as an instructor. I met Kevin at the Faugheen 50 road race meeting in
2014. He was interested in this study and he agreed to take me out on the road and give me
some lessons on how to improve my riding technique.

Robert’s Profile
I met Robert while staying in lodgings at the Isle of Man TT festival in 2013. Of all the
people that I spoke to from outside the group, Robert had a wealth of experience and an
abundance of interesting stories about his time as a motorcyclist. He was particularly
knowledgeable about road racing and the motorcycle market. Robert is much older than many
of the participants from the group so he oftentimes spoke from a different perspective. As a
father of a road-racing son, Robert was on the paternal side of the father/son relationship that
had been so crucial to many of our participants’ developments as motorcyclists. In our
conversation he described his son and himself as a father and son team. In this sense Robert’s
experiences offered a novel perspective, which importantly was not accessible from within
the group. For these reasons, I chose to include Robert as a research participant. Robert works
as a project manager in the construction industry and currently rides a Ducati Monster 696.

3.6.3 Data Collection
Stage 1 – Observation and Immersion
As ethnographers it is important to familiarise ourselves with the cultural context of the phenomena that we investigate. This context is accessible through artefacts of discourse (written text, film, music etc.), which serve as resources of cultural knowledge that are ‘inextricable from everyday practice and local ideologies’ (Pink 2009, p.47). This study was made up of three data collection stages each consisting of a period of three months in the field. I began my immersion into the motorcycling scene by joining Irish motorcycling forums on-line. I concentrated my efforts on becoming familiar with recurring discussion topics and also the language of the community. This exercise was useful in that it provided insight into the collective understandings of those participating in the motorcycling community. I also subscribed to a number of popular motorcycling publications (MCN, Fast Bike, and the Bike Buyers Guide). This was helpful in terms of developing an understanding of what was happening in the motorcycling scene. I also analysed advertisements to get a sense of the marketplace. By reading opinion pieces and expert reviews, on a range of motorcycling, I started to develop a sense of how motorcycling culture was represented in the media.

I also looked to popular culture to understand the myriad of meanings surrounding motorcycling. I started with the 1953 film The Wild One; this ‘celebration of delinquency’ (Osgerby 2005) received much media attention because of Marlin Brando’s portrayal of the motorcyclist as a hyper-masculine, non-conformist, with an aversion to authority. In a time of uncertainty, motorcyclists were presented as a threat to the ideals of mainstream American society by the media. The film was banned from public screening in Britain until 1963 (Seate 2000). In the furore that ensued, the motorcyclist’s position on the margins of society was clearly established. Next, I turned my attention to Hunter S. Thompson’s (1967) account of his trials and tribulations with the outlaw motorcycling gangs of California. The 1969 film Easy Rider provided further insight into the historical development of the outlaw identity, which seems so dominant in popular culture. Documentary films such as Faster (2003), Fastest (2011), TT: Closer to the Edge (2011), and Isle of Man TT: A Dangerous Addiction (2012) provided a closer insight into the practices around high-speed motorcycling. Ghost rider, a Youtube sensation, and subcultural hero amongst the group provided some insight into the practice of high-speed driving on public roads. The popularity of his escapades also illustrated the burgeoning appetite for this approach to motorcycling.

Stage 2 – Participation and Data Collection

In an effort to understand the group, I immersed myself into their world over a four-year period. I engaged in multiple periods of participant observation ranging from one to two
months. I took part in what Agar (1996, p.158) calls ‘hanging out’ – conducting formal and informal interviews, engaging in casual conversations, writing up field notes, taking photographs and capturing video representations. During this first stage of immersion I participated in group rides and spent time hanging out with the group. My time hanging out in the group consisted of regular meet ups at participant’s workshops and garages. These informal meetings often revolved around working on the bikes. Talk was always an integral part of these meetings. Conversations usually revolved around motorcycles: new products coming into the market, opinions about different motorcycles, driving techniques and practices, maintenance and repair strategies, and also sharing stories about incidents from the road.

Attending these meet ups was important in the sense that it provided me with an opportunity to understand the types of activities and issues that were important to the group. These meetings were useful in that I gained an understanding of the ways that participants talked about their practices within a naturally formed setting. I tried to familiarise myself with appropriate ways of talking and being in the group. During these meetings I developed a rapport with members of the group, which was useful in securing their participation in more formal interviews. After each meeting I wrote up detailed field notes, which recorded events, outlined casual conversations and also outlined my general interpretations of what was happening in the field. In recording these experiences I placed a significant emphasis on the language and phrases used by the group.

During this stage I conducted an initial round of 7 narrative interviews (Wengraf 2001) with members from the motorcycling community. The first subsession of interviewing began using the SQUIN technique, during this session a conscious effort was made to avoid promoting or interfering with the participants’ responses. These subsessions typically lasted between 20-40 minutes. During a short break, I highlighted topics that would be used in the second subsession. During the next subsession questioning techniques adhered to the TQUIN technique outlined by Wengraf (2001). Narrative inducing questions were drawn up based on relevant topics raised in the SQUIN session. These interviews typically lasted around 30 minutes. A third session was conducted, where further narrative responses were required.

Stage 3 – Participation and Data Collection II

During this phase of immersion, I began to adopt a sensory approach to ethnography (Pink 2009; Hopwood 2013) with the intended purpose of furthering my understanding of the embodied aspects of high-speed motorcycling. The goal was to use this knowledge to make
sense of the participants’ experiences, values and ways of life as high-speed motorcyclists (Pink 2009, p.45). To begin this process, I engaged in the activity of high-speed motorcycling while trying to remain cognisant of my body. With the help of others I began to develop an awareness of how to use my body to engage in high-speed motorcycling. As my skills developed, I began to switch attention to my own experiences of the multi-sensory nature of high-speed motorcycling. In this way, I became more cognisant of the sensations and emotions that one experiences while riding a motorcycle at high-speeds.

This process required ‘accounting for [my] own sensory subjectivity, an ability to be reflexive about how this subjectivity may be implicated in the production of ethnographic knowledge, and an openness to learning how to participate in other sensory ways of knowing’ (Pink 2009, p.52). In particular, I turned my awareness towards the routine, and often taken for granted, tasks involved in motorcycling practices (Hockey 2006). I used these somatic experiences to engage with participants again, this time focusing on reflexive discussions around shared embodied experiences. These experiences were beneficial in that they helped me to develop an empathetic understanding of the experiences of participants. At this stage I conducted four further interviews: two follow up interviews with members of the community, a series of riding lessons with Michael and also a more formal driving lesson with Kevin.

Having developed meaningful relationships with members of the group I proceeded to take on the task of learning to participate in high-speed motorcycling practices. By engaging in participation in the role of an apprentice (Harris 2007; Ingold 2000) I gained an opportunity to develop an awareness of the embodied skills and techniques required to ride a motorcycle at speed. Ingold (2000, cited in Pink 2009) asserts that such embodied techniques are not transmitted through ‘genetic replication’, but rather through ‘systems of apprenticeship’, constituted by the relationship between more and less experienced practitioners in hands on activity’. The apprenticeship approach to ethnography not only provided access to embodied techniques, it also provided an opportunity to understand the ways that people learn (Downey 2005). By developing this reflexive appreciation of my own embodiment, I felt better equipped to make sense of the embodied experiences of the participants.

3.7 The Knowledge Production Process: Producing Meaningful Data

As interpretive consumer researchers it is important that we establish the trustworthiness of our research outputs (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). To do this we must shed light on the processes of analysis and interpretations that transform raw data into research findings.
Spiggle (1994) calls for greater clarity regarding the distinctions between analysis and interpretation. These terms are often used interchangeably in consumer research, which further fuels confusion about the process of interpretative consumer research. For the purposes of clarification

Analysis is both a way of knowing engaged in by the researcher during the research and it is part of the reflexivity of the sensory ethnographer who seeks to understand other people’s ways of being in the world but is simultaneously aware that her or his involvement is part of a process that will eventually abstract these experiences to produce academic knowledge.

(Pink 2009 p.120)

Interpretation includes the process of making sense of consumer’s intentions and inferences (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy 1998). Insights into consumption phenomena are reached through the experiences and behaviours of consumers. During data analysis, some consumer researchers engage in an intuitive, non-linear process that includes stages such as categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration and refutation (Spiggle 1994, p.492). The lack of explicit direction on exactly how the analysis process is conducted can be traced from the early days of ethnography in consumer research (Belk et al. 1988, 1989; Hirschman 1992; Schouten 1991) right up to the pioneering pursuits of sensory ethnographers today. Given this unwillingness to provide clarity on the process, it is perhaps pertinent to question the separation of data collection from analysis. Do we replicate and represent this distinction in our work to ensure that our research fits within the parameters of the academic system? Is it possible for the researcher to not be influenced by what she or he learns about the experiences of others at all stages of the research process? In conducting data analysis I adopted Pink’s (2009) proposition that we could begin to shed light on interpretative analysis by situating our understanding of it within the knowledge production process.

In following Pink’s (2009) strategy analysis is formulated as the way to knowing. The practice of analysis was organised around particularly intense and systematic treatments of research materials – interview transcripts, video, photographs, notes, memories and imaginaries. This process involved some a degree of intentionality, in that I aimed to impose an order and deduce patterns within the research materials. These activities were performed during periods in which I refrained from any engagement in the research context. Research materials such as photographs, videos, interview transcripts, and field notes were used to reconnect with the situated context. The intention here was to ensure that the sensory elements of the research process remained central in the process of analysis. These research materials were embedded in multisensory experience (Pink 2009), and therefore they were treated as receptacles of these experiences. In this sense, these
objects were important both in terms of their own materiality and the experiences that they represent. This approach to data analysis did not replace the process of identifying important themes as they emerged in the research material. A more systematic approach was used to identify the most significant emerging themes.

Pink (2009) borrows from David MacDougall’s work on the role of the body and senses in ethnographic filmmaking. His work provides insight into the ways in which the ethnographer can use visual materials to gain insight and understanding. MacDougall (1998, p.53) reports that ‘our film experience relies upon our assuming the existence of a parallel sensory experience in others’. Expanding upon the work of Merleau Ponty, MacDougall (1998, p.53) proposes that the ‘resonance of bodies…suggests a synchrony between viewer and viewed that recovers pre-linguistic, somatic relation to others of infancy, a capacity that still remains accessible to us in adulthood’. This resonance with the body is formed on the basis that ‘the viewer…usually responding to not only the content of the images…but also the postural schema of the film itself, embodying the filmmaker (ibid)’. Pink cleverly works with MacDougall’s ideas to position the ethnographer filmmaker as the viewer of his or her own production. In this sense, the viewing of the film creates a much stronger resonance, as it allows the ethnographer to reconnect with the sensorial, emotional and experiential dimensions of the research context, phenomena and process. The relationship between vision and touch is something that has been explored in some detail by film theorists. Laura Mark’s (2000, p.26) explicates further, ‘if vision can be understood to be embodied, touch and other senses necessarily play a part in vision’. Moreover, Marks reports that ‘since memory functions multi-sensorially, a work of cinema, though it only directly engages two senses activates a memory that necessarily involves the senses (2002, p.22). Pink (2009) works with this idea to forge a connection to the notion of sensory memory, while also pointing out that analysis of this type has already begun.

Analysis of my video documentation of [Japanese dance] lessons enabled me to focus on very small units of transmission and analyse the gradual embodiment of the artistic practice. From personal experience, I ‘knew’ how Iemoto taught dance. My body had been thought the methodical repetitions of movement. Curiously, kinaesthetic sensations (the sense of motion and orientation) often fell over me when I observed the videotapes, and somehow guided me through the analysis. It seemed that the field tapes were reinforcing my physical understanding of movement/sound while my body also performed the analytical process.

(Hahn 2007, p.278)

Adopting an ‘embodied, sensorial and emotional’ stance was important in terms of analysis because it provided access to the embodied sense of knowing that is so important in terms of understanding our participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. Essentially, it
provided a way of contextualising the more systematic analysis of key themes that emerged from interview transcripts, audio clips, field notes and video. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for critical reflection on the experience of the research process, which allowed me to search for a new level of awareness. This line of argument is equally transferable to the rest of the collected research materials. Field notes, photographs, and audio clips were also used to evoke the sensory experience of encounters in the field. Steven Feld argues that a sense of place can always be linked back to ‘acoustemology’ in the sense that hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence (2005, p.184). This body of work clearly blurs the distinction between data collection and analysis as distinct phases in the research process. In this research I adopted the view that the analysis of materials is ‘inextricable from the process through which they are produced and made meaningful’ (Pink 2009, p.125).

3.7.1 Coding and Interpretation of Interviews

In order to organise fieldwork data into manageable categories and facilitate the emergence of key themes, I adhered to Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) approach to coding. This process enabled me to identify themes as they emerged from the data. Before beginning the more formal process of coding I first created a ‘start list’ (Miles and Huberman 1994) of codes, which stemmed from areas of interest that were related to the research questions. The start list was built around issues previously identified as important aspects of motorcycling culture and included codes such as Communitas, identity, and authenticity. For the first read through the data set I adopted an idiographic approach, to understand each participant’s interview as a whole in itself and to make connections between sections of the data. In this way I was able to make an initial assessment of its relevance to the content of the transcript as a whole (Thompson et al. 1989).

Having reached an idiographic understanding of each of the transcripts I moved to the next phase of the part-to-whole assessment (Thompson et al. 1989), which involved identifying the areas of commonality across the data set. Seidel and Kelle’s (1995, p.55-56) approach to coding and retrieving data in this way encompasses three stages: 1) noticing relevant phenomena, 2) collecting examples of those phenomena in the data, 3) analysing those phenomena to identify commonalities, differences patterns and structures. These patterns of commonality were identified as global themes and were significant in the sense that they represented the shared experiences of the participants (Thompson et al. 1989). Through this
inductive process a number of further codes emerged. Initially I created code labels that utilised phraseologies employed by the participants to ensure codes remained rooted in the data e.g. ‘how to use your body’, ‘keeping up to everyone’, and ‘the bike becomes a part of you’.

Based on this second phase the prevalence of certain codes began to emerge. Some of these codes grouped into themes that connected with the primary research questions (e.g. the motorcycling body/multi-sensory aspects of the experience), however others codes opened up themes that went beyond these initial questions (Braun and Clarke 2003). For example, based on the prevalence of excerpts of data identified using the code ‘the bike becomes a part of you’, I developed a further global theme labelled ‘significant connections with the motorcycle’. Throughout the analysis, I was conscious of the need to refer back to the participant’s transcripts in order to not lose grasp of the original context. This strategy ensured that the global themes remained rooted in the participants’ experiences (Thompson et al. 1989). In summary, the first phase of coding was useful in terms of addressing the previously stated research questions, while the inductive phase of coding opened up the space to see new possibilities in the data.

In the next phase of the coding process, I assigned a label and colour to each of the nominated codes. I then re-read each interview and highlighted the stretches of data that were related to each code. I began cutting the highlighted stretches of data from their original files and pasting them into new word documents in order to compile each code into a more accessible format. In doing so I was able to connect representative categories and occurrences of particular phenomena together on the basis of their shared properties (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Procedurally, the process of coding was important in enabling localised themes to emerge and also in terms of ordering the data in manageable units. As a heuristic device, coding enabled me to think about and interact with the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). In this way, the coding process opened up new possibilities in terms of identifying the types of questions that the data set was capable of addressing.

In the next phase I set about exploring each coded theme in order to develop meanings. This stage presented an opportunity to identify connections and sub-categories within and across themes. For example, I identified sub-categories related to the theme labelled ‘significant connections with the motorcycle’. The list of subcategories included: ‘the emotional connection to motorcycles’, ‘the reforming of the connection’, and ‘physical connections with the motorcycle’. Once the data had been organised into coded themes and subcategories, I moved from coding to the work of interpretation. I began by once again reading through the
data files containing each coded theme for the purpose of identifying linkages between codes and subcategories. The aim at this point was to identify ‘patterns, themes regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities’ across the data set (Delamont 1992, cited in Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.47). For example, in this phase I identified the prevalent role of paternal figures and the connection to a number of previously identified themes and subcategories. This phase was important in terms of allowing me to find pathways through the data’ (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.46). Through this iterative process of coding and interpretation, I made sense of the data set and developed ideas about the most important themes and the linkages between them. While this process is described here in a linear process from coding through to interpretation, in actuality these analytical processes were emerging and developing right throughout the process.

3.7.2 Interpreting and Representing Sensory Knowing

During fieldwork I collected research materials based on various activities, ranging from informal meetings, group rides, and trips to motorcycle shows and race meetings. The research materials included a combination of written field notes, audio interviews with written transcripts, photography, audio-video footage, and the production of an ethnographic film. Using these mediums I tried to capture the ebb and flow of daily life within the group. This mixed approach to data collection resulted in a diverse range of research materials which I used to contextualise my analysis. As memory aids, these materials served to transport me back to the time and place of the research encounter. Photographs capturing representations from various research trips helped me to reflexively reencounter my experiences in the community. Audio-video footage served to reconnect me with the sensorial experience of high-speed motorcycling. In re-watching audio-video representations of the practice I could develop my understanding of the multi-sensory nature of the high-speed motorcycling experience.

Analysis of these research materials helped me to make sense of the participants’ experience of life within the group. To further develop this analysis I moved from different sets of research materials all the while maintaining a sharp focus on the sociality, sensoriality materiality of these experiences. I used these materials to trace through my own somatic experiences of the preceding years of research. I tried to interpret my own experiences to make sense of how these experiences were both similar and different to those of my research
participants. In this sense, ‘analysis entailed moving between different sets of research materials and memories to piece together abstractions of events and processes in such a way that they related the phenomenology of the research process to written academic debates’ (Pink 2009, p.130).

3.8 Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter I argued for the benefits of adopting an interpretivist approach in this research. This interpretive stance brought forth a focus on the particular over the generalisable. This stance also directed us to examine motorcycling phenomena within their situated contexts and to prioritise contextualising these accounts through the process of thick description. In terms of operationalising this stance, the phenomenological perspective directed our attention towards the everyday lives of high-speed motorcyclists. In this way, our enquiry became invariably linked to context and time and a sense of the participants being in their world. Immersion into the world of high-speed motorcycling made it possible to understand and develop empathy towards the daily lives of our participants. This was achieved by engaging in their social world and its boundaries, rituals, and practices. In this sense, immersion becomes important in terms of understanding ‘the shared systems of meanings’ that combine to make up motorcycling culture (Goulding 2005, p.298).

The adoption of Pink’s (2009, p.1) approach to sensory ethnography orientated our enquiry into the ‘multisensoriality of experience perception, knowing and practice’. Pink’s perspective highlights the interrelated and interconnected nature of the senses. For this reason I engaged in the culture and experiential aspects of motorcycling while remaining cognisant of the role of the senses. The emergence of global themes from the participants’ transcripts signalled the importance of further cognisance towards the connection between my body and the motorcycle when engaging in motorcycling practices. In this way, Pink’s (2009) sensory ethnography allowed me to delve deeper than imitation and instead move towards an understanding of embodiment (and its development) in high-speed motorcycling. Based on Pink’s (2009) understanding of the senses, I refused to prioritise mind over body during my engagement in the field. Within the context of the overall research project, this perspective will become essential in allowing us to understand they ways in which high-speed motorcyclists forge connections in the material world. To complement the sensory ethnographic approach, I employed a narrative approach to interviewing participants (Wengraf 2001, p.113). Importantly, in telling their own stories the participants gained the opportunity to construct a sense of their own experiences.
The final section of this chapter focused on providing a detailed account of the research journey. In order to situate this project within a sense of place, I opened this section with a description of the research context. This contextualisation introduced the motorcycling community and provided a rationale for deciding to focus on a particular group of enthusiasts within that community. In order to provide a clear sense of this group I offered detailed accounts of each of the participants, which also traced the relationship between members and the story of how the group came into formation. The next section detailed the three stages of data collection, beginning with building a familiarisation with motorcycling culture, through to immersion into the group, and finally to sensory data collection. The final section outlined the processes employed in order to develop the data set into meaningful data. After a series of phases of coding a number of global themes emerged from the data. The three proceeding empirical chapters are organised around the most significant global themes. The significance of global themes was judged in terms of relevance to the research questions and also in terms of potential contributions to consumer research.

The empirical section will open with a chapter that focuses primarily on the participants’ life stories as motorcyclists. This chapter begins with an introduction that tells the story of my own experiences as a motorcyclist. This introduction will also provide further details of my immersion into the group and my rationale for deciding to focus on this particular group. This chapter also provides insight into the participants’ developments as motorcyclists, which subsequently will allow us to understand the particulars of the group. In this way we will also develop a sense of the internal dynamics of the group and their place within the larger context of the overall motorcycling community. It is important to open with this chapter because it provides a rich contextualisation in terms of the group, its members and its activities. In this way, we will carry a rich contextualisation forward into the remaining chapters.

The second empirical chapter primarily addresses pertinent research questions related to the multi-sensory experience of high-speed motorcycling. This chapter will include narrative accounts of my own experiences of participation within the community. These narrative accounts will be developed from field notes related to the second phase of data collection. The second half of this chapter will develop insights into the ‘embodied experiences of motorcycling’, which emerged as a global theme during coding and interpretation. This section will build upon the following subcategories: ‘developing an awareness of the body’, ‘embodying high-speed motorcycling skills’, and ‘the embodied experience of emotions and sensations during high-speed motorcycling’. In this way, this chapter will aim to develop an understanding of participants’ embodied experiences as high-speed motorcyclists.
The third empirical chapter is focused on an emerging global theme that was identified in this chapter as the ‘significant connections with the motorcycle’. This chapter is organised around the following subcategories: ‘the emotional connection to motorcycles’, ‘the reforming of the connection’, and ‘physical connections with the motorcycle’. By developing these subcategories, this chapter will aim to expand upon insights developed in chapter five by examining our participants’ embodied experiences of being in the material world of motorcycles.
Chapter 4:  The Motorcycling Community

4.1 Introduction

I think that thing on the BBC the other night was a bit unfortunate, you know the bike went off in the senior race and they came out on the North West news and said this is the most dangerous sport in the world. They introduced it as this and they were reporting apparently from the most dangerous race in the world. Well that's a bit bad isn’t it? I mean there will be some comment on that in the press about what she said. So it’s like before people even get a chance to form an opinion it’s already established as the most dangerous sport in the world. That's the first thing she said. I think that will annoy a lot of people.

[Robert]

I’ll never forget my first time sitting on the back of a motorcycle. I was about 9 years old and a friend of my family threw me up on the back of his motorcycle and brought me for a spin around the town. I remember being absolutely terrified. I wrapped my hands around him and held on like my life depended on it and maybe it did. I also vividly remember the thrill that I felt that day. My father and uncles had motorcycles when they were youngsters and they often shared stories about the things that they got up to with my brother and me. These early experiences and the stories influenced my persisting affinity for motorcycling.

One of my uncles, who was closer in age to me than my father, must have shared similar experiences because he developed the same interest in motorcycling. When he was in his early twenties he bought his first motorcycle. At the same time my cousin also bought a motorcycle. I remember this time fondly because it was really exciting. On weekends and summer’s evenings I would sit on the back of my uncle’s motorcycle and we would ride for miles along the coastline and through the mountains. During these times motorcycling was just about fun and a sense of adventure.

When I was fifteen, I saved all of the money that I earned from a part time job so that I could buy a scooter on my sixteenth birthday. As my birthday approached, I found a scooter and my uncle came with me so that we could check it out. We negotiated a deal there and then. I’ll never forget the feeling of driving the scooter home that day. I felt so proud of myself. In the beginning, I would go out driving at all hours of the night. At this time, the buzz was being able to go where I wanted when I wanted. This feeling was so strong in the beginning and, in many ways, I’m not sure if that buzz has ever really fully faded away.
Somewhere around that same time, my uncle began to develop a more serious approach to motorcycling. I was intrigued by the rapid transition that ensued. First, the Honda was replaced by a Harley. Then the leather jacket was adorned with a waistcoat with Harley Davidson back patches. When he officially became a member of a local Harley Davidson club, the waistcoat was stitched with patches that designated his position within the club. During this time I moved from a scooter to my first bike. I spent some time going to the clubhouse for various events. The clubhouse was basically a bar, with a pool table, satellite TV and a stage for bands to play. The club was painted in orange and black to demonstrate their allegiance to the Harley Brand. The place was decorated with all the usual things you would expect; American Eagles, Confederate Flags, Club Flags and Harley memorabilia. From the beginning, it was always clear to me that this was something that I never really wanted to be a part of. There were too many rules, too much posturing, and not enough time spent on the bike. Club members would look down on anyone that didn't drive a Harley. I resented that at the time because I knew that the majority of them drove to work in their cars, while I froze putting in the hard winter miles. I couldn't understand the relevance of the connection between motorcycling and the machismo, which seemed so integral to their identity. Over the years I saw this play out in numerous ways, but it was always particularly prevalent at the annual club rally where more time seemed to be spent talking about enforcing security measures. Without hours of conversation attributed to how escalating tensions would be dealt with. For me this was too far removed from the experience of motorcycling.

Around this time my brother had also bought his first bike. As a kid he had, what seemed like, an unquenchable appetite for danger. He seemed to express himself best while jumping from second story windows, smashing his front teeth with his skateboard, and perhaps most painfully, while breaking his leg after falling from the top of a thirty foot wall. It was worrying, but hardly surprising that he would adopt a similar attitude when he got his first motorcycle at the age of sixteen. Immediately, Leon embraced an approach to motorcycling that was different from what I had seen in the Harley Davidson scene. Just like his previous leisure pursuits, immediately he embraced an approach to motorcycling that was about pushing himself to the limits. He soon found a group of friends that shared that same interest in motorcycling.

Before beginning this research project, I had already begun riding with Leon and his group of friends. In some ways, it was an easy transition into the group because I shared their connection with getting out on the bike and riding. Personally, I could not understand why the so-called “rebel motorcyclists” needed so many rules and structures. For me the
rebel/motorcycle connection was about shaking off these structures so that one could experience a sense of unconstrained freedom. In this way, I found it refreshing to be surrounded by motorcyclists that were also not interested in the sideshows that seemed so prominent within the Harley Davidson community. The practicalities of learning to keep up with the group were certainly more challenging than grasping the group’s sensibility towards motorcycling. When I began the more formal research process, the core group consisted of six people that would meet up once or twice a week. There were also four or five others that would come and go from time to time. Group meetings usually involved everyone arriving at one of our garages or houses and spending time talking bikes, smoking cigarettes and drinking tea. Unlike the Harley Davidson club, everything about this group was informal. From the beginning it was clear that the group didn't have explicit rules governing individual behaviour or obvious structures demarcating status. In the group of, self-proclaimed, high-speed motorcyclists I observed a group of guys that shared similar interests, who met up to share experiences with liked minded others.

Within the group, meetings were often arranged in order to tackle technical problems related to their motorcycles. While participating in the field, I spent countless hours helping to take motorcycles apart and putting them back together. The group seemed to thrive on the notion that they could overcome technical problems independently and avoid paying mechanics and main dealers to solve problems for them. Some members in the group, worked technical 'hands on' jobs and they were usually the ones leading the way when it came to maintenance and repair work. As a group we enjoyed getting to know the bikes in this intimate way. It was always a cause for celebration when one of the group arrived along to show off a new motorcycle. It became a sort of ritual, where each member would walk around the bike offering complements about this bit here or that bit there.

During this time, participating in the group, I was introduced to riding motorcycles in the field, for the first time. A number of people in the group owned trials bikes, which are bikes designed specifically for this terrain. The first time I attempted to drive one of these bikes, I misjudged its intense power and ended up running along after it went crashing into a bunch of forty-foot Leylandii. It was embarrassing. I had been driving motorcycles for seven or eight years at this stage without ever falling off. I thought that this was something to be proud of. But, in this group it was a clear sign that I hadn’t pushed myself or the bike to the limit. Riding in the field was great because it gave me a chance to experience a different side of motorcycling. In the field I experienced, for the first time, a different type of enjoyment, which was about pushing the limits of your skills. I experienced a new way of developing my technical skills and control of
the bike. It was in the field that I first learned how to wheelie and also how to fall from a moving motorcycle. Playing with bikes in this way takes away a lot of the physical fear. You realise that the body can take a few falls and the inevitable bumps and bruises. From this experience, I found myself embracing that same playful spirit when I returned to the road.

The majority of my time participating in the group was spent riding motorcycles. On summers evenings we would ride for hours as a group without any real aim other than to enjoy the trip. There was an air of deviance in the way that the group approached group rides. When riding as pack, you could hear the other lads make their move before you’d see it and then it would be on. We’d be hammering through the gears, snapping throttles, attacking the narrow space in between cars as they passed in either direction. On group rides, we experienced a lot of horn blowing, dirty looks, and angry gestures from car drivers. But to be honest, the group seemed to thrive on this reaction. I found myself becoming swept up in excitement of doing this together. Experiencing the same buzz as everyone else at the same time. It always seemed much easier to break the rules when you were moving at that speed because we’d be gone before anyone had really grasped what was happening.

In this chapter I aim to work with participant narratives to empirically develop an appreciation of our groups understanding of the differences that exist between groups within the motorcycling community. The intention here is to contextualise the research setting by developing an understanding of the landscape of the motorcycling community. This focus will illuminate the tensions that exist between groups within this community. These tensions will lead us to question the notion of authenticity. We will also question how this group of participants developed its penchant for high-speed motorcycling. This orientation will evidence the influence of paternal figures in terms of shaping an understanding of motorcycling that primarily revolves around the concept of speed. In doing so, we will briefly address the concept of speed and consider what this concept means to our participants. This enquiry will also bring to light the social dynamics involved in fostering our participants approach to motorcycling. In this section we question how our participants learned to keep up with the demands that the high-speed approach places upon them. Finally, we will turn attention to the notion of identity and examine its place within this motorcycling group.
4.2 Understanding Difference within the Motorcycling Community

Many of the current members of the community, highlight how they began participating in the community whilst still in secondary school. Leon gives some insight into his early involvement in the community:

I was consumed by it. I was doing the leaving cert in school and that should have been the most important thing that I was doing at the time. But it wasn’t. I was doing doughnuts and wheelies and driving the bike … I was literally consumed by it. It was all that I could think of for months. Before I got the bike, going to bed every night all that I would be thinking about was getting the bike. You know I might have been out on a spin on the back of a bike with the lads and it was all I could think of like. So then when I got the bike it was unreal because I had the means to do all these things that I thought were so cool … There were other people in school that would have just got a bike because they needed transport and not because they wanted a motorbike. They might not have been old enough to have a car, so the bike was kind of like a go between. It didn't seem that they were really interested in the bikes. They are the people that you wanted to stand out from. You didn't really want to look like one of those. But you did want to look like the people that were into their bikes. You know the people that I hung around with they were the kind of people that were going to have bikes for years. They were the people that you wanted to fit in with and you wanted to not fit in with the other crowd.

[Leon]

In this excerpt Leon explains the compulsion that he felt in terms of becoming a motorcyclist. This excerpt is interesting because it brings us right back to the beginnings of our particular group of motorcyclists’ careers. It allows us to see that, even at this early stage, they were already beginning to form particular feelings about the type of motorcyclists that they wanted to become. Leon is keen to disassociate himself from peers that viewed motorcycling as purely a means of transporting themselves from A to B. For these people, motorcycling offered a short-term solution to a practical problem. In this excerpt, Leon describes how he sought to find like-minded others that were also deeply committed to motorcycling. For Leon, finding this group was also significant in the sense that it allowed him to differentiate himself from those that viewed motorcycling as simply a means of transport. In this example we see echoes of Simmel’s (1957) thoughts on the dialectical tensions that exist between the individual and society. We see this notion play out in Leon’s attempts to use consumption to locate himself in relation with others who share similar interests and orientations towards motorcycling.

In the narrative below Eoin begins to elaborate on some of the different group’s of motorcyclists and styles of motorcycling that exist within the wider community.
There are a few different groups. I’m not sure if I could name them all … but there are Harleys. Then you have the lads on your pan Europeans. Those fellas are into touring … they look for comfort. Then you have the lads on their street fighters … they’re just crashed bikes. I kind of like the street fighter myself. No fairings and sitting straight. Then you have the racing bikes and they are just the fastest. You couldn’t dispute that. I’m not sure if people pick it because of the seating position or they just like the style of different bikes. I know a fella and if he was going for a bike he wouldn’t pick anything except the racing style. He wouldn’t pick anything where you would sit up straight … I think it’s just for pure speed. Get down in the clocks and fucking reddening it.

In this extract Eoin uses culture specific language to highlight some important distinctions between different groups of bikers. Using this terminology, he alludes to what he sees as the distinctions between different styles of motorcycling. One of the key differences that Eoin elucidates is the distinction between motorcycles that are built for comfort and those that are designed and driven for speed. Harley Davidsons’ saddles are positioned in a manner that props the motorcyclist into an upright position, necessitating an almost straight back. The handlebars are often outstretched and raised so that the motorcyclist must almost puff out their chest when gripping the handlebars. In this way, riding a Harley Davidson creates a visceral feeling of power. Yates (1997) describes how generations of disenfranchised men have found solace in the aura of strength that seems to emanate from these motorcycles. Within the community, this style of motorcycling is referred to as ‘cruising’ and the style of motorcycle is known as a ‘cruiser’. Pugliese and Cagan (2002) investigate how Harley Davidson incorporates central tenants of their brand identity (power, rebelliousness etc.) within what they term as the ‘shape grammar’ of their product design. They observe a continuity in design strategy, which has enabled Harley to embed a ‘more powerful look, sound, and feel’ in their motorcycles (ibid, p141). This understanding gives weight to the notion that creating and maintaining the values associated with brand identity is as much the job of engineers and product designers as it is marketers.

What Eoin refers to as ‘Street fighters’ are racing style motorcycles that have been crashed or dropped causing damage to the fairings1. With the fairings removed the body of the motorcycle is uncovered or what is colloquially referred to as ‘naked’. Typically, street fighters have customised straight handlebars, which help motorcyclists to perform handling manoeuvres and stunts. In Eoin’s narrative we learn that there are also people that ‘wouldn’t pick anything except the racing style’. In a practical sense this experience involves crouching forward, almost resting your chest on the petrol tank and your face just inches above the speedometer (‘getting down in the clocks’) and accelerating to the extent that the revolutions

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1 an external metal or plastic structure added to increase streamlining on a high-performance car, motorcycle, boat, or aircraft.
per minute (RPM) needle goes into the red zone (‘reddening it’). Participant narratives shed insight into the different groups within the community. In this narrative, we see important differences in terms of the values and experiences that different people seek through motorcycling. In particular Eoin’s narrative drives home the idea that there are important differences associated with different styles of motorcycling.

There is two sides to the spectrum. First there is the MCCs, these are a group of lads that drink together on a Friday night and go for a spin on a Sunday… they may end up forming a club. On the opposite end is the MCs, the back patchers… Back patch means a lot more in Ireland, England and America then it does in Europe. Back patch is recognised as the 1%ers. The whole outlaw type of thing…They are the Hard Core, the outlaw guys they support each other and do their own thing and we are kinda stuck in the middle somewhere between them. We are neither here nor there.

[Hugh]

In this excerpt, Hugh lays out the spectrum of formalised motorcycling clubs that are active in the Waterford biking scene. We can see that the community encompasses the hard and soft core elements, which Schouten and McAlexander (1995) described in the North-American HDSC. Because they do not adhere to the outlaw identity, Hugh finds it difficult to place the group on this spectrum. From the vantage point of a speed enthusiast, Eoin further elaborates on his understanding of the Harley Davidson inspired approach to motorcycling.

Like the thing with Harley people is hard to explain … I think you are either into them or you’re not. It’s like there’s nearly a division between the Harley Davidson type driver and sports bikes and street fighters. The Harleys they are just kind of out on their own … It’s a different kind of thing for the Harleys. I don’t even understand it … I’m not sure if it’s drinking they are into just going around to the pubs spinning around. They aren’t into driving quickly. It’s just slogging around. They are out on their own.

[Eoin]

This idea that the Harley thing is hard to explain is something that I encountered a number of times while participating in the field. When I asked one enthusiast about his connection with Harley Davidson, he bluntly remarked, ‘if I had to explain it to you, you wouldn’t understand’. Even as an avid motorcyclist, Eoin claims that he is still uncertain about what exactly is going on with Harley motorcyclists. But the one thing that Eoin is certain of is that ‘it’s a different kind of thing’. We get the sense from this narrative that he genuinely doesn’t grasp the allure of the Harley experience. Having said that, it is also noticeable that he is more than willing to critically dissect what he understands to be the essence of the Harley Davidson experience of motorcycling. Eoin’s accusation that Harley drivers spend their time drinking and going to the pub encompasses the idea that superfluous sideshows distract them and because of this they are less dedicated to the “pure” motorcycling experience. Eoin’s use of

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2 MCC is an acronym for Motor Cycle Club
3 MC is an acronym for Motorcycle Club
the word ‘spinning’ is interesting because it stirs up an image of the Harley Davidson biker as a glorified Sunday drivers in fancy dress. Furthermore, the use of the word “slogging” is apt because it encapsulates the viewpoint that many racing style motorcyclists hold about Harley Davidson. For these speed enthusiasts, Harley Davidsons are sluggish and designed for display as opposed to performance.

This key difference allows Eoin to confidently exclaim that whatever it is they’re into it certainly isn’t speed. Even in the early stages of participation, I soon realised that speed was the characteristic most highly regarded within this community. It’s interesting to note the contrast between Eoin’s use of the words ‘spinning’ and ‘slogging’ to describe his understanding of the Harley Davidson approach to riding with Paddy’s description of his approach to motorcycling as more a kin to a ‘gallop’.

Another time on a random Saturday I was just in the house and I was bored cause the lads were out drinking their brains out and I had no interest in doing that...I just said fuck I’d go for a gallop and there was one corner and it not so much always catches me out but I always remember what happened that day there. It was like a continuous right BUT it tightened as you went round. Sure I came barrelling up on the 250 thinking I was the right lad and next thing I was kind of mid corner and next thing...Oh FUCK this is getting tighter and luckily there was a run off into an old yard and so I missed the wall and I was like EHHH UH OH. There was about 100 feet of run off and the gravel was deep enough so I didn't know how to react and next thing the front just went and I was on me arse before I knew it and the bike just went backward into a fencing post and dented the wheel and punctured the tyre but I got up and I was like that's after giving me a scare I was destroyed in dust... But what pissed me off that day and it kind of shows the difference in class between bikers... A rake of lads on Harleys just went past me and they didn't even wave or anything going past me or see if I was all right. Even if I had of given them the thumbs up and they went past then that would have been all right like... That was not a nice experience.

Through Paddy’s narrative we begin to see signs of the tensions that exist between different groups within the motorcycling community. For Paddy, this experience serves as evidence of a gulf in ‘class’ between Harley Davidson motorcyclists and high-speed motorcyclists. Motorcyclists commonly share a basic level of connection, which is displayed by the exchange of salutes between passing motorcyclists. To pass by without offering or returning a salute would certainly be regarded as a snub. But passing a motorcyclist in distress on the side of the road is a clear marker of the tensions that exist between groups. Paddy appears somewhat dismayed when he experiences these tensions first hand. In the next narrative account, Eoin offers a more explicit account of our groups direct experience of these tensions:

There was a Harley Davidson day on down in the Harley Davidson centre in Waterford … We drove down … I had the Hornet. When we drove in, they were all disgusted. They wouldn’t even talk to us or anything. They were just kind of looking and one of them shouted over, ‘All plastic’. We looked over and they just looked away. We definitely didn’t feel welcome. Like if
we went to the road racing you would get a totally different reception. First of all, you wouldn’t see any Harley Davidsons at it. It’s all sports bikes or street fighters.

[Eoin]

To outsiders motorcyclists may seem indistinguishable from one and other but motorcyclists themselves are extremely cognisant of the differences that exist between them (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Eoin seems quite sensitive to the reception that the group received upon their arrival and it may be an exaggeration to say that the Harley enthusiasts were all disgusted the moment that the group arrived. But Eoin’s sensitivity in this regard allows us to comprehend that visceral feeling of difference that exists between groups. ‘All plastic’ is an insult, which refers to key differences in design between Harley Davidson motorcycles and racing motorcycles. Harley enthusiasts pay a premium for the large amount of chrome that is used in the manufacturing of the motorcycle. Many Harley enthusiasts go to great lengths to further customise their motorcycles by replacing standard non-chrome parts with chromed equivalents. Racing style motorcyclists are often much less expensive because they use plastic fairings to cover the body of the bike in order to make it more aerodynamic. In this example the Harley riders’ overtly displays disdain for this difference. In Eoin’s narrative we witness an illuminating example of how consumers use consumption and the symbolic meanings associated with it to create a sense of self. In 1995, Schouten and McAlexander reported that these types of tensions were played out using xenophobic slurs such as “Jap Crap” and “Rice Grinder”. The tensions in this example seem more connected to ideas of taste (Bourdieu 1984) and connoisseurship (Warde 2011). In these ways, we see how motorcyclists not only use consumption to create the self but also to locate the self in relation to others (Belk 1988, 2010, McCracken 1986, 1990, Wattanasuwan 2005). We also see how these motorcyclists use consumption to communicate values to those around them about who they are and what they stand for (Schouten 1991). Speaking to this point, Douglas and Isherwood (1996, p. 10) explain that ‘goods in their assemblage present a set of meanings more of less coherent, more or less intentional. They are read by those who know the code and scan them for information’. In these ways we can understand how consumption becomes meaningful within the everyday lives of these motorcyclists.

Cumulatively, insights arising from these narratives evidence palpable tensions between different groups of motorcyclists. On this basis we can comprehend the distinct place of our group of motorcyclists within the overall motorcycling community. We can also identify the tensions that exist between speed enthusiast and Harley enthusiasts. But these accounts also serve to problematize the homogenous understanding of motorcycling authenticity reported in Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) investigation of the HDSC. Hugh’s narrative vividly
captures a plethora of notions of authenticity encompassed within different motorcycling identities.

I don’t think you can really describe the authentic biker. I suppose it’s someone that appreciates anything on two wheels. I mean it could be the Hells Angel who just lives for the bike. Or it could be an old guy that lives up the mountain and has an old Honda 50 that he has driven to work every day through wind, rain, hail and snow just to get to work. Or is he the back-patch code biker that’s involved in money extortion, prostitution and drugs rather than just getting up on his bike and just enjoying it. I think it’s very hard to describe what a real biker actually is.

Hugh’s excerpt is important because it challenges us to consider what it means to be a motorcyclist. It describes authenticity as an active process through which motorcyclists find their own meaning. In the motorcycling community, identities are forged on the basis of a multitude of motorcycling practices. Early on in my experience participating in the community I began to appreciate that the relationship between groups is often far from harmonious. My own interpretation is that hostility reverberates around this battle for authenticity. Oftentimes, deeply invested in their own identities, motorcyclists hold strong views on what they understand to be the essence of motorcycling. Fundamental differences based on these varied meanings create barriers, which leads to animosity between groups. Observing similar tensions in the rave scene, Thornton (2013) conceptualises the subculture as an arena of contestation in which people actively contest meanings of authenticity. On a material level, these differences are evidenced in the consumption choices that motorcyclist’s make in terms of the type of motorcycle that they purchase and its corresponding aesthetic style (Douglas and Isherwood 1996, Schouten 1991, Wattanasuwan 2005). In combination these insights demonstrate that, the motorcycling community supports a wider ‘variety of dynamic, contents, forms and meanings’ (Kates 2002, p. 383), than evidenced previously in consumer research.

4.3 Fostering Community

Having examined some of the differences that exist between groups of motorcyclists we will now take a step back and consider how our group developed an understanding of motorcycling that is primarily based on speed. In this next section we will explore important moments, which shaped this particular understanding of motorcycling.

I suppose for me it all started when I was a kid. I always remember my father telling stories of dangerous escapades on his motorbike. I remember him telling me one story when I was very young. He told me how he crashed his bike when he was driving home from his girlfriend’s house. He slid along the road and burned all his leg. He had to wheel the bike home and then
climb in a window so no one would hear him. He got into bed and the bedclothes ended up sticking to the cuts. When I was a kid that sounded dangerous and cool. I think that was the start of my love affair with bikes.

[John]

In my discussions with participants, I learned about the influence of paternal figures in terms of sparking an initial interest in motorcycling. But importantly, I also learned about their influence in terms of shaping attitudes with regards to a particular understanding of motorcycling. Within this community, it is clear that these relationships played an influential role in shaping the careers aspirations of the participants. Oftentimes adopting the role of master, more experienced riders pass on their knowledge through instruction, demonstration and by observing the newcomer. In the stories they tell, these paternal figures masters impart wisdom and lessons learned through life experience on the road. But interestingly, as we see evidenced in John’s tale, the plot lines of these tales often revolve around speed, danger, escape, and going over the edge. Undoubtedly these stories have added to the mystique and allure that our aspiring motorcyclists associated with high-speed motorcycling. These stories served to inculcate our participants with a particular vision of motorcycling.

I was about ten or eleven and I was after buying a new mountain bike and I was always cycling around in the field and my uncle and brother were always big into bikes. My brother had a bike, a 125 Aprilla and my uncle had bigger bikes. Then between the jigs and the reels of it, it was one Sunday morning, I woke early and my brother and uncle were going up the mountains on the trials bike and they asked me if I wanted to come. I was like ‘ok’. I was up there cycling around after them. It was good fun. We stopped at the bottom of a forest course and we were chatting and my uncle was having a fag. My brother had a 350 Aprilla trials bike. He said to me ‘do you want to take that for a rip up the track?’ I said ‘ok’. It was such a cool feeling, not so much that you’re going fast but you’re moving on two wheels and you don't have to peddle. I went up and down a couple of times. He said ‘what did you think of that?’ I says ‘Loved it’ … At the time I couldn't afford to even buy a bike for the fields really. I could get a spin around the house on anything my brother had but that was about the height of it.

[Paddy]

Again in this example we see then influence of paternal figures in terms of guiding our participant’s earliest encounters with motorcycles. It is interesting to think about how early the participants were exposed to the ways of the community. It is perhaps surprising to think that the participants were, not just permitted, but also actively encouraged to ride such powerful motorcycles at such an early age. Once again we see the influence of these paternal figures in terms of shaping our participants ensuing careers as high-speed motorcyclists. When discussing these early stages of skill development a number of participants made reference to the skills and techniques that they developed on push bikes. Basic competencies such as balance and steering helped them in making the transition to driving a motorcycle for the first time (Shove et al. 2012).

I started off with bikes from the age of 8 … I had friends that had Honda 50s and we just started in the fields. Every evening we were out driving around … so eventually I got my own Honda
So that’s when it started I think … At the age of 12, I moved onto a 100cc RXS. I was still in the fields and then I was putting all of my money into them … Then I had a scrambler at one stage … I think I had six of them. At the start I think I was attracted to the freedom … especially the freedom in the field … we didn’t have to wear a helmet or anything. It was just go out and rally the shit out of it in the field. At the start all of the lads had Honda 50s and I suppose I just wanted something a bit faster than everyone else was on. There was a Honda 90 came up … its not much quicker but I got that. It was just about trying to get something a bit faster.

Because many of the group began motorcycling before they were legally old enough to do so, their first experiences were well away from the institutionalised space of the public road. In forests, fields, and private roads our participants experienced motorcycling without any of the regulations or restrictions that generally govern how motorcycling is performed in public spaces. These initial experiences influenced an understanding of motorcycling that appears invariably intertwined with notions of speed, freedom and a sense of individual autonomy. Rosa (2010, n.p) explains how ‘speed in modernity is closely connected to ideas of power and self-determination or autonomy, and hence to the experience of freedom and happiness’. In this way the desire to experience speed is wrapped up in the idea that the good life, is one that is lived free from restriction, regulation and constraint. In their narrative accounts we can see that the participants experienced their autonomous potential in spaces not bound by the rules and regulations of public roads. They rode care free, without helmets and were bound only by the limits of their individual potential and the material capacities of their motorcycles. In these ways, these early experiences influenced a particular attraction to high-speed motorcycling. This remained when they later transitioned to the institutionalised space of the public road. In Eoin’s narrative, we are introduced to a sense of the participants’ appetite for pushing their individual potential. Lyng (1990) describes this type of risk taking behaviour as edgework. According to Lyng (1990, p.871), ‘edgework involves not only activity specific skills but also a general ability to maintain control of a situation that verges on complete chaos’. Eoin’s narrative clearly evidences his desire to push himself and the motorcycle to the threshold of his capability in order to get close to the edge. This tendency also illuminates Turner’s (1976) distinction between the institutional and the impulsive self, which is also central to Lyng’s (1990) concept of edgework. In this example, Eoin pursues an impulsive self that is expressive, spontaneous, and self directed. In these ways, we come to recognise that we cannot fully understand or explain this risky consumption phenomenon purely on the basis of the symbolic or communicative aspects of our participants’ consumption choices (Warde 2005, Watson 2008, Watson and Shove 2008). The acknowledgment that our participants are seeking a particular embodied experience through their consumption activity serves to highlight the limits of the explanatory value of the symbolic in understanding this consumption activity.
It is striking to see the similarities amongst participants in terms of their early beginnings and their ensuing approach to motorcycling. Participant narratives have revealed how many of the participants were born into what could only be described as motorcycling families. For these participants motorcycling just seems natural. It is not so much that these youngsters made a choice to become motorcyclists – motorcycles were always there and it seems inevitable that they would find themselves on the saddle.

I would tend to try something once I suppose. I would always try something. But it's a different sort of thing you know I’ve grown up with them. So I don't perceive it as a risk if you like. I do obviously think and you know you've got to be careful, ride carefully and be a safe rider. But I don't perceive it as a sort of risky thing, because I’m sensible. But you never know do you? Life’s like that. Life’s a risk.

[Robert]

These early beginnings undoubtedly shape the riders’ attitudes towards motorcycling. Some of these riders barely knew a time without motorcycles. As Robert exemplifies, it can be difficult for them to accept the dangers inherent in an activity that has played such a formative role in their lives. Young, aspiring motorcyclists often feel no sense of fear. For the most part, their attention is directed towards developing the skills and competencies that will equip them for pushing the limit. Along this journey, they learn hard lessons with their bodies and with their emotions. Through these experiences motorcyclists gain a more acute understanding of the dangers involved in motorcycling. But motorcycling is still natural, and the development of skill and road craft helps them to arrive at a point where they feel that they are equipped to manage the risk. Paddy speaks to this notion of learning to manage the risk:

Like people say when they see people flaking around on the bike they just look at you and they say you’re mad. But when you’ve got the helmet on and the visor down, it doesn't seem that way it just seems normal. It’s so engrained into you that it doesn't bother you.

[Paddy]

This excerpt is powerful in the sense that it illustrates an important moment in terms of becoming a high-speed motorcyclist. We see how the high-speed motorcyclist categorises themselves as different from the average person in terms of the way they view and handle risk. It is interesting the way Paddy describes having the helmet on and the visor down because it alludes to the transformation in terms of his identity. Perhaps this alter ego allows him to approach the world in a different way. In Paddy’s case years of practice have culminated in the embodiment of particular skills, which serve to normalise the risks inherent in this particular style of motorcycling.
4.4  Identity and Community: Learning to Keep Up

Participants’ narratives described how access to the high-seed motorcycling community revolved around the riders’ capacity to perform motorcycling in particular ways. Through discussion and observation I came to recognise the significance of skill development in terms of gaining access to the community. Practical skills like learning to handle the motorcycle at speed and performing stunts and tricks seemed to take precedence over any symbolic meanings associated with their consumption choices.

I was getting driving lessons, well not so much driving lessons but , my brother, he had a 280 Gas Gas at home and he was after prepping it for a trial competition. He said ‘take that thing for a dickie around the house. Get familiar with the clutch control’. I started getting fairly cocky thinking I was Jack the Lad. I was coming up the driveway and I was thinking Jesus, I can wheelie a bicycle, I can surely wheelie a bike. So I popped it off the clutch. I carried it a little bit and then it was like Oh CRAP that is going wrong and it was like OH CRAP again. Basically, I ended up flipping it but as the bike flipped it basically went into the gable end of my house and it broke a brake lever and a foot peg off of it. My brother knew what was after happening and he came running down; ‘you all right, you all right’? ‘Yeah I’m grand’. Then he beat the living shit out of me ‘cause he had the competition the next day. When I say beat I mean he kicked me around the place, I was in agony after it. He’s a big man as well he’s a six foot four hairy beast.

Paddy’s relationship with his brother is particularly interesting because it allows us to trace his development as an aspiring high-speed motorcyclist. In my multiple conversations with Paddy, featured as a dominant character: passing on advice, facilitating learning opportunities, punishing mistakes, and overseeing/controlling Paddy’s development and movement from the periphery of the community. Similar to other participants, Paddy was born into a biking family and it perhaps seemed inevitable that Paddy would develop a keen interest in motorcycling. Although his upbringing undoubtedly had a socialising impact, Paddy was keen to assert that it was his own conscious decision to become a motorcyclist. His background provided him with access to the material dimensions of motorcycling, motorcycling knowledge, and an opportunity to learn through social coparticipation. Without question the apprenticeship relationship that emerged between Paddy and is a complex one. Paddy is subservient to and his knowledge and experience. At times, like the example above, ’s mentoring seems overly harsh. When judging this example though it is perhaps worth considering the severity with which high-speed motorcycling punishes mistakes. Overall, ’s ubiquitous presence has a positive influence in assisting Paddy to reach his goal of becoming a high-speed motorcyclist.

I mean if you take someone starting off on a bike at 16 …they have to get used to the gears, the clutch, the brakes and start to learn about how the road works for motorcyclists. I mean if you
ask me it’s just too much to take in at the start. On top of that the majority of people get on bikes without any training. Their mates might show them the basics … but they aren’t getting 10 lessons off an instructor in a safe area first. It’s a hell of a lot for anyone to take in at the one time.

[John]

John alludes to the path of development that aspiring motorcyclists embark upon to become competent high-speed motorcyclists. For successful high-speed motorcycling to take place, motorcyclists must acquire the bodily skills required to operate the motorcycle. The first stage of learning occurs directly in relation to the object. Next, the novice motorcyclist must expand upon these object-centred skills by performing purposive tasks in a constantly unfolding physical environment. This early stage is particularly dangerous as novice motorcyclists contend with working in tandem with the motorcycle while simultaneously learning to navigate the road. In line with Merleau Ponty’s (1962) contention that driving is about much more than sensory feedback, we can see that the path of development is linked to performance and the acquisition of bodily experience in relation to the object and the physical environment. We also see evidence of the communal dimensions of knowledge transfer. Participants highlighted the influence of friends in terms of shaping attitudes regarding driving practices and in particular their appetite for speed. John’s narrative once again highlights a lack of institutional guidance in terms of facilitating learning and ensuring that novice motorcyclists have the prerequisite skills required to navigate the road. This highlights the role of the community in terms of shaping new comers approach to motorcycling and also their approach to safety.

Participant narratives share a connection when it comes to the social dynamics involved in learning to become a high-speed motorcyclist.

Yeah that’s what I mean, it was something that I was so consumed by that I’d never forget … I remember before I got the bike watching Luke do it. Watching what he was doing with his legs and his hands. So before I even had the bike, I was practising by doing it in my head. In my head like, I’d leave out the clutch and open the throttle and I’d be doing all these different things. So I suppose it’s something that you wouldn’t forget but then as well its something that’s like riding a bike you know. Or like any skill that you pick up like it just stays with you. I asked people as well. I think I used to be even asking people if I could try it out on their bikes. I just wanted to learn how to do it and yeah Luke told me how to do the things. But someone telling you how to do it wasn’t enough and then I’d get on the bike and I’d try do it but that wasn’t enough. You had to practice it yourself and really get a feel for it. From between when Luke told me how to do it and when I actually really started to do it, it must have been months before I could actually do it myself … it was just practice, practice, practice. If you were trying to do a wheelie, it was just driving along in first gear and trying to get the combination of things right. So it was just keep doing it over and over again until you have it.

[Leon]

Before he could even afford a motorcycle of his own to practice on Leon tried to gain a cognitive appreciation of motorcycling by asking questions and observing complex
motorcycling techniques. Leon describes the techniques that he learned in those early stages in such detail that it was clear that he could remember the exact bodily position and techniques that he adopted in learning to drive the motorcycle. This excerpt is revealing in the sense that it draws our attention to the role of observation in terms of gaining a cognitive understanding of how motorcycling practices should be performed. Leon, himself identifies the shortcomings that are associated with cognitive modes of learning. Knowing how to drive a motorcycle is infinitely different from driving a motorcycle at speed. This excerpt highlights the parts of the process that we miss when we frame learning as a ‘mechanistic, cerebral process of transmission and absorption of ideas’ (Cox 2005, p.529). In this narrative we see the active, dimensions of learning, which is evidenced in the need for practice to develop ‘a feel for it’. We begin to understand how the tacit knowledge that we require to carry out everyday practices in the world relies heavily upon bodily practice. This is knowledge that can only be gained through bodily experiences of being in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

It was the 23rd of October 2011, the day before my birthday … I was after having a row with herself. I said fuck this I’m outta here. I said I’d just go for a gallop around the roads you know. I had the one-piece leathers on. They had the knee sliders and everything on them. But there wasn’t a scratch on them. I was trying to get my knee down for ages on the 250. But I could never do it, never do it! I had the R1 six months at the time. There was one big roundabout out near Granagh castle. It was a big huge massive one. I’d been driving twisty roads so I knew I had the heat in the tyres so you’d have the confidence to kind of try. I had my L-plate knee sliders on ‘n’ all. I came up anyway and I wasn't even looking at my speed or anything and I just fucked it into the roundabout. When your trying to get your knee down the guidelines they say that you should have one arse cheek, if not even one and a half arse cheeks off. Underneath your toe should be on the peg and you stick your knee out. Next thing all I could hear was this screeeech. It took a split second and then I was like. I GOT ME KNEEDOWN. I GOT ME KNEEDOWN I GOT ME KNEEDOWN. I FINALLY GOT ME KNEEDOWN I FINALLY GOT ME KNEEDOWN I FINALLY GOT ME KNEEDOWN. I just had a childish burst of excitement inside the helmet and I was roaring and shouting … I was finally after doing it and it wasn't that I was trying so hard but I had been trying and trying to do it and I could never do it. Then I just got it that one-day and I was just like … Deadly! I was so so happy. I can do it ever since. Leon’s seen me do it. But the only thing that I can remember from that day was the feeling of just overwhelming joy almost. It was like wow I finally did it. You know wheelies aren’t my thing. Like I can do a damn good fork stretcher but wheelies aren’t for me … Yeah I haven’t felt that sensation since, doing anything. It was just one of them buzzes … I said it to my brother when I called up to him and he said it’s only a scratch on the slider. But it was just like a great feeling and ever since then I can just do it. Some fellas, like say take Leon for argument’s sake, he likes to pop a wheelie every now and again. It’s kind of like a moment where you’re just like ‘ah FUCK IT’! The knee down, well that’s my kind of little thing.

[Paddy]

Paddy’s narrative colourfully illuminates an important milestone in his career as a high-speed motorcyclist. The level of detail that Paddy exhibits in retelling this story gives us a clear indication of how significant this day was for him. Paddy talks us through the first time that he managed to get his knee down. This is a technique where riders shift their weight into the bend to the extent that the body comes in close contact with the ground and the riders’ knee slider scrapes off the road surface. This important riding technique enables Paddy to negotiate
bends at high-speeds. There are a number of key issues revealed in Paddy’s narrative. First, he explains the importance of equipment such as full leathers and knee sliders\(^4\) in terms of their capacity to minimise the bodily risks involved in this manoeuvre. Paddy exhibits advanced road craft, by preparing the motorcycle through warming up the tyres. This creates a greater degree of traction between the motorcycle and the road surface. In this narrative we start to see the emerging importance of the material dimensions of high-speed motorcycling.

Paddy’s talk about the ‘guidelines’ on getting your knee down, which indicates that this knowledge exists and that it is accessible to aspiring high-speed motorcyclists. Similar to Leon’s previous narrative, Paddy knows what the guidelines say but the difficulty involves putting this knowledge into practice. These narratives serve to highlight the importance of learning to embody particular skills and techniques within the community. In this short narrative Paddy describes the ‘childish burst of excitement’ and the feelings of ‘just overwhelming joy’ that he experiences when he succeeds in getting his knee down. His description allows to fully grasp the intensity of the emotional experience that Paddy enjoys when he gets close to his edge. Paddy’s narrative also provides us with a clear indication of the multi-sensory nature of this intense experience. In culmination this experience stirs up a particular buzz, which our participants seem to be continuously in search of. This narrative demonstrates that motorcycling is much more than a mundane form of mobility (Belk and Wallendorf 1989). Paddy’s brother, who undoubtedly held the role of master in their relationship, was keen to keep him in check – reminding him that there were more scratches to be gained before he could consider himself a master. In culmination this narrative allows us to identify the corporeal and material aspects of high-speed motorcycling as major emerging themes, which will require further investigation.

Once again bringing the focus back to the question of how motorcyclists learn to keep up, I asked Robert about how he felt about his son’s decision to take up motorcycling.

\[\text{Its ok, he’s all right. He did some club racing and that tends to straighten people out. You know at least all of the facilities are there. He had a few crashes all right but nothing too serious. He’s had a few crashes, he did all of his ligaments in his right leg and he got all the skin off his ankle another time. His ankle got stuck under the bike and it came right through the boot and took off all of the skin. He helps with the bike though and we work on the bikes together and get all of the bits and sort it out and do all of the fitting and do all of the mechanics on it … The racing teaches you a lot actually. Gavin came on really quickly when he started racing because you’re following people and you’re following what they are doing and you’re going faster and faster just by racing. Your training is probably in the race itself and you do get practice. He used to enter maybe three races a weekend. So you do a practice for each of them and you do a race}

\[^4\] Knee sliders are made from a very hard material with a very low coefficient of friction. This allows the puck to last longer and give better feed back to the rider. The slider does not grab the tarmac but allows your knee slider to be placed and slide over the asphalt without catching.
either end. [Robert]

From speaking with Robert it was clear to see that the bond between father and son is strengthened through their shared love of motorcycles. Robert described how the race day paddock is mostly made up of father and son teams. By taking part in motorcycling racing, Gavin quickly developed his motorcycling skills. By observing more experienced riders and following the line that they take on the road aspiring riders can quickly become faster. This provides further evidence of the significance of the social dimensions of learning within the high-speed motorcycling community. Robert’s narrative is revealing in so much as it demonstrates how his role as motorcycling mentor appears to supersede his parental role. In his role as mentor he seems to overlook the consequences of Gavin’s participation by deeming them ‘nothing too serious’. Robert appears to detach himself from the severity of the injuries that Gavin endured whilst engaging in high-speed motorcycling. This notion of detachment seems to be part a central strategy, which allows Robert to rationalise and cope with the dangers inherent in this risky pursuit. This excerpt also reminds us that motorcyclists pay for their mistakes, and the mistakes of others, with their fragile human bodies. By experiencing physical pain, motorcyclists learn hard lessons that are not easily forgotten. Broken bones, scars, limps, and amputated limbs serve as harsh reminders of mistakes and mishaps from their past. Considering the severity of the consequences with which high-speed motorcycling punishes mistakes it is unsurprising that motorcyclists are keen to stress that they never make the same mistake twice.

Those engaged in high-speed motorcycling inevitably have accidents, and are routinely called upon to justify them (Laurendeau 2006). Leon’s narrative typifies attempts by motorcyclists to shift attention away from their own ability to control a situation.

‘Acting the mickey man’ was just messing and doing things you weren’t supposed to be doing. I would have been doing it on push bikes and BMXs before I was ever doing it on a motorbike ... It’s showing off and acting the cool fella. Doing dangerous and stupid things to look cool and for the actual excitement ... My first crash happened when I was ‘acting the mickey man’ on someone else’s bike. I was racing someone in a van and I had no helmet on. The van went in front of me and I was driving right behind ... and a dog ran out in front of the van and he slammed on the brakes. I didn’t have much experience on the bike so I grabbed the front brake and automatically it locks the front wheel to either direction and throws you off the bike. I was thrown off the bike and the first thing to hit the ground was my head. I was ‘acting the mickey man’ and I didn’t have a helmet on. It was the first time that I was ever injured on a bike. I tore up my arm and I had to make up stories ‘cause I didn’t want to tell my family that I was after crashing a bike. [Leon]
In relaying his narrative Leon describes how he has always been drawn to activities in which a level of personal risk exists. In his personal construction of reality, he views the representation of danger as a desirable element of the self. In this story Leon openly describes how, as an edgeworker, he has transcended many of the rules established to govern society (insurance/helmet/street racing). He points to his lack of experience as the root cause of his inability to control the chaos he encountered on the edge. The dog becomes the factor that pushes him past the edge. He goes onto explain the physical harm caused by his inability to maintain control. It appears that Leon has justified this accident as a momentary lapse in concentration (Laurendeau 2006). Although fortunate that his injuries were not more severe, the remainder of his account sets the scene for future edgework. As his experience and capabilities improve, he advances the boundary line against which he is prepared to push himself. For others, relevant experience on the bike is a necessary precursor of edgework, and absence of the right stuff inevitably culminates in problems.

Born again bikers! I can even remember my own cousin. I went for a spin with him and he went to take me on straight away. He wasn’t even insured like. It wasn’t even a bend we came to on the main road and he couldn’t take it. He went out across the white line. The car coming the other way had to swerve into the ditch to avoid him. You know ... ‘cause he was on [bikes] years ago. I mean he was off [bikes] 10 or 15 years. When he came back then he still had the ego and he just wanted to flick it. He was driving a CBR 1000cc. He is able for it now again ... but at the time he wasn’t close to it. He had to do a course to get the insurance down with Aon and I think that helped. In fairness, that made him more aware you know. When he was [riding before] there wouldn’t have been as much traffic on the road. You have to know how to do your life savers ... if you’re moving on a motorway it’s no good looking in your mirror. You have to look in the blind spot. [Eoin]

Here, Eoin explains that although his cousin had previous experience on motorcycles, it was in a different context, and his cousin simply didn’t have the ability to push the edge; the result was a near-miss with a car on the motorway. As a community, our participants have had very real reasons to reflect upon the consequences associated with high-speed motorcycling.

I wasn't there when the accident happened. I didn't see it. Percy was there, he saw it happen and like he's probably seen one of the most horrific things he'll every have to see in his life. Nothing will ever top that. Not that you want anything to ever top it. But nothing will ever surpass that. But I can just remember that day ... I was stopped in traffic, next thing, I see a car coming towards me and there was someone waving like mad at me out of it. I was thinking, what the fuck? Next thing, I see the car stopping and Percy getting out. I was like OK, this is not good so I just turned around and pulled up on the footpath. ‘Get out to the hospital straight away, Stevie’s after having a bad one’ and part of me said he’ll be grand he’ll be grand. The other part of me was saying he’s gone like. I remember going out and parking the bike at the hospital and he was alive for a half an hour in there and then the doctor came out and said unfortunately he has passed away and that. It was just an incredibly numb feeling I didn’t think of anything bike related. It was just bloody hell I’ve lost one of my best friends right there. Then I can remember my mum and dad coming out to the hospital and they said are you coming home or what are you doing. ‘I don’t know what I’m doing; I don’t know what I’m doing’. [Paddy]
For the first time, we witness the earth shattering consequences that unfortunately can never be fully separated from the experience of high-speed motorcycling. Days like this one forever alter the relationship between the motorcyclist and the motorcycle. In no uncertain terms, motorcyclists are forced to acknowledge the fragility of their bodies, and the delicate nature of human life. My own abiding memory of this day, is consoling my brother as he considered giving up motorcycling all together.

I remember after Stevie died the whole thing just changed. It all became kind of real. Before that you were just going out for a spin on the bike and there were no consequences, I thought we were all invincible. But then after that you knew the danger was real. Somebody that we knew was gone because of bikes.

[Leon]

Everyone knows about the statistics that are out there. I mean, after every weekend you can read about someone that’s been killed off a bike. Sometimes it would make you think . . . You know, you are aware of it. But I think you always think that it is going to be someone else. It’s hard to really connect with it when you don’t know the people involved.

[Dave]

That's exactly it. And like before that you were always hearing that there was a motorcycle fatality in Dublin, Cork, Kerry whatever and you’d be like ah Jesus.

[Paddy]

You don’t connect with it though do you?

[Leon]

Through this unforgettable experience the community faced the stark realities of high-speed motorcycling. Lessons of this magnitude, acquired in the emotional turmoil, demonstrate the centrality of learning through experience. Learning of this nature cannot be gleaned from a book or imparted through the instructions of a master. These narratives serve to demonstrate the dimensions of learning that depend upon our capacity to participate with others in the social world (Lave and Wenger 1991, Merleau-Ponty 1962). This tragic day forced members of the community to reflect upon their choice to become high-speed motorcyclists and, more importantly, to evaluate the consequences of continued participation.

Drop me off I said, I may go collect that bike. I couldn't leave it in the hospital like, I thought about it. I had the jacket on me and I was walking up the road thinking, should I be doing this, should I be doing this? I was second guessing myself the whole time I was walking up the road. I walked around to where I had parked it outside of the A&E. I put the key in the ignition and smoked a fag first and I was like, I shouldn't be doing this. But I had to do it because it was all that I really knew. It was the only thing that I had an interest in really. So I said I may do it so. So I got up and drove her home. I’ll maintain till the day that I go under, that was one of the hardest things that I ever had to do in my life. Just that one day. That one time. It was only a ten or fifteen minute journey but that was very, very hard … I remember driving out to the house
and I have no shame in admitting it, I put my head in my hands and just started bailing my eyes out, absolutely bailing my eyes out.

[Paddy]

This part of the narrative is interesting in the sense that it allows us to see how much the tragic event affected Paddy in terms of the choice to continue. Paddy’s admission - ‘it was all that I really knew’ demonstrates the investment that he made in becoming a high-speed motorcyclist. In no uncertain terms he had dedicated his life to it. This event was particularly challenging for him because motorcycling was the thing that he usually turned to escape the stresses and strains of every day life – but now it had become the source of so much pain. In the end, after all things were considered, he felt like he had no choice because motorcycling was the only way that he really knew.

One of the other hardest experiences that I’ve ever had, the uncle that inspired us to get on the bikes. He had a trivial accident on a building site … Myself and my brother led a guard of honour in front of the hearse down to the church from the house. That was a sad, desperate experience but … there was maybe fifty or sixty bikes lining up outside my house. It was so nice to see that so many people thought that of the man and that they’d do that for him you know. It was a nice experience it shows the unity, the sense of community with motorcyclists as well. There was none of the Freewheelers there, thanks be to fuck they wouldn't be welcome anyway. But like the normal motorcyclist that's not in a club or doesn't need a club to identify with or anything.

[Paddy]

Paddy’s narrative powerfully captures the bond of camaraderie that exists within the motorcycling community. We see how the community enacts a significant ritual to mark the death of one of its members. The ritual is symbolic in the sense that it displays community solidarity. This ritualistic display is extremely important to Paddy because it eternalises his uncle’s identity and place within the motorcycling community. It is notable that Paddy also uses this opportunity to mark a distinction between the freewheelers, who are the local outlaw club, and the rest of the motorcycling community. My own interpretation is that Paddy is intimating that they are not “real” motorcyclists because they do not exhibit the autonomy to stand independently of the structures of the club.

At the moment I suppose it’s just a really good group of lads that have the same interest, the same common goal and they get on together and it just happens. It’s a good mix like… To me the most important thing is dependability, to be able to depend on someone.

[Hugh]

In this excerpt, Hugh appears to articulate the essence of this group of high-speed motorcyclists. Without the formalised structures of biker clubs, this group comes together to
share their interests in motorcycling and the common goal of speed pursuits. In this way, the group developed a sense of camaraderie and togetherness.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, our participants provided insider knowledge, which helped us to identify the existence of different groups within the overall motorcycling community. We were introduced to a range of different styles of motorcycling and different groups such as Born Again Bikers, Outlaws, High-Speed Motorcyclists, Touring Enthusiasts, Harley Davidson Bikers and Street Fighters. Participants’ narratives offered rich insight into their understanding of key differences between groups within the community. Our group of motorcyclists clearly identified their place within the community through their identification as high-speed motorcyclists. It was clear that the group used consumption and its symbolic properties to construct particular motorcycling identities (Belk 1988, 2010). Through their consumption choices these motorcyclists communicated values to other motorcyclists about who they are and what they stand for (McCracken 1986, 1990, Wattanasuwan 2005). In this way, consumption partially contributed to the participants’ capacity to locate themselves in relation to others within the motorcycling community.

Perhaps most striking in these narratives was the symbolic and practical differences that the group articulated in relation to the Harley-Davidson group. It was clear that our participants had first hand experience of the tensions that exist between these two groups. For the most part the participants articulated a negative view of the Harley Davison approach and openly questioned their notion of authenticity. We have seen that, within the motorcycling community, authenticity is an active site of contestation and dispute (Kates 2002, Thornton 2013). This understanding is distinct from the monolithic, homogenous understanding of authenticity proposed in Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of the HDSC. In this way, this chapter contributes a more complex understanding of the motorcycling community and the identities and aesthetic styles associated with it. But perhaps, more importantly, this enquiry demonstrates the complex, contested and ultimately fluid nature of authenticity within this community.

In this chapter, we learned how a variety of factors influenced an understanding of authenticity that was ultimately connected to the notion of speed. In their stories of speed, danger, and going over the edge, paternal figures began shaping our participants
understanding of motorcycling. In many cases they also provided access to the material resources needed to engage in motorcycling. Because of their age, many of the participants first experiences, were well away from the institutionalised space of the public road. Without regulations and rules the participants experienced an unconstrained form of motorcycling. This experience of motorcycling was connected to notions of speed, freedom and the riders’ individual autonomy. In these circumstances our participants pushed themselves to get close to the edge (Lyng 1990). In these moments, the participants found an impulsive self that was expressive, instantaneous and self-directed. For this group, motorcycling seems to be about riding to experience the intense moments that are found close to the edge. For this group, these moments seem to represent the essence of motorcycling. Perhaps blinded by the allure of this experience, they are unable to comprehend an alternative understanding of motorcycling. From the perspective of the high-speed motorcyclists the ensuing tensions may arise because the Harley biker finds meaning in activities away from riding. It may be that the Harley rider experiences a different edge in these experiences.

Enquiry into the more practical nature of participating and keeping up within the high-speed motorcycling group, indicated important factors that lay beyond the symbolic dimensions of consumption. Participant’s narratives highlighted a necessity to embody a range of skills and techniques in order to engage in the practice of high-speed motorcycling. In this way, we can recognise that it is not just the meanings associated with consumption that are important but also what people do when they consume (Reckwitz 2002, Warde 2005, Watson and Shove 2008, Watson 2008). This empirically informed realisation could be useful for the future direction of CCT, which has often appeared preoccupied with the meanings associated with consumption (Borgerson 2005, 2009, Bettany 2007, 2011).
Chapter 5: Bodies for High-speed Motorcycling

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we focused on narratives that explored differences, influences and identities from within the motorcycling community. Given this focus, it was striking to see the prominence of the motorcycling body as it repeatedly emerged within our participants’ narratives. In this regard, we were introduced to the notion of the impulsive-self (Turner 1976), which encapsulated the participants’ search for an embodied experience in which their bodies became expressive, spontaneous, and self-directed. Perhaps most comprehensively, we witnessed an indication that accessing this impulsive required the embodiment of a range of motorcycling skills. In this regard, we saw the distinction between the cognitive appreciation of how high-speed motorcycling should be performed and actually embodying the skills required to perform. In references to ‘the buzz’ our participants commonly pointed to the sensory nature of the high-speed motorcycling experience. Moreover, these narratives were littered with references to the emotions involved in this embodied experience.

In light of these emerging considerations it seems fitting to direct our full attention, in this chapter, to an examination of high-speed motorcycling as an embodied experience. Moreover these emerging considerations can be used to inform a number of tentative questions. How can we access the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling? How can we make sense of the body in high-speed motorcycling? Can we reach a deeper understanding of ‘the buzz’ that are participants commonly report? What type of body does this activity necessitate? How do these sensations and related emotions structure the experience of high-speed motorcycling? In this chapter, we will first turn attention to how we can access this multi-sensory experience.

5.2 Accessing the Multi-Sensory Experience of High-Speed Motorcycling

In an effort to comprehend the multi-sensory nature of high-speed motorcycling we must be open to the complete sensory domain (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Joy and Sherry 2003). In order to develop insight of the bodily experiences of our participants, I made the decision to participate in high-speed motorcycling practices. In an effort to gain an informed sensory appreciation, I tried to maintain an awareness of my body. My intention was to use these experiences to inform my interpretations of participant narrative. Moreover, these field notes
offer an opportunity to articulate the sensory experience for the reader. Through participation, I became cognisant of what Lyng (2004) describes as the dualism between both *being* a body and *having* body. This presents a challenge because reflection can create distance from the sense of *being* a body; the greater the distance the more the body becomes objectified (Desmond 2003). Crossley (2005) offers an interesting perspective on this matter. He contends that, particularly in work of this nature, one can easily slip into a dualistic framework between subjective and objective understandings of the body. He explains a linguistic habit in which we talk ‘about ‘my body’ what ‘I’ think of ‘it’, what ‘I’ put ‘it’ through and what ‘I’ want ‘it’ to look like’ (*ibid*, p.1). Our capacity for self-reflection enables us turn back on ourselves, which we see reflected in Mead’s (1967) conception of the ‘I’ (the body as subject) and the ‘me’ (the body as object). Crossley (2005) argues that it is necessary to recognize this distinction as reflective as opposed to substantial in nature. He contends that it is our empathetic capacity to see the world through the eyes of another, which allows us to turn back on ourselves in this way. In linguistic terms the distinction between mind and body seems clear and substantial, but Crossley (2005, p.2) argues that this:

> does not indicate a substantial distinction between mind/self and body… It does not often even reflect the emergent stratification between the body as a biochemical structure and the body as a sensuous, active agent… The best work in the sociology of the body recognizes this. It challenges dualism, insisting that ‘I’ am ‘my body’ and that body projects are therefore reflexive projects (see esp. Crossley, 2001, 2004a; Entwistle, 2000; Monaghan, 1999; Smith, 2001; Sweetman, 1999; Wacquant, 1995, 2004).

All things considered, I concentrated on developing a reflexive awareness of the ways in which my senses were engaged while performing high-speed motorcycling. Over time, with practice and guidance from more advanced riders, I began to embody some techniques that propelled me to move faster. As Crossley (2004) advises, afterwards I returned to these bodily experiences through self-reflection. I tried to reflect upon how my body negotiated the performance of each task. Asking myself questions like how does this feel? What exactly do I have to do to get my body perform in this way? How does my body interact with the motorcycle? At times the detail seemed inconsequential. But over time, the process helped me to become mindful of the significance of my body in terms of the way I performed each purposive task. I started to become overtly conscious of the bodily experience of high-speed motorcycling. Each time I drove the bike I would try to take stock of how it felt to be a motorcycling body. What was the experience? How did it feel? It is intended that the written field notes of my experiences will assist the reader in understanding high-speed motorcycling as a fully embodied practice.
5.2.1 Cold Winter Mornings: The Hard Miles

Before I even fully wake, I’m listening out for clues about what lies in store for me. The sound of rain and wind crashing against my bedroom window reminds me of the downsides of riding a motorcycle as a primary mode of transport. I know the drive ahead is going to be drudgery. Extra layers and waterproof rain gear causes my body to over heat and sweat. Rain soaks through my gloves. It leaves my hands damp, cold and stained black with dye. Over time motorcycling gloves inevitably develop a dank odour that unfortunately envelops everything that penetrates them. In the winter my hands carry a faint whiff of this odour everyday no matter how hard I scrub them. The visor on my helmet fills with more and more condensation each time I exhale. Every so often, the water exploits a weak spot. Usually the zips on my boots give way first, then the water slowly fills the boot drip by drip. Like a parasite the rainwater sucks the heat from my feet and the constant wet leaves the skin on my feet shrivelled and cold. At least the water is warm when I empty my boots I suppose.

I let the bike idle it gives it time to warm up before we go on our journey. The bike appreciates this time and I use the time to make a transformation. I pull the black-padded trousers over my jeans. I step into the boots and pull the zips closed. The pants fall over the boots. The leather jacket weighs heavy on my shoulders. The worn leather gloves, just about, create a seal over the cuffs of the jacket. I press the helmet down over my head. My body is now covered from head to toe in black. I feel bulkier and bigger, different than I was before. This second skin is less fragile than my own. It protects my body and makes me feel safe but it also places restrictions upon my ability to move my body freely. The weight and tightness of the protective materials and padding slow me down.

I approach the bike, turn off the choke and awkwardly throw my right leg over the saddle. This is where the protective clothing serves a purpose. A backward kick of my left heel sends the side stand flying upwards and into the ready position. In this position the weight of the bike is evenly distributed on the balls of both my feet. I tighten the grip of my left hand and pull the clutch towards me. I position my left foot above the gear lever and push down. The bike purrs slightly. With my right hand I gently pull back the accelerator. I’m releasing the grip on my left hand and searching for that sweet spot on the clutch. Once I hit that spot the bike is edging to push forward. As I release the clutch fully the bike propels forward rising from the forks and our journey begins.
These mornings can be hard. The comfort and warmth of the car looks appealing. On dark, cold winter’s mornings I question if it’s worth it. Why persevere? Why put my self through it? I hear the sounds of engines idling as I approach to filter through the traffic. I nearly choke on the fumes that are excreted from the 1978 school bus as it coughs and splutters its way from start to stop. I glance in my right mirror; I turn my neck slightly to look over my shoulder. As I do so my left thumb flicks the indicator. My hands are already sore from the cold. The air always finds a way to cut through the gloves. It leaves my hands numb and unresponsive to commands. I shift my weight to my right thigh. The bike responds by dipping right. I’m riding on the white line now. The tires don’t grip the way they should here. The line is uneven which makes maintaining balance slightly more difficult. The centre is an occupied territory – a no man’s land that motorcyclists try to claim. The force of the air that passes through the face of the helmet leaves my eyes watering. In winter the wind continuously scalds the skin on my cheeks, which leaves my face raw.

As I approach the junction I ease off the accelerator and grab for the clutch in anticipation of the need to stop. The bike idles forward towards the white line. I’m trying to catch a sign of cars approaching. I’m anticipating if I can make it through without stopping. As I reach for the clutch again, my neck twists automatically and I’m back searching for signs of oncoming cars. At first glance it looks like I can get through, but as I get closer to the junction I hear the rumble of a car hurtling around the bend. On hearing the sound I pull the clutch closer, tighten my grip on the brake lever and gently apply pressure to the back brake by pressing my right foot downwards. The bike stops dead, the front tyre edges out just over the white line.

My grip on the throttle is constant. I shift my weight in accordance with my perception of the cars on my left hand side. When there is nothing coming towards me on the right, I shift my body towards the space to create greater distance between myself and the cars that are at a stand still. I pull the throttle closer, and use this space to move faster. When a car approaches on my right I adjust my road position again by shifting my body to the left. When I shift close to the left I loosen my grip on the throttle. In this instance I’m literally inches from the wing mirrors of each car. My attention is focused on judging the surroundings for changes that will cause a driver to edge slightly right. If they do so my space disappears. I have to be constantly ready to squeeze the breaks. As the cars on my right pass, I shift the bike into their space. The bike responds by crossing over the white line. Now there are feet instead of inches separating their wing
mirrors and me. In a single movement I snap the clutch, drop a gear and crack the throttle and hurtle towards the space.

5.2.2 Learning to Speed

Kevin has agreed to come and observe me riding so that he can give me some pointers on how I can improve my technique. I’m a little nervous when we hit the road. It’s a long time since I’ve had somebody assess my driving skills. It’s daunting having someone with so much experience watching over me. Kevin’s an extremely skilled driver. He has been giving motorcycling lessons for nearly 10 years and he’s completed advanced training courses. I’ve made a conscious decision to try and not stray too far beyond my limits. At the same time though I recognise that I’m eager to show Kevin that I’m not a complete novice. Just as we pull up at the junction to leave the estate another two bikers pull up beside us. The air is full with the sounds of the hammering engines. It makes me feel like there’s nothing else that I’d rather be doing at this moment. Warm summer evenings like this one give you the urge to get out on the bike. I snap the clutch and the bike accelerates out onto the main road.

Just as we leave the city limits the road starts to clear so I pull the throttle and begin to pick up the pace a little. I can hear Kevin’s bike behind me roaring even louder. I feel like it’s the time to show him what I can do. We approach the first real bend. It’s a right-hander. I dip a little to find the line right, but I touch the brakes too early and it kills the bike’s speed too early. As the bike moves through the bend I’m scrambling a bit to drop a gear so that I can accelerate quickly out of the bend. The bike exits the bend and I know that I’ve made a balls of my first test in front of Kevin. I’ve spent the last couple of months really trying to push on and improve what I can do on the bike but instantly my insecurities about my lack of skill come flooding back. I know that Kevin will have picked up on my failures in negotiating this simple task.

I’m over eager to make up for my previous mistake so I start to increase the bike’s speed. My sense of caution evaporates and I start pushing it to show Kevin that I’m up to it. It’s easy on the straights all you really have to do is pull the throttle. After dipping around a small bend, I can see that we’ve got clear road in front stretching for nearly a mile. I furiously kick my way up through the gears, while working between throttle and clutch. A quick glance down and I can see that the speedometer is pushing for 130. As we approach a tight left handed bend I start to ease off the throttle and
work my way down through the gears to prepare the bike for negotiating the bend. I shift my weight the bike dips. We make it through the tight bend but again the manoeuvre feels sluggish and laboured. We work through another couple of bends and with each one I become more conscious of the fact that I’m being judged or assessed in some way.

Kevin pulls up besides me and signals to pull in at the approaching lay by. We pull in and dismount from the bikes. Kevin gets off the bike and my first full on lesson in high-speed motorcycling begins.

Kevin: Right so, a couple of things. First off just a little safety titbit. Your safety glances are all over the shop. Basically anytime you’re moving your bike on the road, left or right, you need to check your mirrors and your blind spots. You could have a motorcyclist or cyclist behind you in an area that you just can’t see with your mirrors. There were a couple of times there that you overtook cars and you checked your mirrors but you never checked your blind spots. So I could have just as easily been going to overtake you and you would have come straight out on top of me. The next thing then is probably your positioning on the road. You need to be thinking of things in terms of visibility. The first tight left hand bend after the pub, you were coming up into the bend and you were kind of tight into the left hand side of the road for the bend. If we take the example of the hairpin bend after the long straight. Coming up that long straight you want to be out on the white line, which is giving you the clearest line of vision on where you’re going. The more to the left you are the less you can see in front of you. Out on the white line you can see the most and then say in terms of a racing line to get around the corner the quickest you want to be out on the line for as long as you can. Then just as you’re coming up to the Apex of the bend you want to drop into the bend (demonstrating using his hands). So coming into the bend you’re out on the far right up as far as the apex.

Stephen: What exactly is the apex?

Kevin: The apex is say where the corner is at its most round. So you’re on the outside, outside, outside and then when you come to the apex your dipping into the bend. So that’s the point where if you don’t turn now your going onto the wrong side of the road.

Stephen: So I need to drive right into it up until then?

Kevin: Yeah that’s it exactly. But then the other thing that I noticed was your body position (Kevin sits up on my bike and begins to demonstrate using his body). When you were coming up to the bend you’re sitting straight up on the bike, but really where you want to be is, you want your elbows tucked in, you want to be far down (Kevin crouches so that he is as far forward on the seat as saddle as possible, his upper body is almost over the petrol tank, his arms are bent) your arse comes out and you literally hang off the side of the bike. So you’re physically putting yourself into the corner. It’s all about shifting your weight. It’s not just moving the bike on the road. You have to move yourself on the bike. So your bum comes out off the side of the bike and you’re tucked right into the corner like this (Kevin is almost hanging fully off the bike while demonstrating this technique).

Stephen: Ok so just talk me through it again? What’s the first thing that I need to do?
Kevin: You have to shift your weight so you're getting your body out right off the side of the bike. But even before that you've got to remember that you're going to be coming down hard because your accelerating down the straight. Say if we take that left again as the example, that's quite a sharp bend. So you keep the power on the whole way up basically as far as you can. Just coming up into the bend your going to have to start breaking and pulling the clutch, gear down. So say you were coming into that in maybe fourth. Clutch in down to third, down to second then you're around the bend and you're off again power back on. As soon as you get around that corner its power straight back on and then you're moving around corners at speed. Obviously though that's goings around a left bend if you're going into a right hand bend it's the opposite, rather than being out on the white line you want to be stuck to the ditch. That's giving you the clearest line of sight. So its ditch, ditch, ditch and then as you come up to the right hand, then your dropping in. But obviously on nights like this where the road is busy you've got to be careful not to go out onto the other side of the road. You know you've got to acknowledge that we're not on a race track so you can come out as far as the white line but that's definitely it. Let's go again and you can fall in behind and have a look.

As we get back on the bike I feel a bit deflated. Kevin’s guidance has reminded me of how far I've got left to go. His knowledge is intimidating. It’s blindingly obvious that he operates at a completely different level to me. His movement is loose and natural and he’s fearless in the way that he approaches each bend. It's startling to see how fluid the movement is each time he shifts his body. On approach the wheels of the bike are literally stuck to the inside of the white the line. He waits right up until the very last second before dipping his body to the left and the bike seamlessly drops into the bend. He has the confidence to know how the bike will respond when he makes his move. He’s approaching the bend at high-speed with cars coming from the other direction and he just goes about his business as if he has the road to himself. He pushes the bike so far down that his knee is almost touching off the ground. It's the split second where you've got to choose between going harder or dropping off that seems so hard to overcome. No matter how much I feel like I’m going to commit to it, at the last second I seem to lose my nerve. I touch on the brakes when I shouldn't and then end up taking the wrong line around the bend.

Following Kevin is a really helpful exercise because I can study his movement and his line. The sound of the bike gives me some idea of how he is interacting with it. I can hear him quickly shift down through the gears just as he enters the bend. I can also hear exactly when he starts to pull on the throttle as he leaves the sharpest point of the bend. There’s real fluency in his motion. He moves the bike around cars as if they’re not even there. I can only imagine what they must be thinking when the bike roars past. The other thing that’s really noticeable is how much following someone like this propels me to ride faster. It doesn't seem as crazy when you're seeing somebody else
do it with such ease right in front of you. Behind Kevin I start to move faster without conscious effort and without ever feeling like I'm moving out of my comfort zone.

Kevin: Ok let’s talk again about exactly what’s happening when you’re approaching the bend. So what we want to do is get to the bend as quickly as possible and drop off enough speed so that we can get around the bend. So just breaking it down then to what you’re physically doing when you’re approaching the bend. (Kevin gets onto the bike again) So lets take the example of the left hand bend that we went through just before we pulled in here. So you’re out on the white line. Your knees are tucked in tight to the tanks. [I watch as he squeezes the petrol tank with his thighs]. Your elbows are tucked in. You've got power on, power on. Just as you see that bend approaching you literally have the power on until you start going around the bend. You’re going down into the bend and then you release the throttle. The second you see that bend approaching you roll off the throttle. You’re on with the front break and you’re on with the back break. You’ve got to scrub off enough speed and as you’re doing that you’re dropping down your gears. So lets say you’re coming up into it in fourth. So its drop down, drop down into second. Now you have to have all of this done before you go around the bend. If you're going around the bend and you’re trying to break, what’s happening is the bike will be trying to straighten itself up so you need to have this done before you get around the bend. If you’re breaking going around the bend the bike physically wants to straighten itself up because it’s stopping or even just reducing speed.

Stephen: Is it a case of losing traction?

Kevin: Well it’s changing your line on the road if you start to break. Like if you're going into a bend and start breaking the bike will be standing up straight again. It’s sending you on the wrong line on the bend ok? So what you want to do is get your gears dropped to bring yourself to the right speed to go around the bend and then you’re bringing the power back on again. You’re opening up the throttle. Obviously the breaks are off. You’re opening up the throttle again and then you’re up through the gears again.

Stephen: Ok what way did I do that last bend?

Kevin: It’s hard to know exactly what you were doing with your breaking and clutching but I could see that you were taking the wrong line coming into the bend. Your body was too straight. You were sitting straight up. (Kevin demonstrates the rigidity of my riding posture). What you need to be doing is getting yourself tucked into the bend. As we talked about before you've got to be shifting your body weight into the corner. So that's basically what you need to be doing. Just to give a little summary. Keep the power on for as long as you can. Speed up as far as the bend. Start applying your breaks dropping your gears before you go around the bend. Make your way around the bend and then power back on.

Stephen: So say before I even get into the bend?

Kevin: As you start to drop into the bend then when you need to have everything done. Just as you start into the bend really you should have everything done. You should be coming into the bend at the right speed and you shouldn't have your breaks on anymore. Then when you get around the bend you can wind the power up and drive it on again.

Stephen: Ok so everything done before?
Kevin: Now you don’t shut the power off going through the bend either. You can keep it on a bit but it’s important that when you start coming out of it again you start winding it on again. That’s what you have to start doing if you want to increase your speed.

By going on this reflexive journey, we develop a sense of the multi-sensory experience of motorcycling. We see that the senses are integral to the performance of high-speed motorcycling. Through the sounds that it makes, the motorcycle communicates with its rider. Through the senses the motorcyclist experiences the surrounding environment (wind, sun, cold fresh air). The rider must also develop a tactile relationship with the motorcycle, what our participants previously described as developing ‘a feel for it’. In particular, Kevin’s instructions place the body at the centre of high-speed motorcycling practices. As we have witnessed in his instructions, much of the skill involved in high-speed motorcycling involves learning to navigate bends and corners at speed. This rider is required to constantly visually survey the road and this involves manoeuvring the motorcycle in a manner that continually ensures the clearest line of sight. Kevin also carefully articulated the physicality of these practices. The speeding motorcyclist must learn to engage the body in a series of intricate movements. Furthermore, these bodily movements are made more complex because the rider must initiate them whilst using the body to interact with the motorcycle in a rapidly unfolding material environment. Aspiring riders must overcome all of these challenges in a situation where the risk of serious bodily harm or death is ever present. In this way, we can perhaps, appreciate some the obstacles that our participants have overcome in their journeys.

5.3 The Embodied Experience of High-Speed Motorcycling: Skills, Sensations and Emotions at the Edge

You talk to these racers that come out of it the ones that have been around here and they are high aren’t they are buzzing when they come back. Because its just something that they’ve done and they’ve gone as fast as they can. You know they’ve done it well if they’ve made it back. It’s a competitive spirit I think. I think it’s just the human competitive spirit and that wanting to do something better. I think that's it really.

[Robert]

In this short narrative, Robert manages to bring so much of the high-speed motorcycling experience to life. We see emotions, speed and risk, all factors that are inseparable from this experience. Robert explains this behaviour in terms of the individual and the innate desire to compete. In this section, we question why our participants repeatedly put their fragile human bodies on the line. What is it that is so alluring about the experience of motorcycling and speed that propels our participants to risk it all?

I had hassle with me parents since I got this bike. My father told me he didn’t want to spend the rest of his life looking after me in a wheel chair. He really went to town on me. He wouldn’t talk
to me. I’m driving since I was 16 like. That’s 5 years like and he still doesn’t want me getting the big bike. I mean if your good at driving bikes you can drive a 125 or you can tip along on a 1000cc. Once you know your limit, I think I know my limit. I would go off up and redden it out. They wouldn’t go to bed in the night until they know that I’m home. That’s how bad it is. I’m 22 like and I’m sounding like a bit of a baby but it’s just over the bike if I’m out in the car they don’t… I was always driving the bike. Even on the wet days I used take the bike. I mean the car, I have is a two litre diesel and its slower than a one litre and the bike is fucking quicker than an Evo on the road. So I don’t know whether it’s the speed or what. It’s the freedom I think you know being able to go off on your own… Going off for a day and being able to sit down and relax. It’s more relaxing. Even though you would be getting the adrenaline going quick. It’s some feeling. You have it on a 125 at first and then you kind of lose it. It doesn’t last long at all. So you end up always looking for more. The problem is, is that there isn’t that many decent drivers around. They all have a different way of driving.

In a similar manner to Robert, Eoin evocatively captures essential components of the high-speed motorcycling experience.

Not for the first time, we are confronted with the notion of the edge and the fragility of the motorcycling body. Lyng (1990, p.857) explains that in edgework this boundary can take a number of different forms: ‘life versus death, consciousness versus unconsciousness, sanity versus insanity, an ordered sense of self and environment versus a disordered self and environment’. In high-speed motorcycling, going over the edge involves death or serious bodily harm. Because of this reality and the stakes involved, Eoin appreciates that it is essential to ‘know your limit’ when engaging in high-speed motorcycling. We get the sense that Eoin feels that the riders’ who do not know their limit are the ones that are really at risk. In his opinion, it seems that his ability to know the edge is what separates him from other drivers. Eoin has perhaps developed a sense of elitism because of his previous experience of controlling chaotic situations. Eoin has perhaps developed a sense of elitism because of his previous experience of controlling chaotic situations. These notions and the emotions and sensations that they evoke seem central to our participants’ high-speed motorcycling experience. Eoin also firmly establishes the link between high-speed motorcycling and the material affordances of the motorcycle. In a similar manner, Lyng (1990) describes a form of edgework, which sees the edgeworker establishing the performance capabilities of particular technologies. Paddy’s narrative provides powerfully illuminates this phenomenon:

I was with one of my friends Pedro, he had a Kawasaki ZX36 and he was telling me everything about what this thing could do and it could do everything bar make the tea… One day we were down the port road and he was wheeling the thing up and down. And I was standing there thinking WOW people can do this. He said, ‘do you want a rip on that’? I said are you sure? He said bring it off for a cut there and see how you get on… He said… ‘Don’t be afraid of it, but don’t take the piss either. Don’t just yank open the throttle in first gear ‘cause it’ll wheelie and flip you off’. I can remember going down the road and passing him at about sixty or seventy miles an hour thinking this is a bit civilised. But he was kind of giving me the signal to go with

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it. So I said fuck it now and I dropped it down into 3rd. The road was clear for about a mile and a half in front of me and I said right lets see what this baby can do. I dropped it to third…and it seemed fairly docile the way it was moving, it was low in the revs nothing mental happening. Next thing I dropped it to third and just nailed it. Oh sweet Jesus Christ it was like a violent eruption in the engine. The thing just fucking took off but I was just focusing on what I was doing. And next thing I was like give it a gear, give it a gear. Stephen, I swear to Christ it was actually pulling my arms off. You could actually physically feel the strain on your arms. I was like OH this is a game changer! I like this! And I just glanced at the clock and I saw 150 miles an hour... I said right that's enough for me I’ve seen what this thing can do and I shut off the throttle. Turned at the bottom of the park road and came back up at about a tone. First thing I instantly did I don't know if it was fright or adrenalin flowing but I just took off the helmet and lit a cigarette. He said well what you make of that? Fucking hell, Jesus Christ that thing is fucking mental. It was like so weird up to about half way though the rev range nothing was happening and then it just explodes into life and its just the complete most mental bastard thing ever. That set the ball rolling. Those thoughts again of going bigger again and I was thinking oh crap. I’m goanna get myself in fucking trouble here.

In Paddy’s narrative we gain further indication of the importance of the material in our participants experiences of high-speed motorcycling. In this instance, Paddy witnesses the affordances that the more powerful motorcycles can provide. Pedro offers some guidance to Paddy in terms of exerting control over this powerful motorcycle. In this example, the performance limit of the motorcycle is clearly greater than Paddy’s personal edge. In this sense, for Paddy, this transitional experience is about respecting the power and limits of the motorcycle. Similar to Eoin, he maintains a sense of control by acknowledging his own edge, which this time he experiences at one hundred and fifty miles per hour. In this narrative we gain a sense of the intensity of this experience, as everything else is pushed to the background. Similarly Lyng (2004) explains how edgeworkers describe an innate survival skill, which allows them to overcome fear and remain focused in intense moments similar to this one. The edgeworkers capacity to exert bodily control in such circumstances, leads Lyng (2004) to conceptualise the edgeworking body as a ‘disciplined body’. Paddy powerfully articulates the physicality and sensory nature of this experience, which clearly establishes high-speed motorcycling as an embodied practice. Repeatedly, our participants articulate their visceral experiences of a range of sensations and emotions, which appears central to their desires to seek the edge. Paddy also articulates that the motorcycle ‘explodes into life’, which provokes an understanding that there is much to consider about the nature of the relationship that emerges between the rider and the motorcycle. This experience has evidently altered Paddy’s relationship with his own motorcycle. His motorcycle cannot afford him the intense sensations and emotions that he has experienced in this instance and because of this he ‘has those thoughts again of going bigger again’. This notion emerges as a common theme in our participants’ narratives.

It reminds me a bit of people who like skiing. People go skiing because they like to do something a bit risky. But if you talk to people about motorcycling and skiing they probably
think that motorcycling is a bit more dangerous than skiing whereas it’s probably not a lot different. It’s just that skiing is a bit more socially acceptable than motorcycling. That to me is the frame of mind. I bet someone that likes skiing would like motorcycling because its that sort of activity you know its speed and its timing and your skill against a road and a bike. However good or bad you are.

Robert

In this short narrative, Robert explains the similarities between different forms of edgework. Similar to Lyng (1990, 1991, 2004, 2005, 2008), Robert identifies risk as a core component of this type of experience. Similar to previous narratives, Robert explains that speed is central to this experience because it brings perception and skill to the fore (Lyng 2004). Because of these factors, Robert surmises that skiers would be equally enamoured by the challenges provided by high-speed motorcycling. Lyng (1990) describes this phenomenon as ‘crowding the edge’, whereby edgeworkers engage in a range of risky pursuits in order to ascertain the edgework experience. Robert also adds a further layer of complexity to our participants understanding of the rider/motorcycle relationship, when describing how the rider is pitted against the motorcycle and the road (material). In this narrative, we also get a clear sense that Robert feels that there is an unjust stigma attached to high-speed motorcycling. This stigma may serve as a form of social control (Larsen et al. 2014), in the sense that it seeks to restrict individual freedom by controlling the way that motorcycling is performed (Laurendeau and Brunschot 2006). High-speed motorcycling may be considered socially unacceptable because it is unlawful to break the rules that govern driving behaviour on public roads.

5.3.1 High-Speed Motorcycling: Developing an Awareness of the Body

If you’re going to learn how to drive a bike at speed you have to learn how to use your body. You can’t be stiff on the bike. Like you’ve got to be able to use your body weight to help you get around a corner. Cause you’ve got to be able to hang off the bike if you want to really drive it on. When you’re hanging off you learn to keep the bike more up right so that you’ve got a better grip on the road. It’s much safer once you know you’ve got that grip. Then you can be confident making it through a corner.

Michael

In this narrative, Michael places the body at the centre of the high-speed motorcycling experience. For Michael, embodying skills and techniques is clearly a prerequisite for those engaging in high-speed motorcycling. As Michael explains, aspiring high-speed motorcyclists must develop an awareness of their bodies, in this excerpt this involves learning ‘how to use their bod jes’, in order to engage in high-speed motorcycling. For Michael bodily control becomes a source of confidence, which allows the high-speed motorcyclist to go in search of the edge.
Well like to start with you should always be as aerodynamic as possible. It’s not the only way to ride a bike but it is if you want to be fast. So then to get into that aerodynamic position, first off you’re tucking your head in close to you and trying to get below the windshield if you’re on a sports bike. Your keeping your line of sight up, like I just can’t overemphasise how important it is to remember to keep your eyes on the road. It sounds stupid to be mentioning it but people forget and that’s how accidents happen. Your hands should be loose on the handlebars again so that you’re not fighting against the bike. You’ve also got to place your feet firmly on the pegs so that you’re like tight and secure on the bike. Like I already mentioned you’ve got to be light in yourself and ready to shift your weight as the bike moves. This way you’re tight to the bike so you’re set up then to get through corners.

Similar to my own experiences of learning to engage in high-speed motorcycling, Michael describes how the motorcyclist must learn to contort the body into a series of positions in order to manoeuvre the motorcycle at high-speeds. Once again, we see how our participants learn become aware of their bodies by embodying a complex range of positions and techniques. We also see how high-speed motorcyclists learn to use their senses in very particular ways. Michael describes an important distinction in terms of the way that motorcyclists must learn to use their upper and lower bodies. The lower body is held ‘tight’ and strong, such that it can be employed to direct the motorcycle. In this sense, the lower body cements the connection between the rider and the motorcycle. On the other hand, the upper body is ‘loose’ and fluid and therefore capable of adapting to the movements of the motorcycle. In this way, the upper body is capable of acting and reacting in the moment. This understanding brings to light the challenges that aspirants face in terms of developing an awareness of their bodies such that it utilised to perform in kinaesthetically complex ways. On a conceptual level, we are reminded that sight and touch are both intrinsic parts of the actions required to be in the world as a motorcyclist (Dant 2004). My own experiences of failure in this regard underscore the challenges involved in learning to become a motorcycling body.

5.3.2 High-Speed Motorcycling Skills: Getting Your Knee Down, Cornering and Wheelies

Yeah exactly, your knee should be at a right angle facing right down into the tarmac. You’ve got to know how to shift your upper body and lean it with the bike. So that means similar to getting your body position right for cornering, you’ve got to get your head and shoulders right down past the mirror. When you start out trying to do this it’s really hard to get the confidence. It always feels like the bike is about to fall over. But you’ve got to be brave enough to keep stretching out the little bit extra every time. This way you can actually start to trust that the bike isn’t going to just fall over and leave ya on your arse. Do ya know what I mean?

Michael explains the bodily techniques involved in cornering a motorcycle at speed. This narrative is powerful because it illuminates the presence of the body in this particular high-
speed motorcycling technique (knees, upper body, head, shoulders). As Michael elaborates, to successfully perform this technique high-speed motorcyclists’ must exhibit an awareness of the whole body. In this technique the edge is prominent and clearly understood – if the rider goes too far or loses balance both the rider and motorcycle will hit the road. This technique has got to be performed with enough speed so that the motorcycles tyres have enough traction to get around the corner. Michael explains that it takes more than just bodily skill to perform this technique. For Michael, this technique necessitates the bravery to continually push the edge, further and further, each time until success is gained. Michael explains that doing so enables the rider to develop trust in the relationship with the motorcycle. This understanding adds a further layer of complexity to the rider/motorcycle relationship. In one of our discussions, I asked Paddy about how he felt after getting his knee down.

Yeah you’d have a content feeling about you…On the second 250 I got me knee down…Flat in top*. Which I think was about one hundred and five or one hundred and ten miles an hour. Because you’re on something smaller than what you’re used to with the 1000cc, you’re on the 250 again. I can’t even explain it now but basically I was going up to the girlfriend’s house and you know yourself when you have something big and you go onto something smaller you just rag it. You drive the ring out of it. I can remember just going barrelling up there and (Paddy moves from his seat onto the ground and he begins imitating how he uses his body to perform this technique) there was nothing ahead of me and it’s just kind of common practice than when you’re turning hard you turn your arse cheek off and you’re just hanging your weight off and I came along now it [his knee] only glanced the tarmac for two or three seconds but I still did it... We were only going out three or four months at the time, I remember telling her and she just said you’re mad. You’re off your fucking head. I told one of her other friends up there and he just looked at me , ‘are you mad as a box of frogs?’ . Like people say when they see people flaking around on the bike they just look at you and they say you’re mad. But when you’ve got the helmet on and the visor down, it doesn’t seem that way it just seems normal. It’s so engrained into you that it doesn’t bother you.

In this narrative about getting his knee down (see also section 4.1), we can see that Paddy has become more confident in his own ability to perform this technique. It is interesting to see Paddy’s description of the material influences in this practice. He explains that because he is moving from a more powerful bike, back down to a lower powered one, he instantly feels more in control. In this example it appears that Paddy’s performance limit stretches beyond that of the machine, which seems to compel Paddy to ‘just rag it’. Although not in nearly as much detail, Paddy explains the bodily movements and postures of this technique in a very similar manner to Michael and Kevin. But what is perhaps most interesting about this particular description is the way that Paddy returns to his own body and uses it as an aid in order to articulate the specifics of this technique. In this narrative we gain a clear understanding that knowledge resides in this motorcycling body. Initially Paddy feels that he can’t explain it, but then he returns to his body and in imitating the bodily movements he is

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* Flat in Top means riding at maximum rpm in the motorcycles top gear.
able to find words to describe how he performs each step of the manoeuvre. This understanding allows us to recognise the importance of embodied knowledge in the performance of high-speed motorcycling. When combined with previous insights offered by Leon (section 4.1), we can now clearly understand the motorcycling body as a knowing body. This understanding underscores a clear distinction between cognitive knowledge and embodied knowledge in high-speed motorcycling. In narrative, we see that for Paddy, this form of embodied knowledge distinguishes him from other motorcyclists. This knowing body has come into effect through the development of embodied awareness, which thus enables them to operate in situations of risk. Our participants have described how cognitive thoughts fade to the background in these potentially chaotic situations, in these moments our participants depend upon the knowing body to survive.

There’s often been days where I’ve been in the house bored off me box. Nothing to do! I just think I’ll go for a few laps of the roundabouts. So I sling on the leathers and head for the two roundabouts out by my Mum and Dads. What you do is you go up the Port Road and down by Abbey Park and tear back up the Port Road. Scrape your knee the whole way around the roundabout, stand it up go for the next roundabout, knee down around that. You might do two or three laps, you know you’d burn twenty minutes and then you’d instantly feel good. You just think happy now!

[Paddy]

In yet another narrative about getting his knee down, Paddy makes a link between the performance of this bodily technique and the emotions that it evokes. In this example, we clearly see that the performance of this bodily technique and the ensuing emotions provide Paddy with a form of escape from the stresses of his everyday life. As edgework, motorcycling, offers our participants an experience that breaks away from the strains and monotony of their everyday lives. Lyng (2004) explains that this could be partly explained on the basis that successful edgeworkers experience a rare opportunity to co-opt the body, in a society that, for the most part, has a disemboding effect.

I prefer tipping along into the corners, rather than just flat out. I love it. With the yolk I have you have straight bars and you can leather it into the corners either way. If you have a sports bike, your weight is down on your wrists. It’s more painful even to go on a back road on a sports bike. I think it’s probably more dangerous. If the road was smooth you could go around a bend on a sports bike way quicker. But with a street fighter you’re just going to sort of horse it down. There’s no bother like, you know.

[Eoin]

Similar to previous narratives, Eoin’s excerpt underscores the feelings and emotions that our participants have developed in relation to the performance of particular embodied techniques. We also learn how the material mediates the sensory experience of cornering at speed. The sports bike may allow the rider to corner faster, but that advantage comes at the expense of
the riders’ physical comfort. It’s particularly interesting to consider Eoin’s proposition that bodily discomfort is compounded in the material environment of the secondary road.

Another thing that drew me to it, my first motorcycle, a Honda NS180 was that because it was so light you could kind of do anything with them. You could wheelie on them. Not because they were powerful but because they were so light. You nearly had to shift your weight to the back of it. You could only do it with the power pipe. So what you do is you drive along and the power pipe creates this thing called a power-band⁷ … this was like the turbo that I was talking about. So when you hit that point a certain amount of revs it suddenly picks up so what ya do, I think it was around 8 or 9 thousand revs it used to happen, so you’d drive slowly up until around 8 or 9 thousand and just when the power band was about to kick in you just tap the clutch, which gave it an extra little boost and then the power pipe kicked in and as you were doing that you bounced the suspension on the bike so you pushed down on the front. So it all had to happen at exactly the same time so ya had to bounce the suspension hit the power band at the right time and touch the clutch. So that was the first thing that I wanted to learn how to do I suppose.

[Leon]

Leon’s narrative further evidences the notion that motorcycles offer distinct affordances in relation to the rider. Leon explains that the make–up of this particular motorcycle enables the rider to perform wheelies. As witnessed previously, when recalling these bodily actions, the chair that Leon is sitting in is transformed into the saddle of the motorcycle. He contorts his body into the position necessitated by this technique. He raises his hands and wraps them around the imaginary handlebars; he crouches forward and ducks his head behind the invisible wind-breaking visor. In this position, Leon performs the movements that he describes in this narrative. Snapping the clutch with two fingers, gripping the throttle and imitating footing the gear lever with his outstretched flat hand. Similar to Paddy, his ability to recall how this practice is actually performed is directly connected to his bodily memory of past performance. We also see the importance of the sensory connection between Leon and the motorcycle. A glance of the rev clock on the motorcycle, coupled with the pitch of the engine, provides important information that for Leon signals the start of a series of bodily actions. The image of Leon, almost, bouncing his body to exert his full bodily force through the front suspension, vividly captures the physicality of the connection between the motorcycling body and the machine.

5.3.3 High-Speed Motorcycling: Sensation & Emotion Seeking

It’s just that rush I suppose that high, it doesn’t last forever. It’s like when I was younger jumping off rocks into the water. You jump off a small rock and there is adrenaline there and then you jump off the next one and you keep jumping off higher and higher things looking for more adrenaline cause the adrenaline doesn’t stay with the smaller things I suppose. It always has to be bigger and more dangerous. I suppose the danger is probably where the adrenaline comes from.

[Leon]

⁷ The power band is the point in the rpm range that the engine makes the most power. It is usually the point where climbing horsepower meets peak torque.
Leon’s captures what appears to be, some of the core sensations that our participants seek from the high-speed motorcycling experience – ‘the rush’, ‘the high’ and ‘the adrenaline’. This narrative also further exemplifies Lyng’s (1990) notion of ‘crowding the edge’. On this basis, we recognise our participants not just as high-speed motorcyclists but also as edgeworkers. We can appreciate that it is not just the high-speed motorcycling experience that our participants seek, but also the sensations that they derive from relying upon their bodies in situations involving risk. This narrative also clearly illustrates the fluid nature of the edge and our participants’ desires to continually push the edge, in order to maintain the intense sensations experienced during edgework.

Yeah I think that’s something every biker would tell you about. It’s just that feeling of having that power at your fingertips. You might not even use it that often but it’s a great feeling just to know it’s there when you need it. I find if I get pissed off, I’m more inclined to drive it on. Like if I’m in a bad mood, I will tear around everywhere I go. It’s a way of leaving off a bit of steam. The other thing then is that bit of power can get you out of trouble too. You know you can jump across lanes and nip in front of cars and that. But I suppose it will get you into just as much trouble as it will get you out of.

[Jimmy]

This narrative further demonstrates that high-speed motorcycling can provide a release from the stresses of everyday life. In this example, we see how the bodily sensations experienced during high-speed motorcycling positively affect Eoin’s emotions. Perhaps most strikingly, Jimmy’s describes the universality of the sensation of power, which motorcyclists seek. In a previous narrative, we gain a sense of the apprehension that Paddy experienced when moving to a more powerful motorcycle for the first time. In this narrative we get a sense of the emotion that edgeworkers experience when this apprehension subsidizes. This is the feeling of power, which Jimmy describes as residing in the riders’ fingers tips. This phraseology is telling because it connotes agency and a sense of control over one’s environment. Lyng (1990) describes how skydivers experience a range of sensations, in sequence, each time they jump from a plane –initial emotions of fear, prior to the jump, typically give way to feelings of omnipotence or control over one’s environment during the free-fall. This narrative suggest a diversion from Lyng’s (1990, p.860) interpretation, which describes how a feeling of omnipotence stems from the development of bodily control over the motorcycle.

I suppose what interests me is that sometimes if I was pissed off I would just put on all me gear and I would go off in the rain. When you’re on the bike you’re just away form everything. It clears your head. It calms ya down and you kind of get something out of your system. It’s not even driving quick.

[Eoin]
In the previous two narratives, we witness that the state of sensory arousal experienced during high-speed motorcycling and how it stimulates a positive internal emotional response in our participants. When considered in the context of the stresses and strains daily lives, we can see how this experience allows our participants to momentarily experience life in a more intense way (Jantzen et al., 2012, p.6). In this way we can appreciate how our participants experience high-speed motorcycling, in a way that marks a departure from the oftentimes-mundane nature of everyday life (Turner 1986, Lyng 1990). By understanding this process, we can begin to comprehend how the high-speed motorcycling experience becomes meaningful to our participants daily lives. We can also pinpoint how the positive emotions experienced by our participants are related to the increased level of arousal that they experience during high-speed motorcycling (Jantzen et al. 2012). In this regard, as Paddy previously explained, high-speed motorcycling may offer a rare opportunity to experience ‘absolute joy’ in this increasingly bland and monotonous everyday life (Jantzen et al. 2012).

He said ‘the racings after been abandoned here’. ‘Oh shit’ I said what happened. ‘Richard Britton had a bad one and he didn’t make it’. Richard Britton was at that particular time in the racing was like a hero to me…What I really enjoyed was that whether he won or came sixth he was always laughing his head off at the end because he just enjoyed the sport. That was what really made me admire him. He was a great showman as well. I was lucky enough to have met the man and get me autograph with him. And then I heard that and I was just like – FUCK!!... After what I was after been through the couple of weeks before it was just after all getting to me⁸. The girl I was seeing at the time rang me and I’ve never forgiven her for this. She said what’s up? And I told her and she says another fucking eejit going too fast on a motorbike. I just said ‘fuck you!’ and hung up. It was hard and then I was just kind of thinking will I get out of bikes all together, and I was thinking and thinking and I just said fuck that, I’m not getting rid of them.

[Paddy]

Of course the reality of high-speed motorcycling, and all forms of edgedwork, is that the edge exists and some edgedworking workers will inevitably end up going over. As we have seen through our participants’ experiences, high-speed motorcyclists’ encounters with the edge result in serious bodily harm or death. This narrative captures the tensions between the voice of society that predominantly blames motorcyclists and the alternative understandings that emerge from within the culture. The rationalisation that ‘this was just another fucking eejit going too fast on a motorbike’ is far from a unique one. This reaction encapsulates the viewpoint that motorcyclists do not value life. But an insider’s perspective can be utilised to deconstruct this powerful myth. Our participants’ narratives demonstrate a shared lust for life. It is this desire, to live life, and experience it to its fullest, that sees them repeatedly seek out the edge. This understanding runs in direct opposition to the notion that they do not value life. Contrarily, for our participants ‘not responding to the lure of motorcycling [would] mean a wasted life’

⁸ Paddy is referring to the death of his friend Stevie, which was documented in the previous chapter.
Then you get a feel for it. Same with all the other bikes, you get a feel for it you get used to it. But there was one day I was driving home from work, I had driven it on a small bit say a hundred and ten or a hundred and twenty mile an hour in spots and I thought I was a right lad … I said I’d go up the Waterford bypass. I got a Euro coin and plastered it to a nut on the top of the bike ‘cause it sits into it and I could pay my toll. So I pulled up to the toll, took off the plaster, payed my toll. Said ‘good luck now’ to the toll woman. I looked up and I could see that the road was clear. I went over the bridge doing sixty or seventy and I said right let’s see what this puppy can do. So I dropped it to second and nailed it. I just kept giving it and giving it gears. There’s curves on the bypass and when you’re doing sixty or seventy or even a hundred their just small little curves but when you’re going hard they’re corners. They’re big corners! But just before you come off the bypass there’s a straight and I was carrying so much speed coming up but I said fuck it, right one last little squirt. Kind of pushing her on that little bit more to see what she’ll do so I just kept it nailed. I was watching what was in front of me. Glancing. Climbing. Climbing up the revs. I looked down at the clock. Have a guess? A hundred and eighty two. Well it was a hundred and eighty one it was holding on but it flicked to a hundred and eighty two. I had me head ducked behind the screen and I just hit the throttle I said that's enough. I stuck me head up without realising the speed I was doing and I nearly got pulled off the bike. I was like fuck. Then I was just on a buzz I was like WOW that was fucking mental.

Hence we gain insight into Paddy’s persistent urge to experience speed. Now riding a Yamaha R1 superbike, he recalls the familiar process of becoming accustomed to the configuration of the motorcycle. At this point he has put in the effort required to embody the skills that are needed to operate the motorcycle successfully (Illmonen 2004). In this instance, Paddy felt assured that the material conditions were right and that his connection with the machine was strong. Manipulating the machine’s instruments with skilful bodily movements, we witness his ascent into intense speed. Hence we can begin to more fully appreciate the intensity of this somatic embodied experience. The pure physicality of the experience encountered at this intense speed forces Paddy to rely fully upon his body – his body must hold on but also act and react in this rapidly changing material environment. In this edgeworking experience Paddy reaches his own personal limit at the motorcycles limit, which happens to be one of the fastest motorcycles on the road. Unsurprisingly, when it was all over, Paddy experiences that ‘buzz’ that so many of our participants have described. In our discussion, Paddy attempted to put words to the intricacies of his experience.

You don't feel anything. You don't feel any sensation as such because you’re so immersed in your own concentration of what you’re doing and where you’re going. You don't so much have a chance to enjoy the speed you’re doing. Not so much enjoy it, but you don’t have time for emotions. You’re in the zone concentrating on where you’re going and what’s in front of you. There won’t be much in front of you anyway.

[Paddy]
Paddy articulates moments in which he experiences an altered perception of reality, as all bodily sensations fade to the background. We know that his perception of reality is altered because of the intense physical reality of this situation. In these moments, close to the edge, Paddy’s entire focus is fixed on ensuring his survival. At his edge, Paddy momentarily experiences a body devoid of emotions. This narrative evidences that enjoyment is not experienced at the height of the high-speed motorcycling experience. This evidences striking similarities to Lyng (1990, p.861), perspective, which states that ‘at the height of the experience (as they approach the edge), their perceptual field becomes highly focused: background factors recede from view, and their perception narrows to only those factors that immediately determine success or failure in negotiating the edge. In this state of mind, edgeworkers not only are oblivious to extraneous environmental factors, but they also lose their ability to gauge the passage of time in the usual fashion’.

Leon: It’s even scary to look down at the clock isn’t it? It’s like if I break my concentration even for a second. It’s like I don't have time to not be looking at the road.

Paddy: That's exactly it. The minute I got home it was just like Fag and Aaaaahh. I was just content then. I was a happy man I had found out what it could do. It was a rewarding experience when you thought about it but at the time, when you were doing it you couldn't enjoy it. Your just like, its almost borderline nearly scared like. But at the same time your concentrating so you don't have time.

In addressing the notion of the marketization of experience, Jantzen et al. (2012 p.7) argue that:

The importance of subjective conditions in the generation of pleasure is important here. Pleasure is an inner effect, only measurable by the experiencing individual; and the mere desire for pleasure is not in itself a sufficient prerequisite for actually experiencing joy. A range of mental activities from consumers themselves, such as planning for experiences, manipulating the senses and counting the means are implied in this hedonic operation. These can be broken down into aspects including imagination to spot and assess experiential opportunities; knowledge of the experiential market; understanding how the experiential qualities of products can be actualized most efficiently; and a willingness to be surprised by the unexpected. It also requires an ability to bring about the right mood for experiences and possessing the means to pursue experiential goals successfully.

In Paddy’s narratives we see evidence of a striking resemblance with the subjective conditions required for the generation of pleasure, which Jantzen et al. (2012) outline. Throughout Paddy’s narrative we’ve seen the effort that he has invested in terms of preparing his body to go in search of this experience. In this extract, he identifies the open road as an opportunity for engaging in edgework. He clearly appreciates the qualities of the motorcycle and understands how its capacities can be utilised to go in search of pleasure. Doing, so indicates ‘his willingness to be surprised by the unexpected’ (ibid). In terms of demonstrating an ‘ability to bring about the right mood for experiences’, Paddy manages a range of emotions
and sensations, in sequence, going from fear, to focused attention, to pleasure (Lyng 1990). In this way Paddy has, more than adequately, equipped himself to experience what he previously described as ‘absolute joy’.

Stephen: Do you ever think about what if in that moment?

Paddy: No because if you’re in the zone and you’re driving hard. Even on a twisty road if you’re not doing big speeds, but your cornering hard and you’re kind of going from corner to corner dropping gears and going up gears and what not. You don’t really have time to think of that. But my reaction would be fairly good. Say if you’re on a twisty back road and you see tractor tyres on the road say now not big clumps of muck but little brown v’s. Then you know that there’s machinery working near by maybe. You wouldn’t be looking in the fields as such but you know that their might be work going on. If you’re driving on not going ultra hard but fairly strong you don’t even have time to think of that. I find it very hard to describe.

In this extract we can appreciate a sense of the connection that Paddy experiences with the motorcycle during the edgework experience. When he is ‘in the zone…driving hard’ there is no time for cognitive reflection, the body takes over as manages interactions with the motorcycle in order to survive. More than likely, owning to his previous edgework success, Paddy hold’s his bodily capabilities in high esteem. This is further evidence of our participants’ elitist orientations, which Lyng (1990) reports is a common feeling amongst edgeworkers. In this extract Paddy also displays his belief in his advanced road craft skills. Bellaby and Lawrenson (2001) report that a belief in advanced road craft skills is an influencing factor in motorcyclists’ confidence that they are equipped to overcome risk. Although he has clearly displayed an astounding capacity to articulate the intricacies of the edgworking experience, Paddy briefly points to the ineffability of edgework, which is also a common theme amongst edgeworkers (Lyng 1990)

Leon: Well the thing is, everything is not always in your control.

Paddy: Yeah exactly there you have it, a car could pull out in front of you. You would crash into the car and next thing you're a vegetable, in a wheel chair or worse still you’re six feet under pushing up daisies. You know you don't want your future son, daughter or whatever, or if your really unlucky twins or triplets. But you don't want them growing up without a daddy or a father that's not able to do simple things like go out and play football with them. You don't want to miss out on those precious experiences in life.

Between them, Leon and Paddy display an awareness of the limitations of their innate capacity to control the uncontrollable. This understanding is useful in allowing us to critique the almost supernatural powers reported by Lyng (1990) from within the skydiving community. Our group of high-speed motorcyclists, previous experiences of death and serious injury, has allowed them to comprehend the fragility of the motorcycling body. In
these extracts we see their desires to continue to experience life its fullest, in ways that also stretch beyond the intensity of the edgeworking experience.

5.4 Conclusion

By reflexively engaging in the bodily practices of high-speed motorcycling we first gained access to the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling. Reflexively informed field notes allowed us to go on a journey in which we encountered the sensory nature of the high-speed motorcycling experience. Kevin’s careful instruction placed the body at the centre of the high-speed motorcycling experience. It soon became clear that to achieve the high-speed experience, riders must first develop an awareness of how to use their bodies to engage in high-speed motorcycling. This journey illuminated many of the challenges that aspirants face in terms of gaining access to the intense experience of high-speed motorcycling. The auto-ethnographic sensory approach provided an opportunity for me to document the minutiae of the sensory experience of motorcycling. Next, we turned back to participant narratives in order to examine their experiences of the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling.

At a basic level, our enquiry into the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling was guided by a tentative research question; what is ‘the buzz’ that our participants commonly reported? These narrative evidenced risk as a core component of our participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. As opposed to an aversion of risk, our participants demonstrated an acute awareness of the place of risk in the high-speed motorcycling experience. In this regard, the participants spoke of their belief in their innate abilities to manage the risk involved in high-speed motorcycling. Risk emerged as a core component of the experience in our participants’ references to the similarities between high-speed motorcycling and other risky leisure pursuits. Developing the bodily skills to first comprehend and second to manage personal limits appeared central of our participants’ attitudes towards high-speed motorcycling. Our participants’ belief in their own capacities influenced them in terms of distinguishing themselves from others. We were able to conceptualise these emerging dynamics through Lyng’s (1994) theory of edgework. On the basis of the concepts explanatory potential, the remaining sections were organised around three emerging themes: developing awareness of the body, high-speed motorcycling skills, and high-speed motorcycling sensations and emotions.

Michael’s narratives detailed how motorcyclists must develop an awareness of their bodies, doing so, enables them to embody a range of complex motorcycling techniques (5.3.1).
When combined with Kevin’s detailed bodily focused instructions and demonstrations (section 5.2.2), the knowing body emerges as a prerequisite for those seeking the edgework experience. The development of bodily awareness enables the participants to exert some control over the surrounding material environment. In the next section (5.3.2), narratives described a range of motorcycling skills that have enabled the participants to push to continually push their limits. Participants spoke of the importance of bravery in terms of pushing personal boundaries. In this way, our participants developed trust in their bodies and their motorcycles. Perhaps, our most important insights emerged when we witnessed the participants returning to their bodies in order to articulate the specifics of these techniques. In this way, we came to recognise the high-speed motorcycling body as an intelligible body. This understanding is important in terms of grasping the distinction between cognitive and embodied knowledge, while also emphasising the place of the latter in high-speed motorcycling.

In this chapter, we developed an appreciation of the fluid nature of the edge in high-speed motorcycling. Our participants’ narratives evidenced a range of routes to experiencing the edge. They experienced the edge at the limit of their personal performance limits, in some cases the personal limit was reached before that of the motorcycle. In other cases, the participants experienced the edge at the performance limit of the motorcycles capacity, when they themselves were equipped to go further. At one hundred and eighty two (and flickering to one hundred and eighty three) miles per hour we witnessed the meeting point of Paddy’s individual limit and the Yamaha R1 superbike. These accounts demonstrate that, within high-speed motorcycling, the edge is inextricably linked to the motorcycle. Although the focus in this chapter was placed on the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling, we have also seen how the material stuff of motorcycling is inseparable from these experiences.

We gained insight into the participants’ emotions and sensations during their embodied experiences of high-speed motorcycling. In a number of cases, our participants turned to high-speed motorcycling as a means of escaping negative emotions brought on by the stresses and strains of their daily lives. In these cases the high-speed motorcycling experience provided a mechanism to reach ‘contentedness’, ‘absolute joy’, ‘power’ and to ‘leave off steam’. In this way, our participants demonstrated an awareness of the high-speed motorcycling experience as a transformative internal experience. This transformative process involved a sequence of experiences, from an altered perception of reality, a fading away of unrelated thoughts, and a loss of awareness of emotions. The culminations of this process were internal shifts from states of discomfort to states of pleasure (Jantzen et al. 2012).
Chapter 6: The Material of High-Speed Motorcycling

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we traced the participants' journeys as they developed the embodied awareness and skills needed to engage in high-speed motorcycling. During this enquiry it became apparent that the development of these embodied dispositions is invariably linked to the materiality of the motorcycle. Based on this emerging insight, we will now turn our focus to the specific matter of the embodied relationship between rider and machine. Subsequently, a number of important questions emerge. What is the nature of the relationship between the participants and their motorcycles? How does the material make-up of motorcycles contribute to the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling?

In an effort to answer these questions we will order participants' narrative into a sequence that will allow us to chart their material progression through the ranks of motorcycle ownership. This strategy will allow us to compare and contrast the participants' understandings of their embodied experiences in relation to a range of different motorcycles. Subsequently, we will re-orientate our gaze by turning attention to the hands-on work of maintaining, modifying and repairing motorcycles. This switch in focus will enable us to see a range of practices that also contribute to the relationships between our participants and their motorcycles.

6.2 The Emotional Connection to Motorcycles

You couldn't compare it to that like [consuming other things]. I suppose the sensation before whether your buying a T.V, a phone or a laptop, you always have a buzz before you get it. You know the anticipation of how much better your life will be when you get it. I can remember the last time I got a laptop and the buzz before you get it and then it gets sent out to the house and you open it up and it's a massive anti-climax because it hasn't changed your life in anyway. You know you're not getting an adrenaline buzz sitting there on the couch with the laptop. Whereas when you get the bike like it's a different story...I suppose it lives up to your expectations a lot more than other things I think. Which is one of the most important things for me. I find it hard to get the same buzz from anything else as I would getting a new bike. I suppose with the bike you're getting the experience. It's not the same thing as just getting something that you would hold or something that you'd wear. With the bike it's different you're getting on to it and if you want it will bring you down the road at one hundred and fifty miles an hour. So it's not the same thing as buying anything else I don't think. I don't know if that's because that's what's important to me I don't know it's hard to explain why it's better than anything else. I think it just lives up to its expectations a lot more than anything else does.

[Leon]
This narrative eloquently describes the place of motorcycle consumption within the broader context of consumer culture. Leon explains the buzz of anticipation and the bodily sensations that he experiences at the purchase stage of the consumption cycle (Arnould et al. 2002). He articulates the shortcomings of the majority of consumer commodities in terms of living up to the often times lofty expectations set by advertisers. Ultimately, these commodities fail in terms of ‘chang[ing] your life in anyway’. For our participants, motorcycles are distinct from other consumption objects in the sense that they actually deliver on the promised experience. In this way, ‘it’s not the same thing as just getting something that you would hold or something that you’d wear’. In making sense of this perspective, Jantzen (2013, p.15) explains that hedonism ‘becomes a field of social comparison…The importance of both what to do and how to do pleasure presupposes a system of discourse directing and instructing individuals on preferable objects of pleasure as well as enabling them to express their experiences with such objects in clear and distinctive terms’. On this basis we see that the pursuit of lasting pleasurable experiences is at the heart of Leon’s consuming behaviour.

At the time I didn’t want to put the two bikes in the garage at the same time ‘cause I thought they might upset each other. I had a complex like. It was like having two pets like. I felt bad on the old bike for getting a new bike. I was kind of guilty like you know. So I used to keep one outside and put the other in the garage. I’d put the new bike in the garage and then I’d feel bad. So not only had I got a new bike but the old bike ended up outside. Then I’d end up feeling sorry for the first bike so I think I ended up rotating it for a few nights. I was trying to pay a bit of attention to the old bike as well. I had a bit of a guilt complex. I don’t know was I smoking the wacky-backy at the time or what.

[Tom]

Tom’s narrative provides insight into the deep connection that our participants share with their motorcycles. In their narratives the participants regularly anthropomorphize the motorcycle. In this example we see Tom clearly imbue the motorcycle with human qualities. By placing the motorcycles in close proximity to each other, Tom feels like he has pitted the two motorcycles against each other. For Tom, it seems inevitable that the two machines will end up fighting it out for his affections. He tries to avoid this conflict by separating them. But putting the old motorcycle outside, where it is subjected to the effects of the elements only induces more guilt. Rather than choose between the two machines, Tom implements a rotation system. Although there was room in the garage for both, he felt that this was the fairest option for all parties concerned. This narrative serves to demonstrate the emotional connection shared between our participants and their motorcycles (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), while also indicating the complex nature of these relationships. Although Tom makes sense of this relationship by drawing comparisons with the master/pet relationship, the guilt that he experiences makes the narrative seem more reminiscent of a love affair.
The bug I suppose its like when you get a bug with anything, it’s an absolute obsession. It’s something that you can’t get out of your head and you’re constantly thinking about it when you go asleep, then your dreaming about it. When you’re in school and you’re supposed to be studying you can’t concentrate. You’re constantly thinking about the last time you drove a bike or the next time you’re going to get to drive a bike. This obsession takes over everything. It doesn’t really go away, it only gets worse. I suppose until you actually get a bike, you constantly have the bug ‘cause you’re seeing bikes and you’re seeing people driving them and occasionally getting a spin on a bike it makes it worse again. ‘cause it’s that bit fresher in your mind, the last time you got to drive a bike you might have got a longer spin and gone a bit faster than you did the last time. You might of gone up through the gears or just had more fun than the last time. The bug is just always getting worse and it can go on even when you end up getting the bike. ‘cause you want a bike that will go faster. So I suppose it never really goes away. I suppose once you get the first bike you kinda dampen the bug a bit but its always still there ‘cause you want to get a bigger bike or a faster bike. So I think until you have the most powerful bike you can get it’s the same. I have got that far yet but I’m assuming when you have the biggest or the fastest bike you’re always going to want to go faster. I think the bug kind of evolves from a person wanting a bike to just wanting to go faster. Basically the bug just turns into an obsession with going faster and getting the bigger bike.

[Leon]

In this narrative Leon describes his connection to motorcycles as an all encompassing ‘bug’, which takes over his entire being. In this example motorcycling is an addiction, which Leon seems incapable of escaping from. Ultimately his fantasies are predicated on the pursuit of feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). We can clearly see the lure of motorcycling impacting upon his everyday responsibilities. In the beginning Leon feels an intense desire, which he ‘can’t get out of his head’. Actually getting a chance to ride a motorcycle seems to only intensify his desires to continue to live life to its fullest (Campbell 1987, Carù and Cova 2003). In this narrative, we see how culturally constituted desires play a role in structuring Leon’s imagined future (Jenkins et al. 2011). For Leon the only prospect of satiating his intense desire is to own his own motorcycle. In this narrative, Leon firmly highlights the importance of the motorcycle in terms of that continuous desire to go faster and push limits (Lyng 1990). As we have seen throughout this enquiry, within this particular group, motorcycles are inseparable from the speed experience. What is particularly interesting about this narrative is the notion that the bug never goes away, and the only hope they have is to ‘dampen the bug’. It is abundantly clear that our participants share a deep and often intense connection with their motorcycles. In the following section, we will turn attention to the nature of these relations and their development. As Leon rightly identifies the journey that our participants embark upon ‘evolves from a person wanting a bike to just wanting to go faster. Basically the bug turns into an obsession with going faster and getting the bigger bike’. We will now examine the participants’ journeys of progression through the ranks of motorcycle ownership.
6.2.1 Starting out Small: Riding to the Limit

Back then I just wanted to go fast. That was the main thing. Having a little one up on the people my age that had bikes. So just having something a little bit faster made all the difference back then. Now people can have any type of bike but back then there really was only a couple of bikes. There was the NS1. There was the TW125, there was the Varedero 125 and the Marauder 125 and they were the only bikes that people drove really. The NSR with the power-pipe was probably the quickest out of all of them. Everybody had a little something on their bike that would let ya know that it was their bike. When you’d go out to the car park in school and all the bikes were lined up, there could be loads of bikes the same but ya always knew that was Conor’s or that was Eoin’s because there was always just a little something, like a sticker or a different exhaust just something on it a scratch or a ding. I suppose everybody had something that made their bike theirs.

[Leon]

As 16-year-old learner drivers, regulations restricted the group’s access to motorcycles with engine capacities of 125cc and below. As Leon explains this limited their choices to just a small number of motorcycles and many of the group decided to buy Honda NS1s. In terms of its design, the NS1 is modelled on the style of a super sports bike. As seen previously9, super sports models orientate the body in a way that encourages speed. By embedding these same characteristics into the NS1 80 model, the manufacturers appear to subvert the intentions of the regulations that have been put in place to protect the safety of inexperienced learner drivers (Pugliese, and Cagan 2002). Market segments are created on the basis of

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9 See sections 4.2 and 5.3.2
particularised meanings and styles of riding. These meanings are created by marketers, propagated by advertisers and further shaped by community discourses (Dant 1998). Pugliese and Cagan (2002 p.140) explain that ‘evolving consumer preference for form and image have significantly shaped motorcycle design. Rather than progressing toward a uniform collection of the latest and most technologically advanced components, motorcycles have continued to diverge’. In this way we can acknowledge the role of intentional human design in terms of embedding particular capacitates and meanings into each motorcycle (Dant 2004). In this way we can see the active role of motorcycle manufacturers in shaping and refining the motorcycle market in accordance with their own interests. This point is hardly surprising, but worth highlighting when we consider the pervasiveness of the individual responsibility perspective on rider safety (Murphy and Patterson 2011). It could also be argued that, through their design of the NS1 model, Honda facilitated younger riders to engage in a particularly risky style of riding:

Another thing that drew me to it was that because it was so light you could kind of do anything with them, you could do wheelies on them not because they were powerful but because they were so light…. It took ages but once you got the timing right the front of the bike came straight up. So that was the first thing that I wanted to learn how to do I suppose. Another thing that you could do on them then was donuts. So if you stand stationary on the bike in first gear then you put your left leg out wide and you hold the bike down towards the ground so that the handlebars are nearly touching the ground. Then you dump the clutch on it. You had to have your left foot in the right position so that the bike could pivot off your foot. So if you didn't the bike was just going away from ya. But if ya had your foot in the exact right position then the bike would just start spinning around and around in circles for as long as you wanted. So the two of those things, the NSR was the only bike that you could do them on. So yeah that was another reason that I went for the NSR as opposed to anything else. I just thought that it was so cool I used to see the lads doing them and I used to just think it was so cool. I wanted to be able to do it and I wanted to have a bike that would be able to do it and the first person that I saw doing both of those things was the person that owned the bike before I bought it off him. So I knew that the bike could do these things. That was another reason why I wanted that exact bike. Then in terms of speed I think they only did…I mean you could squeeze one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour out of ‘em, which is just under eighty miles an hour. So you’d have to like tuck in your legs and tuck in your arms and stick your head in under the, well there wasn’t a screen on them, but you’d have to stick your head right down on ‘em into the clocks and you’d be going down a hill with the wind behind ya… you’d get one hundred and twenty kilometres out of it. Which was quick for a bike the size it was.

[Leon]

Leon’s narrative highlights some of important elements of the NS1s material make up which influenced the group in deciding to choose this particular model as their first motorcycle. It was light enough and fast enough (when the power band opened) to wheelie. It was also light enough that it could be handled and manoeuvred in a similar manner to a pushbike, which lends itself well to performing stunts. But ultimately this particular motorcycle provided the greatest possible access to speed, which in turn influenced a particular riding. Leon describes this riding style as getting the body ‘right down…into the clocks’.
When you’d start out you have no fear. You kind of push it to the limit. You know you have a limit and its very high. Then you get your first scare, your first crash and that's when your like settle there now PJ.

[Paddy]

In terms of gaining insight into the relationship between the rider and their first motorcycle, Paddy describes how he first approached the motorcycle without fear. The absence of fear was common amongst our participants in these early stages. Paddy describes how he quickly learned to respect the power of the motorcycle.

Yeah ... it’s like I was saying before. After a certain time on a bike you get to a stage where you feel like you have mastered it. You know everything about how the bike runs, exactly how it handles. You get right down to knowing all the little peculiarities that each bike will have ... When you get to that stage it’s almost like the bike becomes a part of you.

[John]

You just get a connection with a bike after you have been riding it for a certain amount of time ... You think you know everything about how the bike handles and what your capabilities are on it. When I feel like the bike has become a part of me I’m over the stage of being cautious on it ... At the start, when I'm getting used to it, I take it easy until I’m confident on it. But once I feel like I know it inside out and it’s a part of me, then I start pushing it and seeing what I can do.

[Jimmy]

These narratives provide insight into the evolving nature of the rider/motorcycle relationship. Through these narratives we learn that it takes time to develop an embodied relationship with the motorcycle. John and Jimmy detail the development of a deep connection between rider and motorcycle, which blurs the physical boundary between body and object. In making sense of this physical relationship Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.143) explains that to get used to a hat, a car, a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body. Habit expresses our power of dilating our being in world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments’. In this narrative, we can see that Jimmy has incorporated the motorcycle into the bulk of his body. Dant (2004) explains the coming together of human bodies and material objects in terms of assemblages. He explains that the ‘drivers sense of how fast they are going and what speed the road conditions will permit, becomes a skill embodied through the vehicle, not only in its dials but also its sounds and vibrations’ (2004, p.73). Based on a culmination of participant narratives, we can surmise that ‘the connection’ that Jimmy speaks about can be understood as a skill embodied through the motorcycle.

But then after you knew its capabilities, what it could do and that you get bored. Not so much bored but you think I have enough of this thing and you start lusting for something else. You start leering over what your next thing might be but you know how that works. Money and bla bla bla.

[Paddy]
Paddy’s description of deciding that the time was right to change the motorcycle is indicative of the groups’ experiences of deciding to upgrade their motorcycles. Paddy has clearly experienced the performance limits of his TW125 (Lyng 1990). Subsequently, he feels that this motorcycle can no longer provide a route to the excitement of the edgework experience. This realisation sparks the desire to purchase a more powerful motorcycle, which will restore access to the edgework experience. Speaking to this point, I asked Paddy if he could remember an experience that brought about this realisation.

Yeah I remember that point very, very well. I had been toying with the idea of buying something bigger and a couple of the lads around were after buying 250s. But it kind of fell into the back of me head. It was one sunny Sunday afternoon and a friend of mine Percy, he had a 125 dragster, which was quicker than what I had, and Stevie was after buying his CBR 250. The three of us went for a spin and none of us really knew the roads so we just plodded along nicely. They had passengers as well, then we went across to Dunmore and we knew the road fairly well ‘cause I had done it a few times on me own. I can remember that day and I just felt like keeping up to everyone. Not be just puttering around like Miss Daisy. I remember going into corners on the 125 and I was just thinking the tyres are fucked on it but I still did it. I knew straight away when I parked her up that day I says; I have to get something bigger because I’d hit me limit. When you buy something bigger the game changes – you have the speed, you have the handling and different things like that. You have cornering capability and all of that. It’s like updating your iPhone from ios 4 to ios 8 the whole thing changes. Everything is that little bit better. That day just made me think; get yourself something bigger chief or your going to kill yourself off that 125.

In this narrative, we see the prominence of social relations in terms of influencing consumption patterns within the group. Because of the group’s penchant for speed and continually pushing boundaries, the pressure to conform can be explained in terms of the pressure to keep up. In this social context, keeping up becomes tied to material progression. It is also interesting to consider the perspective that upgrading to a more powerful motorcycle can be precautionary in the sense that it enables Paddy to keep up without continuously riding the motorcycle at the edge of its performance limits. It is perhaps surprising to consider that safety concerns also featured as part of Paddy’s rationale for upgrading to a more powerful motorcycle. This rationale seems logical when we consider Paddy’s experiences of the social pressure of keeping up within the group. In his narrative it appears to be somewhat chaotic to continue riding the motorcycle to the limits of its capabilities. It is also noteworthy to trace the development of Paddy’s relationship with the TW125 from being fearful to being over-confidence.

Stephen: So you were actually thinking, I need to get something bigger to look after myself?

Yeah exactly ‘cause I had probably gone to the stage where I was gone a little too cocky on the TW. Even though on the straight it was a complete snail, whereas on corners because it had the
fat tyres you could corner fairly hard. Some bikes have really skinny tyres, but with this you knew that you had a bit to play with kind of. I just thought it’s time now to maybe change up a bit. That was where the chronicle of me buying my first CBR 250 starts.

[Paddy]

6.2.2 250's for Keeping Up

A Honda CBR 250. It was the next step up from the same manufacturer. But it was four-stroke and a hell of a lot faster. MC22 to was the model but it was a Honda CBR 250. It was black red and silver

[Leon]

I had always consulted my brother on bikes and I said to him I’ve been thinking about it a lot and I’m thinking about the CBR 250. He said to me ‘I think it might be a good idea to trade up just so you’re not driving as hard trying to get the best out of a yoke. Trying too hard to keep up with the lads. When you have room to play with the game does change and it will improve you an awful lot’.

[Leon]

In Paddy’s narrative we see further evidence of the shared belief that progressing to a more powerful motorcycle can be framed as a safety measure amongst high-speed motorcyclists. By moving to the more powerful Honda CBR250, Paddy can keep up with the rest of the group without having to push the motorcycle to its performance limit. But switching from the NS1 to the CBR250 also necessitates that familiar process of getting to know the motorcycle all over again (Merleau-Ponty 1962, Dant 2004). As we have seen in the previous chapter, learning to engage effectively in high-speed motorcycling requires a combination of cognitive understanding and embodied knowledge. In these narratives, we begin to appreciate that this embodied knowledge must be developed each time a more powerful motorcycle enters the frame.

Leon explains his experience of going as far as he could with the Honda NS1. This motorcycle could no longer provide access to the edgework experience. In this narrative, we see further evidence that it takes time for the human body to
become transplanted into the motorcycle (Merleau-Ponty 1962). As Dant (2004, p.73) explains ‘the embodied orientation to the world of rapidly moving objects from a sitting but rapidly moving position is something that must be learnt’. This orientation cannot be developed without the aid of the human body. In terms of the relation shared with the motorcycle, we can also see that the rider does not automatically begin in a position of power. This idea of engaging in a ‘whole new learning curve…to be able to learn control’ demonstrates the connection between embodied knowledge and the materiality of the motorcycle. Through these narratives, we come to recognise the significance of the materiality of the motorcycle in term of achieving the edgework experience. This understanding also underscores the significance of consumption and financial resources in terms of maintaining access to the edgework experience. For our participants the CBR250 marked the next stage in their continued progression as speed seeking edgeworkers. Leon explains how the material make-up of the CBR250 altered the embodied experience of motorcycling:

Well physically it was a lot bigger. The biggest difference was the weight of it and the thick wheels. The wheels on the NS1 they were like…just the wheels of a mountain bike. But the wheels on this were much bigger you know. They were like proper wheels for a motorbike. This meant that you were much sturdier on the bike. The weight of it then meant that you couldn't do donuts. In terms of speed then instead of having a top speed of eighty miles and hour you were able to do a top speed of one hundred and twenty miles an hour. So it went a hell of a lot faster. There were two big disc brakes on the front of it, which was handy for scrubbing off speed. I suppose it was just a lot more like a real motorbike than the NS1. The other one was kind of more like a toy…like a scooter with gears even though they were quick enough for the size of the engine, but the other one was a little tiny single cylinder engine. It had one cylinder that was 74cc. The new one had four cylinders that were 50cc each so you know the engine was nearly four times the size. Everything was just bigger you know on the NS1 the chain was like the chain off a pushbike. Where as on this one it was like a proper chain off a big motorbike.

[Leon]

Many of the participants described the transition from the NS1 to the more powerful 250cc motorcycle in terms of feeling like they had jumped up to a “real bike”. Leon explains this transition in terms of the material components of the motorcycle. The design of the motorcycle in terms of the size of its wheels, its weight, and its overall size significantly alters the embodied experience of riding. In particular, the materiality of the machine provides a more solid connection between the rider’s body and the motorcycle. This enables the rider to experience faster speeds while avoiding the chaos of riding at the performance limit of the motorcycle.

You know when you’d get up on a bigger motorcycle than what you had you think this thing is going to be leery. It’s going to try kill me at every opportunity! He (Paddy’s Brother) knew I was nervous about that but he just said, ‘take your time at and you’ll be grand’, and it worked out. I had a lot of fun on that thing. I remember for the first while driving around on it I was just
In this narrative we gain insight into Paddy’s initial fears in relation to riding the more powerful CBR250. Paddy’s assertion that the motorcycle is ‘going to try to kill [him] at every opportunity’, evidences Paddy’s understanding of the active role of the object in the assemblage between rider and motorcycle (Dant 2004). For Paddy, the motorcycle is clearly more than an inanimate object. But his assertion that the motorcycle possesses the intent to kill is perhaps an overstatement (the Irish are not known for holding back when it comes to telling a good story). But his assertion can still be useful in the sense that it indicates the initial power dynamic that exists between the rider and the more powerful motorcycle. From this narrative we can assert that the participants’ themselves attribute agency to the motorcycle. Leon’s narrative provides additional insight on the notion of the agency of the motorcycle:

I suppose it was just learning how to control it. You know … as I was saying like, you're the variable … you know the bike isn’t the variable … so you have to adapt to the way the bike works like I suppose once you know how it works, then you kind of work together with the bike so you know how the bike is going to react.

Leon’s perspective on the initial relation between rider and motorcycle is insightful in the sense that he identifies the rider as the variable. The motorcycle will perform in the manner that it has been designed to perform in and, on this basis, experience has taught Leon that it is the rider that will have to adapt to meet the capacities of the new machine. Experience has taught our participants to be cautious of the motorcycle when setting about forming the assemblage. As we learned previously, getting to ‘know how it works’ involves orientating the motorcycling body to the motorcycle. Moving to a new motorcycle necessitates a reorientation of the motorcycling body through the senses. Leon poignantly articulates the interactive relation between rider and motorcycle – the rider acts and the motorcycle reacts. In reforming the assemblage then, the rider must take the time to once again develop a feel for the motorcycle. We know that this means investing the time to embody an understanding of how the motorcycle will react to the riders’ actions. In doing so the rider can once again gain a sense of control over the object, which is essential to their endeavours in controlling the boundary between life and death in edgework.

There’s this corner at home and I can remember if you’d approach it at 60, and now it’s a nothing corner, but when you first started going through at 60 on the TW you felt like a maniac. But then on the 250 you went through the same corner at 60 and you wouldn't even know that you were after doing it. You have a different comprehension of what speed is as well, which is a big thing too. When your getting to learn it and figure it out and it feels like there’s a rake of
things happening and then everything just clicks. And then you’re just like I have this thing sussed.

[Paddy]

In this narrative Paddy recalls how upgrading the CBR250 altered his experience of riding. This narrative is particularly fitting because he identifies how the materiality of the motorcycle alters his experience of riding within the same material environment. Paddy clearly articulates how the material make-up of the CBR altered his perception of speed. He could ride at the same speed without feeling that it was chaotic. In this sense we can understand how material progression, in the form of upgrading to a more powerful motorcycle, is important to the group in terms of their quests to experience greater speeds. The process of embodiment is clearly not taken for granted and the group understand the challenges of re-orientating their bodies to the motorcycle. When ‘everything just clicks’ and they have the ‘thing sussed’ they can once again set about discovering the performance limits of the motorcycle.

It was the same story getting the first bike as the second bike ... I thought I knew how to drive it because I had the other bike for a year. But then I realised that with the power of the new bike it was a different story again. So this started a whole new learning curve, trying to be able to learn control ... It took months again to be able to drive the bike to its capabilities.

[Leon]

Leon’s narrative highlights the participants understanding of the inevitability of the embodiment process. In this narrative we get sense of the time that this process takes. We can also see that their efforts are directed towards the goal of driving the ‘bike to its capabilities’, which subsequently enables them to once again go in search of more intense experiences of speed.

The NS1 can go one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour. The first time I was on the back of a bike doing one hundred and kilometres an hour per hour I thought it felt like one hundred miles an hour. Then when I got my own bike and I was doing one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour on it. It felt unbelievably fast and there was adrenaline attached to it. But it wore off and one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour felt slow. Then when I got the new bike there was more power probably 2 or 3 times the old bike. The buzz was back again, going faster than I had gone before. Then it went from being able to go one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour to being able to go one hundred and twenty miles an hour. That’s since worn off and even though I haven’t moved on yet I know the next bike I’ll get will go faster and there will be adrenaline and after a while it will wear off. You’re always left looking for the, I don’t know, I suppose the next adrenaline rush. In relation to the bike it’s just always going to be a bigger bike and a faster bike. It’s just that rush I suppose. That high, it doesn’t last forever.

[Leon]

In this narrative Leon places the motorcycle and its affordances at the centre of his experiences as a high-speed motorcyclist. In this way, we can fully appreciate that the materiality of the motorcycle is inseparable from Leon’s journey as an edgeworker. In this
narrative, Leon also identifies the centrality of the motorcycle and its capacities in terms of structuring the experience of high-speed motorcycling. At the time of this discussion, Leon had developed the bodily skills required to reach the performance limits of the CBR. But doing so consistently overtime, meant that he no longer experienced one hundred and twenty miles per hour in the same way. One hundred and twenty miles per hour no longer allowed Leon to get close to the edge of his own capacities, which thus limited his access to the edgework experience. This realisation kick starts the familiar thoughts of moving on to ‘a bigger and faster bike’.

The colour scheme of it was black red and silver so it was a bit different than the other ones that were around so I kind of thought this one is nice and then when you’d have her spitting shined up you’d be looking at it thinking that yolk is queer nice I fucking love that thing. You know yourself you think your jack the fucking lad going around. The truth of it is though you see a fella on a proper big bike and that’s the just the come down that you need. You think you’re a hero and then a fella passes you properly and you’re like ok back in your box.

[Paddy]

In this narrative we gain an opportunity to grasp the significance of the social factors involved in influencing Paddy to progress to a more powerful motorcycle. We can see that Paddy was more than content with the CBR250, but being passed out by a more powerful motorcycle reminds him that there is further to go in terms of becoming a high-speed motorcycle. In this regard, we see the motorcycle not just in terms of its functionality but also in terms of the symbolic values that are attached to its capacities. The group are also acutely aware of the fact that their bikes configure their riding practices, enabling and encouraging alternative strategies of movement (Pinch and Reimer 2011). The narrative accounts shared by participants help us to comprehend the impact of the motorcycle on their willingness/ability to engage in high-speed motorcycling:

At the moment I drive a Kawasaki Ninja 250R. I think it’s some job ... It’s the latest version of a Kawasaki bike that has been around for a long time. They have redesigned it and I think it’s the best 250 sports bike that is on the market. Its definitely one of the fastest anyway ... I mean it still only has a 250 engine but I think it looks like it could be much bigger to people who don’t know much about bikes ... They raised up the seating position as well so it looks a lot more like a sports bike and it has that sports bike feel when you’re sitting on it. I like that feel you know ... I like the seating position ... because you have complete control. It allows you to dip into corners and really get around them. I think it’s harder going on the driver ... physically. You have to exert yourself more and after a while you can start to feel a bit uncomfortable because you’re crouched over so much but it’s worth it ... With the ninja there is a lot of pressure down on your wrists because of the seating position. But it’s okay ... you get used to it.

[Dave]

Here, Dave highlights the fact that the design of the bike makes certain demands of the motorcyclist while also allowing for the degree of control necessary for high-risk practice.
6.2.3 Settling Down at the Top

Going from that to the Hornet, Jesus ’twas a fair step. You’d be struggling for seventy miles an hour, you’d be just ticking over on the Hornet at seventy miles an hour you could do one hundred and forty kilometres and hour – handy! It was a feeling of a bigger bike, smoother. It’s the same thing with the last change, like the new one is four times the CC again. I wouldn’t even say that I mastered the Hornet. I was happy out on it until I ran into the back of someone. I was content now. I supposed I did master it but it didn’t bother me. I used to look after it but after that I felt like I had gone to the end with it. I used to look after a thing but then after that I’d be looking at it knowing it was in shit and it would never be the same again. The clocks were wrecked the handlebars were bent. I was just saying to myself it’d never be the same again to me. I kind of lost interest in it then. I had it well mastered then so I just drove the shit out of it then for a while. I didn’t really care like. Since I got the new one I’m only tipping around. I’ve only had it since Monday.

[Eoin]

In Eoin’s narrative we gain further insight into the emotional relationship aspects of the relationship between participants and their motorcycles. A number of times in our discussions, the participants explained how crashing or dropping the motorcycle compromised these emotional relationships. The consequences of these mistakes remained on the motorcycle in the form of scuffs, dents, scratches, and broken fairings. These material imperfections remind the participants of their mistakes long after the event. In this way we see how memories become embedded within the materiality of the motorcycles shell. Speaking to this point, Belk (1988, p. 148) argues that ‘possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past’. But these imperfections serve as sign of the motorcyclists’ mistakes and thus contribute to a loss of emotional connection, which in turn inspires the desire to upgrade. Although the concept of mastery remains ever-present, this narrative adds an additional layer to our understanding of the nature of consumption patterns within the group.

The new bike was a Kawasaki 650 RN. It’s a good bit more powerful but probably the same weight. So in terms of power to weight there’d definitely be a bit more power. But it’s not like I wasn’t used to the power. But again I found that it was a different style bike. It’s a road bike so it is similar but just the position of the seat to the handlebars is a bit different. I’m up a bit more straight. Actually having said that it is quite similar to the Suzuki. The frame is kind of the same size....But because I’m in Sydney now I drive a lot differently than before. I don’t have much option because of the cops and speed cameras. It limits you that. If you’re going to speed you’re very likely going to be caught...There’s a spot an hour away from where I live like here, it has windy roads and their good roads. But again there, I’ve gone once or twice where I’ve pushed it. But I’ll only push it where I can see the end of the road and see there’s no cop there. Because around that bend there’s a chance, a good chance that there’s a cop with a speed camera... There’s a lot more cops I think its just being a big city...My first year or two there I had nine penalty points built up just from the car cause I was still a bit more inclined to drive like I would here. That’s why I was happy coming home because I had a nice rental car and I was able to boom out to Dunmore.

[Tom]
In Tom’s narrative we gain further insight into the influence of the design of the motorcycle in terms of altering the embodied experience of high-speed motorcycling. But this narrative is novel in the sense that it is located in a different physical space than all of our previous narratives. In this way, we can see how the institutional and material environment of Irish roads has also contributed to our participants’ opportunities to pursue the high-speed motorcycling experience. Speaking to this point a recent Irish Times (2015) article states that ‘numbers in the Garda Traffic Corps have plummeted, with nearly four out of every 10 members who were in the unit at its peak in 2009 now retired or deployed elsewhere’. It is noticeable that throughout their extensive narratives the participants make little reference to any impediments to their pursuit of speed. Before even getting a motorcycle, Tom was forced to alter his driving behaviour because of the significant difference in the way that Sydney’s public roads are surveyed and policed. This point demonstrates that Tom had developed his embodied way of driving in relation to the materiality of Irish public roads. For Tom, returning to Ireland’s public roads offers a welcome respite from the restriction of Sydney’s public road system. Upon returning to Ireland Tom intends to take full advantage of the lack the freedoms of the Irish road system. Through this narrative we can comprehend the material not just in terms of the motorcycle, but also in terms of the material environment of Ireland’s public roads.

After that I got a VTR1000 I stuck with Honda again actually its always been Honda. It's a 1000cc VTWIN so again like the CBR was three times the engine size of the other one, the VTR was 4 times the engine size of the CBR. But there’s a different set up on it, the CBR was an inline four cylinder whereas this is a VTWIN, so it just has two big massive 500cc cylinders. So it drives differently and it sounds completely different. They make power in a really different way that's what people always say about them. Just the different set up on the cylinders makes power in a different way. You know like I was saying the CBR goes up to like 20000 this one only goes up to twelve. The power is more constant, its just immense power the whole through the gear until you click into the next one whereas on the CBR it started out a little bit slow and then really built up as the revs went up. That was the main difference with it really.

[Leon]

In this narrative Leon articulates the material significance of progressing from the CBR250 to the VTR100. He eloquently explains the distinction between the material make up of the two motorcycles in relation to the embodied experience of riding – both in terms of the senses and in relation to the experience of power. Through this articulation we can fully comprehend our participants desires, as edgeworkers, to progress through the material ranks. On the VTR1000, Leon experiences a lasting feeling of ‘immense power’. Previously, our participants experienced this feeling of immense power only in the heights of the edgework experience. By progressing to the highest category of motorcycle available, Leon experiences power that is less temporal. When we consider the place of omnipotence in the edgeworking
experience, we come to grasp the importance of material progression in terms of our participants’ lives as high-speed motorcyclists:

I think they make you drive completely differently. Actually the major difference was probably the seating position, all of the other bikes would have been racing bikes whereas this is a Sports Tourer...So say on the CBR you’re completely bent over the tank. So like the way it was designed, the way that you sat on it made you want to go fast. You know it was designed in that way. You were supposed to go fast. You were supposed to be driving it on. Whereas this one you were sitting up a good bit straighter and because of the way that the engine made power it made you feel like you didn't have to be driving the shit out of it... It’s like when people describe the difference after moving to a jeep to a car. You don’t feel like you have to be driving as fast. It’s nice to be just tipping along in it. I think that's the way it was with the VTR. Although in saying that, it’s still like a really quick bike and every so often I’ll decide that I want to drive really fast and I’ll just go out and drive the shit out of it for a while. But the bike doesn't egg you on to that half as much I’d say. Even though the bike is a lot faster and a lot more powerful, I drive it a lot slower than I would have on the last one.

[Leon]

This narrative provides, perhaps, the clearest insight into the active role of the motorcycle in terms of shaping our participants approach to riding. Further to what we have seen previously, everything about the material make-up of the CBR250 encourages the rider to speed. Leon describes that the design of the bike actually urged him to ride it to the edge of its performance limit. Alternatively, the material make-up of the VTR1000 provided a feeling of absolute power. This feeling of power seems to satiate his desire to seek the edge – both in terms of his own performance limits and that of the motorcycle. In this way he gains the feeling of omnipotence without the intensity of the edgework experience. At the height of the edgework experience our participants rely upon their bodies to manage the border between life and death. Subsequently in terms of his on-going survival as an edgeworker, material progression allows him to reduce some of the risks involved in motorcycling. Although he explains that he now rides a lot slower, he is also quick to remind us that he has not given up on edgework altogether.

I suppose you know like when you’re getting the bigger bike that you’ve got to respect it a bit more because, like you can drive a 250 around and drive the shit out of it and you’re not going to be…like you just can’t treat a 250cc the same way as a 1000cc. You can’t go out and drive everywhere as fast as you can because it's a 1000cc and you’ll be arrested or killed. So you know that you have to like pull it back a little bit. Yeah like if you were driving on the 1000cc the same way as you were on the CBR you’d be driving everywhere at over a hundred miles an hour or more so you have to pull it back a little bit…I suppose you just feel that bit safer once you get used to it you’d be that bit more in control again. I suppose stability is just an obvious plus like to feel safe and to feel that the bike is solid underneath you…Yeah you don’t have to be going faster on it unless you decide to. If you were just driving along at the same speed as you would usually then it feels safer.

[Leon]

In terms of understanding the nature of the relationship between our participants and their motorcycles this narrative serves as culmination of all of the previous insights that we have
gained. Our participants have described leery motorcycles that are equipped with the power and intent to kill. In detail they have described their experiences of investing time to ‘suss’ out and develop a ‘feel’ for each motorcycle. Ultimately, as Leon articulates, the relationship between our group of high-speed motorcyclists can be understood in terms of ‘respect’. In this group, respect means appreciating the immensity of the inherent power of these machines. Respect means understanding the time required to fully embody each motorcycle. Their goal here is to develop the bodily skills required to exert some degree of ‘control’ over each motorcycle. Upon reaching the top of material ladder, our participants comprehend that they can now longer constantly seek the performance limits of the machine:

People who go out there probably see themselves as a bit of Phooaw I could do that (race the Isle of Mann TT). But actually you’d never get anywhere near it because you’d not be good enough. But that's the thing you know. You get these bikes now and the bike is so much more advanced than the rider, the normal rider and yet they sell bikes on changing them and making them better each year. But actually for the like of me, there’s no point in giving me a bike like that because it’s just wasted. The one that's six or seven years old is still too fast for me

[Robert]

Robert explains how the process of constant technological advancement has resulted in the sale of motorcycles with capabilities that lie far beyond the riding capacities of the average leisure-time motorcyclist. Road fatality statistics would suggest that for every rider that has comprehended this point, there is another that will still seek out the performance limit of the motorcycle in their pursuit of the edgework experience (Lyng 1990). As Robert elaborates, market forces have created a marketplace that exhibits scant regard for the safety of its consumers.

Cracks me up! If the fastest speed limit is eighty miles per hour, why do we have bikes that can do one hundred and thirty miles per hour at a canter? Why are they selling bikes with this discrepancy between a speed limit of eighty miles per hour and a top speed of one hundred and eighty miles per hour? It's the elephant in the room. I don't know why but they get away with it don't they? It's the market that they are in. People will buy them. The law doesn't seem to take any notice of how fast that bike can actually go... It's like they turn a complete blind eye. We’ll set the speed limits at this but we won’t even ask how fast the bike can go. It doesn't make much sense. It really doesn’t! But it’s an industry isn’t it? It’s a compete industry and in fairness these things do bring a livelihood to a lot of people and you have to look at that side of it as well don’t you.

[Robert]

In this narrative Robert articulates the inherent contradictions between the institutional regulations that are placed upon individuals and the corresponding lack of marketplace regulation. Robert’s statement that is ‘the elephant in the room’ could not be any more apt. In this way we can comprehend the power of the marketplace, and its forces, in terms of its capacity to ensure that responsibility is solely placed upon the individual motorcyclist. Road safety strategies and advertising campaigns emphasise the personal responsibility of the rider
Previously our participants have clearly articulated the place of manufacturers and their designs in terms of carving out a distinct market segment that is, above all else, based upon the pursuit of speed. The reality of this situation has lead to a marketplace in which leisure-time motorcyclists can purchase road ready motorcycles that are capable of accelerating from zero to two hundred miles per hour in 5.4 seconds (Motorcycle News 2013). Manufacturers desires for product differentiation through continuous technological advancement are undoubtedly offered at the expense of rider safety.

Oh definitely, yeah. They want to win this. Honda wants to win this because it sells bikes. I bet you look at motorcycle news this week and I’ll bet you there’ll be an ad for a Fireblade in there. Saying how good it is and who rode it.

Robert explains that winning the Isle of Mann TT is an important goal for motorcycle manufacturers that are active in this particular market segment. To comprehend the impact of this event within the community, we must first understand that this illustrious event is raced on public roads that have all of the same hazards and obstacles that our participants face on a daily basis. Because of this the community can identify with the participating riders and the glory that is reaped upon them for sacrificing all. The worlds best and most fearless riders compete in this event and regularly sacrifice their lives for that privilege. In this way, manufacturers can use the event to tantalise leisure enthusiasts with the possibilities that their motorcycles afford in terms of experiencing the most chaotic intensity.

6.3 Hands on Work: Maintaining, Modifying, and Repairing Motorcycles

In this section we will re-orientate our analytic gaze by turning our attention to another key aspect of the relationship between our group and their motorcycles. In doing so we will examine how the hands on work of modifying, maintaining and repairing motorcycles also contributes to the relationships between motorcyclists and their machines. We will begin this enquiry with a review of narratives that detail our participants’ experiences of maintenance.

6.3.1 Maintaining Motorcycles

I was always into mechanical things. My brother used to mess around making lights and little boxes. For some reason I used to love making Meccano. That’s probably it really when you think about. I loved making switches and making motors. I just loved mechanical things. The
bike is the ultimate mechanical thing then. I think its kind of part of the hobby of it. Part of it is to take the time to do stuff like that. Look after it...It’s maybe not as good as driving it but it's still a big part of it. It’s like going back to the Meccano, its not just a thing to get you from A to B, its also like the thing itself like. It’s a two-way hobby like there’s the thing itself and then there’s the freedom that you get from the thing.

[Tom]

In this narrative, Tom traces his fascination with mechanical things back to his early childhood. Through his narrative, we can appreciate the role of material objects in terms of shaping particular embodied dispositions and sensibilities. Material objects, like Meccano, enabled Tom to develop an understanding of the fundamental principles of mechanics, while also enabling him to develop an embodied feel for working with mechanical objects. For Tom the motorcycle is the ‘ultimate mechanical thing’. This understanding allows us to comprehend an important additional aspect of motorcycling as a leisure activity. Throughout this enquiry we have understood the motorcycle predominantly in terms of its capacities to foster social and embodied experiences. But in this narrative, we see the motorcycle as an object in its own right and the maintenance of that object as an important aspect of the leisure-time experience of motorcycling.

I’ll definitely keep up the service on it and I’ll keep it clean. I’ll keep the chain tight; 'cause if the chain came off it I’d be in trouble and it happened me before. I was trying to get the last out of a chain ‘cause I didn’t have any money when I was on the Varedero. It just hopped off like and it got tangled in around and it locked up the wheel. I was lucky I wasn't killed. I was doing about sixty miles an hour. It marked all the swing arm. After that then I kind of looked after the chain. I make sure the wheel is tight. With the tubeless tires they don’t ever go flat. If you get a puncture you’ll know it will kind of stay hard. On the old Honda’s with the spoked wheels, if you get a blow out it was a big deal. They were really dangerous. You see these born again bikers buying these Royal Enfield’s. Some of them are death traps they wouldn’t have disk brakes or anything.

[Eoin]

From Eoin’s narrative we can appreciate the realities of financial restraints within the group. This lack of financial resources, in many ways, forced the group to engage with the mechanics of their motorcycles. In this narrative, we see some of the dangers that are associated with trying to get the last out of the motorcycles wearable parts. Through this experience Eoin realised the importance of maintaining the motorcycle. This point was stressed by all of the participants:

It's the valve clearances that you need to check because they just wear a bit and that's quite critical if you burn the valves out. Other than that it’s just change the oil and off you go. Break pads are the main thing; break pads, tyres and chains. Look after the engine. We change the oil after...It’s amazing the difference in the engine oil after... They’re durable things. They’re near enough bullet proof to be honest.

[Robert]

Like my bike now I know how to maintain it. I change the breaks myself. I do the oil myself. It’s not the kind of thing you learn unless you read about it or you’re shown how to do it I don’t
think. Because you could fuck it up I suppose, if you done it wrong... Mechanically again I serviced it I changed oil filters and breaks, chains, sprockets, fork-seals.

[Tom]

I did basic servicing say oil, filters, plugs, changing brake pads ... basic things like that. Like it was a fairly basic motorcycle. You couldn't kill it if you tried. Mechanically it was very basic. Like say the first time work had to be done on it my brother done it for me. But I watched it intently and I took in every word he said because my brother is very good with his hands and you can always know that you can trust every word he says because he’s been around long enough to know that these things can go wrong or keep an eye on that.

[Paddy]

These narratives evidence our participants’ engagement with the mechanical maintenance of their motorcycles. We see similarities in terms of the types of tasks that they are willing to take on. Once again we see the prominence of paternal figures in terms of passing on their material knowledge by way of instruction and demonstration (Lave and Wenger 1991). During my own experiences of participating within the group, I witnessed the group regularly coming together to share their knowledge for the purpose of solving mechanical problems (Orr 1996). Undoubtedly, these problem-solving rituals contributed to a sense of Communitas within the group (Turner 1969). In this way, we see how the materiality of the motorcycle also contributed to the sociality of the group. While group rides enabled group members to, at once, experience similar sensory and emotional embodied experiences. The hands on work, of twisting wrenches, turning screws and greasing chains enabled a different form of sociability. In the masculine setting of workshops and garages, amongst the pungent odours of petrol and oil, the group created their own ceremonies around the ritualised work of maintenance, modification and repair (Turner 1969). In this setting, our group created opportunities for experiencing being in the material world with motorcycles (Merleau-Ponty 1969).

And that also helps a lot with your confidence with the machine. ‘Cause you know, say for argument sake, you’re barrelling into a corner you’re thinking Oh SHIT, I mightn’t be able to stop here but then you think I know the brakes are right. I can push it that little bit harder; I know the tyres are good. Stuff like that does add to your confidence big time whereas if you’re just say now, I’ve seen some people and they buy a bike but they don’t do any maintenance on it whatsoever and when the thing goes pop they are sitting there thinking, ‘why the fuck did that happen’? ‘I thought this thing was bullet proof’, whereas clearly if they cared for the thing and looked after it so to speak then these things don’t happen. Some people wouldn’t be technically minded and I suppose it’s something that I enjoy doing as well.

[Paddy]

By engaging with the materiality of their machines with their hands, our participants were able to experience more intimate bonds of connection with their motorcycles. Knowing the motorcycle in this way embodied way allowed them to develop a deeper sense of connection, which also contributed to their confidence in pushing the motorcycle to its performance limits. But in this narrative, we can comprehend that this work was not just about pursuing the
edgework experience – our participants experienced pleasure when working on motorcycles for its own sake.

I think so yeah but I think it’s probably a false sense of security because there’s always something. You know you don’t know that you just ran over a fucking nail and your tyres going to blow out when you’re doing a hundred miles and hour. You know what I mean but at the same time it’s nice to know what’s been done and not that you’ve dropped it off to some fella in a garage and you don’t know what he’s after doing with it.

[Tom]

In speaking to the point of the material connection with the motorcycle and pursuit of the edgework experience Tom offers a perspective that differs something what from Paddy’s understanding. Tom reminds us that this connection may offer nothing more than a ‘false sense of security’ because of the unpredictability of the material environment in which edgework is performed. Tom highlights the consequences of riding over a nail, but other narratives have featured unpredictable bends, ice, oil, muck and also an unruly cat. Each of these material factors contributed to our participants going over the edge. In this way we come to understand that the material connection between the rider and the motorcycle is never enough to remove the uncertainty of operating in a constantly unfolding, and ultimately unpredictable material environment.

6.3.2 Modifying Motorcycles

I suppose some people would have consciously tried to make their bike different. You know it’s like modified cars. That something that some people were into you know, modifying the bike. Like with the small bikes that we all had then, there wasn't major things that you could do with them. Changing the exhaust was probably the biggest thing that you could do with them. That made the sound different and with the two strokes it made them faster. The standard exhaust has this sound like kinda as muffled as much as possible. They have the bike as quiet as it can possibly be, I don’t know for noise regulations or whatever. Usually like the first thing people change is the exhaust. They want it to sound louder or more like they want the bike to sound.

[Leon]

In this narrative Leon introduces us to the concept of motorcycle modification while also highlighting its significance within the group. In this example we see how the group members set about modifying the motorcycles exhaust system in order to alter the sound that the motorcycle emits. This modification also made a marginal difference to the top speed of the small NS1. But in this time period, where efforts were directed towards continually pushing the motorcycle to its limit, even minute advancements were highly sought after. In this narrative, we begin to see how modification provides the group with an opportunity to circumvent institutional regulations.
Yeah I remember the sound. I’d know it straight away. Every so often you’d hear one and even at 100 yards I know what the bike is and the exhaust that’s on it. The sound is an important part of it, 100%. The power pipe on the NSR gave it a kind of high pitched sound and it sounded a bit more aggressive than the standard one and its kind of like music I suppose. I definitely wanted the bike to sound more aggressive. Everyone was just mad into going fast back then like and I suppose it was all part and parcel of that. I suppose just the idea of having a better bike or a faster bike or a cooler bike than everyone else. That was what we all wanted. I suppose as well there was a few people that I hung around with an we all had the same bike and they all had power pipes on theirs. So I don’t know would I have been thinking that I had to be the same as them or maybe it was a bit of peer pressure. It’s hard to remember. You know though if everybody else had their bike modified and then you come along with your bike with everything standard than they’d be saying that Leon’s bike isn’t up to scratch you know it’s the standard.

Leon emphasises the significance of sound within the high-speed motorcycling experience.

To Leon the sound of an engine is memorable in the same way you can replay the sound of your favourite song in your head. But it is particularly interesting to consider how modification is used to alter the sensory experience and communicative potential of the motorcycle. In this way, we come to recognise that modification is important to our group in terms of its capacity to alter the symbolic and embodied meanings associated with the motorcycle (Hewer and Brownlie 2010). Furthermore, we see how modification relates to the construction of individual identity within the group (Wattanasuwan 2005). Leon uses modification to integrate into the group, while at the same time using it to individualise his identity within the group. On this basis we can recognise that modification can be, at once, used to fit in and stand out (Simmel 1957).

In Ireland celebrations of any kind, however big or small, usually inspire a ‘bit of a session’. Just like the birth of a baby the purchasing of a new motorcycle inspires a celebration, which involves the consumption of alcohol (and probably in copious amounts). In this narrative, the group appropriate a ritual usually reserved for newly made fathers in order to celebrate Tom’s new arrival. We see the group once again moving into unregulated material environments in
order to escape any restriction on their behaviour (de Certeau 1984). Unsurprisingly, the coming together of teenagers, alcohol, a field and a motorcycle results in disaster. But what’s interesting is the way that the consequences of these events bring the group closer together. The challenge of restoring the motorcycle, to its former glory, has a uniting effect upon the group. In this narrative, we see how the group create a further sense of ceremony around the practical hands on work of modification and repair (Turner 1969). This particular ritual allows the group to fuse the new motorcycle into their collective identity (Belk 1988). Once again we see the influence of paternal figures in terms of passing on their embodied knowledge of the materiality of motorcycles (Lave and Wenger 1991). But what is particularly interesting about this narrative is the innovative tactics employed by the group in order to circumvent any engagement with the marketplace (de Certeau 1984). Rather than lamenting the damage done, the group are excited by the possibility of working together on the motorcycle.

I didn’t maintain it properly so small little things kept building up until I was driving around on an absolute heap of shit. I can remember getting stopped by the guards and they thought that I had robbed it ... because it looked so bad. I remember someone offering to buy it off me for the fields ... At that stage I remember thinking holy shit I need to fix this up. I took it off the road then for about two weeks and stripped the whole thing down. I took off all the bodywork, took off the tank, took off the wheels, took off the clutch and the break levers, took off the indicators took off the registration plate ... The first thing I did was get the fairing sanded down and sprayed ... Metallic black and the same with the wheels I got them sprayed Kawasaki green. I wanted to do it like the Monster colours ... so like the monster energy drink racing colours I thought they would look good. I’d seen a bike before with similar colours so I wanted it to look something like that. So that was the plan initially when I took it off the road and that’s why I sprayed it black and green. I got the levers and the tank done as well. The levers matched the wheels ... when I got the fairing back I put the Monster stickers on them. I think after I got the monster stickers done I started to put the whole thing back together. I put the wheels back on and all of the bodywork back on and the levers ... and then I took off all of the indicators and put on new LED indicators. I took the two seats off 'cause they were grubby and I got them reupholstered and I changed the grips and put a new chain and sprocket on it ... and two new mirrors and a new front fairing ... I can’t even remember where I got that out of, but basically I had a brand new bike when I put it all back together.

[Leon]

Through this narrative, we can comprehend the significance of modification in terms of providing the motorcyclist with the capacity to refashion the motorcycle as a symbolic sign. In this example we how see Leon works with marketplace symbols to imbue the motorcycle with particular symbolic meanings. The energy drink company Monster sponsor high-octane sports such as: Formula 1, Moto GP, Drifting, WRC, and Motocross to name but a few. Through this example, we see that the company’s intended audience has successfully received and interpreted these symbolic communications. This understanding demonstrates the contrasting viewpoints between sign experimentation and sign domination (Murray 2002). Sign experimentation paints consumption as an unconstrained expressive act. The sign domination perspective refutes this claim, on the basis that all forms of symbolic expression
ultimately serve the marketplace. Leon’s narrative demonstrates the expressive qualities of modification, but in this example his expression is ultimately dominated by marketplace symbols.

The cost of the insurance was probably the same as what the bike was worth and I just paid out the ridiculous amount of money hoping that it would go down the next year. It was just something that I really wanted so I was happy enough to work and pay for the insurance. I didn't have any other expenses, I was living at home and it was me hobby as well. I was after paying out a stupid amount of money and I was delighted then to have it insured. It was getting into summer time and I set it up. I put a fucking car stereo in the back seat of it and I put a speaker under the back wheel but I hadn’t accounted for the fact that you need that space under the back wheel if you go over a bump. I had a prodigy CD and I had it blaring and I went down to Faithlegg and you know on the way to Faithlegg the way there’s a bump in the road and I ramped up and when I hit the ground the wheel hit the speaker and the speaker got ripped out and went all over the road But like I spent a load of time trying to fit a car stereo into a motorbike. Eventually I found out that you could put the speaker under the seat. It’s not my proudest moment Steve but I can't say I didn't do it.

[Tom]

In Tom’s narrative we are reminded of the practicalities of engaging in motorcycling as a leisure-time pursuit. Uniformly our participants engaged in work, from a young age, in order to secure the financial resources required to purchase motorcycles, equipment, and sometimes tax and insurance. This undertaking serves as a reminder of the centrality of consumption in our participant’s pursuit of this leisure activity. Furthermore, this narrative highlights the innovative modification strategies employed by the participants in terms of altering the embodied experience of motorcycling. This narrative highlights the practice of *bricolage*, which de Certeau (1984) uses to explain the ways in which consumers become transformed into active producers. Here we see an example of Tom, inventing and appropriating new ways of making and doing with the cultural objects that have been handed down to him by the marketplace. In a similar manner Leon describes the modification process of de-restriction, which the participants engaged in order to resist institutional regulations that limit the power of 250cc motorcycles for learner drivers.

So you just had to bring your bike to a mechanic and get your bike fitted. Basically what he did was fit four little pieces of metal into the carbu rettor and that restricted the flow of petrol going into the bike. So that cut the power of the bike from 43-break horsepower back down to 33. After he did that the mechanic would give you an official cert to say that the bike was restricted. You sent that off to the insurance company then and they were happy then. But all of the lads just removed it themselves then straight away after. So they had the piece of paper to say that they were covered to drive the bike and that the bike was restricted but really the restriction had been removed. I removed the restriction kit as soon as it went into it. It was doing my head in. So I just took off the petrol tank, took off the air box, took the tops off the carburettors and then you could just see the four washers there sitting inside the carburettor and it was just a case of lifting them out and then put the bike back together. Most people did the same because the people that had these bikes had them because they were fast, faster than the rest of the bikes their size. That was why people bought them in the first place...So you know obviously they weren’t happy with their bikes being slower than they had been so people just removed them.

[Leon]
In this narrative we find further evidence of the group’s capacity for improvisation in relation to the materiality of the motorcycle. This narrative demonstrates the group’s capacity to refashion the embodied experience of motorcycling (this time in relation to speed). But what is perhaps more pertinent in this example is the way that the group take on ‘wily’ and ‘cunning’ tactics of improvisation in order to resist institutional road-safety strategies (de Certeau 1984). In this particular example our participants can be understood as adept poachers, in the sense that they employ modification practices in order to ensure access to the performance limits of their machines.

6.3.3 Repairing Motorcycles

As it went on with that bike I pretty much replaced all of the parts. I took everything apart and he helped. I learned a lot from that and from him. We replaced the cylinder head and the piston one time and he showed us the tricks like. You needed to make a tool to get the piston back in with the rings. The tool was a piston compressor. I wouldn’t of known how to do it unless he was there to help us do it and explain. We knew very little at that stage. The tool is basically just a flat piece of stainless steel or something like that. So you’ve got your piston with the two rings that stick out and you just need something to hold the rings in so you can slip it back into the cylinder. You wrap it around the rings to keep the rings tightened and slide the cylinder down. So he got a piece of flat galvanised steel and made it the shape by bending into place so that we could put the piston back in. That was later on I think after I’d revved the shit out of the bike and it had to have a new piston put in… Because my father was a fitter he would never of really wanted. You know he’d be saying why would you bring it into that fella when we can do it. That kinda thing. He’d never pay a mechanic because he could do it and he would have done it back in his early years.

[Tom]

Consistently riding motorcycles at the limit of their performance capacities exerts a lot of pressure upon the mechanics of the motorcycle (particularly ones with smaller engine capacities). Because of their riding style, the group frequently encountered mechanical problems. In this vein, Tom explains that he ‘pretty much replaced all of the parts’ on his Honda NS1. Once again, we see the influence of paternal figures in terms of passing on their mechanical knowledge. But what’s interesting here is the idea of passing on the ‘tricks’ of this trade. Putting a piston with its rings back into a cylinder is tricky work for the hands. It requires dexterity and an embodied understanding of how each object should be held and manoeuvred such that the piston slots back into the cylinder with the piston rings remaining in their correct position. This understanding once again evidences the distinction between cognitive knowledge and embodied understanding, and the significance of the later to motorcyclists. It is unlikely that a repair manual would have provided enough insight for this task to be completed successfully by a first timer (Orr 1996). Tom’s father’s ability and willingness to fashion a specific tool for the task demonstrates his capacity to use his embodied knowledge to shape the material world to his advantage. Consumer culture
increasingly seeks to disengage consumers from this type of hands on work with consumption objects (Dant 2004). Here we see the group as, bricoleurs, devising innovative ways of making and doing. In these moments, they are transformed from passive consumers to active producers (de Certeau 1984). As Tom explains his fathers work as fitter influenced his attitudes and capacities for this type of work. Over a lifetime he developed embodied skills that allowed him to experience a degree of self-sufficiency in terms of his engagement with the material world. This type of hands on work was also valued in Tom’s family, which we have seen illustrated in Tom’s narratives when he was given Meccano as a child and encouraged to play with switches and motors. In these ways, Tom also developed a capacity to use his hands to great effect. He has since become an electrician and a motorcyclist capable of carrying out most repair tasks independently.

I always kind of dreamed that when I was an old man I would resurrect it in the garage in my house. I could picture myself bringing it back to life bit by bit. Kind of a Frankenstein effort. I think 'cause we went so many places together I always felt like I couldn’t sell it. Plus it was my first so that was kind of important to me. Even when she was really busted up I didn’t want to get rid of her. Eventually about a year ago I had to give in. I was getting too much hassle trying to store it. I sold it to a bike breaker. I heard that he got it running perfectly and it looked like new. Fucking hell I was sickened. I couldn’t believe that fucker could bring her back and he didn’t even know her.

[John]

In many ways John’s narrative gets to the essence of the relationship between the motorcyclist and the motorcycle. We see the motorcycle as a material object that affords the participants pleasurable time. We see this evidenced in John’s daydreams about bringing the motorcycle ‘back to life bit by bit’ (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). This example is noticeably distinct from the pleasure that the participants find in the heights of the edgework experience. In this fantasy, the motorcycle features as a material object that allows John to claim back contemplative time (Carù and Cova 2003, Manzini 2001). As opposed to the intensity of edgework, the motorcycle also provides access to a less intense form of experience that involves creative production. Throughout this section, the participants have clearly articulated the pleasure that they enjoy through these experiences. They find pleasure in developing these intimate and embodied relationships through working on their motorcycles. The emotional relationship is strengthened through these practices of maintenance, modification and repair. We can appreciate the depth of these relationships in Tom’s fantasy, which centres on restoring life to the machine. Tom feels physically sick when he hears that somebody else had performed this feat by working intimately on ‘his’ machine. Although, his story telling maybe be somewhat tongue in cheek he seems distraught that somebody else could handle the motorcycle in this way.
We got it then and I was like a child at Christmas but the only disappointing thing was I couldn't drive it that day 'cause we had to load it up on the trailer 'cause so to speak it wasn't even road worthy. So we had to bring it on home with the trailer and father was driving and he wouldn't be the quickest driver but I was just saying 'go easy Pat, go easy Pat'. So got her home up on the bench and she basically started being dismembered. My brother was going through relationship trouble at the time and he at the time I had to go off and do other things. He said he'd prick around with it for the day. The thing couldn't even start but we knew that it would be good enough 'cause it had good compression but it just wasn't turning over but we knew that the engine was fairly sound in it. He rang me about an hour and a half later; that yolk is running. I said; what you do? I charged the battery, just drained the carbs and put fresh juice in it and I said she's grand now not a bother on it. But in fairness when we put a bit of juice in the battery she would run. We knew that it was there.

In this narrative, we gain further evidence of the emotions associated with motorcycle consumption. On many occasion we have seen how this emotional attachment causes the group to imbue motorcycles with human characteristics and qualities. Throughout this enquiry we have seen the participants engage in process of anthropomorphism and animism. Doing so enables the participants to animate their motorcycle with life like characteristics. But universally, our participants have applied feminine pronouns when speaking about their motorcycles. Guthrie (2007) argues that sex-based distinctions are amongst the most important in terms of understanding human relations – these distinctions are simply too powerful to limit to humans. He further argues that 'if we see the self as a dramatic effect and an image cast by arrangements, then we need not limit it to the bodies of persons, but may attribute it in other entities as well’. For Guthrie, the gendering of objects can be partly understood in relation to the design and shape of the object. He argues this point through the example of the masculine wine bottle and the feminine wine glass. But looking to the design and shape of the motorcycle, it is difficult to identify a unity of prominent features that would lead to an appropriate gender based classification. On this basis, I venture to argue that it is the nature of the intimate relationship between the rider and the motorcycle that leads our participants to feminise the motorcycle. The participants clearly want to bring this object to life, but it is hard to imagine them describing their relationship with the motorcycle using male pronouns. Perhaps due to the prominence of machismo within motorcycling culture generally (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), the participants feel more comfortable speaking about their intimate, sensual and oftentimes tender relationship with a ‘her’. In this narrative, we see evidence that the motorcycle, as an object, also provides escape from the strains of everyday life. In times of ‘trouble’, the unique material environment of garages and workshops provide a retreat from everyday life. In previous narratives we have understood this pleasurable experience as a social ritual but both in this narrative and the one previous we see manual work as an individual experience that provides respite.
6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we gained insight into our participants experiences of being in the world with motorcycles. This perspective allowed us to view and make sense of the complex relationship shared between the group and their motorcycles. For the group, consuming motorcycles is unique in the sense that the motorcycle provides access to a lasting pleasurable experience, when so many other consumption objects come up short. In this chapter, we have witnessed the participants experiencing a gamut of emotions both for and through their motorcycles. Frequently, we observed the participants imbuing their motorcycles with a range of life like characteristics. At different times, the motorcycle appeared as a puppy, a beast, a jealous lover, Frankenstein and also a would-be murderer. Through these expressions the participants breathe life into an, otherwise, inanimate object. In these stories, the participants allowed us to see the depth of the emotional connection that they feel for their motorcycles.

This enquiry also yielded significant insight into the nature of the relationship between our participants and their motorcycles. In charting the participants’ progressions through the ranks of motorcycle ownership we were able to see how the materiality of motorcycles structured their experiences and careers as high-speed motorcyclists. In the beginning, as teenagers, we witnessed the participants approach their first motorcycles without fear. But misadventure taught the participants to be more cautious of the motorcycle and its power. These experiences influenced a sounding out period of getting to know the motorcycle. By taking the time to embody these material objects, the participants began to experience a sense of control over these motorcycles. After taking the time to embody the motorcycle, the participants described the deep sense of connection that they experienced with their motorcycles. In narratives addressing the rider motorcycle assemblage (Dant 2004), we witnessed a blurring of the boundary between the consuming body and the consumption object. In this assemblage, we saw the bulk of the riders’ body becomes transplanted into the motorcycle. Moreover, we observed the material make up of the motorcycle and its influence on embodied experience of riding. The Honda NS1 facilitated a riding style that was about ‘getting the body down in the clock’ and ‘reddening it’. After some time, the participants began driving these motorcycles to the edge of their performance limits. A number of factors influenced the participants’ decisions to move onto a bigger motorcycle: the adrenaline wearing off, losing the buzz, pressure to keep up, and safety concerns related to continuously riding at the performance limit.
The CBR250 was ‘the next step up from the same manufacturer’, and the groups experiences of this progression brought the assemblage back into the fore. At the outset, the participants expressed apprehension, caution, and fear in relation to the motorcycle and its inherent power. In this regard, they described a ‘whole new learning curve…to be able to learn control’. This learning curve involved, once again, orientating their bodies to the motorcycle (instruments, handling, weight etc.), while also becoming accustomed to the sensations that the assemblage produced. In these narratives, the participants frequently attributed varying degrees of agency to their machines. In these circumstances we understand agency, not in the sense of intentionality, but in the sense of the interactive relation experienced between rider and motorcycle (Dant 2004). In the assemblage, there is action and reaction between the rider and the motorcycle. In this chapter, we came to recognise the significance of the material in terms of structuring our participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. Importantly, we have witnessed the formation of the assemblage as an important precursor to the participants’ pursuing the edgework experience. Once again, after the formation of the assemblage, the participants were back riding at the edge of the motorcycles performance limit. But eventually the buzz of ‘being able to go one hundred and twenty miles and hour…wor[e] off’ and decisions were made to yet again purchase more powerful motorcycles.

In their narratives, the participants described a marked difference in relation to the material make up of these powerful motorcycles and the embodied experience that they provide. At the top-tier of motorcycle ownership, the participants experienced lasting feelings of ‘immense power’. From this vantage point, the participants consciously acknowledged that the capacities of these immensely powerful machines were far greater than their own. For the first time, the participants’ acknowledged a satiation in their desires to seek the intense high of the edgework experience (Lyng 1990). The embodied feeling of immense power experienced through these assemblages, to an extent, lessened the desire to seek similar feelings through edgework. Ultimately, in this chapter, our participants’ relationships with motorcycles can be characterised in terms of respect. Time and time again, this was demonstrated in narratives that acknowledge the power of the motorcycle and the necessity of investing time in order to embody the motorcycle and gain a sense of control.

As we have seen previously the motorcycle enables the participants to experience an intense range of sensations and emotions. But by focusing our attention specifically on the materiality of the motorcycle, we learned that motorcycling is ‘a two-way hobby…there’s the thing itself and then there’s the freedom you get from the thing’. This understanding allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of motorcycling as a leisure time experience. In this way, we learned about the participants’ inclination towards mechanical things, with ‘the bike being the
ultimate material thing’. In this regard, we saw an alternative range of experiences as they arose in the hands-on work of maintenance, modification and repair. This focus allowed us to make sense of the importance of these practices in terms of the sociability of the group. We observed the ritualization of these practices and their subsequent importance in terms of opening up communal spaces to be in the world with motorcycles. In this way, the practices of maintenance, repair and modification invariably contributed to a sense of Communitas within the group (Turner 1969).

On numerous occasions we identified the prominence of paternal figures in terms of passing on material knowledge of the motorcycle through practices of observation, instruction and demonstration (Lave and Wenger 1991). Importantly, we also saw how these practices enabled the group to circumvent engagements with the marketplace. Moreover, we also saw how the group employs a range of innovative tactics to resist institutional strategies orientated towards limiting their behaviour. These tactics enabled the group to, at times, transform their status from consumer to active producer (de Certeau 1984). This focus also provided insight into the significance of these practices in terms providing the participants with opportunities that enabled them to form a more intimate connection with their motorcycles. For our participants, this intimate connection was important in terms of developing the confidence required to engage in high-speed motorcycling. In this sense we can comprehend the significance of maintenance, repair and modification in the formation of the assemblage. This chapter comprehensively underscores the centrality of the material dimensions of motorcycling in the participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides an opportunity to discuss the findings of this research. This discussion will be structured around the key research questions. I will work across the previous empirical chapters in order to compile insights. Where relevant, I will also highlight connections to our previous literature reviews and discuss points of similarity, difference and contention. The aim here is to work across the breath of the thesis to comprehensively address our research questions.

After each discussion, I will detail how the findings of this thesis can be used to make contributions to consumer culture theory. First, I will detail how this study contributes to understandings of motorcycling culture within CCT. In outlining this contribution I make comparisons between findings from this research and Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption. Second, I will detail how this study contributes to understandings of experience within CCT. By making connections to previous CCT research on the consuming body and consumption experiences, I will demonstrate the significance of our findings in relation to embodied consumption experiences. Third, I will detail how this study contributes to understandings of materiality within CCT. To achieve this end, I will first demonstrate that consumption objects in CCT are primarily understood in terms of their symbolic properties. On this basis, I will demonstrate the significance of our findings in terms of the embodied relationships that develop between consumers and consumption objects.

7.2 An Alternative Understanding of Motorcycling Culture: Identity, Communitas, and Authenticity

Our previous review of motorcycling-related literature indicated the significance of identity within motorcycling culture generally (Alford and Ferriss 2008; Austin et al. 2010; Hebdige 1979). In particular, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnographic account of the North American HDSC detailed the importance of identity, communitas and authenticity. On this basis, our first research question was orientated towards exploring the resonance of these concepts within a group of Irish motorcyclists. This enquiry yielded significant insight into the nature of identity within this group of high-speed motorcyclists. Participants’ narratives
brought us back to the group’s earliest memories of motorcycling. We learned about the significant influence of paternal figures and their stories of freedom, danger, and adventure. Through these stories, these paternal figures influenced the participants in terms of their burning desires to one day become motorcyclists themselves. By casting themselves as protagonists in these heroic tales, paternal figures inculcated the participants with a distinctive image of the type of motorcyclists that they should become (Holbrook 1982; Bruner 1986).

But beyond their storytelling, paternal figures also opened up pathways for the participants to experience motorcycling and its culture whilst still at a very young age. Being privy to motorcycling culture in these formative years undoubtedly had an influence in terms of their desires to become motorcyclists themselves. In narrative accounts they recalled their burgeoning desires to become motorcyclists, describing it as ‘the bug’. At times this compulsion took over the entirety of their being. Leon described how he became overawed by incessant daydreams, which he claims prevented him from concentrating on his schoolwork (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Uniformly the participants engaged in part-time work, whilst still at school, in order to secure the financial resources required to purchase their first motorcycles. Paddy detailed his experiences of saving all of his money so that he could put it into motorcycling, while the rest of his friends were spending theirs on ‘drinking their brains out’. In these regards, we can understand the sacrifices that the group were prepared to make in order to ensure that they could become high-speed motorcyclists.

Based on these formative experiences of motorcycling culture, from the outset, the participants had a keen understanding of the type of motorcycling identities that they wanted to create. While still in school, they first set about defining their own identities as motorcyclists. From the beginning, they understood that they could use consumption to build the identities that they so fervently desired (Belk 1988; Wattanasuwan 2005). Through their narratives we learned about how the participants used consumption ‘to stand out’ from other motorcyclists. They were keen to distinguish themselves from those that ‘used the bike as a go between’ because ‘they didn’t seem like they were really interested in the bikes’. The decision to purchase Honda NS1s opened up a realm of motorcycling possibilities, which enabled them to feel like they were on a different path than others. The group wanted to experience speed and this particular motorcycle provided that opportunity. But they also wanted to ‘have a little one up on the people [their] ages that had bikes’. So the group was established in the understanding ‘that they were the type of people that were going to have
bikes for years’. In this way the group began to create a communal identity (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Cova 1997; Kates 2002).

But beyond this initial understanding of their communal identity, we also learned about how individuals used consumption to create individual identities within the group. Individual identities were created around subtle differences, ‘like a sticker or a different exhaust… [just] something that made the bikes theirs’. Essentially the group engaged in these practices of modification to display their penchant for and understanding of the speed aesthetic, but also to improve their machines’ performance capabilities in order to display their riding prowess (Alford and Ferriss 2008). The participants used their consumption choices to embed their motorcycles with symbolic meanings (Hebdige 1979; Schouten 1991; Wattanasuwan 2005) and their motorcycles became a part of their extended selves (Belk 1988).

After the microcosm of school, the group began operating within the context of a much larger motorcycling community. This community included a myriad of different groups, each of which embraced alternative visions of motorcycling (Outlaws, Harley Davison enthusiasts, Pan-Europeans, Street Fighters, High-Speed Motorcyclists, Born Again Bikers). Within this context, the participants encountered other groups that were just as enthusiastic and committed as them. In this sense, it was no longer sufficient to rely on the notion that they were real bikers solely on the basis of their commitment. In this transition they moved from a context in which their Honda N1s were the fastest, to a larger scene in which these motorcycles carried little, if any, cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Within this context, the group quickly tired of these motorcycles.

Leon identified the Honda CBR250 as ‘the next step up’, and he was prepared to pay the exorbitant costs involved in insuring it. One by one, the group began progressing to 250cc motorcycles. The group was moving on and internally there was a pressure to keep up. They described the CBR as a ‘real motorbike’, while explaining that the NS1 now seemed ‘more like toy’. Through these consumption choices, the group set about re-establishing their identities as high-speed motorcyclists within the context of the overall local motorcycling scene. After purchasing his Honda CBR Paddy recalled how he felt like his one was nicer than everyone else’s and he was back ‘feeling like Jack the fucking lad’.

In making the transition to the Honda CBR, the group could once again re-establish speed as the core component of their motorcycling identity. Importantly, we learned about how the transition to these more powerful motorcycles necessitated a re-orientation of the participants’ motorcycling bodies. In this regard, we were able to identify the significance of embodied
skills and techniques within the group (Bourdieu 1984). As a group, learning to embody a series of complex riding skills was essential in terms of the pursuit to establish themselves as high-speed motorcyclists. According to Dant and Wheaton (2007, n.p), ‘acquiring the bodily skill is also an induction into a community or sub-culture of those who share the skill; the sub-culture, which may have other features, will take the embodied ability as a key feature common to its members’. Similarly, in this study we observed the participants investing time and effort to develop the skills that would enable them to establish themselves as high-speed motorcyclists.

On an individual basis, the participants set about perfecting particular skills that would define them within the group. For example, Paddy focused on getting his knee down, while Leon concentrated on learning to wheelie. In this regard, we come to recognise the importance of embodied capital within this group of high-speed motorcyclists (Bourdieu 1984; Dant and Wheaton 2007). Although it was not explicitly conferred or openly displayed, the embodiment of particular skills provided a route to attaining status within the group. In contrast, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) described a motorcycling subculture in which status was openly conferred and visibly displayed on the basis of commitment to the HDCS ethos. Our group of high-speed motorcyclists appeared to be uninterested in creating any kind of formal structure within the group. This understanding once again contrasts with the HDSC, which enacted strict top down hierarchies on this basis of commitment to the ethos and erected boundaries to separate insiders from outsiders (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

In this study we identified the group not just as high-speed motorcyclists but also as edgeworkers (Lyng 1990, 2004, 2005). This understanding was central in terms of enabling us to unpick central characteristics of their identities. We observed the group’s history of partaking in various risky activities and recognised the significance of risk in the participants’ lives. The group understood risk as a part of the ‘human competitive spirit’. At times the group articulated this capacity as an innate survival skill (Lyng 2004), which allowed them to overcome fear and remain focused in the most intense moments. The group differentiated themselves from other motorcyclists on the basis of this capacity to recognise the edge. Based on this capacity and past experiences of successfully negotiating the edge, on occasion, the group articulated an elitist sense of their identities as motorcyclists. With the untimely death of a group member the participants were forced to fully contemplate their identities as high-speed motorcyclists. This epiphanic experience was recognised as a major turning point, which invariably left a mark on their lives (Denzin 1992). In facing their greatest challenge the group were forced to contemplate their futures as high-speed motorcyclists. In these moments of adversity, we recognised the full significance of high-speed motorcycling in the
participants’ lives. Because of the significance of their prior investments, the participants found themselves unable to give up on their identities as high-speed motorcyclists. We demonstrated that the group’s decision to continue as high-speed motorcyclists was born out of a desire to continue to experience life to its fullest (Campbell 1987; Holbrook 1997). For the group ‘not responding to the lure of motorcycling [would] mean a wasted life’ (Bellaby and Lawrenson 2001, p.375).

As high-speed motorcyclists the group ultimately found meaning and established identity in those most intense moments, which they experienced when they were closest to the edge (Lyng 1990). In these moments, they reconnected with an impulsive self that was instantaneous and self-directed (Turner 1976). It was in these moments that high-speed motorcycling enabled them to experience the sense of escape that they so desperately desired. In the intensity, these high-speed motorcyclists identified with a “real self” that was revealed in moments ‘of uninhibited behaviour, emotional outbursts, [and] spontaneous expression’ (Lyng 1990, p. 864).

‘Ritual is a specific behaviour or activity which gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of the actor(s), individually or in a group’ (Rando 1985, p. 236). Rituals are predefined ways of behaviour, which enable people to relate to particular life experiences and to establish and instil meaning into those experiences. Rituals contribute to a sense of *communitas* within groups, in the sense that they enable insiders to distinguish themselves from outsiders (Shabanowitz 2013). In our enquiry, we learned about the significance of social rituals in terms of the development of a sense of *communitas* within the motorcycling community. We saw the motorcycling community coming together to mark the passing of Paddy’s uncle, who had been an active member within the community throughout his life. Rituals related to death are perhaps the most enduring because they assist us in the difficult task of making sense of death (Shabanowitz 2013). Belk *et al.* (1989, p.7) explains that ‘like sacrifice, ritual prepares one to approach the sacred and may be enacted as an individual or, more commonly, as a group. Ritual surrounds the contact of profane persons with the sacred’.

The large procession of motorcyclists leading the hearse, served to sacralise this important journey in a way that was deeply rooted in motorcycling culture. As a symbolic act the guard of honour carried significant meanings, which the community may have otherwise found difficult to communicate. At this difficult time Paddy found solace in the display of unity offered by the community.

In our enquiry, we also observed the group creating rituals to celebrate the arrival of a new motorcycle. The participants described this ritualised experience as a type of ceremony. The
ritualisation and celebration demonstrates the significance of this consumption activity within the group. Through this ceremonious act, the group created an opportunity to fuse this new motorcycle into the group’s collective identity (Belk 1988). Belk et al. (1989) explain that anything can become sacred when we understand sacredness as a process of investment. In this sense, this ceremony enabled the group to invest significant meaning into this otherwise profane object. The ceremony of the bike, demonstrated the group engaging in ritualistic practices in order to sacralise the new motorcycle. The new motorcycle becomes de-commodified, as they embrace it and infuse it into the collective identity of the group. This ritualistic ceremony contributed to a sense of *communitas* within the group, while also paving the way for Tom to develop a meaningful relationship with his new motorcycle.

After damaging the new motorcycle in the initiation ceremony, the group came together to ‘fix up the bike and that was the next ceremony’. With the help of Tom’s father, the group set about returning the bike to its former glory. During these interactions with their machines, we witnessed the group opening up an entirely gendered space in their garages and workshops. Mellström (2004, p.370) argues such ritualised practices of tinkering are ‘often part of what it means to be a man; it is part of a masculine script in many different contexts (Mellström 2003b)... Technology has often been an essential part of many men’s upbringings as boys and connects closely to definitions of what is masculine and what is not. Crucial for such identification is the early socialisation with and the embodiment of different machines and technological knowledge and the pleasures derived from this. Such tinkering pleasures are generally codified as masculine’. In the case of the group, the ritualisation of maintenance, modification and repair practices exemplifies how masculine bonds are mediated through engagement with the material world of motorcycles. Mellström (2004) argues that the pleasures found in rituals of tinkering are culturally connected to notions of masculinity and power, which subsequently contributes to the dominance of the former in the world of technology.

Throughout this enquiry, we gained insight into the broad range of different groups that make up the motorcycling community in Ireland. From their vantage point as high-speed motorcyclists, the group provided a rich contextualisation of life within this community. Noticeably, the participants’ narratives contained significant references to Harley Davidson enthusiasts. From the outset it was clear that the group had very little understanding of the Harley ethos. They admitted their failures in grasping the core concepts of this group and subsequently they found it difficult to articulate its appeal. But significantly they were clear in the understanding that there is a ‘division between the Harley Davidson type driver and sports bikes and street fighters’. In this division we identified a departure from the mythologised
image of the North American outlaw biker. This understanding became crystallised in the negative responses that the group offered in relation to the Harley Davidson group. The group were unenthusiastic about a version of motorcycling that they felt was more concerned with drinking and spinning from pub to pub than actually riding. Based on insights gained in Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) research, it could be argued that the group held a limited understanding of the Harley Davidson approach to motorcycling. But their viewpoint is nonetheless significant for us because it allows us to grasp the battle for authenticity that exists within this motorcycling community.

In terms of this battle for authenticity, the group chose to denigrate the Harley enthusiasts based upon their own interpretations of their riding style. From the group’s perspective, Harley enthusiasts were certainly more into ‘slogging around’ than ‘driving quickly’. Our group used this distinction to demarcate, what they understood as a significant distinction between the two groups. Like the Rockers before them, this distinction in riding style became a cornerstone of the group’s claims for authenticity within the motorcycling community (Alfrord and Ferriss 2008). Within the context of the overall motorcycling community, this understanding provides further insights into why the group chose to embrace speed as their defining characteristic.

Notably the participants recalled their first-hand experiences of the hostility that exists between high-speed motorcyclists and Harley enthusiasts. Although they rode in on motorcycles, the group were immediately identified as outsiders when they attended an open day at the local Harley Davidson dealership. In their narrative accounts this hostility reverberated around differences in aesthetic tastes related to motorcycle design (Hebdige 1979; Pugliese and Cagan 2002; Alford and Ferriss 2008). Significantly, Eoin remarked that this would never have happened at a road-racing event. Paddy’s experience of being snubbed by a group of Harley enthusiasts after crashing his motorcycle invariably left a sour taste in his mouth. Paddy interpreted this gesture (or lack thereof) as an illustration of ‘the difference in class between bikers’. From my experiences of participation within the community, I know that motorcyclists commonly share a sense of connection through their passing salutes. In culmination the participants’ recollections of these events, serve to exemplify the tensions that exist between these two groups.

In summary, we can conclude that the distinctions that exist between these two groups of motorcyclists are deeply entrenched in notions of aesthetic style (Hebdige 1977), approaches to riding (Alfrord and Ferriss 2008), and the dynamics of group formation (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). These culturally specific differences allow us to identify the significance
of the other in terms of carving out a distinct space within this motorcycling community (de Certeau 1984). For our group of high-speed motorcyclists, Harley enthusiasts provide an essential reference point, which the group use to construct a sense of their own identities within the community (Hebdige 1979). In this sense, the group need the Harley enthusiasts because they allow them to carve out an identity on the basis of distinction (Bourdieu 1984). On this basis, the group’s identity contains meanings that are culturally significant within the context of the overall motorcycling community. We can understand, then, that consumption choices are central not only in terms of the group creating a sense of self (Belk 1988; Schouten 1991; Wattanasuwan 2005), but also in terms of the group locating themselves in relation to others within the community (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Cova 1997; Kates 2002).

Perhaps most significantly this enquiry has revealed a more fluid understanding of authenticity within motorcycling culture. In contrast to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) monolithic and homogenous subculture of consumption, within this motorcycling community authenticity is an active site of contestation and dispute (Kates 2002; Thornton 2013). Throughout this enquiry we have demonstrated the complex and oftentimes varied nature of motorcycling culture, and in doing so we have been able to provide a representation of motorcycling culture that does not solely rely upon the lure of the outlaw.

7.2.1 Contributions to Understandings of Motorcycling Culture in CCT

Our previous outline of the historical development of motorcycling culture demonstrated that the (his)story of motorcycling is predominantly developed from a North-American viewpoint (Phillips 2005; Maynard 2008; Austin et al. 2010). From this perspective, we outlined the historical events and cultural influences that inspired the development of the influential outlaw motorcycling identity. We also identified that academic understandings of motorcycling culture have, for the most part, emanated from subcultural accounts that examine the ways in which groups of outlaw motorcyclists organise to oppose mainstream values (Hooper and Moore 1983; Quinn 1983; Harris 1985). We identified similarities between this body of research and Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnographic investigation of North-American Harley-Davidson bikers.

There can be no doubt that Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) work has had a lasting impact on CCT. Arguably, the most significant contribution from their work is the understanding that consumption can be a central organising force in facilitating communal interaction. Furthermore, their research powerfully illustrates that consumption can be used as
a means of maintaining boundaries of access within consumption communities. This contribution sparked a fervent conversation, which debated the nature of communal interaction and the ensuing communal dynamics in a range of consumption communities (Cova 1997; Cova and Cova 2001; Kozinets 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). This conversation was later designated as a founding pillar of the CCT project (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In this regard, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) paper maintains a seminal resonance within CCT. But importantly this study demonstrates that it provides just a single representation of motorcycling culture.

Although Schouten and McAlexander (1995) set out to deepen our understanding of motorcycle culture by turning away from the outlaw identity, it is clear that their study remained heavily focused on this stereotypical representation. To a large extent the subgroup that they choose to examine was constructed on the basis of its adherence to this stereotype. Their research serves to further this stereotype because it offers an understanding of a motorcycling identity that is constructed in the likeness of the outlaw. In many ways the HDSC, is merely a diluted version of the outlaw identity that is commodified and made palatable for more mainstream consumers. Although Schouten and McAlexander (1995) claim to uncover a more complex social structure than the hierarchical structure found in outlaw clubs, to a large extent, their research further promotes the notion that motorcycling cultures are predominantly based on this strict top-down structure.

In their investigation we learned about the significance of status within groups and between groups within the overall Harley community. Within these groups status was conferred on the basis of adherence to the HDSC ethos and also on perceived levels of authenticity. Across the Harley community, subgroups attained status in the very same ways. In their attempts to embody this ethos, aspirants were judged on the basis of their adherence to principles of personal freedom, American heritage and machismo. In this regard, status could be achieved by those capable of embodying these principles and performing them for the audience. Within the HDSC status was formally conferred through the provision of in-group ranking systems. Group members visibly displayed their status by wearing patches and other symbolic devices. Subgroups erected symbolic boundaries to protect themselves from outsiders. Similar to previous understandings of outlaw clubs, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) investigation of the HDSC puts forward a vision of a monolithic subculture, which leaves little room for variation, difference or exceptions to its rules.

In terms of contributing to our understanding of motorcycling culture, this study provided a novel account of the daily lives of a group of high-speed motorcyclists in Ireland. In terms of
difference, the group openly articulated their disdain for the formalised structure and rigid rules that Harley enthusiasts adhere to. While Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) study evidenced the significance of performing a version of the outlaw identity, our group emphasised the significance of performing motorcycling. On this basis, the mythologised image of the outlaw biker found little resonance with our group of high-speed motorcyclists. Within the group, the participants attained a sense of status by embodying a kinaesthetically complex range of particular riding skills. In this sense the group prioritised embodied capital (Bourdieu 1984; Dant 2006), while the HDSC built a formalised structure around their symbolic capital. Significantly, our group refrained from formally conferring or openly displaying status in their personal appearances. While the HDSC created their identities around the values of personal freedom, American Heritage and machismo, our group continued to define themselves on the basis of their capacities to perform high-speed motorcycling. The participants admitted their failures in terms of grasping the allure of Harley-Davidsons’ Americanised vision of motorcycling. As high-speed motorcyclists, the group identified with a vision of motorcycling culture that emanates from a long lineage of successful Irish road racers. Consequently, they built their identities around the notions of speed, adrenaline and personal bravery.

On this basis, it becomes possible to argue for a less rigid understanding of the dynamics of authenticity within motorcycling culture. In contrast to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) monolithic and homogenous subculture of consumption, this study reveals authenticity as an active site of contestation and dispute (Kates 2002; Thornton 2013). We can also argue that Schouten and McAlexander (1995) arrived at this monolithic structure because they failed to question or problematise the notion of authenticity within motorcycling culture. Because of this oversight, it seemed predetermined that authenticity would continue to be framed in relative terms to the outlaw. Although Schouten and McAlexander (1995) set out to deepen our understanding of motorcycling identity and community in many ways it seems likely that their study may have had quite the opposite effect. This study contributes to CCT by providing an alternative understanding of this culture.

In contrast to previous motorcycling studies in CCT, the theoretical and methodological approaches developed in this study enabled us to understand that motorcycling culture should not be separated from the embodied experience of motorcycling and the materiality of motorcycles. This approach enabled us to comprehensively demonstrate a range of physical, sensual and emotional experiences to which motorcyclists are drawn.
7.3 The Embodied Experiences of High Speed Motorcycling

7.3.1 Sensory Ethnographic Accounts: An Introduction to the Multi-Sensory Nature of High-Speed Motorcycling.

In an effort to explore the multi-sensory nature of high-speed motorcycling I employed Pink’s (2009) approach to sensory ethnography. The intention was to engage in high-speed motorcycling, while remaining open to the full capacities of the sensory domain (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Joy and Sherry 2003). Sensory pursuits in the field brought to light a dualism between *being* a body and *having* a body (Lyng 2004). To address this issue I adopted Crossley’s (2005) stance to argue that it is our empathetic capacity for reflection that enables us to survey ourselves in this way. Accordingly, the tendency to describe our own embodiment in objective terms is more attributable to linguistic habit rather than a true objectification of the body. This understanding allowed us to avoid slipping into a dualistic framework between subjective and objective accounts of the motorcycling body.

Auto-ethnographic accounts developed from reflexive fieldnotes, brought us close to the multi-sensory experience of high-speed motorcycling. The first account provided a *thick description* of an experience of riding a motorcycle on a cold winter’s morning (Gertz 1973). This account detailed the daily experience of transition, which encompassed transforming the body with motorcycling gear. This transformation accounted for an alteration in my personal experience of my own embodiment. When covered from head to toe in protective clothing my body felt and moved in a different way. This transition prepared me for the embodied experience of riding in the winter’s harsh elements. This account illuminated the multi-sensory experience of riding a motorcycle on an Irish road; almost choking on fumes, hands frozen and unreceptive to commands, eyes watering, face scalded from the cold. This account also allowed us to identify the centrality of the motorcyclists’ senses in terms of negotiating a motorcycle on the road. To negotiate this constantly unfolding environment, the motorcyclist must be constantly vigilant. To ensure vigilance the motorcyclist must be attuned to the senses: reading movements in the traffic, listening to the sounds of engines. In this sensory account, we also began to develop an appreciation of the centrality of the motorcyclists’ body in terms of interacting with the motorcycle to negotiate a way through the material environment.

The second auto-ethnographic account provided a *thick description* of my experiences of learning to ride a motorcycle at high-speed through instruction (Gertz 1973). In particular,
Kevin’s detailed instructions placed the body at the centre of the practices of high-speed motorcycling. Through his instructions Kevin brought our understanding of rider vigilance to an entirely different level. He taught us about the significance of ‘blind spots’ to rider safety and how the speeding motorcyclist must constantly interact with the motorcycle to overcome the anatomical shortcomings of the motorcycling body. He also taught us about the importance of continuously manoeuvring into positions that would ensure ‘the clearest line of vision on where you’re going’. Learning to position the motorcycle in this way enables the speeding motorcyclist to attain the ‘racing line’, which is essential in terms of negotiating corners at high speeds. Through his instructions we developed an understanding of the physicality of riding a motorcycle at high-speeds. In this sense, the speeding motorcyclist must learn to simultaneously manoeuvre their bodies in a variety of kinaesthetically complex ways. This auto-ethnographic account allowed us to comprehend the bravery of high-speed motorcyclists in terms of overcoming fear and putting their bodies on the line. In this regard, Kevin instructed me that I should ‘come out as far as the white line but that's definitely it’. In attempting this feat, I quickly discovered that my own personal edge existed as a barrier that prevented me from reaching the white line. In observing Kevin’s fluid interactions with the bike and the road we witnessed a high-speed motorcycling body at ease. Although, I was able to move faster when following Kevin I also became aware that I had come as far as I was prepared to in terms of my pursuit of high-speed motorcycling. On this basis, it was time to return to the real experts in order to grasp their experiences of high-speed motorcycling.

In combination, these reflexive accounts served as an introduction to the multi-sensory experience of high-speed. They enabled us to see the centrality of the sensing body in the high-speed motorcycling experience, while also grasping the challenges that our participants faced in terms of becoming high-speed motorcyclists. With this in mind, we turned our attention to the participants’ experiences of developing the skills necessary for engaging in high-speed motorcycling.

7.3.2 Narrative Accounts: Skills, Sensations and Emotions in the High-Speed Motorcycling Experience

The participants understanding was very clear, ‘if you’re going to learn how to drive a bike at speed you have to learn how to use your body. You can’t be stiff on the bike’. In this regard, we observed the participants developing an awareness of how to use their bodies for the purposes of performing high-speed motorcycling. By investing time practicing a broad range of skills, the participants began to develop self-confidence and trust in their motorcycles.
Significantly in recalling their experiences of learning and practising a range of motorcycling techniques, we repeatedly witnessed the participants both returning to and calling upon their bodies to assist them in articulating the details of these techniques. This pattern demonstrated a clear distinction between cognitive knowledge and embodied knowledge, while also indicating the significance of the latter in the performance of high-speed motorcycling. On this basis, we identified the emergence of a knowing motorcycling body, which comes into effect through the development of embodied awareness.

Importantly, we tried to understand what exactly the participants found so alluring about the experience of high-speed motorcycling and why they were prepared to risk so much to pursue this experience. In recalling their life stories as motorcyclists, some of the participants identified a history of risk taking and sensation seeking that predated their experiences as high-speed motorcyclists and in this regard we started to identify the participants not just as high-speed motorcyclists but also as edgeworkers. In making sense of their calls to risk, we conceived that “the pursuit of risk, pleasure, style and empowerment—are ways to “body forth” in a social context where actors are subjected to regimes of work, consumption and communication that deny the creative possibilities of their bodies” (Lyng 2004, p.360).

Through the participants’ accounts we were able to understand edgework as a fully embodied practice. Participants’ narratives helped us to unpick the seductive allure of high-speed motorcycling. Their narratives detailed the sensations and emotions that they derived from this risky leisure time pursuit. Participants’ accounts of the speed experience were littered with references to intense pleasurable sensations: the ‘adrenaline rush’, the ‘high’, and most prominently the ‘buzz’. As the intensity of this experience peaked, the participants described how thoughts, emotions, and even sensations faded away into the background. In these moments the knowing motorcycling body came to the forefront – acting and reacting to elicit a sense of control over the material environment. Universally, the edgework experience evoked positive emotional responses in the participants. They described feeling ‘contentment’, ‘instantly happy’, ‘excitement’ and ‘overwhelming joy’ when they reached the other side of the edgework experience. The participants themselves were aware of these possibilities and used edgework to transition from feelings of discomfort to feelings of pleasure. We saw the participants turn to the edgework experience when they were ‘pissed off’, in ‘bad moods’ and feeling ‘bored’. In these moments they turned to edgework as a means of escape. The experience provided escape in the sense that it ‘clears your head’ and ‘it calms ya down’ and you ‘get something out of your system’. So the participants would turn to this experience when they needed to ‘leave off steam’. When considered in the context of the stresses and strains of daily life we can see how this experience allows our participants
to momentarily experience life in a more intense way (Jantzen et al. 2012, p.6). Given both the prominence and obvious significance of these multi-sensory aspects, we can contend that the participants’ experiences of embodiment and the bodily pleasures that they derive are indeed critical features of their pursuits as high-speed motorcyclists (Lyng 2005).

But the other side of this risky endeavour of course is that the edge is a reality. As we saw in this enquiry, for high-speed motorcyclists going over the edge results in either serious bodily harm or death. This group learned hard lessons both with their bodies and their emotions. These embodied experiences reminded them of the risks of engaging in high-speed motorcycling as a leisure pursuit. In these occurrences they experienced sensations of pain and physical discomfort that influenced the adoption of slightly more cautious approaches to motorcycling. With the death of a group member, the participants experienced the realities of the edge in a very visceral sense. So while the group clearly experienced some of their best days on motorcycles, they also went through some of their ‘hardest experiences’ because of motorcycling. When considering the magnitude of these risks it becomes possible for us to grasp just how alluring this high-speed experience is for the participants.

This discussion has provided rich insights into the experience of high-speed motorcycling as an embodied practice, but the full significance of these insights can really only be realised by placing these speeding bodies in relation to discourses about speed and society.

With some of the turn-of-the-century speed inventions, particularly the motorcar, the increased regimes of speed in modernity, which, with its clocks, schedules and Taylorist efficiencies, was becoming more and more onerous, was repackaged as a sensation and a pleasure to be put at the disposal of the individual consumer. Speed, which had been manifested as more intense and tighter social control, was rerouted into the excessive speed of individual pleasure.

(Duffy 2009, p.4-5)

In detailing and interpreting the gamut of sensations and emotions that our participants experienced as high-speed motorcyclists we have been able to outline the grammar of this pleasure. The pure physicality of the experience encountered at this intense speed forces the participants to rely fully upon their bodies to control the rapidly unfolding environment. In a society that for the most part has a disembodied effect, high-speed motorcycling provided the participants with an opportunity to fully co-opt their bodies (Lyng 2005). At the height of the speed experience the participants relied fully on their bodies for survival, which made it distinct from other aspects of their lives (Lyng 1990). This experience was extraordinary then in the sense that it broke out from the more mundane experience of day-to-day life (Abrahams 1986; Turner 1986).
But beyond these individual experiences, we also gained insight into how marketplace forces and institutional conditions combined to enable the commodification of speed as an individualised pleasure. We learned about how particular motorcycles are designed and constructed in way that urges the motorcyclist to speed. The participants’ themselves identified the exorbitant discrepancies between institutional speed limits and the speed capabilities of the modern motorcycle. Continuous technological advancement for the purposes of market creation has resulted in a position where the capabilities of the modern motorcycle far exceed the capacities of the average leisure time motorcyclist. On this basis we can convincingly argue that manufacturers’ desires for product differentiation through continuous technological advancement are undoubtedly permitted at the expense of rider safety. For the participants this is the ‘elephant in the room’. The participants observed that, ‘it’s the market that they are in. People will buy them. The law doesn't seem to take any notice of how fast that bike can actually go... It's like they turn a complete blind eye’. Unequivocally, institutional strategies place the onus on individual riders – personal protective equipment, rider skills training, defensive riding training and advertising campaigns (Murphy and Patterson 2011). In making sense of the situation that motorcyclists currently find themselves in, Duffy’s (2009, p.8) words appear to be most fitting:

Consider that the promise of speed pleasure appeared at the moment when the age of empire was at its height, but just when awareness was dawning that it would soon effectively be over. The new offer of speed as pleasure participated in this political and cultural turn to the extent that it exemplified a move away from projecting desire onto the faraway exotic locale, and onto the personal effort and intensity experienced on one’s own body. …Territoriality mattered less than mobility, and speed was envisioned not only as pleasure but as a means of extraordinary personal power.

Duffy’s analysis of the development of speed culture bares striking similarities to the connections, that we previously identified, between the Romantic period and (post)modern consumer culture (Campbell 1987; Holbrook 1997). Within this context, our speed-seeking motorcyclists stand as the epitome of the postmodern consumer – continuously seeking to define themselves through their high-speed experiences. With this understanding it seems to be somewhat unfair that high-speed motorcyclists are labelled as deviants, when they are more likely the intended outcome of a consumer culture that continually implores consumers to seek out self-defining, and oftentimes intense, consumption experiences (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999; Carù and Cova 2007).

7.3.3 Contributions to Understandings of Embodied Experience in CCT
Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) and Holbrook (1995) were instrumental in facilitating the movement from conceptualising consumers as information processors to emotional pleasure seekers. Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1982, p.132) argued that the focus on the multi-sensory nature of the experiential perspective made it ideally suited to examining previously ‘ignored phenomena’, [which] include[d] various playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, day dreams, aesthetic enjoyment and, emotional responses’. In this regard, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) envisaged that consumer researchers would employ the experiential perspective to examine the embodied nature of consumption experiences.

Although Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1982) research became one of the most widely cited papers in CCT, for the most part, consumer researchers set about investigating the consuming body from an alternative perspective. CCT’s investigations of consumers’ experiences focused on the consuming body as a material representation of the character within. Rather than focusing on the multi-sensory aspects of these experiences, consumer researchers argued that consumers’ adopted disciplinary conceptualisations of the body. In this regard the consuming body was represented as a window to consumers’ senses of morality and self-discipline with regards to food, exercise and general bodily maintenance (Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Consumer researchers understood the body as a material sign, which consumers worked upon to fashion meaning. Consumer researchers demonstrated that consumers engage in continuous cycles of body change. This body was either under construction or falling into disrepair (Askegaard et al. 2002). Through surgical manoeuvres consumers undertake bodily reconstruction for both practical and cosmetic purposes (Schouten 1991). This brief review of pertinent literature from CCT demonstrates a disciplined body (Desmond 2003), which is understood as a material sign that is worked up to alter its communicative potential. In this regard, CCT has presented an understanding of the body that is predominantly about identity, self-presentation and meaning as opposed to experiences of the body.

In terms of contributing to bodily discourses in CCT, this study paid much closer attention to Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) seminal call. In this regard I focused on unpicking the multi-sensory nature of the high-speed motorcycling experience. The first challenge here was to develop a theoretical and methodological approach that would allow us to integrate this multi-sensory understanding of experience. By calling on Crossley’s (2001) work, I gained a novel way of conceptualising the role of the body in consumption. Most significantly, this invocation allowed me to consider the body as a source of knowledge, which consumers draw upon to negotiate consumption experiences. With Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Crossley (2001) we came to appreciate that self-reflection is about more than emptying the contents of our
mind. An understanding of the self can be reached through our capacity to survey our own actions and sensory experiences of being in the world. This theorisation was supplemented by a methodological approach that directed attention to the somatic dimensions of consumption (Pink 2009). Pink’s (2009) approach to sensory ethnography helped us to move forward in this vein by asking the important question - how is the body present in consuming experiences? To answer this question we recognised that we needed to explore the ways in which consumers develop embodied knowledge. In this vein, we adopted Pink’s stance (2009) that we could learn about others, by engaging and by making sense of their experiences through our own embodied experiences in their world. In this understanding we immersed and participated in this life world while staying attuned to the entire sensory domain.

This enquiry demonstrated that high-speed motorcycling is a deeply somatic and embodied experience. With their sensing moving bodies our participants experienced a heightened sense of risk, excitement, danger, pleasure, success and failure. When engaging the body in high-speed motorcycling the participants experienced the full gamut of sensations and emotions. This physical, sensing, feeling body was active, conscious and ever-present in the participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. For the participants the development of embodied awareness was an important precursor to their pursuits into the intensity of the high-speed experience. Having developed bodily awareness, they used their bodies to perceive, anticipate and negotiate the experience of high-speed motorcycling. Our enquiry also yielded insight into the entrenched, embodied and habitual aspects of this embodied experience and the social nature of motorcycling’s embodied techniques. Perhaps, our most important insights emerged when we witnessed the participants returning to their bodies in order to articulate the specifics of these techniques. This understanding was important in terms of grasping the distinction between cognitive and embodied knowledge, while also emphasising the place of the latter in high-speed motorcycling. Cumulatively, these insights enabled us to recognise the knowing body that was present in our participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling.

Our participants were well equipped in terms of the subjective conditions necessary for the generation of pleasure (Jantzen 2012). Commonly the participants demonstrated their capacities to prepare, identify, seek and ultimately experience pleasure. For these reasons our group could be seen as perfect poster boys for the experiential economy, in so much as they are ‘able to plan and organise [their experiences], and at the same time capable of being surprised. [They] act deliberately, react emotionally uninhibited, and moreover [have] the capacity to verbalise how mass-produced goods contain authentic messages about the self’
In this regard, we observed that the participants engaged in high-speed motorcycling as a means of escaping negative emotions brought on by the stresses and strains of their daily lives. We recognised that, for the participants, high-speed motorcycling provided a transformative internal experience. This transformation was constituted by a sequence of experiences that range from an altered perception of reality, a fading away of unrelated thoughts, and a loss of awareness of emotions. The culmination of this process was a series of internal shifts from states of discomfort to states of pleasure.

Critically, it is this notion of being a body that contributes most to our understanding of consumption experiences in CCT. This study evidences that bodies in consumer culture are about much more than meaning; these bodies are significant in ways that extend beyond the construction of identity. The consuming body is also a source of knowledge, the body acts instinctually, the body seeks spontaneity, and in these ways, we identified that embodiment is central to consumption experiences. In this study, the body emerged as a central theme in terms of the participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. With this understanding we were able to demonstrate the significance of embodiment, while also posing novel questions about the role of the body in consumption experiences. These questions have allowed us to see the sensual creation of consumer experiences while still attending to the meanings that consumers attach to these experiences. ‘Consumers have always lived in an experience economy. Consumer researchers have just begun to understand the sensuous negotiation that life demands’ (Joy and Sherry 2003, p.280). In this understanding, this research contributes a more detailed exploration of embodied consumption experiences.

Armed with this new understanding of the embodied and multi-sensory nature of consumption experiences it becomes possible to return to relevant CCT research. For example, Celsi et al. (1993) draw upon the concept of flow, which frames high-risk leisure consumption as an intensely somatic experience directed towards mastery of a particular skill or activity. However, they fail to follow through on this initial framing and instead concentrate on offering an account of the motivating factors involved in high-risk consumption pursuits. Similarly, Arnould and Price’s (1993, p.24) examination of the extraordinary experience of white water rafting contends that consumers are drawn to such leisure pursuits because they provide an opportunity to construct self-narratives about ‘personal growth, self-renewal, communitas, and harmony with nature’. While these papers provided significant contributions to the way we understand consumer culture they also further emphasise the preoccupation, within CCT, with the meanings that surround consumption experiences. Because of this focus we never really get close to understanding
what it feels like to launch your body out of a plane while cruising at five thousand feet above sea level.

Findings from this research demonstrate that we cannot fully understand why consumers are drawn to these types of leisure time activities without understanding the embodied experiences that they provide. On this basis we can confidently argue that there is still much to add in terms of our understanding of leisure time experiences such as skydiving and white water rafting. To briefly exemplify, we can now argue that the body is also deeply implicated in the extraordinary experience of white water rafting. Basking in the sun, feeling the wind on your skin, breathing fresh air, water drenching your clothes, feeling the oar in your hands, the physical challenge of learning the techniques to competently control the raft. The sensations and emotions that this extraordinary experience evokes are just as important as consumption narratives in terms of understanding why people are drawn to this leisure activity. The novel approaches developed in this study demonstrate the multi-sensory nature of these experiences. Ultimately, consumers negotiate these experiences using their sensing, moving bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Crossley 2001; Dant 2006; Pink 2009). By adopting this perspective it becomes possible to acknowledge and appreciate the inherent values of physical engagement in consumption experiences. This research demonstrates that consumers are drawn to these experiences because of the sensory and emotional pleasures that they derive from these deeply embodied physical experiences. The important point is that alternative truths can be reached when we examine the role of the body in consumption through a perspective that encompasses the embodied and multi-sensory nature of these experiences.

In combination these approaches provide an innovative means of bringing the body forth in consumer research. This perspective allows us to extend beyond representations of the body. In so doing, empirical enquiry reveals the social dynamics of bodily learning that exist beyond instances of individual performance. We see that embodied practices are neither hard-wired nor completely idiosyncratic processes. We see how consumers develop an embodied feel for consumption practices through immersion in repetitive bodily practice. Empirical data demonstrates the centrality of the sensing moving body in terms of experiencing the visceral and emotional dimensions of consumption. Cumulatively, these findings serve to blur the boundary between body and mind in terms of our appreciation of consumption phenomena. Freedom can be reconceptualised in terms that extend beyond notions of cognitively informed choices – we see how the body acts and feels in consumption experiences. But we can also see how consumers are limited by the affordances and capacities of their human bodies. Furthermore, empirical data clearly demonstrates the body as a source of knowledge, which is
useful in terms of unpicking the distinction between cognitive (mind) and embodied (body) knowledge in consumption practices. This important distinction points to the significance of the embodied dimensions of consumption, which, for the most part, have remain unexplored in CCT. We can see that novel appreciations of consumer culture can be reached by asking the important question; what do people do when they consume? In this way, we can move much closer to understanding the role of the body in consumption. In combination Merleau Ponty (1962) and Crossley’s (2001) work on embodiment and Pink’s (2009) approach to sensory ethnography provides a novel way of conceptualising the body and also an innovative approach to capturing experiences of embodiment.

7.4 The Stuff of High-Speed Motorcycling

In analysing the participants’ narratives it quickly became clear that the multi-sensory experience of high-speed motorcycling is inseparable from the material aspects that structure and shape these experiences. This emerging understanding allowed us to develop a number of further research questions. On this basis it became possible to question the nature of the relationship between the participants and their motorcycles. We also queried how the material make-up of motorcycles structured the participants embodied experiences of motorcycling.

7.4.1 Assembling and Structuring the Embodied Experience of High-Speed Motorcycling

Our enquiry provided insight into the complexity of the relationships that the participants developed with their motorcycles. Our analysis of the participants’ narratives revealed a deep emotional connection between the participants and their machines. In their stories, the participants commonly brought their motorcycles to life by imbuing them with a diverse range of human characteristics and qualities. In this regard, we identified the participants’ tendencies to apply feminine pronouns when making references to their motorcycles. We argued that the participants were drawn to feminising these objects because of the oftentimes intimate, sensual and tender nature of these relationships.

Mellström (2004) reminds us that relationships of this nature have a history that runs deep in our culture. He argues that motorcycles have become feminised within a culture that teaches men to seek out intimate connections with machines. Mellström (2004, p.379) asserts that
these relationships produce and express a type of ‘(hetero) sexual energy’. Our participants’ recollections regarding the deep sense of connectedness that they experienced with their motorcycles adds weight to Mellström’s proposition. We also witnessed the participants’ desires to gain a level of mastery that would enable them to attain control of this assemblage. With the help of Mellström (2004), we understand that our participants operate in a culture that urges men to fully embrace technological objects to the extent that they become an extension of themselves. In this sense the rider/motorcycle assemblage is deeply rooted in contemporary culture. The nature of this assemblage relationship helps us to unpick this pattern of feminising the object.

Ironically, the excluded sex is often present symbolically since the interaction with artifacts often involves feminisation of the artifact—something that seems to be part of a system of producing difference between the sexes. That difference is then (re)produced in an anthropomorphisation of the man-machine relationship, where the machines are transformed into subjects in what might be termed a (heterosexual) masculine, technical subjectivity. (Mellström 2004, p.380)

Within the context of material culture it becomes possible to delve further into the nature of the rider/motorcycle assemblage. We have already traced the connections between technological inventions and the pursuit of speed as an individualised pleasure in consumer culture (Duffy 2009). The motorcycle is an integral part of this cultural evolution because it provides a meeting point between the human body and the material world. This assemblage is particularly significant because it enables the pursuit of individualised speed-seeking pleasures. This assemblage provides high-speed motorcyclists with ‘the possibility of experiencing [a] new physical sensation – a pleasure possibility outside of the illusory if spectacular fetish of the commodity…[essentially it] allow[s] people to experience modernity in their bones’ (Duffy 2009, p.8).

In this sense, the knowing motorcycling body that we previously identified is not just an outcome of embodied practice, it also a product of participation in the material culture of motorcycling. This material culture is partly created in interactions between motorcyclists and their motorcycles. Importantly, insights developed in this study demonstrate that motorcycling culture is also shaped by intentional human design, which embeds these objects with particular characteristics, capacities and affordances. The participants themselves identified the active role of these objects in terms of structuring their experiences of motorcycling. In this regard, we come to acknowledge that racing-style motorcycles are a manifestation of the cultural values of speed. The participants have the opportunity to realise these values when they assemble with motorcycles to pursue speed-seeking pleasures.
The participants’ narratives provided rich insights into the influence of motorcycle design in terms of structuring their experiences of high-speed motorcycling. We learned about how the design of their first motorcycles urged them to engage in a very particular style of motorcycling. This style was about getting ‘right down…into the clocks’ and riding the motorcycle to its performance limits. On this motorcycle, the participants first learned to perform a variety of tricks and stunts. In these narratives we also learned about their efforts to attain a degree of mastery over these machines. This idea of mastery was central to the participants’ understanding of the formation of the rider/motorcycle assemblage. After attaining a degree of mastery over the motorcycle they became self-confident and developed a degree of trust in their motorcycles. In this regard, we identified that the rider/motorcycle assemblage involved transplanting the body into the motorcycle or conversely incorporating the motorcycle into the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Dant 2004). Through our analysis of the participants’ experiences we identified the formation of the assemblage as an important precursor to the participants’ pursuit of the edgework experience. This understanding points to the significance of these material objects in terms of structuring the participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling.

Once they felt like they had mastered these motorcycles the participants quickly became bored. This repeated pattern illustrated that like all pleasures, ‘speed thrill is polymorphous and resists being pinned down…the ease with which one adapts to it makes appreciation of speed as a pleasure less likely, as this familiarity…runs counter to desire’ (Duffy 2009, p.5). While Duffy’s assertion is indicative of our participants’ experiences, they also provided further justifications for making the decision to move on. Within the group these decisions were also influenced by the social pressures of keeping up and interestingly safety concerns related to continuously riding motorcycles at their performance limits.

By tracing the participants’ material progression through the different levels of motorcycle ownership we gained further insight into the nature of the rider/motorcycle assemblage. In this regard, we came to recognise the significance of these material objects in terms of the formation of the assemblage. Each time a new motorcycle entered the frame, the participants recognised that they needed to once again invest time to re-orientate their bodies to these new objects. Upon first approaching these new motorcycles, the participants were apprehensive and practiced caution in relation to the motorcycle and its inherent power. In this regard we demonstrated how the participants’ recognised embodiment of these motorcycles as a type of taming process. In this understanding, we demonstrated that the participants themselves attributed a degree of agency to these machines.
In following the participants’ progression to the top-tier of motorcycle ownership, we gained further insight into the influence of this assemblage in terms of structuring their embodied experiences of high-speed motorcycling. At this point the participants acknowledged that the performance limits of these powerful motorcycles far exceeded their own riding capacities. From this vantage, the participants acknowledged a transition in terms of the pleasures that they derive from the motorcycling experience. On these more powerful motorcycles they experienced a feeling of ‘immense power’, which importantly was less temporal than it had been on previous motorcycles. The pleasurable feeling of power influenced a reduction in their desires to continuously seek out the intense heights of the speed experience. In this understanding, we could once again identify the influence of the material in terms of structuring the participants’ experiences.

7.4.2 Feeling Motorcycling in the Hands

Our investigation of the materiality of motorcycling was perhaps most significant in the sense that it allowed us to grasp an alterative understanding of motorcycling as a leisure time pursuit. The participants informed us that motorcycling ‘is a two-way hobby…there’s the thing itself and then there’s the freedom that you get from the thing’. We learned about the participants’ love of mechanical things and how they came to be ‘technically minded’ men. Let us for a moment return to Tom and his Meccano Kit and re-evaluate this situation through the lens of Mellström’s (2004) material culture. With this understanding we can now argue that the Meccano kit did not just provide an opportunity to begin to develop an embodied feel for mechanical objects. As a gift, this material object was part of a socialisation process that prepared Tom for the material world of machines and masculinity. In a sense, through his interactions with this kit, Tom began learning how to ‘perform manhood’ (Gutmann 1977). Throughout this enquiry, we were introduced to a host of influential male figures that each played a ‘fathering role’ in terms of preparing and guiding the participants through this culture of men and machines (Gutmann 1977).

Away from the intensity of the speed experience, we found these men in garages talking about motorbikes, twisting wrenches and dismembering their machines. In these garages we were introduced to this other side of their leisure pursuit. We came to understand an additional aspect of the group’s sociability in which the materiality of the motorcycle took centre stage. In practices of maintenance, modification and repair we witnessed the participants developing hands-on relationships with their machines. We learned about the
significance of these practices in terms of initiating the formation of the assemblage. In embodying this intimate understanding and connection, the participants developed a deeper sense of trust in their motorcycles. This sense of trust was important in terms of building the confidence required to push these machines to their performance limits.

We learned about the significance of practices of modification in terms of altering the multisensory experience of high-speed motorcycling. Furthermore, through practices of modification the participants were able to alter the symbolic properties and communicative potential of their machines. In these acts we were able to identify moments through which the participants were transformed from consumers to active producers (de Certeau 1984). We witnessed the participants adopting a host of innovative tactics to resist institutional strategies for control and also to circumvent engagement with the marketplace. Importantly, this understanding enables us to now understand that this leisure activity is constituted by both production and consumption.

Perhaps most significantly our turn to the material aspects of life within the group yielded insight into the more tranquil and meditative side of our participants’ experiences (Jantzen et al. 2012). We gained an insight into the participants’ experiences of being in the world of motorcycles (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This understanding allowed us to illuminate equally important aspects of this leisure pursuit that occurred away from the intensity of the high-speed experience. In this regard, we uncovered a range of additional practices through which the participants also experienced sensations and feelings of pleasure. While the edgework experience influenced increased levels of arousal that enabled the participants to experience life in a more intense way, the hands-on work of maintenance, modification and repair elicited a ‘reduction in tensions [which led] to equally pleasant states of tranquillity, contemplation [and] meditation’ (Jantzen et al. 2012, p. 6). For the participants these experiences were memorable in the sense that they provide respite from the pressures of their everyday lives. These practices enabled the participants to claim back the experience of contemplative time (Manzini 2001; Carù and Cova 2003). Cumulatively, these experiences contributed to the construction of their identities both as men and motorcyclists, their sense of belonging within the group and also in terms of their relationships with their machines.
7.4.3 Contributions to Understandings of Materiality in CCT

We cannot hope to understand consumer behaviour without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions. (Belk 1988, p.139)

With this statement Belk brought attention to the importance of possessions in the lives of consumers. This paper was hugely influential for consumer researchers because it highlighted the significance of the subjectively defined symbolic meanings that surround peoples’ possessions in a time when consumption objects were predominately understood as ‘vessels of meaning’ (Holt 1995, p.1). In highlighting the significance of the symbolic dimensions of consumption Belk announced that we are our possessions and boldly argued that this is ‘most basic and powerful fact’ of consumer behaviour (1988, p. 160). Essentially, Belk (1988) was telling us that consumers construct symbolic meanings around consumption objects and that these objects become significant when consumers use these meanings to construct a sense self. Belk’s (1988) seminal paper inspired a generation of interpretive consumer researchers to explore the symbolic properties of consumption objects and the meaningfulness of these objects in peoples’ everyday lives. For example, Schouten’s (1991) study on aesthetic plastic surgery explicitly examined the link between individual identity and symbolically orientated consumer behaviour. This study solidified the link between the consumption object and the construction and maintenance of a satisfactory sense of self. In the interest of broadening this enquiry, Cova (1997) investigated the ways in which consumption objects facilitate relationships between individuals and groups. Cova (1997, p.314) contends that ‘consumption can be studied…as much for its functional and symbolic aspects relative to individuals as for its emotional and aesthetic aspects relative to the communal links between individuals’. Further studies illustrate the emotional (Holbrook 1993) and aesthetic value (Joy and Sherry 2003) of consumption objects in the everyday the lives of consumers. Undoubtedly, Belk’s (1988) call was successful in establishing a wave of interpretive consumer research that moved beyond neo-classical understandings of the consumption object as a vessel of objective meaning (Holt 1995).

It is clear that in returning the subject to the centre of analysis, consumer researchers have focused their attention on understanding the processes involved in meaning creation. On this basis, it is logical that the consumption object is viewed primarily in terms of its symbolic properties (Belk 1976; Mick and De Moss 1990; Joy 2001). With this lens, CCT research clearly articulates the subject-orientated dimensions of consumption. We witness the impact of consumption objects in terms of the construction of individual (Belk 1988; Holt 2002) and group identity (Cova 1997, Schouten and McAleander 1995), we see the significance of
consumption in the everyday lives of consumers through our willingness to forge emotional relationships with things (Holbrook 1993), we see that consumption can be about ideology (Murray 2002, Thompson and Hirschman 1995), while all the time explicating the myriad of ways that people consume (Holt 1995).

The emphasis within CCT has clearly been placed on the subject side of the subject/object binary. In this sense CCT adopts a social-constructionist understanding of materiality, which assumes that consumption objects should by understood in terms of their socially constructed symbolic meanings. Hence, the general emphasis within CCT has been placed on understanding the ways in which consumers use objects to create meaning. Borgerson (2013, p.141) warns against this ontological position because a ‘focus on the human subject’s agency, will and desire may seem appropriately in line with a proposition that human beings could ultimately control the world and all of its systems’. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that CCT requires an explicit engagement with the concept of materiality and its varied epistemological and ontological positions.

In terms of contributing to our understanding of the role of the consumption object in CCT, this study has conclusively demonstrated that consumption objects feature in consumer culture in ways that extend beyond their symbolic meanings. Emerging insights enable us to problematise CCT’s tendency to focus on the individual’s role in constructing the boundaries of the consumption object. Invoking Dant’s (2004) assemblage was important because it allowed us to avoid prioritising the consuming subject at the expense of the consumption object. This perspective also enabled us to avoid prioritising the mind over the body, which became significant in terms of understanding the significance of the embodied relationships that develop between subjects and objects. The rider/motorcycle assemblage demonstrated the centrality of the kinaesthetic movements of the rider amidst the materiality of the machine. This subject-object relationship relies upon the sensory experience of motorcycling, perception, object design and the physicality of the connection between rider and motorcycle. In the rider/motorcycle assemblage, we saw the active role of the object in terms of feeding back information to the rider. Furthermore, we learned about how the design of the object encourages consumers to consume in particular ways. The rider/motorcycle assemblage signals a more dynamic relationship between the consuming subject and the consumption object. In this assemblage we witnessed the consuming object’s boundaries emerging through its interactions with consumers. These findings demonstrate that the connection between consumers and consumption object is forged through a combination of bodily knowledge and sensory perception. This understanding highlights the active role of the consumption object in terms of influencing consumption patterns and practices.
The rider/motorcycle assemblage demonstrated a recursive relationship between the human body and the material world. Of greatest significance in terms of contribution is the empirically informed realisation that objects impact upon the everyday lives of consumers in significant ways that extend beyond their symbolic meaning. This understanding uncovers the limitations of CCT’s understanding of subject-object relations, which predominantly locates ‘agency entirely within human subjects and relegate[s] nonhuman entities to object status’ (Martin and Schouten 2014, n.p). Contrarily, this assemblage relation demonstrates that consumers’ everyday lives are significantly shaped by the potentials afforded to them by their interactions with objects. In contrast to previous studies in CCT, this study empirically demonstrates the significance of objects and their functional use in consumer culture. This contribution is significant because it demonstrates that consumer culture is shaped in significant ways by the interactions between consumers and material objects. We have seen that consumers’ experiences and relations between consumers are mediated through material relations. This study also demonstrated that negotiating consumer culture is as much about learning to embody consumption objects for their functional use as it about learning to utilise their communicative potential.

By focusing on the material aspects of motorcycling, this study also demonstrated important aspects of these experiences that are far removed from the intensity of the high-speed experience. On this basis we refused to overlook the more mundane motorcycling experiences that involved investing time to embody the motorcycle through practice and practical hands-on work. We came to recognise the significance of the embodied relationships that motorcyclists develop with their machines (Mellström 2004). By recognising that motorcycling takes place within the broader context of material culture, it became possible to develop our understanding of masculinity in motorcycling culture. In particular, our analysis of the practices of modification, maintenance and repair demonstrated the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary co-exist in consumers’ experiences of motorcycling. For the participants these more ordinary experiences were an important aspect of this leisure pursuit because they provided a welcome break from the pressures of their everyday lives. The contributions that emerge from our investigations of the material aspects of motorcycling indicate the importance of not extracting extraordinary/intense experiences from the ebb and flow of the participants’ everyday lives (Abrahams 1986).

On this basis we can confidently call for the invocation of a more fluid ontology of objects in CCT, one that conceives of the object’s boundaries as emergent through the interactions with human and non-human actors. Thus, we can see how ‘the hardware of material culture figures
in the doings, as well as in the displays of social life’ (Watson and Shove 2008, p.70). In relation to CCT, this research demonstrates the need to acknowledge and consider the varied nature of relations between consumers and consumption objects. The theoretical and methodological approaches developed in this research provide a means of orientating the research gaze towards these relations.

7.5 Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study are limited by the scope of the chosen sample of participants. In terms of the limitations of this research, I acknowledge that this study has given voice only to the dominant demographic within the Irish motorcycling community (Irish, white, and male). The decision to focus attention on an all male group meant that it was only possibly to represent a part of the story of high-speed motorcyclists. Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander’s (2006) re-examination of Schouten and Alexander’s (1995) seminal research evidences that re-enquiry from a multiple feminist perspective can reveal other truths that facilitate a more holistic appreciation of the phenomena at hand. A focus on the lived experiences of female riders would undoubtedly result in the emergence of noteworthy interpretive differences with regards to the core themes that emerged in this study. In terms of directions for future research, this pathway could provide a way forward in terms of extending our appreciation of the multiplicities that exist within motorcycling culture. More specifically, future researchers may gainfully examine the ways in which female motorcyclists negotiate a material culture, which connects the materiality of motorcycles with notions of masculinity. Similarly, a study on women’s edgework by Olstead (2011) illustrates that a completely different account of edgework experience is revealed when gender is foregrounded. In terms of further directions for future research, Olstead’s (2011) findings underscore the necessity of unpicking female riders’ experiences of high-speed motorcycling. However, as Martin et al. (2006) contend, we must remain aware that gender is just one piece of the picture. While I acknowledge this limitation in this work, I recommend further multi-perspective research in this field thereby encompassing the voices of others within the community.

This study’s focus on the embodied nature of the participants’ experiences of high-speed motorcyclists presented a significant challenge in this research. Most significantly, we must recognise the inherent limitations of both capturing and representing embodiment in textual form. Here we are confronted by the limitations of language in terms of representing the oftentimes-ineffable nature of our own embodiment. In this regard, I acknowledge the
inescapable limitations of representing felt sensations, emotions and complex forms of bodily movement in written language. Such representations are meaningful because they enable us to give form to embodied experiences. These representations are significant in so much as they serve as a ‘mnemonic device’, reminding readers already literate in the language of embodied experience (Farnell 2012, p.57). But without question we can acknowledge that something will always be lost in the translation that occurs when embodied experiences are represented in text. In terms of addressing this shortcoming, future research could experiment with alternative modes of representation to assess their suitability in terms of representing embodied experiences. In particular, videographic modes of representation could provide an innovative means of overcoming the ‘objectifying linguistic form of conventional academic expressions’ (Hietanen 2002, p.138). Moving image is appealing here because of its potential to express embodied material relations within a contextually situated story. Future research could utilise videography to evoke the sensual nature of embodied consumption experiences and the emotional affects that flow from these experiences (De Valck et al. 2009). Videography provides an interesting means of moving forward because it offers the potential to (re)present embodied experiences within a ‘context rich environment’ (Smith et al. 2007, p.89).

7.6 Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to explore the lived experiences of a group of Irish motorcyclists. I will use the remaining space to briefly summarise the participants’ most significant lived experiences and detail how insight into these experiences allowed us to address the research questions. I will also briefly reemphasise how our findings contribute to knowledge within CCT and also delineate how these findings could be used to direct future CCT research.

In the opening empirical chapter we set about addressing the first research question, which involved examining how important aspects of motorcycling culture (i.e. identity, communitas and authenticity) featured within the community. From this perspective, we examined the participants’ experiences of daily life within their own group and also in terms of the wider motorcycling community. We learned about the ways in which the participants formed their identities both as individuals and as a group. In a variety of ways, the participants invested time and effort to embody a range of kinaesthetically complex riding techniques, which became central to the formation of their motorcycling identities. As a group they defined themselves as high-speed motorcyclists, and in their understanding this identity meant a
number of a things. First and foremost, they were motorcyclists interested in the pursuit of the high-speed experience. In pursuing this experience, they had to be skilful, brave and also prepared to push themselves and their machines to the limit. But to survive as high-speed motorcyclists, they also had to recognise the risk and respect their limits. As high-speed motorcyclists, the group felt like they had an innate ability to overcome fear and remain calm in the most intense of moments. Our enquiry also yielded insight into the ways in which a sense of communitas was developed within the group. We learned about how the group helped each other by sharing their knowledge about riding techniques and the technical aspects of modification, maintenance and repair. Through these different aspects of the leisure pursuit of motorcycling the participants’ bonded and enjoyed experiences of friendship and family. Through the ritualisation of a range of activities the group established patterns of behaviour, which enabled them to instil a sense of meaning into their shared experiences. The participants’ experiences of the, at times, hostile rivalry between groups further contributed to their sense of belonging within their own group. We recognised that this rivalry was also significant because it provided a reference point, which the group could distinguish themselves from. Understanding the significance of this rivalry within the participants’ lives, was also important in the sense that it allowed us to identify the ultimately contested nature of authenticity. Within this community of motorcyclists, we identified authenticity as site of contestation and dispute. Significantly within the group, notions of authenticity diverged from the stereotypical image of the outlaw biker.

In terms of contributions to our understanding of motorcycling culture within CCT, our findings were significant because they provided insight into a different range of motorcycling practices, experiences and meanings. In doing so we brought an alternative vision of motorcycling culture to life. This understanding allowed us to make interesting comparisons in relation to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) influential representation of the Harley-quasi outlaw biker. By focusing on this group of high-speed motorcyclists, we were able to see that access to particular consumption communities are not only maintained by symbolic boundaries, but also by more practical boundaries which serve to separate those who have learned to orientate their body to the world in particular ways (in this case the motorcycle) from outsiders. But significantly, the theoretical and methodological approach developed in this study also allowed additional insights to emergent. These insights are significant in the sense that they extend our understanding of motorcycling culture beyond notions of identity, communitas and authenticity. In terms of academic understanding of motorcycling culture, this study provides just one step forward in terms of presenting a novel perspective that challenges the stereotypical representation of the outlaw motorcyclists. But further research is still required if we are to reveal the multiplicities of motorcycling culture. It would be
interesting to see how female high-speed motorcyclists experiences differ from the experiences reported here. In particular, it would be useful to examine how female motorcyclists negotiate the material culture of motorcycles and its hegemonic structures (Mellström 2004). Having considered the role of the marketplace and the media in terms of propagating the image of the outlaw motorcycle, it would also be interesting to closely examine how representations of speeding motorcyclists have been mediatised and marketed.

The second research question necessitated that we examine the nature of our participants’ experiences, while also assessing how multi-sensory aspects were implicated in these experiences. Sensory ethnographic accounts provided a useful introduction in so much as they illuminated the multi-sensory experience of riding a motorcycle on an Irish road. These accounts also allowed us to recognise the challenge of learning to develop an awareness of the body in order to perform high-speed motorcycling. These accounts provide the reader with an empathetic understanding of the participants’ experiences. With further analysis, we recognised that the body was deeply implicated in the participants’ experiences as high-speed motorcyclists. We learned about their efforts to develop what we identified as the knowing body. In a variety of ways, we identified the significance of embodied knowledge in terms of participants’ experiences as high-speed motorcyclists.

The group practised and embodied a series of techniques to prepare them for the pursuits into the intensity of the edgework experience. The participants’ accounts of these experiences allowed us to comprehend the significance of the multi-sensory aspects of these experiences. We identified a prominent pattern in the group whereby the participants would go to the edgework experience as a means of escaping negative moods and feelings. As a means of escape the edgework experience provided a range of intense sensations that pushed thoughts and feelings to the background. At the peak of the speeding experience we witnessed the knowing body coming to the forefront – acting and reacting in order to control the situation. In this regard, the participants understood the capacities of edgework in terms of providing a transformational internal experience. This transformative process involved a sequence of experiences, from an altered perception of reality, a fading away of unrelated thoughts, and a loss of awareness of emotions. Ultimately, there was a shift from states of discomfort to states of pleasure (Jantzen et al. 2012).

In detailing and interpreting the gamut of sensations and emotions that our participants experienced as high-speed motorcyclists we have been able to outline the grammar of the pleasures that are found in leisure activities such as high-speed motorcycling. From this perspective, we also underscored the significance of embodiment and physical engagement in
leisure time experiences. In this setting we contributed the knowing body, which represents a significant departure to CCT’s previous understanding of the disciplined body. These findings suggest the need to move beyond conceptualisations of a body upon which cultural values are assigned and beyond notions of embodiment rooted in representation. In this research we reached an understanding of embodiment that is grounded in the bodily experience of emotions and sensations. This phenomenological body is a body from which culture emerges as opposed to a body upon which culture is ascribed. Importantly, this understanding problematises current conceptualisations of the body in CCT. Instead of reading the body as an objectified text we must engage with the notion of *being in the world* (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Invoking Merleau-Ponty’s notion of being in world encompasses a return to pre-objectified understandings of bodily being in the world. This phenomenological understanding of the body provides a route to engage with the multi-sensory nature of consumption experiences.

In terms of directions for future research, this research demonstrates a leisure activity in which consumers are reengaging with their bodies by developing embodied awareness. This finding is significant when we consider the current proliferation of leisure activities that provide routes for consumers to reconnect with the body. In their droves consumers are taking up a myriad of yoga practices that promise to reconnect practitioners with their bodies through sensory exploration. Increasingly exercise is becoming a major part of people’s everyday lives – we are witnessing the rapid growth of fitness culture. Fitness and well-being is becoming big business. The commercial success of fitness movements such as the CrossFit phenomenon demonstrates a societal trend whereby consumers are using their leisure time to reclaim their bodies. In a similar manner consumers are pitting their bodies against the elements in highly commercialised events such as Tough Mudder and Spartan Race. More and more people are being drawn to test the endurance capabilities of their bodies in competition (iron man, marathons, triathlons). Adventure tourism, in its myriad forms offers people that rare opportunity to connect with the body in nature or in more extreme cases pit the body against nature. Undoubtedly, there is much to consider if we are to get to grips with this global phenomena. But from this research it becomes clear that consumer research must take the body seriously in any attempts to get to grips with these phenomena.

Having identified the significance of the material components of the participants’ experiences it became possible to pose two further research questions. First, we questioned the nature of the relationships between the participants and their motorcycles. We also queried how the material make-up of motorcycles structured the participants’ embodied experiences of motorcycling. Participants’ narratives brought to life the development of the assemblage
relationship as the rider invested time and effort to transplant the motorcycle into the body. In a variety of ways, we identified the formation of the assemblage relationship as an important precursor to the participants’ high-speed pursuits and we began to unpick the ways in which the material structures the experience of high-speed motorcycling.

In this assemblage we also identified the active role of the object in terms of shaping and structuring these experiences. Thus, we were able to highlight the role of intentional human design in terms of embedding these objects with particular capacities, characteristics and affordances. We were able to demonstrate that the interests of the marketplace also shaped the participants’ experiences as high-speed motorcyclists. We also identified that the material environment of the Irish road system enabled the participants to engage in high-speed practices, without fear of reprisal. In the ritualised practices of maintenance, modification and repair we learned about the participants’ desires to limit their engagement with the marketplace and at times also circumvent institutional regulations. By not overlooking these more ordinary experiences we identified additional aspects of the leisure time experiences of motorcycling that were significant in terms of the sociability of the group. Through these practices the participants developed intimate trusting relationships that were significant in terms of developing the self-confidence required to pursue the high-speed experience.

Our findings related to the rider/motorcycle assemblage, indicate the significance of subject object relations in terms of structuring consuming experiences. On this basis, we can argue that consumption objects feature in significant ways that extend beyond their symbolic meanings. This research empirically demonstrates the need to rethink the relationship between the subject and object in consumer culture (Borgerson 2005). We have seen how the boundaries of the consumption object are recreated through the active relation between subject and object – the potentials of both are altered through the assemblage union (Dant 2004). In this regard, our findings indicate that social constructionist approaches have provided a limited understanding of the nature of consumption experiences within CCT. This empirical investigation of the rider/motorcycle assemblage paves the way for future researchers to examine how other assemblages come together to shape consumer experiences and consumer culture. Based on these findings, future research may gainfully investigate how consumers learn to negotiate a culture in which they are surrounded by intentionally designed consumption objects.

Most importantly this study, demonstrated that the phenomenological body could also be employed to reach novel appreciations of the role of materiality in consumer culture. By refusing to objectify the body and its borders it becomes possible to recognise the significance
of material objects as they interconnect with human bodies. Moving forward in this vein, means moving away from the dominating conceptualisations of the body and materiality in CCT. To do this we must refrain from imposing preconceived notions of the bodies’ boundaries. Exploration at the borders between human bodies and material objects is critical if we are to understand how these assemblages shape consumer culture. Thus, it becomes crucial to note that bodies and materiality should not be understood as ‘constants amidst flux but as the epitome of that flux’ (Csordas 1994, p. 2). This understanding adds an embodied dimension to our understanding of identity in consumer culture and re-appraises the role of materiality in shaping the everyday lives of consumers. Moving beyond traditional views of the body as material sign has allowed us to see a myriad of ways in which bodies figure in consumer culture – the body in practice, the body in society, the body in relation, the body and emotion, and the body and identity. For Mauss (1973) the human body is important because it is our primordial form and the predominant means by which we have shaped our world. But scholars of culture have been slow to engage with the notion that ‘culture is grounded in the human body’ (Csordas 1994, p.6). It may be that the concept of embodiment provides the best way forward in terms of rethinking the nature of consumer culture.
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