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Ritual and Boundary Distinction in a Recreational Community:  
A Case Study of Motorcycle Rallies and Riders

**Abstract**

Attending motorcycle rallies is an important component of social life for many touring motorcyclists. The significance of these events transcends the mere recreational experience of riding a motorcycle and spending time with other riders. This project is an examination of brand specific motorcycle rallies as a process and social world that has ritualistic features and activities that serve to bond members of the group, reinforce their identity, and distinguish members of this subculture from other motorcyclists and from the larger social world. Drawing on classical social theory and more contemporary research, a framework is established to discuss the activities and social organization of rallies. Objects from the material culture of those involved are examined as distinguishing components used to establish boundaries and confer membership. An in-depth description of rally activities and interactions, enhances the understanding of these events.

**Keywords**

Recreation; Ethnography; Motorcycling; Ritual.

A solo motorcyclist arrives at a gathering of other motorcycle riders, most of which have arrived via a BMW motorcycle, the sacred symbol (Goodall 2004) of this particular consumer tribe (Maffesoli 1996). He<sup>48</sup> rides into a fairgrounds facility, campground, or some other location featuring large open spaces and parks his motorcycle between two bikes that have already arrived. Most of the motorcycles carry a relatively heavy burden of camping gear. His helmet and gloves are slipped off as he disembarks from his bike leaving it resting on the sidestand while removing the protective plugs from his ears. A quick glance at the odometer informs him of the distance he traveled today. He may have ridden only a short distance, or may have left his home the day before. If he is lucky, this event is part of a longer trip that may encompass several weeks of travel. The rider leaves his expensive helmet and favorite pair of riding gloves resting unguarded on his motorcycle with the key in the

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<sup>48</sup> The term "he" is used because of the need to use a gender specific pronoun and the recognition of the fact that the vast majority of participants at these rallies are male.

ignition as he has no concern about the theft of his prize possessions while in the company of his fellow tribal members. If the weather is warm, he slips his protective jacket off and leaves it resting on the seat of his motorcycle, while cooler weather encourages him to leave the jacket on. He slips a ballcap over his head to cover the flattened look of his "helmet hair", resulting from several hours of wearing a full face motorcycle helmet, while looking around for a familiar face or two. This also gives him a few seconds to shake off the mental buzz of the road that is familiar to long distance motorcyclists. He has arrived at his destination for the weekend, a brand specific rally for riders of BMW motorcycles, and has slipped into a well-known world of friends, acquaintances, and shared interests while taking a temporary reprieve from his usual lifestyle of family and work responsibilities. This is a familiar world for him. The rituals, artifacts, and norms of the tribe are well-known and serve to distinguish the true members from the outsiders, while providing comfort and identity to those on the inside.

Observers tell us that the daily lives of human beings are structured with rituals (e.g. Knottnerus and Loconto 2003; Goffman 1967) that can be important in the understanding of consumer behavior (Rook 1985). The concept of ritual provides a window through which to view motorcycle rallies, as well as other important social, sporting, and recreational gatherings, as meaningful constructions of social life. Motorcycle rallies are an important source of community for this subculture of motorcyclists (Austin and Gagné 2008), and, rituals are part of the boundary building and maintenance process. The seemingly trivial day-to-day rituals and the more structured ceremonial rituals help humans to construct their lives. The examination presented here suggests that motorcycle rallies have classic features of rituals and these ritualistic practices have implications for those involved. In addition, various behaviors and material products are used to mark the boundaries of the subculture and to structure the subculture to help preserve its integrity and insure its continuation.

Only 1.7% of new motorcycle registrations in the United States were BMWs in 2000 (Motorcycle Industry Council 2001) with a very similar percentage for 2008 (Snyder 2009). Additionally, only a portion of the relatively few riders of BMW motorcycles regularly attend rallies. Attending a BMW rally is a means of connecting with others that participate in this statistically rare recreational and social activity. Therefore, the reference group for members of this subculture may involve individuals that are spread across a wide geographic area; Pierson (1997):

For people who long to be with other like-minded people, in however large or small a dose, rallies fit the bill. They become highlights on the calendar; goals; purposes; small pleasures. (p. 114)

## **Ritual and Social Theory**

Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915/1965), asserts that society recreates the basic components of religion, in a secular form (Turner and Beeghley 1981). These new secular forms of the previously sacred take over the functions earlier provided by religious rituals, which can mobilize commitment from individuals and reaffirm values and beliefs while serving to integrate individuals into the group or collective (Turner and Beeghley 1981). Ritual performances reinforce and increase the level of attachment between participants and the larger social order (Turner 1986) while the established norms of the group may be utilized in

consciously orchestrating rituals to commemorate or initiate an event that is important for a community and its collective life (Wuthnow 1988).

Modern society is often characterized as a “disenchanted social world” or one characterized by rationalization and intellectualization (Weber 1922/1959; Griesman 1976; Mitchell 2002). In a post-industrial society, different groups and/or forms of community, in particular circumstances, can replace and/or supplement more traditional religious, neighborhood, kinship, and occupational groups in terms of integration and regulation. Research has indicated that important communities of choice can develop among subcultures ranging from internet users (Forster 2004) to recreation vehicle owners (Counts and Counts 1996) and messenger bicyclists (Kidder 2006).

Recreational groups and rituals can be examined within this context as fulfilling community functions while taking on some of the characteristics of ritual associated with other groups. A modern or post-industrial society can produce a condition in which consumers form collective identifications that are ephemeral and “participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure associations” (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 873) to replace group integrative functions previously provided within institutional frameworks surrounding the confines of religion, geographically based community or neighborhood, and/or kinship. These activity based communities of choice can allow individuals to experience some of the collective sentiment of community and belonging without some of the more restrictive normative regulations that exist in more all-encompassing forms of community as these have more respect for individuality (Brint 2001).

Rituals are used to enforce the “collective conscience” (Durkheim 1915/1965) or the commonly held sentiments and beliefs (Nisbett 1966: 83) which have in term evolved from interaction among individuals. These rituals can help to moderate the “free rider” problem that can arise in group contexts (Hilke 1980; Wuthnow 1987) as some individuals are able to access the benefits of group membership without contributing to the maintenance of the group. In many cases, religious organizations structure rituals to restrict the full benefits to those that are contributing members of the group (Ibidem 1987) and ceremonies can help to maintain the social heritage of the group (Cosser 1977). Rituals structure and encourage participation by routinization of activities and incorporation of members into the process. However, secular rituals are also important in the process of creating meaning (Kidder 2006). In a recreational context, rituals can meet these same functions as the ritualized behaviors and social structures reinforce the preferred normative behavior of the group while also preserving and emphasizing the importance of the social history of the group.

Turner (1986) provides a summary of Durkheim’s principles regarding the conditions that produce ritual activity. The presence of other people increases ritual activity, as does the duration of this presence and the extent of a common focus. As the degree of ritual activity increases, this in turn furthers the level of attachment and shared outlook of the group. The increase in ritual activity, accompanied by the heightened attachment and shared outlook leads to a situation in which it is more likely that deviations from the ritual will be met with severe negative social sanctions.

Utilizing the work of Durkheim, we can develop a better understanding of why seemingly unimportant issues, such as brand of motorcycle and selection of riding apparel, become so important to the ritualization process among motorcyclists. Through informal and formal enforcement of the norms of the group, motorcycle rally participants use ritualistic activities to help insure that group norms are not violated to an extent that the normative order will be disturbed. The level of attachment and commitment to the group is increased through the ritual process, which in turn makes normative violations less likely.

In Goffman's (1967) view, we have rituals to maintain society and they occur in our everyday encounters. Even though emotions that are produced in ritualistic settings can be temporary (Shrum and Kilburn 1996), ceremonies are essential for the social order (Collins and Makowsky 1989). Knottnerus and Loconto (2003) point out that many of the studies that focus on ritual have examined religious and/or sacred aspects of social life. The group integration functions that religious rituals provide (Durkheim 1915/1965), such as motivation and regulation, are found in many secular settings and can serve many of the same needs for those involved.

Tilley (2006) helps us to understand how a particular place will be experienced differentially based on individual characteristics and Haldrup and Larsen (2006) point out that tourists experience locations through traditional lenses of gender, race, sex, and age. Shared ritualized experiences can help to moderate these individual micro-level differences and construct a common history, heritage, and understanding, while preserving some individual differences in experiences. Tilley (2006: 14) uses parades and carnivals to help explain how space and time are brought together while creating "a sense of belonging through assuming a particular material form in which inhabitants both present themselves to others and present themselves to themselves," a process that seems to be at the heart of motorcycle rallies.

One theorist that is particularly useful in understanding motorcycle rallies as ritual is Collins (2004) as he provides a list of ingredients for interaction ritual. The first ingredient involves at least two people assembled in the same location and this physical presence has an impact on those involved, regardless of the level of consciousness they have of this. Secondly, participants sense boundaries separating those that are participating and those that are not. A third component are people focusing on a common activity or object and, through communication of their focus, they eventually become aware of their mutual focus of attention (Collins 2004). The final ingredient in this recipe for interaction ritual is a mood or emotional experience shared in common. As described later in a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the culture and activities, BMW motorcycle rallies fit all four of the criteria for interaction ritual. Tourism itself is performed (Haldrup and Larsen 2006) and rallies provide an avenue for individual subcultural performances en route to and from the rally and collectively after arrival.

## Methods

A primary research method used for this research was participant observation. It was used to study informants in their natural social surroundings. Studying a group in which the research shares an affinity is an important aspect and can enhance trust between the researcher and members of the social group under examination (Fielding and Fielding 1987).

Adler and Adler (1987) discuss three levels of involvement in the lives of participants being studied which go beyond the level involved in traditional participant observer. The most involved role of the three, "complete membership researcher," was used in this project. In this role, the researcher and informants have a more equal status with shared experiences and sentiments (Adler and Adler 1987: 67).

A complete membership researcher role can be subdivided into two distinct types. The "convert" researcher pursues participation in the group for research purposes and as the process continues, they undergo a type of conversion in which the researcher recognizably moves from one status or social world to another. The other complete membership role is the "opportunistic researcher," used in this project, in which the researcher examines people and social settings in which she/he

is already a member (Adler and Adler 1987). This role has been successfully employed to examine a variety of social environments and/or subcultures (e.g. Palmer and Forsyth 2002; Hayano 1982; Ouellet 1994; Gagné 1992; Hopper and Moore 1990).

The researcher took advantage of the opportunity to study a familiar subculture by attending approximately eighty BMW motorcycle rallies throughout the U.S. and Canada with attendance ranging from about fifty to over 9,000. This provided for an examination of a wide range of activities associated with rallies and allowed for the identification of any regional differences that may exist. "Assumed identities" are typically developed from a social world in which the researcher is familiar (Tewskbery and Gagné 1997: 138). These factors seemed to work favorably in this project in terms of knowledge of the group, acceptance into the subculture, and willingness of respondents to participate.

The membership role involved participating in rally activities, observing rally attendees, and listening and participating in conversations, as well as traveling by BMW motorcycle extensively in Canada and the U.S. while recording fieldnotes. Additionally, the researcher participated in other activities commonly associated with membership in this subculture, such as reading motorcycle related literature and internet based information. Over the course of the research project, the researcher became immersed in the community of BMW motorcycle riders.

In addition to the above methodology, this study used survey and interview data from a larger project. A non-random survey was completed by a number of motorcyclists. Some questionnaires were distributed to riders by researchers and other questionnaires were strategically placed to be picked up voluntarily by riders at events attended by motorcycle riders. The sample was supplemented by a women rider that volunteered to distribute surveys to a local chapter of Women on Wheels (a national organization of women motorcyclists) to increase the representation of women in the survey. Utilizing these distribution techniques, a total of approximately 450 questionnaires were distributed.

The survey contained approximately twelve questions with a fixed response format which ascertained demographic information (age, gender, etc). and ten open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express themselves in their own words. A stamped envelope was provided for return of the questionnaire of which ninety-five were returned.

Questionnaires contained a pre-addressed postage paid postcard that a respondent could return in a separate mailing if she/he was willing to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Twenty-seven postcards were returned. Additionally, contacts in the field were used to expand the pool of potential interview participants. Nineteen women were eventually interviewed with nine interviews conducted with men. As women are a substantial minority of participants at BMW motorcycle rallies, augmenting the interview and survey data hopefully provided information that might have otherwise been unavailable.

The consistency of data from all three sources (participant observation, survey, and interviews) indicated that the point of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was achieved. For this particular project, only the data from BMW motorcycle riders were used, which was the majority of the respondents and interview participants. For further discussion of research methodologies used in this research, see Austin and Gagné (2008).

## **The Rally Setting**

Motorcycle rallies provide an opportunity for riders to interact and develop a sense of community and common identity (Maxwell 1998; Austin and Gagné 2008) through social interaction and ritualistic practices inviting a comparison to county fairs and parish picnics (Pierson 1997). Goodall's (2004: 732) research on a gathering of Ferrari owners provided a conceptual description appropriate for BMW rallies as "ritual celebrations" in which participants are able to spend time with others that share their unique pastime. In his work on a group of bicycle messengers, Kidder (2006) describes how illegal bicycle races serve as ritual activities that extend their meaning far beyond the actual time involved in the rituals while solidifying the identity and lifestyle of participants. Ritual activities provide much more for participants than just a forum to enjoy their chosen hobby or specialized interest.

A number of local BMW motorcycle clubs organize and sponsor rallies throughout the United States and Canada. These local clubs serve as "ritual sponsors" (Knottnerus and Loconto 2003) for the larger collective. Rallies are most commonly held at campgrounds or other large gathering spots, such as fairgrounds, and tend to be held in or near relatively smaller towns. A local club may be based in a large city but still organize and operate a rally in a small town or rural setting, which is generally more conducive to camping. Most locally sponsored BMW rallies are weekend long events which begin on Friday (a few on Thursday) and end on Sunday and can range in attendance from less than one hundred to several hundred or more. Attendance at these rallies consists of mostly BMW riders, although there are usually a few riders on other brands of motorcycles. Rally attendees usually arrive on Friday for a weekend rally, although some may arrive late at night due to other obligations and the distance needed to travel. On rare occasions, motorcyclists leave work on Friday afternoon and ride all night to attend a weekend rally, arriving on Saturday morning and leaving to return early Sunday. Rallies provide a meeting point for riders to congregate and the ritual activities reinforce their identity despite living in widely dispersed geographic areas.

The rallies organized by local clubs are smaller in scale than the annual "International" rallies sponsored by the two U.S. based clubs for owners of BMW motorcycles. These two clubs, the BMW MOA (BMW Motorcycle Owners of America) and the BMW RA (BMW Riders Association), each sponsor an annual rally. These rallies can attract several thousand riders, particularly the event sponsored by the larger of the two clubs, the BMW MOA.

Local rallies usually follow a prescribed format. Rally attendees pay a registration of usually \$15 to \$45 which typically includes camping, a patch or pin to commemorate the event, door prizes, and, in many cases, some of the meals for the weekend. Some rallies also provide live music. In many instances, the meals are provided by a local vendor or non-profit community group to provide funds for the organization. In addition, food may be available for purchase at the rally site.

## **The Rally Ritual**

Collins (2004: 53) reminds us that "Ritual is a body process" starting by the movement of bodies into the same place. The gathering of individuals in a common location with a common focus helps to start the ritualization process of a motorcycle rally. Following arrival at a rally, riders go to a central location to register for the rally where they talk with each other and with volunteers helping with the operation of the rally. Initial conversations may focus on issues related to the ride to the rally, such as the weather and the number of miles traveled. Registration areas tend to be centrally located and serve as places for informal meetings and conversations among riders. It

is an area for riders that arrive alone to meet others and for acquaintances to reconnect with each other. Registration is a simple process where information, such as name, address, and number of miles ridden to the rally is provided along with the registration fee. The always present release form is signed to protect the club from lawsuits resulting from mishaps associated with rally participation.

### ***Setting Up Camp***

After registering, the next step is usually selecting a campsite and setting up a tent. Some rally goers prefer to stay in local motels, but the majority camp at the rally site. Older riders, and those with unwilling to camp spouses or partners, may be among those that frequent the motel facilities. Campers favor small backpacking style tents as they must be carried with other equipment and clothing on a motorcycle. Tents are setup near each other and most riders have only one person per tent, unless occupied by a domestic couple or family. The campground resembles a small tent city with a relatively large number of tents in a small geographic area. In many cases, tents are placed much closer to each other than in traditional campgrounds in the U.S., which serves to encourage interaction and conversation in this temporary shared living arrangement. Despite the close proximity of campers, or perhaps because of it, there seems to be an attempt to respect each others privacy and desire for quiet. This is perhaps an attempt by rally attendees to create a backstage world (Goffman 1959) for themselves and others as sleeping is usually a backstage event, but the close proximity of tents and the relative lack of privacy makes the staging less certain. When large amounts of open space are available, there is still a tendency for campers to place tents in clusters.

After dark, small groups gather near common areas, such as around registration, throughout the campground, and around campfires. Others may ride to a nearby restaurant for dinner. At some rallies a band is provided and a group will congregate near it. Groups may consist of individuals who all know each other or a group in which some members know a few of the others but not everyone. A stranger riding solo may join a group of friends. The relaxed informal atmosphere gives participants the opportunity to share motorcycling and travel experiences, as well as to reinforce bonds. The importance of sitting around these campground gatherings is emphasized by the fact that most participants bring a small folding chair with them to rallies. Despite the very limited carrying capacity of a motorcycle, the ritualistic aspects of sitting around a camping area for hours with other riders talking and telling stories is such a central component of the rally experience that this valuable space is well-worth the sacrifice for transporting a chair.

### ***Storytelling***

Stories and tales of travel and adventure are frequent fare for these nightly gatherings. Travel tips that focus on budget travel, good camping locations, and scenic roads are especially welcome. Nostalgic recollections of earlier owned motorcycles that should have never been sold, memorable trips and experiences, and past rallies are also potential topics of discussion. Motorcycle maintenance and repair are also popular areas to cover. Telling a good tale is an important skill at these gatherings and can be viewed as a means for individual riders to increase their symbolic or cultural capital (Turner 1986; Collins 2004; Best 2006) within the group (Austin and Gagné 2008) and manage impressions (Goffman 1959). Consumption, in this case of BMW motorcycles and associated material goods, and language can

combine to confirm and display status for members of a particular community (Shankar 2006). The importance of this type of phenomenon is present in other groups that value long-term budget travel (Riley 1988; Adkins and Grant 2007).

In Mitchell's (2002) analysis of survivalists, we see a very similar phenomenon as storytelling provides functions of information exchange, structuring the subculture, and maintaining identity. Storytelling among the survivalists and among these motorcyclists becomes an end in itself, but also provides preparation for difficulties that may occur in the future, such as mechanical problems with motorcycles and various future societal scenarios constructed by survivalists. Telling of stories helps to structure the events in a consequential fashion with meaningful and agreed upon conventions that allow the teller and the listener to construct similar interpretations of their shared reality (Singleton 2001; Langellier 1989). This "communal understanding of events and history" (Seaton 2008: 293) helps to weave personal stories and histories with those of the group itself and individual members of the group.

One thirty-five year old that began riding at age nineteen stated:

I'm usually going to rallies and drinking some beer and maybe learning some new tech tips or such and hearing stories from old men and maybe the old ladies who ride with the old men.

Another rally participant, a forty-nine year old woman with a number of years riding experience, explained why she especially enjoyed one particular annual rally:

It's in the fall. It's the second weekend in October. I like fall temperatures and scenery, you know, with the colors. It's not a real big rally. I like the smaller rallies where you have a chance to either talk with a few more people or there's a few more people that are recognizable. That rally has um, an opportunity with the cooler temperatures for campfires. Goin' from campfire to campfire. Sit and listen, you know? Don't necessarily have to talk. Just let me listen and gather information that way.

When asked what people talk about, she responded

Usually, uh, places they've been, you know. Things that have happened to em. How they've come through different incidents or you know, different uh, maybe mechanical problems that you can kinda listen into and find out what to expect, maybe, on what's gonna happen with the bike or somebody's got a solution of what they did do. Uh, how different people pack and different attire. You know, gettin' different input on what works best for who and why, on whether it be clothes or things for the bike. That kindathing. I like to eavesdrop.

A cigar and/or an alcoholic beverage may accompany the conversations, but without the boisterous behavior that the uninitiated might expect at a gathering of motorcyclists. As the night wears on, one by one the riders excuse themselves and head for their respective tents. On Saturday morning riders begin crawling, literally, out of their small tents at about the time that the sun rises. BMW riders are noted for being early risers. The first stop for some rally participants is a restroom or one of the portable toilets scattered around the campground as there is a price to pay for drinking beer well into the nighttime hours.

## ***Activities of the Day***

During morning hours, as participants rise for the day, rally organizers are very conscientious about having coffee ready and available. At some rallies, breakfast is served at the rally site as part of the rally fee, or an additional fee may be charged. Members of the club that organized the rally and/or representatives of a local charity may arrive early to prepare breakfast.

Riders may also assemble in small groups to ride to a nearby restaurant. Many rally participants seem to prefer locally owned “mom and pop” restaurants over establishments that are part of national chains. This may be a reaction to the rationalized lives (Weber 1922/1959) that riders experience in their daily world or an attempt to localize their experiences by getting away from a McDonaldised society (Ritzer 2004) and its world of standardized food and experiences. For these, or other reasons, it is not uncommon for a larger number of motorcycles to be parked outside of small cafés in a town hosting a rally than are parked at a large fast food chain restaurant nearby. News of a popular locally owned restaurant can spread throughout the campground and riders may have a favorite local establishment from attending the rally in past years. Riders sometimes make an effort to advise each other of well-respected local restaurants that they know of when someone mentions that they will be riding through a particular area or town. In this group, experience seems to be a primary objective in life and avoiding a homogenized fast food dining experience is one way to enhance one’s life experiences while traveling.

After breakfast, rallyers are faced with a number of choices for their Saturday activities. Some choose to explore local roads and scenery, either alone or with a small group. Historic sites, parks, or other local attractions may be the destination of choice. At some rallies, the local club organizes a group ride for riders of motorcycles that are designed for travel on dirt roads. Organizers may also furnish riders with suggested routes that include local scenic roads. Some rally participants may choose to spend the day at the rally site talking to others, reading, or taking an afternoon nap.

One of the long-term features of motorcycle rallies is a poker run. While not included at all rallies, this is a popular Saturday activity for many riders. In this long established rally event, participants follow a prescribed route while stopping at particular locations to draw a card to complete a poker hand. These events are used to provide rally goers with a tour of the local area as organizers typically try to choose scenic roads for the route. It can also be used to encourage riders to patronize local merchants. For example, establishing a location to draw a card at a local restaurant or gasoline station can promote the business as a place of commerce for the participants. A poker run encourages participants to ride scenic routes and interact with each other, as well as promoting economic activity for the local economy (see Goodall 2004 for a description of a poker rally as experienced by a gathering of Ferrari owners). Cash awards, small plaques, or other small prizes are used to award the riders with the best hand(s) and sometimes a prize is also presented for the worst poker hand drawn by a rider.

One feature at some rallies is the presences of vendors, selling an assortment of goods useful for motorcycle travel and camping. Items that riders browse on Saturday might include motorcycle apparel, camping accessories, gear designed to assist in packing a motorcycle, and motorcycle accessories. These “ritual entrepreneurs” (Knottnerus and Loconto 2003) provide another type of economic activity for the rally settings. Many of the vendors are motorcycle enthusiasts themselves.

Saturday afternoon entertainment may take the form of “field events” which are safe low-key contests that involve riders and their motorcycles in typically foolish looking activities to entertain both participants and spectators. One featured field event may be a slow motorcycle race in which contestants try to ride as slow as possible, without putting their foot on the ground, to be the last to pass the finish line. Another events might involve a passenger throwing a water balloon over an overhead bar and attempting to catch it while the driver keeps the motorcycle moving or a sidecar obstacle course where the driver is blindfolded and the passenger must give directions. Field events are a lighthearted ritual that contributes to the festivities by encouraging interaction among spectators and participants while utilizing motorcycles, which reinforces their identity as riders.

On Saturday evenings or late afternoons many rallies have a dinner which encourages rally goers to eat together and promotes interaction. Sharing of meals in ritual settings can increase the bonds that participants feel toward each other (Mintz and DuBois 2002) and seems to encourage riders to meet new acquaintances and share further experiences. If a meal is served it typically, but not exclusively, occurs before an awards or closing ceremony.

### ***Closing Ceremony***

The closing ceremony may not be the last scheduled event for the rally, but it is generally the best attended single activity. At some rallies, door prizes are given away during the ceremonies, while at other rallies, door prizes are awarded throughout the rally weekend by posting winning numbers at the rally site. Awarding the most valuable door prizes may be postponed until the closing ceremony, which lends an air of anticipation to the event. Usually a local club member of the sponsoring club, or perhaps the club president, is in charge of conducting the closing ceremony.

At the ceremony, prizes may be presented to winners of the poker run and field events. Awards are also typically given in various categories for noteworthy riders which may include oldest male and female rider, youngest male and female rider, longest distance ridden to the rally (sometimes divided into male and female), oldest motorcycle ridden, and other similar awards. Rituals help to link the past, current, and future together (Kertzer 1988), in this case by recognizing special accomplishments.

During some award ceremonies rally organizers present monetary donations to local groups that provide services to the local community. As some rallies are held in small remote communities, these contributions can be a significant source of revenue. For example, one rally contributes to a local organization that provides Christmas presents for children in the community. Particular individuals, members of the club and local residents, may be recognized for their contribution to the success of the rally.

While almost all BMW based rallies feature some type of closing ceremony, there are differences based on variables such as level of formality, types and number of awards presented to riders, recognition of volunteers, and size of the rally. Additionally, special events, accomplishments, or other unique situations may be recognized during these ceremonies. For example, at a rally the weekend following the attacks on the U.S. of September 11, 2001, the ceremony provided a moment of silence. Ceremonies are very important human activities that can strengthen the bonds of group members (d'Aquili 1985).

A closing ceremony at the larger International rallies, such as the annual one sponsored by the BMW MOA, tends to have more activities and recognitions as one

might suppose. Ritual occasions allow participants to “come together to celebrate a symbol of their collective identity” which can serve to strengthen community-building (Brint 2001: 19-20) as both our personal and social identities are intertwined (Tilley 2006). Closing ceremonies allow for a type of semi-formal closure as most attendees congregate together for this event. Although live music later in the evening and breakfast on Sunday may still remain as potential activities, these events do not carry the same symbolic importance as the closing ceremonies.

After the ceremony some riders leave the rally to begin their trip home. Occasionally, someone may ride all night while others may begin their trip home with a later stop for the night. Riders who live nearby may return home that evening but most remain at the rally and may watch the musical entertainment if provided and/or continue the discussions in small groups as occurred the night before.

### **Going Home**

Many riders rise early on Sunday mornings and begin to pack their camping equipment on their motorcycles. By 8 or 9 am the campground may be as much as one-half to two-thirds empty. A short non-denominational Christian based religious service is held at some rallies for those wishing to attend. Sunday mornings are a time for old and new friends to say their goodbyes with handshakes and hugs. Among BMW riders, there seems to be a strong emphasis on telling each other to have a safe trip utilizing various phrases which may initially seem to be a typical version of “easy talk” (Liebow 1967), however this practice seems to occur even among riders that are involved in more substantive conversations with close friends. This may serve as a tacit warning of the understood dangers of motorcycling. During the rally, riders may exchange telephone numbers, business cards, or e-mail addresses with new acquaintances. Frequent rally participants can develop a friendship network that extends throughout the country. As one rider explained:

...over the years and over a lot of riding I've made really good friends and, well, um, they're in different places in the states so, and Canada, you know, so I uh, I've got lots of friends, it's just that they're all real scattered, so I have to ride by myself to see the various people, unless you know, somebody's visiting me, which, has been, uh, more common lately.

A fifty-five year old female rider that attends a number of rallies each year explained what she likes about rallies as:

Oh, I like being with fellow addicts, I guess. I like being around people that are as pumped up about living as I am. You know, that, you just start talking to them and riding is so important and it's just that you share that.

Rallies and travel seem to be inexorably linked for many of those that were involved in this research. A rider may focus on a particular rally as a destination for a specific weekend, or a rally may be part of a longer trip that allows the individual to experience the freedom of travel and escape the confines of day-to-day life, but punctuate the trip with connections to a larger community. As one female rider with twenty-seven years of experience explained:

A friend and I went to Newfoundland, we ended up there, but we were gonna go for a month and we went to the Iowa rally and then to the New Hampshire rally and to Nova Scotia and then came back and we went to an Ontario rally so we had four rallies on weekends, which just felt, I don't

know, it has a feel of being around friends even if you're at a rally that's that far away from home and you might not know anyone.

## **Group Normative Behavior**

Behavior at BMW rallies is sedate compared with stereotypical images of “biker” gatherings (Endres 2002; Page 2001), as emphasized by the fact that children are welcome at these rallies with some rallies having events specifically designed for their participation and many featuring reduced registration fees for children. Although alcohol consumption is a part of many rally settings, it takes on a quiet and controlled appearance. Loud drunken behavior is rarely, if ever, a part of rally life and can result in strong informal sanctions. One stereotypical joke about BMW riders is that they are usually getting up in the morning about the time that Harley-Davidson rally goers are going to bed. The group norms discourage loud behavior, including loud motorcycles, and acceptance of those that share these norms but intolerance of those that do not. It is fairly common to hear BMW motorcyclists complain of loud motorcycles and the impact that they have on public perceptions of riders. At larger motorcycle gatherings, such as Bike Week in Daytona, Florida, it is not uncommon for BMW riders to segregate themselves from other motorcyclists in terms of camping location.

Additionally, motorcyclists at these rallies have a high degree of trust exhibited toward other attendees. As mentioned, some rallies may have several thousand participants. Despite the anonymity afforded such large groups, riders feel comfortable leaving items such as helmets, camping equipment, riding suits (which may cost close to \$1,000 or more), and motorcycles with keys in the ignition unguarded for hours or even overnight. This sense of common trust also contributes to a sense of community as riders feel safe, from both violent and property crimes, while participating in rallies. One rider stated: “I seldom worry about equipment being stolen at a motorcycle event and have never lost anything.” Another experienced rider commenting on rallies stated: “even if you don't know each other, you're friends and you're not going to take something from a friend.”

Women, although a noticeably small minority of the BMW rally population, appear to be accepted as full participants in this group (Gagné and Austin 2002) somewhat atypical of the gendered spaces (Bird and Sokolofski 2005) found in many social settings. Despite cross-cultural evidence that men's interaction with machinery, particularly motorcycles and automobiles, provides an avenue for homosocial bonding experiences that exclude women (Mellstrom 2004) this subculture seems to transcend this gender division.

It should be pointed out that a good deal of the conversations at rallies tend to focus on instrumental aspects of life rather than the expressive conversations that are stereotypically associated with female based gatherings, which may be reflective of larger differences in patterns of conversation between the genders (Tannen 1990; for a comparison with a female dominated setting see Montemurro's 2002 examination of bridal shower ritual). Stereotypical “biker” behavior involving objectification of women (Hopper and Moore 1990; Quinn 1987) is not part of the BMW rally scene, despite the general association of motorcycles with masculinity (Chambers 1983).

Past research suggests to us that many women motorcyclists (Glamser 2003; Auster 2001; Gagné and Austin 2002) were introduced and/or mentored into the world of motorcycling by males that were part of their life, such as boyfriends, spouses, or brothers. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the women in this setting have adapted their behavior and orientation to fit into the male dominated

world of BMW rallies, as occurs in other recreational settings (Raisborough 2006). Riding a high number of miles is a status marker in this group and some of the recognized high mileage riders are women, which helps to confer their status in the group. Women are involved in the operation and organization of the rallies, as well as leadership roles in clubs at the national and local level.

The ritualistic aspects of these rallies and motorcycling seem to transcend larger social divisions, such as race, gender, occupation, and social class. These divisions are not invisible, but are negated in comparison to the out-group and in-group divisions based on the rider/non-rider division and reinforced by the motorcycle brand of choice. Hierarchies in this subculture are based on issues that are salient to the group, such as riding ability and adventurous travel experiences (Austin and Gagné 2008). Commitment to the normative structure replaces traditional status markers. As one forty year old female rider explained when asked if she has gained or learned anything that has helped her in other aspect of her life:

It's helped me, like I said, meeting people. If you don't know their backgrounds and it's made me a little bit more accepting and open and not judgmental, you know, as far as occupations and where a person comes from or whatever.

In his examination of edgeworkers or risk-takers, of which motorcyclists can be included, Lyng (2005a: 4) points out that when people that are separated by these divisions get together “and discover deep-seated commonalities of personal experience, they often feel a sense of connection rooted in something basic to their souls.” In his discussion of those that voluntarily take risks, Lyng suggests that there are social and cultural forces in modern life that lead to psychic issues that link participants together. The rituals of rallies serve to reinforce and strengthen these bonds by providing an avenue in which participants are bound together due to their participation in a risk-taking activity or edgework (Lyng *ibidem*) and additionally by the nature and impact of ritual activities (Durkheim 1915/1965; Collins 2004).

### **Tribal Markers and Boundary Distinction**

Recreational subcultures use jargon, equipment, and processes to identify members (Wheaton 2000), and the choice of riding gear and motorcycle provides an avenue for group identity and boundaries to be reinforced at rallies and while riders are away from the safe confines of a rally. The equipment, clothing, and other identifying artifacts can become totems to the subculture (Kidder 2006). While not formally required for rally participants, these accouterments help to insure full acceptance into the subculture and are a ubiquitous feature of rally life.

### ***The Machine***

Social scientists recognize that in the human world, material objects represent more than their simple use value to their owners as members of society interrelate with material objects in their culture and, more specifically, within subcultures. One of the ways that we express ourselves and develop self-identity is through consumption and use of products with the accompanying social interaction (Dant 1999). Rituals and the qualities that a culture assigns to an object can provide the object with a fetish quality (Baudrillard 1972/1981). As Dant, (1996: 511) points out, as

consumption becomes fetishized it includes “the social negotiation and sharing of the values of the object so the ritualistic practices that fetishise objects will involve discursive action related to the object and its capacities.” This suggests to us that motorcycle rallies provide a social avenue for the collective and individual fetishization of the artifacts in this subculture where adherents to this shared culture gather for intense interaction centered on the consumption of the product. It must be remembered that we are speaking in the expansive sense of the word consumption, where the product is enjoyed and revered beyond the mere function- transporting an individual from one location to another- that it serves.

For this tribe, the design of some of the current sacred objects (Durkheim 1915/1965; Collins 2004) can be traced back to 1923 when the first BMW motorcycle was produced. This first BMW motorcycle had a horizontally opposed twin cylinder engine. While the technology has improved and the design has evolved dramatically, the basic feature of a twin cylinder motorcycle with opposing cylinders protruding from the side of the bike has remained a choice for many tribal members. While many current BMW models do not exhibit this design feature, those owners with this design are able to trace their chosen sacred object back to its origin, which provides a sense of continuity and a form of fetishism (Dant 1996).

The sacred object for this tribe, the BMW motorcycle, serves as another means of identifying in-group members. The branding of the bike is more important than the age, cost, or aesthetic condition of the motorcycle. Oddly enough in this group, aesthetically challenged bikes are regarded with special esteem if their condition is attributed to high mileage and adventurous travel (Austin and Gagné 2008), much like well-worn clothing among mountain climbers (Mitchell 1983). For this group, looking at odometer mileage is a search for high status riders and motorcycles and can be an important pastime at rallies.

Furthermore, Chambers (1983) provides insight in understanding the importance that riders attach to this form of transportation and their individual machines as motorcycles are described as an individualistic and personal mode of transportation. Kidder (2006) found a similar phenomenon in his examination of bicycle messengers and their reverence for the sacredness of their bicycles which were imbued with qualities that represent freedom and devotion to a lifestyle for members of their subculture. We would not expect to find this respect and symbolic importance assigned to a bicycle only ridden occasionally around a suburban neighborhood for recreation. The social processes involved with use of the product impact relations between the members of the subculture, but also bears directly on how the individuals interact with the material object itself (Dant 2008). As one rider stated:

I think all riders regardless of the style of riding or the make of the bike, feel a connection to each other. It is an unspoken understanding that we all share a passion. People who don't ride have no concept of that connection, people in four wheel vehicles don't wave to each other going down the highway.

O'toole and Were (2008) help us understand the intensity of feeling and emotion that these riders experience with their motorcycles and how rallies and the accompanying ritualization serves to intensify these emotions. They utilize the work of Hodder (2000), who asserts that there are different approaches to the interpretation of material culture. One category requires that we interpret and understand material culture as much more than just the sum of the use values of the artifacts of a culture or subculture. We must understand that in this approach “material culture represents social and symbolic meaning that is tacit in nature and is

embedded in the culture and practices of the group” (O’toole and Were 2008: 621). The historical, cultural, and circumstantial forces associated with the material aspects of this culture, such as motorcycles and riding gear, combine with the social history of the subculture to combine into a highly symbolic and meaningful social experience. This combination of material and non-material culture and social history can be captured by mechanical representation in the form of a motorcycle.

Automobile use and operation involves an interplay of complex human and mechanical relationships (Thrift 2004). With the exception of particular automotive based subcultures (Best 2006; Goodall 2004), we can assume that many drivers do not embellish their respective vehicles with the same emotional and experiential attributes that these motorcyclists do. Combining this passion with the specialized skills required to operate a motorcycle, compared to an automobile (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration 2007), and the intensity of those involved in “serious leisure” (Stebbins 2001) can help us to comprehend the attachment to material objects that are enmeshed in a subculture devoted to their consumption and use.

The brand and/or style of motorcycle serves to divide riders into various groups (Pierson 1997), in a somewhat sectarian manner which is more traditionally reserved for disagreements over interpretations of ancient sacred texts, ritual, and practices, much like the differences in automotive enthusiast subcultures (Goodall 2004; Best 2006). While other motorcyclists are believers, each brand loyal group realizes that they are the only true believers and feel a certain disdain, or in some cases pity, for those that are not part of the chosen. As is the case in the spiritual world, recent converts are viewed as a victory and may serve as some of the most vocal two wheeled apostles of their new creed, much like a recently reformed smoker being the first to complain about the nearby inconsiderate smoker that just lit up. In discussing the brand and style of riding divisions one rider explained, “I believe there are a number of identifiable sub-groups in motorcycling: Harley true believers; Gold Wing people; hardcore sportbike riders; squids; sport-touring people; BMW people. Many riders identify strongly with their subgroup more than with the sport as a whole. It’s very tribal.”

### ***The Clothing***

Possessions can be an important part of self-identity (Belk 1988; Tharp 2007) and leisure experiences are influenced by the equipment utilized by participants (Chambers 1983). Clothing itself can serve to as a means for socialization and/or social control or, conversely, for liberation (Crane and Bovone 2006). Clothing is one marker of territory, like motorcycle choice, for this tribe as it serves to distinguish between members and non-members when riders encounter each other in a setting other than rallies, such as during the trip to and from a rally location. Black leather vests, doo-rags, and large wallets attached to chains mark the members of a competing tribe, but not this group. This is the world of the familiar blue and white BMW roundel which replaces symbols of other tribes, such as eagles and Harley-Davidson emblems, that predominate at other respective gatherings. Clothing for this tribe takes on a much more functional look inviting comparisons to the Michelin man, a road warrior, or a smurf. Clothing can serve as a marker or sign of membership in a culture or subculture (Kidder 2006), and reflects how we define ourselves (Crane and Bovone 2006), and this group is no exception. While not the exclusive choice, the majority of riders show up wearing leather or synthetic one and two-piece riding outfits designed to protect the rider from adverse weather and the unwelcome spill

that punctuates the risk of motorcycling. Heavy boots, also specifically designed for motorcycling, with some reaching almost to the knee, reside below the riding suit.

This tribal apparel is best suited for the ride as the primary sacred ritual of this group is riding, not walking. The cut of the clothing, designed for sitting on a motorcycle, and its weight can make walking a bit of an awkward appearing experience. Padded jacket sleeves dangle well below the wrist as they appear to be cut for someone with the reach of a heavyweight boxer. They are designed to fit the outstretched arms of someone riding a motorcycle, not the typical use of a jacket designed to merely keep the wearer warm, dry, or stylish. Riding pants appear to be in need of a tailor's attention as they drape lazily over the boots of riders. These too are cut for the ride and fall into a more precise fit with a rider's legs tucked beneath his torso in the riding position associated with European and Japanese touring and sport motorcycles, as compared to the position of legs extended forward in the position more associated with a cruiser style motorcycle. Knee and hip pads lend to the ungainly appearance of walking riders. During times of cold weather, electrically heated clothing may be tucked underneath the exterior garments. Heavy leather, sometimes synthetic, gloves and a full face motorcycle helmet, which surrounds the rider's entire head in a protective cocoon, complete the ensemble and are usually the first items to be removed after climbing off the bike. The gloves, also designed specifically with the motorcyclist in mind, may have a gauntlet that reaches several inches above the wrist to keep the wind and rain from creeping up the sleeves of a jacket. Gauntlets also provide more protection in the unfortunate event of an accident.

The dress code helps to insure that these members are never regarded as "one of those." For this group, the prescribed apparel helps to protect from outside invasion and to identify other true-believers. These tribal members seem to be able to identify each other at rest-stops and gasoline stations, as well as when they pass each other riding in opposite directions at highway friendly speeds. Despite the costly price of the tribal wear for this subculture, it is generally considered a necessity for participation. Safety is of utmost importance, as well as being able to ride in adverse weather conditions. These objectives result in a type of anti-fashion fashion statement.

BMW riders are sometimes known as a conservative and stodgy lot (Slawinski 2005) and the dress code does nothing to dispel the stereotype. The clothing of this group serves both functional and symbolic purposes and helps to delineate the boundaries of the tribe. The symbolic aspects of the clothing help to distinguish these riders as true enthusiasts (Goodall 2004) involved in serious leisure (Stebbins 2001) and edgework (Lyng 1990; 2005a) from those viewed as mere recreational riders, or worse, those labeled as posers.

### ***The Outsiders***

This group regards posers as those that dress and act as if they are motorcycle riders or "bikers" while actually riding very few miles and possessing questionable riding styles and skill levels (Austin and Gagné 2008). Posers are regarded as dressing the part of a real biker while more concerned with appearance, both their own and those of their motorcycle, than with serious riding and high mileage that is so important to this group. In his work on bicycle messengers (Kidder 2006) reports a very similar subcultural bias against "rookie" messengers that too early adopted the symbols of long-term messengers. Best (2006) found comparable sentiment against those in a car subculture that were regarded as fakes rather than racers that are real

or authentic. Those that are labeled as posers may be regarded as not “paying their dues” by long-distance riding, developing their riding skills, and other normative practices that make one a serious rider.

While they may not be that different than this tribe, in terms of their socioeconomic status, the so-called RUBS (Rich Urban Bikers) are stereotypical of those they regard as posers. A sixty-seven year old rider with fifty-three years of riding experience stated that the social aspect of riding that he disliked the most is “the false image portrayed by false wannabes” while also responding that he feels a bond with his peers that “assemble at rallies all over the country and are high mileage riders.” A thirty-three year old rider with fourteen years of riding experience captured the negative sentiment targeted toward those that are regarded as riders that haven’t captured the true essence of motorcycling as he responded that the intellectual or emotional aspect of motorcycling that he dislikes the most is that biking has “developed an amazing number of symbols, which are adopted by a spiritually thirsty population, say yuppies of Daytona. It’s like having the form of something without the soul.” He also stated that he has “met some strange and wonderful people on bikes, as I stated before, but I’ve met a lot of posers, rednecks, assholes, reprobates, scalawags as well.”

This tribe seems to reserve special contention for those stereotyped out-group members that dress the part of the biker with leather vests, jackets, and jeans, but ride few miles and pose as true believers (Austin and Gagné 2008). Although this subculture seems to reserve special contention for stereotyped out-group members that play the role of biker and pose as hard-core riders, the true outlaw bikers, or the so-called one-percenters (Quinn 2001), are so few in number and so far removed that they are virtually irrelevant to this group, as this group is to them. However, the posers with their typically loud exhaust pipes are a contemptuous lot to this tribe. In this social world, motorcycles are viewed as objects of adventure, speed, and travel. Loud pipes do not enhance this experience, but are viewed as creating hard feelings in the civilian population and the prevailing attitude is that this negative imagery can affect all riders with restrictions and negative attitudes.

Touring motorcyclists want to encounter those that are receptive to them (Corey 1996). When a wet and cold BMW rider pulls into a small town mom-and-pop motel to find the vacancy sign does not apply to them, their thoughts of a warm dry motel room shift to blame and anger at the biker image that has been part of American culture for over half a decade (Austin, Gagné and Orend forthcoming; Reynolds 2000) as they wonder if loud pipes and posers have brought the image to this immediately full motel.

A motorcycle rider and writer compared this division of riders in various groups as making it easier to understand how a single religion can be the source of so many diverse groups (Pierson 1997). In this world, as in other motorcycling subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), these divisions are taken seriously and serve to reinforce the choice of motorcycles, and by extension, type of clothing and riding style that mark each group. In a manner typical of in-group and out-group differences (Tajfel 1982), each group tends to stereotype the other while possessing an overly positive imagery of their group at the expense of others.

One 49 year old BMW rider, in explaining distinction between a motorcyclist and biker, alluded to the importance of protective clothing and the style of bike in her self-image

See it was the biker to me that’s no helmet, no jacket, you know. A motorcyclists to me is, bein’ as safe as you possibly can and protectin’ your body. The type of bike Um, you know, I’ve, I’m from the days where choppers were the whole thing, too. You know, everybody took a bike and

extended the forks and had the big handlebars, which I can't imagine ever riding. How would you ride that safely? Just, yeah, that's what I consider a biker.

Riders hinted of these divisions in their responses when they described the social aspects of motorcycling they like the best. One fifty year old rider liked "Rallies, club events, and other events with like-minded people". Another sixty year old rider responded "meeting and riding with like-minded people" and reported enjoying "rallies and camping". When asked about a connection with other riders, this latter rider responded that "within the BMW community, there is a sense of community."

## Discussion

Motorcyclists are notorious for separating themselves into subgroups based on brand and/or model of motorcycle (Pierson 1997; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This project examines only one brand specific category of motorcycle rallies as we focus on those associated with riders of BMW motorcycles therefore care should be taken before using these observations to generalize to other groups. Hopefully, however, this discussion can inform the analysis of other sporting and recreational groups.

As we return to Collins' (2004: 48) theoretical work on interaction ritual, we can see how these rallies contain all four of the prescribed ingredients: 1) "Group assembly (bodily co-presence)" is apparent throughout the rally process due to the high level of physical and social interaction; 2) "Barrier to outsiders" are apparent as non BMW riders, with a few exceptions, are excluded from rally participation mostly through informal mechanisms such as self selection and other social processes. This exclusion is reinforced by markers of the subculture, such as group norms, clothing, and motorcycle choice; 3) "Mutual focus of attention" occurs as common objects, such as BMW motorcycles and riding gear, and common activities, such as field events and closing ceremonies, promote the mutual awareness of participants in terms of "each other's focus of attention"; 4) A "shared mood" exists as participation encourages a common mood and/or shared emotional experience through activities, shared temporary living conditions, and consumption of common products (BMW motorcycles, riding apparel, etc.). Collins (*ibidem*) points out that these four ingredients feed on each other. This can produce a process similar to Durkheim's "collective conscience" with the sharing of beliefs and norms.

Turner (1986: 415) summarizes Durkheim's theory on ritual among those gathered together as promoting "a sense of solidarity, a convergence of outlooks, and an increase in social attachments." Durkheim's work helps us understand the broader context of the importance of ritualistic practices in attributing unique or special characteristics to inanimate objects. Groups assemble and focus on an emotionally laden object, which leads to the production of a sacred object (Collins 2004: 37) and, for society; this is an ongoing process as sacred things are constantly created from the ordinary. In this case, the BMW motorcycle fulfills this function. Dant's work (1996; 2008) suggests to us that the consumption of a product, in the broad sense which includes concepts such as ritual and fetishism of the object, results in a "cultural production" (Dant 1996: 514) that is as real for the consumer as the physical product itself. The cultural production of the object can be more important than its actual physical existence.

Motorcycle rallies, BMW based or otherwise, provide a microcosm of the larger social world. They provide an avenue for a glimpse into a classic world of in-group and out-group (Tajfel 1982) boundary distinctions. The clothing, motorcycles of

choice, and behavioral norms of various types of rallies reinforce the choices that individuals make in their daily lives. The ritualistic practices reinforce the identity of participants and help to distinguish the boundaries of the group.

In a post-industrial world the role of non-geographically bounded communities appears to be becoming more important in terms of our sense of community and attachment to a larger collective (Counts and Counts, 1996; Forster, 2004). As we move further into a post-industrial world, consumer tribes (Maffesoli 1996) appear to be increasingly important in the construction of society and our personal lives. Additionally, these groups and others such as survivalists and bicycle messengers can help us to understand the ability of people to construct meaning in their lives in a post-industrial society (Mitchell 2002; Kidder 2006). Tilley (2006: 10) argues that society is in a condition which results in more uncertainty in terms of class, culture, and community and, as such, social identity has become more of a matter of "self-conscious reflection." Online recreational based interaction even allows for the construction of identification across national boundaries with complete strangers (Adkins and Grant 2007). Rallies help to reinsure participants that they have constructed the appropriate identity for themselves, while also constructing and maintaining a collective and historically based identity for the group. This process links micro-level interaction with the larger social processes of the subculture and, even, the larger culture.

Edgeworkers, those involved in voluntary risk-taking, seem to thrive on the balance between control and catastrophe as they push the edge of this balance. Micro-level experiences, such as self-actualization, are linked with the macro-level influences, such as rationality in the dominant culture, in these subcultures (Lyng 1990; Lois 2005). Perhaps, rituals within groups dedicated to edgework help to moderate between the individual micro-level interactions and the macro-level forces, which operate to encourage the development of edgework as a reaction to these forces. Although, it is not completely clear where edgework and post-industrial culture coincide and conflict with each other. It is somewhere at this intersection of modern social constraints and the attraction of the intensity of edgework that the appeal plays itself out (Lyng 2005b). Rituals may be the functional equivalent of an intersection for these various forces.

It is difficult to isolate specific reasons why particular individuals chose this particular avenue to construct at least a portion of their social life. Insight into these consciously chosen groups can aid in the understanding of the changes occurring in the larger society and the role that recreational and other subcultures of choice can play in replacing more traditional forms of community, ritual, consumption, and identity.

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