2020

A qualitative exploration of female Harley-Davidson apparel wearer's symbolic expression of identities through dress

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A qualitative exploration of female Harley-Davidson apparel wearer’s symbolic expression of identities through dress

by

Amy Jo Shane-Nichols

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandise, and Design

Program of Study Committee:
Ann Marie Fiore, Major Professor
Mary Lynn Damhorst
Telin Chung
Russell Laczniak
Daniel Spikes

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2020

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Randal L. Nichols, (August 10, 1962-February 8, 2017). Thank you for your never-ending support, encouragement and love. To my children, Joseph and Margaret, I hope my work will inspire you and remind you that anything is possible.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Mary Lynn Damhorst and Ann Marie Fiore, my co-major professors, thank you for your support and guidance throughout the course of this research and my journey at Iowa State University. I learned so much by working with you on this paper; it was a valuable experience!

To my committee members, Telin Chung, Russ Laczniak, and Daniel Spikes, thank you for your support throughout my journey at Iowa State University. I truly appreciate your time, dedication, and guidance.

To Dr. Telin Chung and Dr. Jessica Hurst, thank you for your guidance and mentorship in my professional development toward a future academic position. I appreciate working with you both to hone my teaching and research skills. Dr. Hurst, thank you for sharing your personal experiences with me as my mentor for the Preparing Future Faculty courses.

To Arienne McCracken, thank you for your assistance and friendship. To my Uncle Mark, thank you for providing me with a place of solitude to write.

Finally, I want to offer my appreciation to the women who participated in this project. Without you this study would not have been possible. Thank you for your openness and for sharing your time, insights, experiences with me.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the potential role of Harley branded apparel in defining and expressing the self-identity of female participants within the Harley community. In addition, I explored the potential role of the Harley branded community in shaping identity of the women.

To achieve this goal, a grounded theory approach was used. Twenty-three women who resided in central Iowa were recruited for this study through purposive and snowball sampling strategies. All of the participants owned and wore Harley branded apparel items. The ages of the participants ranged from 33 to 65, with an average age of 52. All self-reported as being White. Fifteen of the participants operated their own motorcycle, and eight rode as passengers. The number of years that a participant had been riding motorcycles as operators or passengers ranged from 1 to 45 years, with an average of 13 years.

Data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews, which lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in a private home or in a meeting room at a local library. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. In addition to the interview questions, the technique of photo elicitation, or interviewing with photographs was also employed.

Several existing theories proved useful in understanding patterns in the data. Analysis of the results benefitted from identity and social identity theories, as well as, symbolic interaction, symbolic consumption, and self-image congruity, which stem from social identity theory. Post-post modernism and feminist concepts were also employed. Based on analysis of the participants’ responses to interview questions, four key themes emerged from the data: Harley
business strategies, experiential aspects of consumption, social and relational aspects of consumption, and social roles and personal identity.

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the data centered on the Harley-Davidson Motor Company. Harley dealerships are not only a place to sell products, they are also a place where the company can connect with customers and build relationships that can enhance customer loyalty. The interviewed women were extremely brand loyal. Participants attributed their brand loyalty to the motorcycles, the brand/company’s image, camaraderie among employees and customers, and consumption experiences.

The second theme focused on the experiential benefits of riding. Although understanding the experiential benefits women gained from consumption of the motorcycle and apparel products was not a goal of the study, this topic permeated the conversations with participants. The social and relational aspects of consumption were the most frequently mentioned and sought-after benefit from riding and wearing the apparel. The women also enjoyed the freedom that motorcycling provided. They enjoyed being able to relax and “check out” from their daily responsibilities and enjoy “me time.” The second most mentioned experiential aspect of consumption was sensory stimulation and the sense of connection to nature when riding on a motorcycle. The women described feeling immersed in the sensory environment of the road. Finally, they talked about the feeling of enjoyment and sense of empowerment that came from learning to ride a motorcycle and/or master a new skill. They had an awareness of the challenges associated with riding and showed immense concern for safety.

The third theme revolved around the concept of community and was a motivator for an individual’s behavior. Feeling a sense of connectedness with others was an important aspect of being a part of the Harley community/family. The sub-themes that emerged for this category
were organized around the different social contexts and relationships that occur during consumption. Participants experienced feelings of communitas and comradery as a result of engaging in motorcycling related activities and described experiences that included family, friends, significant others, new acquaintances, and cliques. Several of the women gained enjoyment from participating in and volunteering for charity rides/events and local dealership rides/events.

The fourth theme, social roles and personal identity, permeated participants’ conversations about Harley apparel. Harley apparel did play a role in the female Harley community. Riding is a part of the women’s identity; it is one of the many roles they occupy in society. Marking their identity as a Harley rider with branded clothing helps them express and actualize this identity. The Harley brand is very recognizable; it identifies the women as a motorcycle rider and as a member of the Harley-Davidson/motorcycling community. A majority of the women incorporated Harley apparel into their daily wardrobe and engaged in appearance labor and performativity, as a means to manage their different roles. Wearing Harley apparel and riding motorcycles is an element of their self-definition. Feelings of status, achievement, self-confidence, self-esteem, and an enhanced sense of self were derived from owning and riding a Harley motorcycle and/or wearing Harley apparel. Participants shared behavioral expectations regarding types of apparel worn to motorcycle and non-motorcycle related activities. Finally, participants described body image concerns related to wearing Harley apparel.

It appears that no research had been conducted to understand Harley branded apparel’s potential role in defining the identity of female participants within the Harley community. The findings of this study suggest that participants’ purchase motivation and brand-related behavior is identity based. Consequently, this research expands previous research by exploring women
particpants’ perspectives regarding Harley brand symbolism and the Harley community. Knowledge gained from this study may be used to better design and market the apparel and may benefit Harley in strengthening market share and company viability. Understanding the motivations influencing women’s consumption of Harley branded apparel has practical benefits for Harley and other subcultures of consumption. The Harley SOC represents a unique phenomenon, because it embodies a culture that revolves around the consumption of a luxury item, the motorcycle. Harley branded apparel is unique because it is an extension of the Harley brand. The findings may help Harley to better market its branded apparel line and strengthen riders’ brand loyalty. This study may also provide valuable information for other brands, more specifically other lifestyles or luxury brands, and subcultures of consumption. This study also provides information about building identity through a community of consumption, which could be useful for other brands. This study provides an interesting look into a group of women who reflect changing identities and roles of women in society. In addition, this study offers insight into the thoughts of women who may be post-postmodern feminist consumers.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to understand Harley branded apparel from the perspective of the female Harley community. This research sought to explore the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley branded community in shaping identity for these women. Moreover, this study sought to expand previous research by exploring women’s perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism and the Harley community.

An inquiry into the Harley subculture was warranted because the motorcycling industry was facing a drastic reduction in new motorcycle sales in the United States during 2007 to 2018 (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). The motorcycling community was becoming more demographically diverse as more ethnicities, millennials, and women with diverse socio-economic backgrounds joined the traditionally White, masculine activity (Schouten, Martin, & McAlexander, 2006). Women were playing an ever larger role in the motorcycling community (Motorcycle Industry Council, 2018); therefore, it was important to understand their experiences and socialization with motorcycle brands.

Female Harley riders represented potential growth in a market that overall had become stagnant. In comparison to sales of motorcycles over the past 13 years, Harley branded apparel sales had declined 20%. Meanwhile, other licensed apparel sales had declined as well (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). It appears that no research had been conducted to understand Harley branded apparel’s potential role in defining the identity of female participants within the Harley community. The most recent research found that riders’ identities were not tied to motorcycling, as it had been for the riders of the past (Thompson, 2012a). Thus, it is possible that the stagnation in Harley branded apparel and other Harley licensed product consumption could be attributed to a change in riding’s role in participants’ identity formation and their connection to
the brand community. It is possible that new riders find it unnecessary to wear Harley branded apparel in order to feel a connection to the brand and the community. To ensure that the type of Harley product offerings meet riders’ needs and expectations, there is a need to understand the meanings that individuals’ assign to Harley branded apparel (Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, & Brannen, 2004) and explore the motivations influencing participants’ apparel consumption (Mick et al., 2004). Therefore, an exploration into the possible connection of apparel consumption to female participants’ identity formation and connection to the community is warranted and may benefit the company in strengthening market share and company viability.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the challenging phenomenon now facing Harley-Davidson, a 116-year-old motorcycle manufacturing company. A historical overview of the company and the background of motocycling, a traditionally masculine recreational activity, is presented, which sets the stage for why the current situation of the company warrants an investigation. The purpose of this study is outlined, then I discuss the epistemology, theories, and methodology informing this study. Finally, I end the chapter by defining terms used in the research.

**Background**

Motorcycling is facing a challenging new phenomenon. Sales of new motorcycles have failed to rebound from the 2007-2008 economic crisis, and there has been a shift in new rider demographics as more women are entering into what once was a traditionally male-dominated activity. Harley-Davidson, a 116-year-old motorcycle manufacturing company and a dominant and iconic player in the motorcycle industry, is also experiencing these challenges.

The Harley-Davidson Motor Company, currently the only motorcycle manufacturer based in the United States, was founded in 1903. Harley-Davidson (Harley) was incorporated in 1981 and is currently comprised of two strategic business units: Harley-Davidson Motor Company (HDMC) and Harley-Davidson Financial Services (HDFS). HDMC designs,
manufactures, and sells Harley-Davidson motorcycles and related products such as parts and accessories and general merchandise (including apparel) (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). Harley motorcycles and related products are distributed through a network of independent dealerships. Harley currently has over 1500 dealerships worldwide, with almost 700 located within the United States (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). In 2018, Harley generated around $4.9 billion in revenue from the sales of motorcycles and related products (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). Approximately 78% of Harley’s revenue is generated through motorcycle sales, 15% from Parts and Accessories (P&A), and 5% from General Merchandise (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). In 2009, Time Magazine reported that Harley was facing its toughest cycle since the 1980’s when it almost went bankrupt (Gray, 2009). In 2006, prior to the economic financial crisis, the number of new motorcycles registered in the US totaled 543 thousand, and Harley’s new motorcycle registrations totaled 267.9 thousand (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2006). Thirteen years later, new motorcycle sales are still struggling to gain ground after the 2007-2008 economic crisis. According to data from the Motorcycle Industry Council (2015), Harley is the market leader in sales of heavy weight motorcycles in the United States. Harley’s new motorcycle sales accounted for approximately 50% of total sales within the US in 2018 (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). However, new motorcycle sales for both the United States and Harley in 2018 were 50% less than in 2006 (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). Given the current instability of the motorcycling industry, it would be productive to take a fresh look at one of its leaders, the Harley-Davidson Motor Company, and gain understanding of a unique consumer group – female consumers of Harley apparel.

Recruiting New Riders

Harley has been trying to alter its aging demographic for the past 12 years. Many marketers were eager to point out that the Harley brand was dying, because its core customer, the
baby boomer, was their lifeblood. Understanding the need for a shift in demographics, the company began to look for other market niches (Schouten et al., 2006). Harley began its efforts to recruit new riders in 2007 (Gray, 2009). These outreach efforts were aimed initially at women and young adults but were later expanded to focus more on African Americans and Hispanics. *Time Magazine* reported in 2009 that these efforts had been marginally successful (Gray, 2009). In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in 2011, Harley confided that they were trying to market to outreach customers and keep their macho image intact. Mark-Hans Richer, chief marketing officer for Harley, stated: “We’re not trying to be everything to everyone; we’re trying to be our thing to more people” (Hagerty, 2011, p. B.1). Motorcycling in the US is a male-dominated activity, as reflected in Harley’s definition of its U.S. core customers as Caucasian men over the age of 35 (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). Harley’s reluctance to let go of the macho image has impacted its appeal to women (Hagerty, 2016); however, Harley believes that the “ideals of freedom and self-expression transcend cultures, gender, and age” (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2016a). In 2016 Harley announced that they would be increasing marketing expenditures by 65%, and part of the budget would focus on increasing new ridership (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). In 2019 Harley continued to outline key strategies for engaging new customers and unlocking new markets and segments (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018b). This is far different from the 1990’s when Harley boasted minimal expenditures on marketing and advertising (Rifkin, 1997).

**Women and Harley-Davidson**

Women have been riding Harley motorcycles since the company’s beginning. Throughout the history of motorcycling, women riders have achieved many milestones on Harleys. But, as Ferrar (2000) highlighted, women riders have been confronted by many gender-based barriers and a lack of recognition for their achievements. This is evident as far back as
1910, when Clara Wagner achieved a perfect score for competing in a 365-mile endurance race from Chicago to Indianapolis but was denied a trophy because she was a woman (Ferrar, 2000). While countless women have gone uncelebrated and unrecognized, a few women were exemplified for the value of public-relations (Ferrar, 2000). In the 1920’s and 1930’s Harley was more supportive of women and often featured them riding their own motorcycles in advertising (Joans, 2001). World War II shook gender roles (Joans, 2001), both during and after the war. During the war, women took jobs and managed the family, roles that were traditionally viewed as the purview of men. After the war, women were expected to return to their traditional role as housewives. In the 1940’s and 1950’s when women were being portrayed as homemakers on television and advertising, female motorcyclists were viewed as rebels for breaking the norm (Ferrar, 2000). By 1948, all Harley ads featured women riding as passengers (Joans, 2001). In the 1960’s, marketing campaigns promoted motorcycles to men as a way to attract women (Ferrar, 2000). During the 1960’s and 1970’s motorcycling saw its greatest decline in women riders (Ferrar, 2000). By the 1970’s female riders accounted for only 1% of all registered motorcycle owners (Ferrar, 2000). The 1980’s and 1990’s marked resurgence in women ridership. Harley, who had abandoned women riders in the 70’s, began to court them again with their “I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar” campaign (Ferrar, 2000). During the 1990’s Harley introduced Ladies of Harley, a subgroup of the Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.), a Harley sponsored motorcycle enthusiast organization (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). In the early 21st century Harley and motorcycling were experiencing phenomenal growth. Marketing efforts aimed at women riders once again took a figurative backseat, until the economic crash of 2007-2008.
In an effort to increase new motorcycle sales, Harley expanded its marketing programs in 2007 to target women. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council (2018), today women account for 19 percent of all U.S. motorcycle owners. The median age for female motorcyclists is 39. Almost half of all female motorcyclists are married, and 47 percent hold a college or postgraduate degree (Motorcycle Industry Council, 2015). Harley identifies their average female customer as Caucasian and over the age of 35 (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2016b); they attribute approximately 12% of their new motorcycle sales in the US to women (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2008). Harley was the industry leader in new motorcycle sales to women in the US from 2007 to 2015 and grew their market share of new motorcycle sales to women from 47.9% to 60.2% (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2016b). The increase in female participation in a recreational activity that has been historically male driven warrants an investigation into women’s experiences with the male-dominated subculture.

**Harley Apparel**

Harley has produced apparel since the First World War (Marchese, 1993). It was not until 1989, when Harley started the Motorclothes division and began offering licensed merchandise to consumers, that apparel became a business strategy. Harley’s goal in creating an apparel line was to contain the bad boy image that plagued the company and to offer riders more than the stereotypical black t-shirt (Rifkin, 1997). Harley is unique from other motorcycle manufacturers because it sells its own line of branded apparel, and it considers the apparel line to be one of its competitive advantages (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). General Merchandise includes Motorclothes apparel and riding gear and is primarily distributed within the US through an independent dealership network and through a Harley facilitated e-commerce site (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015).
In 1991 Harley received an award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America for its influence on fashion (Marchese, 1993). Motorclothes executive, Jack Sichterman, reported to the *New York Times* that “Fashion is as important as putting gas in the gas tank” (Marchese, 1993). Harley, once a symbol of anti-fashion (Horyn, 1992), now offers a more fashionable approach to motorcycling for both men and women. As Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander (2006) noted, “Among Harley-Davidson owners the black leather uniform is giving way in many circles to less conformist styles and personal expressions” (p. 176). Motorclothes apparel collections have shifted to follow the trends of the apparel fashion world. Just as “fast fashion” is dominating the apparel industry, Harley dealerships now receive monthly fashion deliveries, thus allowing the motorcycling world to be involved in fast fashion as are many consumers in general. Harley Motorclothes now resembles clothing offered at the local mall, and that opens up many opportunities for women Harley riders to redefine their role within the motorcycling culture. Mainstream fashion offerings also assist in breaking down barriers for women who balance traditional roles outside of the motorcycling subculture.

Appearance is an important aspect of the subculture. Schouten and McAlexander (1993) noted that Harley apparel serves two functions: 1) to protect the rider and 2) to communicate identity or a sense of belonging. They suggested branded apparel and other licensed products aid in a rider’s identity formation and communicate a rider’s connection to the Harley subculture and its core values (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Branded apparel allows Harley riders to demonstrate a connection to the brand community and facilitates a symbolic identification for themselves and others. “Harley licensed products provide a means to include Harley-Davidson symbols in non-riding facets of their lives, serving as a reminder to themselves and others that they are a part of the Harley brotherhood [sic and sisterhood]” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1993,
p. 392). Additionally, Harley apparel allows customers to “try on” the Harley lifestyle. You don’t have to ride to join the family (Joans, 2001).

In addition to a reduction in new motorcycle sales and a shift in demographics, Harley has also faced a reduction in General Merchandise sales over the past 13 years. General Merchandise total retail sales in 2018 totaled $241.9 thousand (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). In addition to General Merchandise, the company also generates revenue through licensing of t-shirts, accessories, footwear and other products (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2012). According to Harley (2015), licensing the name “Harley-Davidson” and other trademarks for use on products allows the company to create awareness of the brand among its customers and the non-riding public (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). In 2018, Harley generated $38.7 million in royalty revenues from licensing (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). Similar to motorcycle sales, both General Merchandise and licensing have struggled over the past 13 years. During this time period there has been a shift in consumer trends. Consumers have spent less of their budget on clothing and shifted those expenditures to traveling and dining at restaurants (Thompson, 2017). Consumers have shied away from logo driven brands and gravitated toward off-price retailers (Thompson, 2017). Harley apparel, being a logo driven brand commanding a premium price, has felt the shift in consumer spending. General Merchandise, which peaked in 2008 with annual sales totaling $313,838, has declined 20%, and licensing revenue has declined as well (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2018a). Although General Merchandise is not the primary product, it is important to understanding the brand and the community that buys it. The intent of this study is to explore the potential role that apparel plays in female participants’ identity formation and their connection to the brand and the subculture.
Outlaw Mystique and Biker Stereotype

When motorcycles were introduced in the late 1880’s to early 1900’s, they were a primary source of transportation for families. Cars were introduced around 1908, and motorcycles quickly became an alternative method of transportation. Motorcycles now are a luxury item, a choice rather than a necessity. Motorcycling is a leisure activity that offers riders fun and enjoyment (Thompson, 2012b). However, from the very early days, motorcycling had an image problem resulting from a few riders who would ride at fast speeds, kick up dirt, and behave recklessly (Ferrar, 2000).

World War II marked a turning point for motorcyclists. It was during the late 1930’s and after World War II that the Harley mystique was born (Joans, 2001), i.e., when motorcycle riders became bikers (Thompson, 2012b). After World War II in the 1940’s and 1950’s, motorcycle clubs and outlaw bikers began to emerge (Joans, 2001; Wolf, 1991). The term outlaw referred to motorcycle clubs who did not register with the American Motorcycle Association (AMA); an outlaw biker was a member of those unofficial types of clubs (Wolf, 1991). The stereotypical image of bikers was created by the outlaw motorcycle clubs (e.g., Hell’s Angels) and Hollywood’s portrayals of bikers in movies such as The Wild One, starring Marlon Brando (Thompson, 2012b). During the 40’s and 50’s Harley’s advertising began to depict motorcycle riders as tough (Joans, 2001). This machismo image continues to shape the public’s image of bikers today. An incident, labeled the world’s first motorcycle riot, occurred in Hollister, California in 1947. The incident was given national exposure, which resulted in a stigmatization by society of bikers in general labeled as deviant (Wolf, 1991). Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, the motorcycle’s association with a deviant lifestyle continued (Thompson, 2012b; Wolf, 1991).
Beginning in the late 1980’s and continuing through the 90’s and into today, affluent baby boomers fueled motorcycle sales (Thompson, 2012b). Doctors, dentists, and lawyers took up riding; the upper-class replaced personal trainers with riding instructors (Marchese, 1993). White-collar, upper-middle-class individuals were engaging in a world that was once reserved for the blue-collar workers (Thompson, 2012b). Traditional bikers disliked this new breed of motorcyclist, as illustrated by a popular biker saying: “$15 thousand dollars and 100 miles does not make you a biker.” These new motorcyclists threatened to alienate Harley’s original and extremely loyal bikers (Marchese, 1993). At the same time, this new breed of riders helped to soften the public’s perception of bikers. According to Schouten, Martin, and McAlexander (2006), “The outlaw biker stereotype has become a cliché, the biker image has lost its sharp edges, and the intimidating biker no longer serves as the public’s dominant frame of reference” (p. 68). Schouten et al. (2006) referred to the current phenomena as a “Post-outlaw subculture of Harley-Davidson Owners” (p. 68). What was once considered an alternative and fringe society has become mainstream (Schouten et al., 2006). The Harley culture has diversified, which has led to an expanded range of meanings attached to motorcycles and to riders (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012b; Schouten et al., 2006). Previous research maintains that the motorcycling community is becoming more diverse, and it may be moving away from its original outlaw biker stereotype. Because motorcycling is a leisure activity whereby participants chose to become members of the motorcycling community, a new inquiry is warranted to explore the current members’ perceptions of the motorcycling community and their use of motorcycle and apparel symbols to relate to that community.

The Harley motorcycling community has a commitment-based status hierarchy (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), which means that a rider’s status within the community is based on
other members’ perceptions of their commitment to riding (Joans, 2001). As Joans (2001) pointed out, “To be a biker, riding is an essential part of life. It is not just a hobby. It is essential” (p. 66). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) identified two distinct types of riders within the Harley community, outlaws and enthusiasts. Authenticity, as described by Schouten and McAlexander (1995), is based on a rider’s identification as an outlaw or an enthusiast. A rider is classified as an outlaw or enthusiast based on others’ perceived levels of the individual’s commitment to riding and the biker lifestyle (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Outlaws perceive themselves to be authentic and view all other riders as pretenders (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). But enthusiasts, who have a different orientation to motorcycling, also consider themselves to be authentic (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). When baby boomers took up motorcycling as a hobby, traditional bikers disliked their lack of commitment. Traditional bikers view motorcycling as a lifestyle, whereas enthusiasts perceive it as a hobby (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). With the changing demographic of riders, new classifications for riders emerged based on other riders’ judgements of their authenticity and commitment levels.

A New Subculture of Riders

Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) research indicated that the new subculture consists of multiple, coexisting subgroups, each having its own separate hierarchy and its own unique interpretation of the biker ethos. What unites these subgroups is a shared loyalty to the Harley motorcycle and to a related set of consumption values (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Kates (2006), however, proposed that the different subgroups within the Harley community would likely ascribe different consumption meanings to Harley products.

According to Schouten and McAlexander (1995), these subgroups are homogeneous and can appear as indistinguishable and stereotypical to outsiders. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) identified two distinct types of riders within the Harley community, outlaws and enthusiasts.
Thompson (2012b) asserted that distinguishing bikers into two subgroups was overly simplistic and could perpetuate stereotypes; therefore, Thompson proposed three categories of motorcycle riders: bikers, neo-bikers, and motorcyclists. Those categories, he argued, could be further subdivided in subcategories or subgroups.

The term *biker* refers to a rider who appears stereotypical. As explained previously, this stereotypical image, the general public’s perception of bikers, originates from outlaw motorcycle gangs and media portrayals of riders starting in the 1950’s. Members of the outlaw motorcycle gangs of the 50’s were often World War II veterans who preferred riding American-made motorcycles. These bikers were loyal riders of Harley motorcycles (Thompson, 2012b), which fueled the public’s perception of Harley riders as bikers. It appears that the terms “biker” (Thompson, 2012b) and “outlaw” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) refer to the same category of riders. A combination of the two terms is often used. Outlaw bikers are committed to riding and the biker lifestyle (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Thompson (2012b) proposed that bikers are comprised of two different subgroups: one-percenter and hardcore bikers. Thompson (2012b) explains that “One-percenters trace their lineage back to those World War II veterans” (p. 15) who formed some of the original outlaw motorcycle clubs in the 1950’s. Hardcore bikers, according to Thompson (2012b), have a lot in common with one-percenters, and are often mistaken for one-percenters. Hardcore bikers are committed to the biker lifestyle and ride Harleys but are not typically affiliated with a motorcycle club (Thompson, 2012b). One-percenters and hardcore bikers usually distance themselves from other subgroups of motorcyclists (Thompson, 2012b).

The second category of riders, neo-bikers, considers themselves to be bikers, but Thompson (2012b) claimed they have more in common with motorcyclists. Neo-bikers ride
Harleys and like to imitate the look and lifestyle of outlaw bikers even though they are not usually affiliated with a club. Thompson’s observation parallels Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) concept of authenticity. Neo-bikers view themselves as authentic, but they are often referred to as posers or wannabes by committed bikers (Thompson, 2012b).

Motorcyclists (Thompson, 2012b), comprise the third category of riders. According to Thompson (2012b), a majority of today’s riders are motorcyclists. Motorcyclists do not want to be bikers, and they do not try to look like bikers (Thompson, 2012b). Motorcyclists are not committed to the biker lifestyle; they ride for fun and pleasure (Thompson, 2012b). Thompson (2012b) proposed that motorcyclists could be subdivided into four subgroups: rich urban riders (RUB), motorcycle enthusiasts, crotch rocketeers/stunters/racers, and off-road riders. A rich urban biker (RUB) often purchases a motorcycle as a status symbol (Thompson, 2012b). The motorcycle is always new (versus pre-owned) and has a hefty price tag. Additionally, RUBs purchase significant amounts of apparel and riding gear, often spending hundreds or thousands of dollars. Their extremely clean motorcycle and coordinating apparel make a RUB easily identifiable (Thompson, 2012b). A RUB, also referred to as an occasional biker (Joans, 2001), quickly grows tired of motorcycling and ultimately sells their motorcycle, usually with very low miles on it. The saying “$15 thousand dollars and 100 miles does not make you a biker” pokes fun at RUBs. The zip code rider, another type of RUB, only rides close to home (Joans, 2001).

The term motorcycle enthusiast refers to the socially diverse group of individuals who ride motorcycles for fun and recreation. Motorcycle enthusiasts are not loyal to a particular brand of motorcycles (Thompson, 2012b). They often own multiple motorcycles, each designed for different styles of riding; for example, a touring motorcycle is designed for long rides versus a sport bike which is designed for performance and speed (Thompson, 2012b). The last two
subgroups tend to be owned by crotch rocketeers/stunters/ racers and off-road riders. Thompson (2012b) grouped crotch rocketeers, stunters, and racers into one category because they ride the same type of motorcycle, a performance sport bike. However, each of these motorcyclist’s riding styles is very different. Crotch rocket is a term that refers to performance sport bikes. Performance means that they are fast and sport means that they are agile, easy to handle.

Thompson (2012b) coined the term crotch rocketeer to refer to sport bike riders that view the street as a racetrack. According to Thompson (2012b), crotch rocketeers are risk takers that ride at dangerously fast speeds on public streets and highways. Stunters perform stunts on their sport bikes and often compete in stunt shows or competitions. While crotch rocketeers like to race on the streets, racers take their speed to the race track. Off-road riders ride dirt bikes which are ridden on unpaved surfaces.

Because motorcycling was a male-dominated activity and consisted mainly of outlaw motorcycle clubs, early research found that women were relegated to subservient roles within a club and were categorized based on their relationships with its members. The titles, degrading to women, were “broads,” “mamas,” and “old ladies” (Wolf, 1991). Joans’ (2001) research, like Wolf’s (1991), was more oriented toward the outlaw biker community. Joans (2001) proposed two categories of women: passengers and riders. She further divided these two categories into subgroups: biker chic, lady passenger, passionate passenger, lady biker, woman biker, and woman rider. According to Thompson (2012a), roles and experiences for women in outlaw motorcycle clubs are not representative of the non-outlaw motorcycling community that most women experience today.

According to Thompson (2012b), there are four categories of women found in the motorcycle subculture: leather lovers, biker babes, two-uppers, and female riders. Thompson
described leather lovers as motorcycle groupies. They are attracted to motorcycles and the subculture, but leather lovers do not ride and are not overly interested in riding (Thompson, 2012b). They just want to hang out with bikers and have a good time. They wear biker apparel, mostly to attract male attention (Thompson, 2012b). Biker babe’s “primary interest in the motorcycle subculture is monetary” (Thompson, 2012b, p. 90). Biker babes are young women who work at local and national events as a way to supplement their income (Thompson, 2012b). At events, biker babes can be found performing bikini bike washes, competing in wet t-shirt contests, selling motorcycle-related products, handing out product samples, or serving products—usually beer (Thompson, 2012b). Biker babes’ wear apparel that accentuates their sexuality, often to increase their tip money.

Two-upper refers to wives or girlfriends who ride as passengers (Thompson, 2012b). Female riders operate their own motorcycle (Thompson, 2012b). The motorcycling community is becoming more diverse, which may cause a shift of role identities. Because more women are participating in the culture that was based on male defined characteristics, a fresh look at female participant-defined role identities is warranted.

**Brand Experience, Social Bonds and Identity Formation**

An individual’s social interactions with Harley group members through participation in activities plays a large part in the consumption of motorcycles. Social activities in the motorcycling community usually include both local and national events. During these local and national events, people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds come together, socialize with each other, and create social bonds. The events can be large or small, but they all have one thing in common — the event revolves around motorcycling. As Ferrar (2000) described, “When bikers get together, motorcycles are social lubricants, demographic levelers, and, ultimately, adhesives for cherished friendships” (p. 147). National events include week-long rallies such as
the Black Hills Motor Classic, held in Sturgis, SD; the Laconia Rally, held in Laconia, NH; and the Daytona Rally, held in Daytona, FL. The Laconia Rally, dating back to the 1920’s, is the oldest motorcycle rally (Ferrar, 2000). Local events include poker runs, charity rides, and weekend rallies that are usually organized by local Harley dealerships, local groups or motorcycling clubs. Schembri (2009) explained: “The Harley-Davidson brand experience comes from within a social context” (p. 1306). Motorcycle-related events and motorcycle clubs facilitate riders’ experiences and interactions with the Harley brand. Brand participation, according to Schmitt (2012), occurs when consumers become socially engaged with a brand. When riders become interactive participants with a brand, they form relationships with the brand, which can lead to emotional connections to the brand (Schmitt, 2012). Brand communities play an important role in building emotional connections between consumers and brands (Schmitt, 2012). It is a shared love of the motorcycle brand and the resulting social network that led Schouten and McAlexander (1993) to identify Harley affiliates as a subculture of consumption. A subculture of consumption (SOC) is a brand-related consumption culture that allows consumers to establish social bonds (Kates, 2006). Consumers not only create bonds with each other, they also build an emotional connection to the brand as well (Schmitt, 2012). From a marketing standpoint, SOC’s are important because research has shown that creating a positive emotional connection to a brand strengthens a consumer’s loyalty and purchase intentions (Schmitt, 2012).

Schouten et al. (2006) claimed that Harley cultivated the subculture of consumption by promoting consumption of its products as a lifestyle. Lifestyle refers to “a pattern of consumption that reflects a person’s choices of how to spend her [sic and his] time and money” (Solomon, 2011). According to Zablocki and Kanter (1976), Lifestyle can also be based around the idea of
community, whereby individuals have an emotional bond to a subculture of one’s own choosing. Harley is a lifestyle brand, and as such the company actively participates in motorcycle events, rallies, rides, competitive racing, consumer exhibitions, and festivals (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015). Harley also promotes the motorcycling lifestyle through its company-sponsored Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.). With over a million members world-wide, H.O.G. is the industry’s largest company-sponsored motorcycle enthusiast organization (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2015).

There are also a number of other non-Harley sponsored organizations whose activities and lifestyles revolve around motorcycling, such as A Brotherhood Aimed Toward Education (ABATE), Christian Motorcycling Association (CMA), Women on Wheels (WOW), and Legion Riders.

Participating in social activities plays an important role in an individual’s identity formation and behavior (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wolf, 1991), discussed further in Chapter 2. As an individual becomes more involved in the subculture, they experience an evolution of motives, a deepening of commitment, and ultimately a transformation of the self (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Individuals adopt attitudes and learn acceptable behaviors through their interactions with other members of the SOC (Wolf, 1991). Social interactions with other members of the Harley SOC also influence an individual’s identity transformation (Friese, 2000), and Harley apparel and licensed products play an important role in the process (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Appearance is an important aspect of the subculture and has potent significance for the riders and many people who are outside the Harley community.

Stone (1965) defined appearance as “That phase of the social transaction which establishes identifications of the participants” (p. 21). In other words, an individual’s dress can communicate to others and themselves that they are a part of the Harley SOC (Schouten &
In addition to communicating an individual’s identification with or belonging to a group, dress can communicate an individual’s position and status within the Harley SOC as well (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993). Apparel items may signify a rider’s commitment to riding and their authenticity as a biker (Schouten & McAlexander, 1993). Dress is a key link between an individual’s identity and their social belonging (Entwistle, 2000). Riders are likely to get their style cues from socializing with other members of the SOC and Harley corporate marketing efforts (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Because social interactions are an integral part of the motorcycle consumption process, it is important to understand women’s perceptions of their social interactions with other members of the Harley SOC. From a marketing perspective, it is important to understand the role that social interactions and the brand community play in building relationships between women and the Harley brand. Previous research discovered that social interactions with other members of the Harley SOC can influence an individual’s identity transformation (Friese, 2000), and Harley apparel and licensed products play an important role in the process (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, it is imperative that a study is undertaken to explore the influence of branded apparel on women’s identity development, their connection to the Harley brand, and their affiliation with the Harley subculture.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand Harley branded apparel’s role within the female Harley community. This research sought to explore the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley branded community in shaping identity for women. Moreover, this study sought to expand previous research by exploring women’s perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism and the Harley community. The findings may be used to better design and market
Harley’s branded apparel and to expand understanding of a subculture of consumption’s use and meanings of branded apparel.

**Rationale and Significance**

The motorcycling industry is currently facing a drastic reduction in new motorcycle sales in the United States. This reduction, which has impact on the livelihood of 6,300 US workers (Schaefer & Murphy, 2016), supports the need for an inquiry into the current state of the Harley SOC. An inquiry into the Harley subculture is warranted, because it is the industry leader in motorcycle sales within the US. Additionally, the Harley SOC represents a unique phenomenon itself, because it embodies a culture that revolves around the consumption of a luxury item, the motorcycle.

The motorcycling community has become more demographically diverse as more ethnicities, millennials, and women with diverse socio-economic backgrounds have joined the traditionally White, masculine activity. To date, most scholarly research has sought to understand the male-dominated subculture that revolves around the Harley brand (e.g., Schembri, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993, 1995; Thompson, 2012b). A few studies have discussed the roles of women associated with outlaw motorcycle clubs (e.g., Joans, 2001; Wolf, 1991). It is possible that women’s experiences today may differ from previous study findings because of a potential shift away from outlaw motorcycle clubs and the biker stereotype of the past (Martin, et al., 2006). Women are playing a larger role in the motorcycling community; therefore, it is important to understand their experiences and socialization with motorcycle brands. An inquiry into female Harley riders is warranted because they represent potential growth in a market that is currently stagnant.

Over the past 13 years, Harley branded and licensed apparel sales have decreased approximately 20%. Previous research has found that Harley branded apparel aided in male
consumers’ identity formation (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, to date, no research has been conducted to understand Harley branded apparel’s potential role in defining the identity of female participants within the Harley community. Recent research found that riders’ identities were not tied to motorcycling, as it was for the riders of the past (Thompson, 2012a). Thus, it is possible that the stagnation in sales of Harley branded apparel and other product consumption may be attributed to a change in the role of riding in a participant’s identity formation and their connection to the brand community.

Additionally, previous research has identified that participation in male-dominated motorcycling activities allowed women to challenge stereotypes and redefine their femininity (Martin et al., 2006; Roster, 2007; Schouten et al., 2006; Thompson, 2012a). Women incorporate both masculine and feminine aspects into their dress (Martin et al., 2006). Women’s motives for riding differ from men; they interpreted the core values of the subculture differently than men, and their consumption behaviors differ as well (Martin et al., 2006). Wearing of certain styles of apparel communicates core values of the Harley subculture (Martin et al., 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, personal expression is replacing stereotypical dress (Martin et al., 2006), particularly for women. It is possible that new riders find it unnecessary to wear Harley branded apparel in order to feel a connection to the brand and the community.

To ensure that the type of product offerings meets riders’ needs and expectations, there is a need to understand the meanings that individuals assign to branded apparel (Mick et al., 2004) and to explore the motivations influencing participants’ apparel consumption (Mick et al., 2004). Identity marketing “recognizes the complex process of how customers become strongly attracted to the brands and products that help them express who they are” (Reed II & Bolton, 2005, p. 18). By understanding consumers’ needs and effectively marketing its branded apparel line, Harley
could strengthen riders’ brand loyalty (Reed II & Bolton, 2005). Therefore, an exploration into the possible connection of apparel consumption to female participant identity formation and connection to the community is warranted and may benefit the company in strengthening market share and company viability.

**Overview of Methodology**

Crotty (1998) proposed that research is informed by four elements: methods, methodology, theories, and epistemology. Methods are “techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The methods of the present study are discussed further in Chapter 3. Methods, methodology, theories, and epistemology are all interrelated (Crotty, 1998). The focus of the present study will be on the epistemology informing the study’s methodology. Methodology has been defined as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Crotty explained that a study’s methodology is informed by a philosophical stance. Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is “embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

**Epistemology: Constructivism**

Schwandt (2015) defined *epistemology* as “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (p. 89). Constructivism is an epistemology that is based on the belief that reality is constructed by human beings (Guba & Lincoln, 2003; Schwandt, 1994) and that knowledge and truth are “created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 120). Individuals’ realities, their perceptions of events or phenomena, are defined through the process of social interaction (Schwandt, 1994). Reality can be expressed in
language, symbols, and objects (Schwandt, 1994). Individuals create meanings for objects out of their experiences and through social interactions (Creswell, 2013).

**Relevant Theories: Symbolic Interactionism**

Theories provide a viewpoint for “identifying, framing, and solving problems, as well as understanding and explaining social reality” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 302). Symbolic interaction (SI) is one of the theories underlying interpretive research (Schwandt, 1994). SI is a social theory whose central concept is hermeneutics (Schwandt, 2015). *Hermeneutics*, the act of interpreting social meaning of objects and actions, is fundamental to human existence and social interactions (Schwandt, 2015). Because the theory is informed by constructivism, SI contends that individuals construct meaning through social interactions (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

Symbolic interaction centers on communication, social relationships, and identity (Crotty, 1998) and seeks to understand meanings and perceptions of social interactions and the role of social interaction in individual and group identity formation.

Interpretivism is a practice that focuses on understanding, contextualizing, and interpreting individuals’ behaviors (Glesne, 2011). Some researchers use constructivism and interpretivism synonymously (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). However, it is Crotty’s (1998) opinion that constructivism is embedded in interpretivism, as interpretive scholars seek to understand how individuals construct and interpret reality. The goal of interpretivist research is *Verstehen*, to understand human behavior. *Verstehen*, a German term for understanding, refers to the methods of learning about humans’ social existence and life experiences/realities by studying human action (Schwandt, 2015). Anderson-Hudson and Ozanne (1988) defined *Verstehen* as “grasping the shared meaning within a culture of language, contexts, roles, rituals, gestures, arts, and so on (Wax, 1967)” (p. 510). Interpretivist researchers believe that human behavior is intentional (Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, interpretivism assumes that “the meaning of human
action is inherent in that action” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 169). Understanding requires a contextual interpretation of the motivation and subjective meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2015). Investigation of shared meanings about actions within a community is imperative for *Verstehen*.

**Methodological Assumptions:**

Employing an interpretivist approach to the present study results in the following methodological assumptions:

**Nature of reality (ontology).** An interpretivist assumes that reality is socially constructed and perceived (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Glesne, 2011). *Socially constructed* means that an individual’s reality acquires meaning based on their social interactions with others and the context in which those social interactions occur (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Because reality is socially constructed and each person’s reality is shaped by unique experiences and background, individual perceptions can vary, resulting in multiple realities (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Glesne, 2011). Additionally, realities are complex and ever changing (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Glesne, 2011).

**Axiological assumptions.** Interpretivism is focused on understanding, contextualizing and interpreting individuals’ behaviors (Glesne, 2011). The primary goal of interpretivist research to understand human behavior (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and to “describe social phenomena from the perspectives of participants” (Glesne, 2011, p. 17). Therefore, interpretivists believe that the researcher-participant relationship is one of cooperative inquiry, in which both the researcher and the participant work together to understand and make meaning of a phenomena (Anderson-Hudson & Ozanne, 1998).

**Previous Harley Research Methodologies and Methods**

A majority of previous studies exploring the Harley SOC has employed qualitative methods, and most of the studies involved fieldwork and participant observations (e.g., Roster,
2007; Joans, 2001; Martin et al., 2006; Schouten et al., 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993, 1995; Schembri, 2009; Thompson, 2012a, 2012b; Wolf, 1991). Wolf (1991) set out to understand the biker culture from an insider’s perspective. His methodology combined participant observation with the symbolic interactionist perspective. Wolf (1991) purchased a motorcycle and set out to find an outlaw club that would allow him access to hang around. Similarly, Thompson (2012a, 2012b) took a symbolic interactionist perspective; his method involved four years of participant observations. Like Wolf (1991), Thompson’s observations came from riding his motorcycle and interacting with members of the motorcycling community. Thompson (2012a, 2012b) also conducted ethnographic interviews and gathered data through online motorcycle forums such as chat rooms and blogs. Joans (2001), who identified herself as a working anthropologist, had been riding her own motorcycle for seven years. Her research methods involved participant observation as well. Schouten and McAlexander (1993) began their ethnographic research in 1990 as non-participant observers. Data collection involved attending two national motorcycle rallies (Black Hills Motor Classic in Sturgis, SD, and Bike Week in Daytona, FL) observing and taking field notes, conducting interviews and taking photos. In 1991, the authors began riding their own motorcycles and continued to observe and interview members of the subculture at rallies. Schouten and McAlexander had continuous ethnographic engagement in the Harley SOC since 1995 (Schouten et al., 2006).

Additionally, Harley SOC research was heavily focused on the masculine aspects of the subculture (e.g., Joans, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993, 1995; Thompson, 2012b; Wolf, 1991). Wolf (1991) was able to participate and observe the inner workings of the Rebels motorcycle Club in Canada. He spoke about the identity process of becoming a biker and the steps involved in becoming of member of an outlaw motorcycle club. He also described types of
activities that the club participated in (e.g., fun runs) and other elements of the lifestyle (e.g., the club house, club bars). Similarly, Schouten and McAlexander (1993;1995) detailed the process of becoming a biker and outlined the roles and norms of the subculture. Joans (2001) outlined the history of the male-dominated motorcycle subculture from an outlaw biker perspective. She also elaborated on the role of women within the outlaw biker community. Similar to Joans, Thompson (2012b) focused his attention on the masculine aspects of the subculture and sought to describe the new demographic of motorcycle riders. Thompson provided a description of male riders based on their level of commitment to riding and types of motorcycles ridden. Thompson, also offered descriptions of female members of the motorcycling community.

In 2006, Martin et al. proposed that recently observed changes in the subculture warranted a fresh inquiry. Martin et al. (2006) noted that motorcycle sales were booming, and as a result, the motorcycling community was growing more diverse. Additionally, they noted that the general public was becoming more familiar with Harley and perceptions of bikers were softening. The increase in rider diversity meant that more women were involved in the leisure activity, so Martin et al. (2006) set out to understand what drives women to participate in the male-dominated subculture. Their study focused on “women’s behavior as gendered activity and underscores the feminist identity constructions of women motorcyclists riding in defiance and/or expansion of gender sex role expectations” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 173). In their study, Martin et al. (2006) drew from three feminist perspectives: liberal feminism, women’s voice/experience feminism, and poststructuralist feminism. Martin et al. (2006) offered the following descriptions:

A liberal feminist perspective holds that differences between men and women are due primarily to socialization and opportunity and the remedy to inequity is equal opportunity. Women’s voice/experience feminism is based on the view that men and women are fundamentally different, but that these differences do not imply an inferior/superior relationship. As with other deconstructionist and poststructuralist philosophies, poststructuralist feminism is based on the assumption that all experience is
socially constructed and mediated by the dominant discourse. Poststructuralists challenge
the hegemony of men and masculine discourse that disenfranchises women and
minorities (p. 172)

Roster (2007) also identified the growing female demographic and the need for further
inquiry into the feminine perspective of the subculture. Roster’s research used a grounded
theory approach. Charmaz (2002) explained that the purpose of grounded theory research is to
“demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which
theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (p. 675). Roster conducted group
interviews with female motorcyclists to “explore the meaning of this leisure activity in their lives
and various factors that facilitate their participation” (2007, p. 443).

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Appearance**
Appearance is used by individuals to communicate
an indication of their identity to other members of
society (Blumer, 1969; Stone, 1965). Appearance is
communicated through the use of nonverbal
symbols such as clothing (Stone, 1965). Appearance
is defined as “That phase of the social transaction
which establishes identifications of the participants
based on visible and other sensory evidence”
(Stone, 1965, p. 25)

**Authenticity**
Others’ perceptions of an individual’s commitment
to riding and the biker lifestyle (Schouten &
McAlexander, 1995).

**Biker**
Refers to an individual who is a loyal rider of
Harley motorcycles (Thompson, 2012b) and is
committed to riding and the biker lifestyle (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The biker’s appearance often includes apparel items, such as leather jackets, boots, jeans, and vests, which reinforces stereotypes (Thompson, 2012b) by visually linking riders to the outlaw and other rider images of the past.

**Brother**
A name or title commonly given by one male biker to another, which “signifies membership in a community of shared beliefs, purpose, and experience” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 51).

**Brotherhood**
The concept of *Brotherhood* originated from outlaw motorcycle clubs and is defined as “fierce, unconditional loyalty” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 51).

**Constructivism**
The belief that reality is constructed and that knowledge and truth are created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action (Guba & Lincoln, 2003; Schwandt, 1994).

**Epistemology**
“The study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 89).
Epistemology is “embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Experiential Marketing

“The customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer’s involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual)…” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 63).

General Merchandise

Harley-Davidson Motor Company (HDMC) is a strategic business unit of Harley-Davidson, Inc., which sells motorcycles and related products, such as branded apparel. General Merchandise is a division of HDMC, consisting of Motorclothes® apparel and riding gear (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2016a).

Grounded Theory

“A qualitative research design, in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Crotty, 1998, p. 83).
Harley Owners Group (HOG). Harley-Davidson sponsored motorcycle enthusiast organization, which is the largest company-sponsored club in the motorcycle industry (Harley-Davidson, 2015).

Hermeneutics The act of interpreting meaning for objects and actions (Schwandt, 2015).

Hyper-masculinity “. . . a form of heterosexual attitudes and behaviors rooted in dominance over women and other masculinities (e.g., Bird 1996; Connell 1987), stands firmly on the foundation of hegemonic masculinity” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 172).

Lifestyle “A pattern of consumption that reflects a person’s choices of how to spend her [sic or his] time and money” (Solomon, 2011, p. 227; Zablocki & Kanter, 1976).

Methods “Techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Methodology “The strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>“A story or fable that reflects important values shared by members of a culture and that is used to teach one or more of these values” (Lindquist &amp; Sirgy, 2009, p. 381).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normative Function of Reference Groups</td>
<td>Individuals’ compliance with reference group norms (Engel &amp; Blackwell, 1982).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs</td>
<td>Outlaw, a term that originated in the 1940’s and 1950’s, referred to motorcycle clubs that did not register with the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) (Joans, 2001; Wolf, 1991).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw Biker</td>
<td>An outlaw biker is a member of an outlaw motorcycle club (Wolf, 1991).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>“Patterns of behavior expected of people who occupy a position in the group” (Engel &amp; Blackwell, 1982, p. 147).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Group</td>
<td>“The group whose perspective an individual takes on in forming values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and overt behaviors” (Lindquist &amp; Sirgy, 2009, p. 499).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Marketing</td>
<td>Regular interactions with customers that focuses on creating and maintaining the customer bond with the company (Berry, 1995).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self

“The self consists of an individual’s consciousness of being and that being comprises a tangible dimension (body and appearance symbols), as well as a conceptual or perceptual dimension (how one defines and appraises the self)” (Kaiser, 1998, p. 95). Stone (1965) explained that the self is established through appearance. A more commonly used definition in apparel research is: “A composite of an individual’s identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to situations for interaction” (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995, p. 12).

Self-concept

“The totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself [sic, or herself] as an object (Originating from Rosenberg, 1979)” (Sirgy, 1982, p. 287).

Social Norm

“Any rule of behavior for meeting societal (group) expectations” (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009, p. 499).

Subculture

“Any cultural patterning that preserves important features of the dominant society but provides for values, norms, and behaviors of a group’s own” (Schouten et al., 2006, p. 434).
Subculture of Consumption

“A distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity. Other characteristics of a subculture of consumption include an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargon, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 43).

Symbolic Consumption

“The acquisition of products and brands not for their functional benefits but for the culturally shared idiosyncratic meanings they convey to others” (Milan & Reynolds, 2014, p. 551).

Values

“A group of norms which have been internalized by individuals, often with some modification by the individual” (Engel & Blackwell, 1982, p. 73).

Verstehen

*Verstehen*, a German term for understanding, refers to the methods of learning about humans’ social existence and life experiences/realities by studying human action (Schwandt, 2015). Anderson-Hudson and Ozanne (1988) defined *Verstehen* as “grasping the shared meaning within a culture of language,
contexts, roles, rituals, gestures, arts, and so on (Wax, 1967)” (p. 510).

**Conclusion**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the current financial and marketing situation that Harley faces. Historical context of the motorcycling culture was presented. The significance of understanding Harley branded apparel’s role within the community was also discussed. The purpose of this study was introduced. The purpose of this study is to understand Harley branded apparel’s role within the female Harley community. This research seeks to explore the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley branded community in shaping the identity for these women. Moreover, this study seeks to expand previous research by exploring women’s perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism and the Harley community.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into two sections. The first section discusses previous research on the Harley subculture of consumption (SOC), and the second section presents applicable theories as they relate to the present study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research questions and their relationship to the study’s purpose.

Harley-Davidson Subculture of Consumption

Lindquist and Sirgy (2009) defined *subculture* as “any cultural patterning that preserves important features of the dominant society but provides for values, norms, and behaviors of its own” (p. 434). Schouten et al. (2006) contended that consumption has the power to organize consumers into social groups. Thus, *subculture of consumption* would be a more descriptive definition than the single term “subculture” for the immersive Harley brand identity consumer phenomena. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) defined a *subculture of consumption* (SOC) 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. Other characteristics of a subculture of consumption include an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargon, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression (p. 43)

Kates (2006) noted that a SOC is a sociocultural brand phenomenon that allows consumers to establish social bonds with other consumers and the brand. Shared connection among members and to the brand, according to Kates, is created through consumption of a particular object. For the Harley SOC, consumption behaviors center on the Harley motorcycle. Kates (2006) explained that members of subcultures of consumption are deeply committed to and invest more time in brand-related activities. Attendance at national and local motorcycle events are examples of commitment found in the Harley SOC. In the Harley SOC, it is the motorcycle that binds people together.
Ideology of consumption refers to a “common commitment to a particular set of consumption items or activities” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1993, p. 389) by an individual, group or culture. Schouten and McAlexander (1993) offered the following description of the Harley subculture of consumption:

There exists, centered in North America, a subculture formed about an ideology of consumption with the Harley-Davidson motorcycle as its principle icon. Perhaps the most obvious impact of the subculture is its existence as a tight cluster of market segments united by a common thread: commitment to a particular product, its symbolism, and the values it represents (p. 390)

Schouten et al. (2006) suggested that through their marketing activities, Harley has been an active participant in promoting the Harley lifestyle. Lifestyle is defined as “a pattern of consumption that reflects a person’s choices of how to spend her time and money” (Solomon, 2011, p. 227). According to Zablocki and Kanter (1976), Lifestyle can also be based around the idea of community, whereby individuals have an emotional bond to a subculture of one’s own choosing. Harley promotes the motorcycle lifestyle through relationship marketing. Relationship marketing involves regular interactions that focus on creating and maintaining customers’ bonds with the company (Berry, 1995). Bonding creates an emotional connection between the brand, the product, and the consumer (“Connecting Consumer and Product,” 1990). Experiential marketing is defined as “any form of customer-focused marketing activity that creates a connection to customers” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 63). Experiential marketing seeks to build relationships with consumers by facilitating interactions or experiences between the customer and the product or company (Schmitt, 2010). Some examples of relationship/experiential marketing activities are Harley’s sponsorship of and attendance at national motorcycle rallies and
their creation of the Harley Owners Group (Schouten et al., 2006). In the 1990’s when a customer purchased a new motorcycle, they would receive a video titled “Welcome to the Family.” Now it is common practice for Harley dealership employees to say “Welcome to the family” when a customer purchases a motorcycle. Joans (2001) acknowledged, “Belonging to the Harley family is one of Harley’s strongest selling points” (p. 32), inviting the new customer to new relationships through the motorcycle experience.

Biker Attitudes, Values, Symbols, and Dress

Lindquist and Sirgy (2009) contended that as a culture evolves it will develop cultural characteristics. The development of cultural characteristics protects the group and ensures its continued existence (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). The cultural characteristics that develop are norms, values, customs, myths, a common language, and symbols (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). Previous research has identified that the Harley SOC exhibits a unique set of cultural characteristics and common traits (Schouten et al., 2006; Thompson, 2012b), which have all been defined by male bikers (Joans, 2001).

In the Harley subculture of consumption, the outlaw biker represents a myth. Lindquist and Sirgy (2009) define a myth as “a story or fable that reflects important values shared by members of a culture and that is used to teach one or more of these values” (p. 381). In the case of Harley, the outlaw biker as a myth serves three functions: 1) provides an origin of existence, 2) influences the subculture’s social code, and 3) establishes rules for personal behavior (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009).

Not all Harley riders are outlaws, but the criminal or gangster image is a result of the outlaw history that both plagues and propels the Harley mystique. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) explained that many riders “borrow heavily from the outlaw stereotype which allows them to dress, act, and feel rougher, tougher, freer, and wilder than they normally would” (p. 53).
Harley riders are stereotyped as rejecting authority, rebelling against societal rules, and doing things their own way (Joans, 2001). Acts of rebellion give them a sense of independence and freedom from the constraints of conservative, normative life. Rebellion’s connection to motorcycling was made infamous by Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* when he said: “What have you got?” in response to the question: “What are you rebelling against?” (Allen, Fournier, & Miller, 2008). Schembri (2009) contended that “consumers emulate and enjoy the rebel image in consuming the bike and the brand” (p. 1299).

Bikers are often thought of as street smart, a concept that originates from bikers who are members of or hang around with outlaw motorcycle clubs. These individuals are thought to gain street smarts from hanging out on the street and engaging in illegal activities (Thompson, 2012b). Another perception is that Harley riders get their street smarts from riding motorcycles. Riders are judged by their ability to ride and handle the dangers of the road (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012b). Riding a motorcycle requires a certain level of knowledge and ability. Riders need to know how to properly operate and maintain their motorcycle. They learn a lot from being stranded on the side of the road with a broken motorcycle. Riding a motorcycle requires physical toughness as well. Motorcycle riders are exposed to all of the elements -- wind, rain, and heat. They are also exposed to the dangers of other vehicles. Motorcycles account for 3% of the vehicles on the road, but the fatality rate for motorcyclists is six times higher than the fatality rate of passenger car occupants (US Department of Transportation, 2016). Motorcyclists are five times more likely to be injured and 27 times more likely to be fatally injured in a crash (US Department of Transportation, 2016). Riding requires alertness and knowledge of how to properly operate a motorcycle to avoid the dangers of the road. Tempting fate, or facing mortality, refers to the idea that a rider, knowing that these dangers exist, takes life into his or her
own hands when choosing to operate a motorcycle (Thompson, 2012b). Riders are familiar with the dangers of riding, yet they choose to participate in the activity, which adds to their aura of toughness.

Riding provides members with a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood (Thompson 2012b). The concept of Brotherhood originates from outlaw motorcycle clubs and is defined as “fierce, unconditional loyalty” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 51). Brother is a name or title commonly given by one biker to another, which “signifies membership in a community of shared beliefs, purpose, and experience” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 51). Research by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) found that the biker persona comes with a feeling of marginality from mainstream society due to the outlaw myth surrounding bikers. The outlaw myth and stereotype that originated in the 1950’s led to the stigmatization of riders (Wolf, 1991) and labeling of the Harley SOC as an alternative and fringe subculture (Schouten et al., 2006). However, the outlaw mystique also strengthens the sense of brotherhood among bikers because they identify with the core values of the group. According to Dennis (2005), “The concept of marginality is closely linked to identity” (p. 5). When an individual identifies with a social group, they feel a sense of belonging, particularly when that group is considered deviant or not mainstream, to protect themselves from the negative opinions of mainstream non-members.

Schouten & McAlexander (1995) asserted that personal freedom is a dominant value of the Harley SOC. The outlaw stereotype allows riders “to dress, act, and feel rougher, tougher, freer, and wilder than they normally would” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 53). For the biker, personal freedom represents liberation from the confinements of everyday life such as work, authority, and relationships (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Freedom represents autonomy, the ability to control his/her own life (Thompson, 2012b). Riding provides an outlet
whereby riders are able to leave their daily life behind and experience the freedom of the open road. Riding provides members with feelings of fun, freedom, relaxation, and excitement. The perception of riders as thrill seekers comes from the level of danger involved in motorcycling and the sense of adventure and exploration that riding provides. The phrase “Not all who wander are lost,” originating from J. R. R. Tolkien and borrowed by the biker community, illustrates the sense of adventure.

According to Thompson (2012b), language is an important element of the motorcyclist subculture. He contends that members of the motorcyclist subculture have their own language, slang, and nomenclature. This language “creates and provides what sociologists refer to as boundary maintenance” (p. 64). By engaging in conversation about motorcycles, riders can distinguish insiders, those who belong, from outsiders (Thompson, 2012b).

Previous research has identified several symbols used in the Harley SOC to communicate freedom, patriotism, facing mortality, rebellion, and toughness (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Thompson, 2012b). Because the subculture of consumption revolves around the motorcycle, it is the most important symbol of the subculture (Thompson, 2012b). Joans (2001) proposed that Harley unites hard-working Americans who value the fact that Harleys are made in America. Riders often express patriotism, and the motorcycle symbolizes the rights of the American people to be free. According to Schouten and McAlexander (1995), “Virtually every biker identifies strongly with the motorcycle as a symbol of freedom…” (p. 51). Other important symbols found in the subculture, which represent freedom, are the eagle and the American flag.

Members of the SOC share a “profound love for the bike” (Joans, 2001, p. 14). In addition to being a symbol of freedom, the motorcycle also stands for rebellion. The motorcycle’s symbolic connection to rebellion originates from the 1950’s, when outlaw
motorcycle clubs began to form and the media portrayed motorcycle riders as rebellious. To riders, the motorcycle represents a form of rebellion by allowing them to escape their daily life. Another important symbol used in the Harley SOC is a skull, which represents death and symbolizes tempting fate or facing mortality. Finally, the Harley logo, called the Bar and Shield, is one of the most recognizable logos in the world. As a symbol, the Bar and Shield visually represents the core values of the brand and the subculture. Many of these symbols can be found on Harley products such as apparel, patches, pins, jewelry, and motorcycle accessories (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These symbols are also painted on motorcycles and tattooed on individual riders (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

According to previous research, appearance is an important aspect of the Harley SOC. Schouten and McAlexander (1993) found that apparel serves two functions: 1) to protect the rider and 2) to communicate identity or a sense of belonging. Additionally, apparel items may signify a rider’s commitment and authenticity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1993). Apparel, including jeans, a jacket or vest, skullcap, and boots, is a combination of meaningful symbols (Thompson, 2012b) that has potent significance for the riders and many people who are outside the Harley community. Additionally, previous research has identified that the apparel worn by riders differs by motorcycle brand (Thompson, 2012b). For example, riders of Harley motorcycles wear black leather jackets, but BMW motorcycle riders wear jackets constructed of a material called cordura, a synthetic fiber that is lightweight, durable, abrasion and tear resistant. Therefore, apparel can serve as brand community boundary maintenance.

There is some uniformity in motorcycle attire that has symbolic ties to early motorcycle riders (Thompson, 2012b). The leather jacket symbolizes the motorcycle subculture more than any other item worn (Thompson, 2012b). The black leather jacket is an iconic biker symbol
made famous in the 1950’s by the outlaw motorcycle clubs and the movie *The Wild One*. Symbolically, leather is a “visible link to hardcore biker subcultures and “personifies” the biker look” (Thompson, 2012b, p. 59). Leather is a natural, animal-sourced protective material that is also used to construct vests and chaps. Wearing leather gives riders a sense of power and invulnerability (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Research indicates that apparel may also be used to display a rider’s commitment to the lifestyle. Pins and patches are used to display a rider’s attendance at motorcycle rallies and events and to make statements about their commitment to biking lifestyle (Thompson, 2012b). Additionally, T-shirts are often purchased to denote motorcycle trips taken to popular tourist destinations and worn as a statement of involvement and commitment (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

**Biker Identity**

Early research on bikers found that, “Becoming a biker constitutes a search for identity” (Wolf, 1991, p. 30). Wolf (1991) wrote, “A man who enters this sub-culture in search of an identity looks to the outlaw-biker tradition to provide him with longstanding values, behaviors, and symbols” (p. 33). The biker turns to the motorcycle to find himself; thus, the motorcycle “becomes a vehicle of self-discovery” (Ferrar, 2000, p. 6), and riding becomes part of the individual’s definition of self (Joans, 2001).

In their ethnographic study, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) found that individuals go through an evolution and a transformation of the self in their quest to become a biker. As an individual becomes more involved in the subculture, they experience an evolution of motives, a deepening of commitment, and ultimately a transformation of the self (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) noted three stages of identity transformation: 1) experimentation, 2) identification and conformity, and 3) mastery and
internalization. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) found that Harley apparel and licensed products play an important role in the process of identity transformation. Harley apparel and licensed products are important in the experimentation phase because they allow aspirants to “try on” the Harley lifestyle and display a sense of affiliation with the brand and the subculture. When non-Harley owners wear Harley apparel, Harley owners perceive this as a display of envy, and the Harley owners experience feelings of status and superiority (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Membership requires a motorcycle, and ownership provides feelings of status and inclusion. Purchases of protective clothing such as a leather jacket, footwear, and helmet coincide with a new owner’s entry into the subculture. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) observed that status in the Harley SOC is based on both a rider’s commitment and their riding skills. Therefore, a new rider has less status than a seasoned, experienced rider. An awareness of their lower status in the SOC hierarchy gives new riders feelings of uncertainty, and they compensate for these feelings by acquiring and displaying “stereotypical biker costumery in acts of symbolic self-completion” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 56). Symbolic self-completion theory maintains that when individuals’ identity has not yet been fully formed, they will employ a strategy for acquiring and bolstering a sense of self (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). This strategy usually involves acquiring and displaying symbols associated with their desired identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). These consumption behaviors usually occur when an individual performs a new or unfamiliar role (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Because new motorcycle buyers are given a one-year membership to HOG, these new riders are likely to get their style cues from Harley corporate marketing efforts through the HOG magazine that is distributed to all HOG members (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) noted that a rider’s status within the group and feelings of authenticity increase as “the rider gains
experience, forms interpersonal relationships, customizes his motorcycle, and otherwise invests
time, energy, and money into Harley ownership” (p. 56). They go on to explain that when a rider
achieves mastery and internalization, they have developed a total biker lifestyle and no longer
feel self-conscious. At that point, the rider may “deviate from established or stereotypical
costumery and create individual styles” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 56). This
observation is in line with the premise of symbolic self-completion theory. Once individuals
have achieved biker identity, they feel less compelled to use products as a means of defining
their sense of self.

Recent research suggests that for the new breed of bikers, both male and female, “Riding
motorcycles is \textit{what they do}, not \textit{who they are}. Rather, like most Americans, their strongest sense
of identity is related to their age, race, sex, family roles, and occupation” (Thompson, 2012b, p.
99). Women, for example, view riding a motorcycle as only one of the many social statuses and
roles that they fulfill (Thompson, 2012b).

\textbf{Femininity in a Masculine Subculture}

Whereas women represent a small percentage of riders, their numbers have been
increasing. Previous studies found that many women are a part of the subculture, but go
unnoticed (Ferrar, 2000). Traditionally, research has placed more emphasis on male riders;
however, women have also played a vital role in the evolution of motorcycling (Ferrar, 2000).
Thompson (2012b) found that women in the motorcycling subculture are typically associated
with stereotypical roles. But, as Thompson (2012b) pointed out, the male-domination and
corresponding sexism that is associated with motorcycle subculture has not dissuaded women
from rider participation. Thompson (2012b) claimed that the male-dominated subculture has
been able to maintain its machismo despite an increase in women riders. Thompson (2012b) also
pointed out that, “Despite decades of feminist progress in larger society, some females still play
subordinate roles in today’s motorcycle subculture” (p. 89). In contrast, Joans (2001) found that the increasing number of women sharing what was once a male sanctuary has led to a realignment of the male image. Joans (2001) claimed that traditional views of femininity and masculinity are maintained when women are passengers or maintain roles that are viewed as submissive. Women riders, however, present a challenge to the traditional male’s identity. Some men have trouble with the change (Joans, 2001). Schouten et al. (2006) concluded that women riders have redrawn gender boundaries by violating traditional gender roles. Schouten et al. (2006) found that women riders redefine and expand their own femininities by engaging in hyper-masculine consumption behaviors. Hyper-masculinity, according to Martin et al. (2006), is “a form of heterosexual attitudes and behaviors rooted in dominance over women and other masculinities (e.g., Bird 1996; Connell 1987), [that] stands firmly on the foundation of hegemonic masculinity” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 172).

Martin et al. (2006) found that for most women riders, the decision to become a motorcycle rider was influenced by a man. Martin et al. (2006) coined five terms that represented males’ roles in motivating women to operate their own motorcycle: riding around with boys, riding against boys, riding for boys, riding beside boys, and boys on the side. *Riding around with boys* refers to women who were exposed to motorcycling as a teenager, usually by riding on the back of a boy’s motorcycle (Martin et al., 2006). These women’s motivations for operating their own motorcycle later in life came from their experiences as a youth when riding on the back of a young boy’s motorcycle was often a scary experience (Martin et al., 2006). *Riding against boys* also refers to women whose motivation for operating their own motorcycle as an adult came from their experiences as a youth (Martin et al., 2006). These women enjoyed motorcycling as a youth and usually operated their own dirt bike (Martin et al., 2006). Riding against boys makes
reference to the fact that these girls often raced against boys for fun and competition (Martin et al., 2006). *Riding for boys* acknowledges that some women operate their own motorcycle to attract or keep a man’s attention. Martin et al (2006) found that some women think that men find women riders attractive, and these women want to fulfill their fantasy. *Riding beside boys* refers to women who like to operate their own motorcycle alongside their husband (Martin et al., 2006). These women enjoy the opportunity to ride and bond with their husband (Martin et al., 2006). *Boys on the side* refers to women whose interest in operating their own motorcycling was influenced by a female role model or friend.

Martin et al. (2006) discovered that feelings of confinement from traditional gender roles and personal identities motivated some women to ride their own motorcycles. “The boundaries are both emotional and social, held in place by their own doubts and self-definitions on one hand, and by perceptions of social norms and pressures on the other” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 184). Ferrar (2000) concluded that once women decide to ride their own motorcycle, it provides them with feelings of empowerment, which often extends to other facets of their lives. Roster (2007) identified five sources of empowerment that women gain by commandeering their own motorcycle: “empowerment through claiming leisure space, empowerment through reconstructing self-identity, empowerment through claiming leisure community, empowerment through resisting social stereotypes and empowerment through developing knowledge and skill” (p. 449). Jansen (2011) attributed women’s feelings of empowerment to motorcycling’s ability to provide adventure, a spiritual experience, a sense of freedom, enhanced confidence, independence, feeling of community, and a balance of feminine and masculine energies. Women who ride also attain an increase in status in the subculture. They are awarded enhanced respect by other male and female riders, and they have more opportunities for participation than do
female passengers (Martin et al., 2006). Martin et al. (2006) proposed that a women’s status is impacted by a gender paradox. They can achieve a higher status by becoming a rider, but their gender constrains their status. Some examples of the gender paradox include that marriage relationships outweigh women’s identities as riders, and typically a woman’s motorcycle is inferior to her spouse’s in brand, size, or expense (Martin et al., 2006). As mentioned previously, Schouten et al. (2006) found that perceptions of commitment and authenticity influence members’ status within the group. According to Schouten et al. (2006), “Women riders establish their own authenticities in the context of women’s ways of riding” (p. 72). “Women also can gain status and authenticity through acts of resistance to the hegemonic male subculture” (Schouten et al., 2006, p. 72). Resistance to male control is usually in the form of anti-male rhetoric. As illustrated by the saying “I know I ride like a girl, try and keep up” or “I got a Harley for my husband, it was a good trade.”

Society and the motorcycling community used to expect women to occupying stereotypical gender roles, fulfilling traditional female roles as submissive and supportive. Women previously were expected to ride on the passenger seat (Joans, 2001). In becoming riders, however, women have violated, either consciously or unconsciously, the rules of stereotypical femininity. Only 3% of the U.S. population rides motorcycles (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2016), with women representing only 19% of those riders (Motorcycle Industry Council, 2018). Because this is such a small fraction of the population, women riders are viewed as nonconformists (Ferrar, 2000). As a result, women riders can be viewed as “gender traitors” or “social outlaws” (Joans, 2001; Roster, 2007). In addition, because women riders are not conforming to traditional gendered norms, they may send conflicting messages to others about their femininity and their gender identity (Ferrar, 2000; Roster, 2007), which leads some
observers to question women riders’ sexual orientation (Martin et al., 2006). Heterosexual women riders, however, believe that riding does not require them to surrender their feminine image or their identity (Joans, 2001). Many heterosexual women riders consider themselves to be feminine but have redefined traditional ideas of femininity and have adopted their own reinvented image, which also gives them a sense of empowerment (Ferrar, 2000; Joans, 2001; Martin et al., 2006; Roster, 2007). This reinterpretation of femininity can be seen in women riders’ apparel. Because riding gear is basically unisex in appearance, women accessorize and feminize their appearances in noticeable ways to communicate their femininity and heterosexuality (Martin et al., 2006; Thompson, 2012b). The addition of rhinestone embellishments to riding gear such as leather jackets is one example of feminizing appearance management. Wearing colors that are traditionally considered feminine, like pink or purple, is another example of feminizing appearance. Many women add feminine touches to their motorcycles as well (Thompson, 2012b). Previous research indicates that women riders also assimilate hyper-masculine symbolism into their appearance (Martin, et al., 2006); women like to look tough and feminine at the same time (Hochswender, 1991).

**Relevant Theories**

In this section I discuss theories that were useful in interpreting the data collected for this study. Some of the theories were helpful in shaping research questions, but were not used in a positivistic manner (i.e., data were not used to test these theories). Theories discussed here were used to interpret patterns in the data inductively if understanding was enhanced by the theory. I provide an in-depth look at symbolic interactionism; show symbolic interaction’s ties to self-concept, identity, and social identity theories; and introduce semiotics as a means for understanding how objects acquire meaning. I compare and contrast identity theory and social identity theory and make a case for the theories’ usefulness for understanding Harley women’s
identity formation, their identification with and membership in the motorcycling community, and related consumption behaviors. Because previous research has identified Harley as consumption subculture (Kates, 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993), I examine self-congruity theory and symbolic consumption theory as avenues for understanding individual consumption behaviors. The usefulness of symbolic consumption and symbolic self-completion in understanding women’s portrayal of identity through clothing is proposed. The applicability of elements of feminist theory in understanding women’s roles and experience in the Harley SOC is presented. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of postmodern and post-postmodern theories.

**Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic interaction theory focuses on communication, the cognitive process involved in communication, and how objects acquire meaning through human interaction and communication. Symbolic interaction theory (Mead, 1934) is based on the idea that an individual’s identity is formed, and the self emerges through a process of reflexivity and social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Davis, 1982). The self develops through a process, in which “a human being can be an object of his [sic or her] own action” (Blumer, 1969, p. 12). The view of the self as an object is the foundation for the development of self-identity. The self, as an object, gains meaning through interaction; identity is formed around social meanings assigned to the self by the self and others. Therefore, symbolic interaction theory considers the self as an object and a function of social interaction (Malhorta, 1988) and acknowledges that social interaction begins and ends with a consideration of the self (Fisher, 1978).

*Duality of self* (Mead, 1934) is a key assumption of symbolic interactionism (Fisher, 1978). The duality of self is the idea that the self is made up of two interdependent concepts: “I” and “me.” According to Mead (1934) the “I” is the part of the self that performs behaviors (Fisher, 1978). The “me” is the part of the self that is shaped by how others see the self. Blumer
elaborated on the word of Mead (1934) who claimed: “In order to become an object to himself [sic or herself] a person has to see himself from the outside. One can do this only by placing himself [sic or herself] in the position of others and viewing himself or acting toward himself from that position” (Blumer, 1969, pp. 12-13). Reflexivity is a process whereby the individual views the self as an object of his or her own action (Blumer, 1969). Reflexive evaluation requires “taking on the role of the other” (Morris, 1977) to understand how others assign meaning to the self; the individual uses others as, in essence, mirrors that reflect the self, a process called the “looking glass self” by Cooley (1902). Fisher (1978) contended that the key to symbolic interaction is that social interaction involves the cognitive process of self-indication and interpretation. Self-indication is a process that involves experience and interpretation when the “I” performs an act and the “me” observes the experience/behavior and interprets others’ reactions and the consequences of the act (Fisher, 1978). Therefore, in social processes, the individual is able to both act and observe at the same time. The interpretation or anticipated outcome of an act influences an individual’s behaviors (Fisher, 1978). Symbolic interactionism proposes that before any self-determined or conscious act, humans engage in a process of deliberation whereby they consider the consequences of their intended actions (Morris, 1977). This view differs from other schools of thought, which believe action to be completely responsive and reactive (Blumer, 1969). In regard to action or behavior, Blumer (1969) asserted:

Action on the part of the human being consists of taking account of the various things that he notes and forging a line of conduct on the basis of how he interprets them. The things taken into account cover such matters as his wishes and wants, his objectives, the available means for their achievement, and actions and anticipated actions of others, his image of himself, and the likely result of a given line of action. (p. 15)

Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) identified two types of interaction: gestures and symbols. Drawing from the work of Mead (1934), Blumer explained that “a gesture is any part or
aspect of an ongoing action that signifies the larger act of which it is a part – for example, the shaking of a fist as an indication of a possible attack…” (1969, p. 9). Gestures cannot be understood separate from the act.

The focus of the present discussion will be on the symbol, because symbolic interaction focuses on the symbolic object. Symbols are objects in society that have acquired meaning that is carried beyond a specific act (Blumer, 1969). Through the process of social interaction, humans assign definitions and meanings to objects that are symbols and learn them from others (Blumer, 1969). According to Mead (1934), when a symbol acquires universal or shared meaning throughout a group or society, it achieves “significance.” Significance occurs when the interpretation of a symbol’s meaning is universally or widely accepted; therefore, anyone who knows the symbol would arrive at a similar understanding of what the symbol represents. For example, although riders can purchase t-shirts online, it is commonly assumed in the Harley SOC that if a rider wears a Harley brand t-shirt, they visited a Harley location and purchased the shirt there. Therefore, the significance of a branded t-shirt is universally understood in the Harley SOC. The leather jacket can also be considered a powerful symbol given its stereotypical association with Harley riders.

**Semiotics**

The idea that objects can act as symbols and have meanings is studied in the field of semiotics. Semiotics scholars seek to answer how symbols, words, and objects acquire meaning through social interaction (Mick, 1986). Mick (1986) explained that semiotics shares similar theoretical and methodological positions with symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists, and cultural anthropologists, and he suggested that there was an overlap between semiotics and symbolic interaction because both theories examine the process of forming meaning. Semiotics, founded by Saussure (1915) and Peirce (1931-1958), focuses on the theory of signs, symbols,
and meanings. Grounded in linguistics, semiotics is comprised of both verbal (words) and non-verbal (including objects) communication.

Saussure’s (1915) model was comprised of two components, the signifier and the signified (Mick, 1986). The signified is the object such as a motorcycle, and the signifier is the word used to represent the object, e.g., “motorcycle.” The work of Peirce (1931-1958) advanced semiotics by developing a three-component model which included the sign, the object, and the interpretant (Mick, et al., 2004). The sign, according to Mick (1986), is “anything that stands for something (its object), to somebody (its interpreter), in some respect (its context)” (p. 198). The interpretant is someone’s (the interpreter’s) understanding or perception of and reaction to the sign, i.e., the object’s meaning (Mick, 1986). The strength of Peirce’s model is that it takes into consideration social and cultural elements as well as context as a part of the communication process (Mick, 1986). Peirce put emphasis on the interpretant or individual (and ultimately society) in creating and assigning meanings that connect words and objects.

Mick and Oswald (2006) credited Roman Jakobson for linking “semiotic operations to innate cognitive processes that enable subjects to interpret and organize their reality and communicate with others” (p. 32). They explained that “Jakobson opened up the possibility of mapping semiotic relations between brand attributes and the satisfaction of unmet symbolic needs of consumers” (p. 33). Semiotics application in consumer behavior research has sought to understand the functions of brand names, logos and trademarks for both companies and consumers (Mick et al., 2004). Additionally, consumer behavior researchers have used semiotics to explore the meanings that consumers associate with experiencing, owning, and using products, such as Harley branded clothing (Mick et al., 2004).
Self-Concept and Congruity Theory

Sirgy (1982) defined self-concept as “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself [sic or herself] as an object (originating from Rosenberg, 1979)” (p. 287). Similarly, Kihlstrom and Cantor (1984) defined self as “one’s mental representation of oneself” (p. 2). An individual’s self-concept “is a part of the individual’s organized system of concepts concerning his or her social or physical world” (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984, p. 4). Self-concept is synonymous with self-image (Sirgy et al., 1997). In addition, consumer research has adopted the idea that the individual consumer has four self-concepts: actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-images (Claiborne & Sirgy, 1990). The four self-concepts relate to how individuals perceive and monitor their own self-image: 1) how they view themselves (actual), 2) how they aspire to see themselves (ideal), 3) how others view them (social), and 4) how they want others to view them (ideal social self).

Self-concept is a useful construct for consumer behavior and can be used to explain consumers’ product/brand preference, purchase motivation and intention, product ownership and usage (Friese, 2000; Malhorta, 1988; Sirgy et al., 1997). According to Claiborne and Sirgy (1990), “Significant relationships have been found between a consumer’s attitudes/behavior and self-image congruence” (p. 3). According to Sirgy (1982), individuals have a tendency to behave consistently with their self-image and are motivated to consume products/brands that enhance their self-concept. Sirgy’s (1984) self-image/product image congruity theory proposed that individuals are drawn to products whose image matches their self-image/self-concept. The matching of a product’s image with a consumer’s self-image is defined as self-image congruence or self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997). Claiborne and Sirgy (1990) explain that an individual is concerned about how they will be perceived by others when they consume a product; therefore, product image is conceived as the individual’s evaluation of particular product’s usage in
relation to their self-concept. Perceived self-image, according to Claiborne and Sirgy (1990), is based on an image of the stereotypical product user. Lindquist and Sirgy (2009) defined **brand-user image** as “the stereotypic image of the generalized user of the brand” (p. 160). Claiborne and Sirgy (1990) pointed out that, when evaluating a product/brand, men and women may not arrive at the same stereotypical image of the product user.

At first thought, it may seem that self-concept and identity are the same. In fact, they are often used interchangeably (Friese, 2000). However, there are differences between the two concepts. Self-concept theory focuses on psychological motivations that drive behavior; whereas, identity theory focuses on the sociological/anthropological functions of identity such as social roles and statuses, reference groups, and social relationships (Friese, 2000). In the next section, I shift discussion to identity and social identity theories. I also present the notion that identity, similar to self-concept, influences consumer behavior.

**Identity and Social Identity Theories**

Identity theory (Stryker, 1968) is grounded in symbolic interactionism and is concerned with predicting an individual’s role-related behavior (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identity theory asserts that an individual’s self is a result of socialization and is comprised of several identities (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). These different identities are referred to as **role identities** and are linked to the different social positions an individual holds within society (Hogg et al., 1995; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). An individual’s identity is formed through social interactions with others (Friese, 2000). An individual’s perceptions and self-reflective thoughts regarding others’ reactions toward their appearance and behaviors influence the individual’s identity formation (Friese, 2000). Self-reflection is a cognitive process whereby the individual sees him/herself as an object (Friese, 2000). Through reflection, individuals will engage in a process of identity management by anticipating others’ reactions to a specific behavior (Friese,
Thus, an individual’s identity management guides her or his social interaction and directs personal behavior (Friese, 2000; Hogg et al., 1995).

As discussed previously, role identities influence both an individual’s sense of self and the individual’s behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). An individual’s self is linked to the social position/role the individual holds within a social structure (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). By conforming to roles, individuals maintain their self-concept (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). Engel and Blackwell (1982) define role as “patterns of behavior expected of people who occupy a position in the group” (p. 147). Identity theory, therefore, is concerned with predicting an individual’s role-related behaviors (Hogg et al., 1995).

Role identities influence behavior (Hogg et al., 1995), and appropriate behavior is learned through socialization with the group (Solomon, 1983). Group members’ conformity to role expectations and norms are driven by a need to preserve the group’s existence (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). A desire for continued belonging and acceptance motivates individuals’ conformity (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). Previous research has found that individuals use products for role performances (Solomon, 1983). Previous research also suggests that dress can communicate an individual’s position, roles, and status within a group as well as an individual’s identification with or belonging to a group (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995).

Frieze (2000) specified that “The self cannot exist in isolation since [sic] for meaning to evolve a person needs to engage in a contextual network of relationships” (p. 41). Because social interaction is a key part of identity formation, most researchers use the term social identity in place of identity (Friese, 2000). In fact, identity theory and social identity theory share some similarities (Hogg et al., 1995). Both theories regard the self as socially constructed, multi-faceted, and related to behaviors (Hogg et al., 1995). Both theories focus on the relationship...
between the self, social structure, and individual behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). The difference between the two, according to Hogg et al., Terry, and White (1995), lies in identity-related behavior. Identity theory emphasizes roles; whereas, social identity theory emphasizes intergroup relations (Hogg et al., 1995).

Social identity occurs when an individual’s identity is defined by belonging to a group (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory, originally conceived by Tajfel (1959), is concerned with the influence of group belonging/membership and normative behavior on an individual’s conduct (Hogg et al., 1995). According to social identity theory, an individual’s behaviors will align with that of the group to which they feel a sense of belonging (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory asserts that individuals’ behavior is directed at achieving and maintaining their ingroup status or membership/belonging (Hogg et al., 1995). Based on the theory of social identity, members of the Harley SOC align their behaviors in a manner that enhances or at least maintains their membership or status with the group. Normative behaviors are a form of boundary maintenance, which allows for easier identification of group members and those who are not (Hogg et al., 1995). This process is also known as in-group and out-group identification. In the case of Harley, stereotypes help to identify members of the SOC from those who are not.

A reference group is defined as “the group whose perspective an individual takes on in forming values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and overt behaviors” (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009, p. 499). Reference groups play an important part in developing a person’s self-concept (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). When individuals become members of a group, their social identity becomes linked to the traits of their social role and the characteristics of the group (Chowdhury, Desai, & Bolton, 2014). Group stereotypes can play a role in identity development and perform boundary maintenance (Hogg et al., 1995). Additionally, a reference group allows for social comparison
(Friese, 2000). Individuals are influenced by the reactions of other members of a reference group to others and to the self; therefore, individuals will act in a way to protect their self-concept in social situations (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). According to Hogg et al. (1995), when an individual’s identity is linked to a group, she or he will be motivated to engage in behaviors that enhance or maintain his or her relationship with the group.

In addition to influencing an individual’s sense of self, reference groups also pressure individuals/members to conform to social norms. Lindquist & Sirgy (2009) defined a social norm as “any rule of behavior for meeting societal (group) expectations” (p. 499). The influence of an individual’s compliance with group norms is defined as the normative function of reference groups (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). According to Lindquist and Sirgy, (2009) a desire for belonging and acceptance will cause new members in a reference group to feel more pressure to conform to group norms. Additionally, members who hold leadership roles are more likely to conform in order to support and reinforce norms (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). From a consumer behavior standpoint, reference groups can influence an individual’s marketplace decisions including product and brand preference (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). Product and brand influence is greatest for highly visible luxury goods (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009).

As discussed so far, there are a lot of similarities and overlap among self-concept congruity theory, identity theory, and social identity theory. Social identity overlaps with social and ideal social self-concepts, because socialization influences an individual’s identity and behavior in all three concepts. For example, the concepts of the social self and the ideal social self are based on an individual’s perception of how others view them or how they want others to perceive them. In social identity theory, an individual’s sense of identity is linked to a reference group (i.e., the group in which the individual considers himself or herself to be a member).
Reference groups play an important role influencing an individual’s behaviors because an individual’s behavior is guided by her or his perceptions of the reference group’s reactions to intentional behaviors. Social identity theory contends that an individual will act in a manner that is consistent with group norms in order to maintain status and identification with the group. Similarly, self-image congruity theory focuses on how identity drives behavior. It is also important to note that identity theory and social identity theory are grounded in symbolic interactionism (Hogg et al., 1995) and self-concept congruity theory is influenced by it as well. One common bond that these three theories share is symbolic interaction’s premise that objects, which include individuals and products, can hold meaning.

**Symbolic Consumption**

Symbolic consumption is defined as consumer use of products/brands to convey messages to themselves and others about their identity. Symbolic consumption is a component of symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction is concerned with an individual’s communication of identity through social interaction, whereas symbolic consumption focuses on the individual’s use of objects (products/brands, as well as services and experiences) to communicate their identity to others in social interactions. Millan and Reynolds (2014) defined *symbolic consumption* as the “acquisition of products and brands not for their functional benefits but for the culturally shared and idiosyncratic meanings they convey to others and the society” (p. 551).

As discussed previously, objects (products/brands) hold meanings, and people use objects (products/brands) to communicate an indication of their identity to other members of society (Blumer, 1969). Objects acquire their meaning through social interaction (Blumer, 1969). In the Harley SOC, the leather jacket is an example of meaningful consumption. The linking of wearing a leather jacket and being a biker has been socially cultivated both within the biker community and in society as a whole. Solomon (1983) argued that products act as symbols and play an
important role in an individual’s quest to communicate identity to others. In addition to communicating identity, research has also linked symbolic consumption to formation of an individual’s identity (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). Through consumption of brands, consumers can define themselves and express themselves to others (Aaker, 1997; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Holland, 2004; Schmitt, 2012). Consumption of products/brands provides individuals with a way to increase their sense of self (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009; Richins, 1997). When a consumer considers a possession to be a part of their self-identity, the item becomes an extension of the self (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). Joans (2001) noted that for a biker, “Riding is a part of his [sic or her] definition of self” (p. 52). Therefore, the motorcycle is a part of the rider’s identity. The concept that material goods have symbolic properties that define and express the self is the foundation of symbolic consumption; Belk (1988) indeed proposed that material goods are an extension of the self.

Symbolic consumption has been linked to many different types of products/brands, leisure activities, leisure products, as well as clothing (Friese, 2000). Researchers have found a connection between a consumer’s identity and purchase intention toward the products that they believe portray their identity (Solomon, 1983). Research has also shown that reference groups can influence a consumer’s behaviors including brand/product choice (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). According to Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), individuals use products or possessions to symbolize their identities in the hopes that their desired identities will be validated by others. Research has also found that products/brands are used to express social relationships, signify accomplishments, and validate personal experiences (Friese, 2000; Millan & Reynolds, 2014). Some examples of the use of products for these purposes are found in the Harley SOC, such as
the wearing of patches, pins and t-shirts to display attendance at motorcycle rallies and events (Thompson, 2012b).

Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) provided a more detailed definition of the self for application in apparel research. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) defined the self as “a composite of an individual’s identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to situations for interaction” (p. 12). Following in the tradition of semiotics, McCracken (1988) described clothing as expressive and capable of communication. According to Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995), as a product of symbolic consumption, the possible meanings communicated by dress are endless. They also noted that the meanings communicated by dress are dependent on the interpretations of others. Studying dress allows researchers to examine a culture, which includes formal relationships, organization, values and beliefs, and its individuals (McCracken, 1988; Tseëlon, 2012). After conducting a review of consumer behavior research focusing on semiotics, Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, and Brannen (2004) concluded that more research was needed to understand the “intentions, truths, deceptions, and desires that influence the choices and combinations of clothing signs” (p. 52). Mick et al. (2004) also asserted that research on clothing should put more focus on the personal and private meanings of clothing.

Discussed previously, symbolic self-completion theory maintains that when an individual’s identity has not yet been fully formed she or he will employ a strategy for acquiring and bolstering a sense of self (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). This strategy usually involves acquiring and displaying symbols associated with his or her desired identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). These consumption behaviors usually occur when an individual performs a new or unfamiliar role (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Schouten and McAlexander (1995)
observed that, in the Harley SOC, new riders experience feelings of uncertainty regarding their riding skills and their status in the group. According to Schouten and McAlexander (1995) these new riders will acquire and wear stereotypical biker apparel, which provide the new riders with sense of identity and belonging. To increase their in-group status, riders acquire and wear symbols as statements of involvement and commitment (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

**Feminist Theory**

As discussed previously, symbolic interaction theory is based on the idea that objects acquire meaning through the process of social interactions (Blumer, 1969). The individual, as an object, also derives meaning or identity through socialization (Malhorta, 1988). According to symbolic interaction, gender is socially defined (Deegan, 1987). Social interactions have shaped women’s perceptions of their femininity and what it means to be a female (Deegan, 1987). Just as society has constructed gendered identities, it has also prescribed feminine and masculine gendered appearances (Kaiser, 1998). Dress is a part of an individual’s socialization (Kaiser, 1998). According to Twigg (2012), fashion “plays a critical part in the way femininities (and masculinities) are rendered, played out, resisted and understood (Holland, 2004), contributing to a set of gendered behaviors and practices that are themselves fluid, shifting and contextual” (p. 18).

Feminist theory is a form of critical theory that centers on the idea that we live in a patriarchal society, in which women are viewed as subordinate to men (Tyner & Ogle, 2008). This patriarchal structuring of gender has been identified in the Harley SOC (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012; Wolf, 1991). Michelman and Kaiser (2000) explained that “A feminist perspective challenges the existing balance of power, addressing social inequalities associated with class, race and sexuality, as well as gender” (p. 122). Feminist research on dress has focused on exploring women’s appearance related experiences to this perceived inequality.
Kaiser (1991) identified three broad categories of feminist theories: rational, anti-rational, and postrational/postmodern. According to Tyner and Ogle (2008), “Rational feminist thought focuses on ways to improve women’s devalued status” (p. 3). Additionally, rational feminism seeks ways to increase female participation in a male-dominated social world (Tyner & Ogle, 2008). Previous research with a rational feminist approach has focused on how women can achieve power and authority through dress (Tyner and Ogle, 2008). Anti-rational feminist thought challenges traditional views of male superiority and focuses on validating feminine characteristics and attributes (Kaiser, 1991; Tyner & Ogle, 2008). In contrast, anti-rationalism views femininity as a strength rather than a weakness. Postrationalism, or postmodern feminism, aims to deconstruct traditional gender categories and acknowledges that individual and social identities are diverse, not bipolar categories, and contextual (Twigg, 2012). Postmodern feminist research has provided a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which dress is associated with power and understood in different social contexts (Tyner & Ogle, 2008). The idea that gender is created or “performed” aligns with postmodern feminism to form an understanding that multiple gendered realities exist (e.g., transsexual identity).

As identified earlier, the Harley SOC is a male-dominated community that has a patriarchal structure, whereby women are viewed as subservient to men (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012b; Wolf, 1991). Previous research found that women in the subculture are typically associated with stereotypical and subordinate roles (Thompson, 2012b). Previous research suggests that gendered roles and identities are challenged when women start riding their own motorcycles (Joans, 2001). Deegan (1987) claimed that when members of a community disagree about the definitions of appropriate behavior, social disorganization occurs and conflicts
can result. Deegan (1987) contended that during social disorganization, new perspectives and definitions of behavior can emerge.

For example, the changing definitions of appropriate behavior present opportunities for expanded rights for women (Deegan, 1987) within Harley subculture. Previous research noted that women riders were afforded more respect and opportunities for participation than were women passengers (Martin et al., 2006). When women take up riding, they create opportunities for themselves and other women and challenge the subculture’s understanding of gender roles.

**Postmodern Theory**

Postmodern refers to cultural phenomenon in Western society during the late 20th century and, to some extent, still today (Morgado, 1996). Postmodern culture has its own identifiable values, norms, social behaviors, and economic conditions (Morgado, 1996). Morgado (1996) explained that postmodern culture also has its own style of aesthetic expression, which is often found in art, literature, theatre, and dress. Morgado (1996) noted that postmodern values can be found in institutions, companies, and socio-political groups. The postmodern cultural ethos is “characterized by a new recognition and valuing of diversity, multiculturalism, and marginalized people and viewpoints, and a consequent denial of the values, truths, knowledge, and ways of thinking characterized by white, male-dominated, western culture in the modernist period” (Morgado, 2014, pp. 314-315).

Postmodern theory is a form of critical theory that focuses on “the nature of contemporary society” (Morgado, 1996, p. 41) and views dress as a central feature of culture and social interactions (Morgado, 1996). Mick et al. (2004) noted that postmodern dress is “characterized by a plurality of forms, fragmentation of styles, and diffusion of boundaries…” (p. 44). Mick et al. (2004) went on to say that “the rejection of tradition, relaxation of fashion norms, and emphasis on individual diversity and variability of styles has decreased agreement on
the meanings of styles” (p. 44). According to Kaiser (1991), “experimentation with fashion is a part of everyday life” (p. 214).

Harley branded apparel has shown evidence of postmodern style. Features associated with postmodern aesthetic style include: pastiche, bricolage, deconstruction, death of art and decentering (Morgado, 1996). Pastiche refers to a subtle twist of meaning (Morgado, 1996). An example of pastiche would be a current fashion trend in which women wear leather jackets over dresses to work. This mixing of formal and informal apparel and wearing them out of context is also an example of bricolage. Bricolage refers to the use of incongruent elements or incorporation of historical styles out-of-context. Deconstruction refers to the questioning of relationships or causing a disruption in the balance of nature (Morgado, 1996). Harley apparel has employed deconstruction techniques such as distressing fabrics or fabricating garments with raw edges. Death of art refers to the demise of hierarchies or distinctions between high fashion and street fashion. The Council of Fashion Designers of America’s recognition of Harley’s influence on fashion is an example of the death of art (Marchese, 1993). Decentering challenges assumptions about what is significant and calls attention to previously marginalized elements of style (Morgado, 1996). Women’s modification of Harley apparel to accentuate femininity through the use of colors such as pink or purple or the addition of rhinestones is an example of decentering. Adding feminine elements into the apparel design calls attention to the female members of the subculture; questioning of traditional masculine power is a symbolic result.

Post-postmodern

Recently, scholars have begun to suggest that society has moved into a post-postmodern cultural phenomenon. According to Morgado (2014), characteristics of this new cultural climate include the global financial crisis, the fear of global climate change, an endangered ecosystem, global political instability, job insecurities, and genetic and technological advancements. The
new cultural climate continues questioning of pre-postmodern rules but moves toward some
development of ethical and relational consumption behaviors rather than assumption of death of
all meanings. The concept of a post-postmodern cultural era is fairly new, and consistent terms
and labels have not been established. To date, there has been no research exploring post-
postmodern apparel. Morgado (2014) set out to identify how dress and consumption behaviors
related to dress might express post-postmodern characteristics. To achieve this purpose Morgado
extrapolated concepts from the works of Bourriaud (2009), Lipovetsky (2005), Eshelman (2008),
Samuels (2008), & Kirby (2010), who she claimed were the “foremost theorists of post-
postmodernism” (p. 332). Morgado’s (2014) efforts arrived at the following aesthetic features
and consumption behaviors associated with post-postmodern fashion:

1. A focus on ethical and sustainable fashion that has grown out of society’s concern for
global climate change and an endangered ecosystem. Examples include: garments made
from recycled products, organic and environmentally friendly garments, retailers that
offer upcycled products or the ability to rent clothing, and a concern for ethical garment
production.

2. Consumers in the post-postmodern culture are engaging in hyper-consumption.
Interestingly, this is in direct conflict with the idea of ethical and sustainable consumption
practices. Consumers are purchasing everything in excess and have a passion for
acquiring new items. Fast Fashion has grown out of this trend. This excess has been
marked by expenditures on frivolous items, such as clothing designed for pets and
excessive decorative details on products such as rhinestones, buckles, and multiple
pockets.
3. Individuals have become *experimenters*, meaning that they are active agents in creating their identity. Individuals are also *tourists* and *explorers* meaning that they manipulate and adapt their dress to different contexts. Both of these ideas have led to the concepts of *fluidity* or *boundlessness* whereby individuals are constantly shifting, creating, and manipulating their identity and their appearance.

4. Post-postmodern appearance is focused on blurring cultural categories such as sex and gender boundaries. Performative aesthetics involves the purposeful incorporation of both masculine and feminine appearance signs with the goal of erasing female/male opposition. Postmodern appearance was androgynous, whereas post-postmodern appearance is transgendered.

5. Everyone wants to collaborate! Multiple authorship through business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) relationships have become a focus. Mass customization is an example of B2C relationship building whereby the consumer participates in the design process. Target’s collaboration with fashion designers, such as Victoria Beckham, to create collections offered only at Target is an example of B2B collaboration. These B2B collaborations have typically involved collaborations between upscale (i.e., celebrity) and down-market retailers (e.g., Target).

6. In the post-postmodern culture, relationships with technology have changed. Multitasking that usually involves technology has become commonplace. Constant engagement with technology (e.g., Internet, Facebook, instant messaging, email communications) has led to altered and reconfigured distinctions between work and play, the self and other, public and private, and human and machine. Wearable technology incorporates technology with
textiles, garments, and accessories. Some examples of wearable technologies are: fabrics infused with sunscreen, garments that have solar cells embedded in them, which allow wearers to charge personal devices (e.g., cell phones), the Apple watch as a personal computing accessory. Fashion styles, called cyberpunk and steampunk, have grown out of the blurring distinctions of human and machine. Cyberpunk and steampunk are a paradoxical mix of mechanical & human, historical revival, and fantasy play.

7. Haphazardness of appearance, referred to as costume as street dress, is a very carefully constructed appearance that incorporates mixing and matching of incongruous elements to create a feeling of randomness. Morgado (2014) cited Japanese street styles as an example of a haphazard aesthetic.

Research Questions

1. What role does Harley apparel play in the female Harley community?
   a. Does Harley apparel provide a means for women to communicate their identity as a motorcycle rider?
   b. Does Harley apparel signify a women’s position or status within the group?
   c. Do women use Harley apparel as a means to signify accomplishments or to validate personal experiences as a rider?

2. Does Harley apparel play a role in shaping female HDSOC members’ identity?

3. Does women’s identification and affiliation with the HDSOC play a role in her marketplace decisions including Harley product and brand preference?
   a. Do women use Harley apparel & related products to communicate a connection and affiliation with the brand?
4. What are women’s perceptions of Harley brand symbolism?
   a. What are women’s perceptions of the outlaw image?
      i. Does women’s use of Harley apparel reflect their connection to past symbolic images of Harley riders, or are there new or expanded symbolic connections reflected in use of Harley branded apparel?
CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Introduction and Overview

In this chapter I introduce and define grounded theory and explain why this qualitative approach was the most appropriate methodology for the present study. Then, I outline the sampling methods that were used and provide a description of the sample. I elaborate on the details regarding the data collection methods such as capturing and storing data. I then identify the data analysis techniques that I employed for coding and interpreting the data. Finally, I close the chapter with a discussion of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and my role as researcher.

Qualitative Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the potential role of Harley branded apparel in defining and expressing the self-identity of female participants within the Harley community. Overall, I explored the potential role of the Harley branded community in shaping identity of these women. Consequently, this research expands previous research by exploring women participants’ perspectives of Harley brand symbolism and the Harley community.

A qualitative interview approach was ideal for this study because it allowed the researcher to facilitate participant introspection and probe for deeper meanings related to identity, the brand, and the community (Millan & Reynolds, 2014). The Harley community has been identified as a subculture consisting of its own norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors. As interpretive qualitative research is concerned with understanding how individuals experience, interpret, and construct their social world (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2006), an inductive, qualitative approach allowed for deeper understanding of sociocultural factors that influence an individual’s identity. Additionally, this study benefitted from employing
a qualitative approach because it provided a more holistic understanding and contextualization of Harley brand symbolism and the Harley community (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2006).

Strauss and Corbin (1998b) defined theory as “plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts” (p. 168). Charmaz (2002) explained that the purpose of grounded theory research is to “demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (p. 675). Because this study explored the relationships among many concepts (e.g., identity, self-concept congruity, social identity, symbolic consumption), grounded theory was an appropriate methodology to employ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

**Grounded Theory**

Creswell (2013) defined grounded theory as: “A qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (p. 83). The ultimate aim of grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory of a process (Creswell, 2013). Existing theories may also be applied to enhance understanding if they are appropriate and useful (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b). Most important, in grounded theory the theory that is generated emerges directly from or is grounded in patterns in the data (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998b). Grounded theory provides for flexibility in the research process, which allows researchers to adjust their data collection and analysis procedures throughout the research process to explore new ideas and issues as they emerge (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 41; Charmaz, 2002). This process is referred to as emergent research design (Charmaz, 2002; Creswell, 2014).

Grounded theorists focus on a particular phenomenon and strive for contextual understanding (Maxwell, 2013). Charmaz (2002) asserted that grounded theory allows
researchers to obtain rich data that “provides a solid foundation for developing robust theories” (p. 677) that may eventually be useful across multiple social groups and phenomenon after careful replication and exploration.

**Research Sample**

Grounded theory asserts that a theoretical sample is important for theory building (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998b). Creswell (2013) classified theoretical sampling as a purposeful sampling strategy; Silverman (2000) explained that these terms for sampling are often treated as synonyms. For this study the sample was chosen purposively. In purposive sampling, “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Similarly, Maxwell (2013) claimed that purposeful sampling involves selection of individuals based on their ability to provide information relevant to answering the study’s questions and goals. Purposeful sampling leads to information-rich data (Glesne, 2011) and strong theory development (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

The sample (n=23) for the present study was obtained using two sampling strategies--snowball and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Snowball sampling is a technique in which people recommend others within the community to be sampled (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Warren (2002) elaborated that the snowball sampling process involves the researcher locating an individual who fits the study’s criteria and who then helps to locate other possible respondents in their social network. Convenience sampling involves choosing individuals that are “conveniently available and willing to participate in the study” (Collins, 2010). Because I had built a network of relationships during my employment at a Harley dealership, I reached out to people that I knew within the motorcycling community and asked them to participate or suggest potential participants for this study; therefore, a purposive sample
was built using the techniques of snowball and convenience sampling. Participants received a $20 gift card for use at a local Harley dealership in exchange for their participation.

**Sample size.** Grounded theory’s emphasis on theory building specifies that researchers collect data to “develop a well-saturated theory” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). *Saturation* is defined as the point in data collection when the researcher stops because “fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell, 2014, p. 248). Merriam (2002) suggested that researchers collect data to the point of saturation as a strategy for strengthening internal validity. Careful attention to saturation alerted the researcher as to when sampling could be ended. The researcher conferred with her advisors to make the decision to end sampling. Sampling a few participants after saturation helped to assure satisfactory sampling of a theoretical sample.

**Data Collection**

A premise of qualitative research is that rich data can only be gathered through interactions between the researcher and participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 41). Interviewing is the most common data collection method used in grounded theory (Creswell, 2013) and fit the purposes of the present study well. Therefore, data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews between the researcher and participants. IRB approval and participant consent was secured before interviews were conducted (See Appendix A).

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. Nunkoosing (2005) stated that *structure* refers to “the degree to which all participants are asked the same pre-selected questions and the order in which these questions are asked” (p. 700). Interviewing for grounded theory should be both flexible and emergent (Charmaz, 2002). An interview protocol was used to guide the interview, but a semi-structured approach allowed the researcher flexibility during the interview to adapt as needed to explore new and emerging concepts as well as adapt to order of ideas generated by the participants (Charmaz, 2002). Interviews consisted of open-ended
questions designed to solicit participants’ perceptions of self-identity and explore the role of community, brand, and apparel in identity development. Conversations also explored participants’ attitudes toward and perceptions of the brand, its symbolism, and the brand community.

In addition to the interview questions, the technique of photo elicitation, or interviewing with photographs (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002), was also employed. The technique of photo elicitation was introduced by John Collier in 1957. Harper (2002) contended that images can “evoke deeper elements of human consciousness” (p. 13). Collier and Collier (1986), explained that photographs “can function as starting and reference points for discussion of the familiar or the unknown, and their literal content can almost always be read within and across cultural boundaries” (p. 99). Finally, Collier and Collier (1986), maintained that the use of images in interviewing allows the participant to take the lead in the inquiry and also helps to guide a structured conversation with the participant.

Photographs have been utilized in previous identity and social identity studies involving individuals’ use of clothing as a way of communicating identity (Harper, 2002). For the present study the interviewer chose 25 images of women’s Harley apparel under the assumption that the design features of the images would portray different roles within the Harley subculture. The 5-by 7-inch images included tank tops, short sleeved shirts, shorts, pants, jackets, chaps, and vests. The images were retrieved from Harley-Davidson’s ecommerce website in June of 2017. The images of the apparel were presented as interview stimuli to participants. The order of the images presented was randomized for each participant.

Interviews lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in a private home or in a meeting room at a local library. Interview locations were chosen based on convenience for both
the participant and the researcher. Transparency and issues of validity and rigor were addressed, as explained subsequently. Field notes were kept to track interviewer thoughts and observations, prior to and after interviews.

Interviews were audio recorded by the researcher, if participants agreed to be recorded. An audio recording made managing, storing, and transcribing interviews easier and more secure (Glesne, 2011). Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist (Creswell, 2014) and checked in detail by the researcher. To protect the privacy of respondents, the professional transcriptionist was only given access to the recording files with names erased, and she was asked to sign a confidentiality statement. I reviewed all transcripts to ensure that they were verbatim records (McCracken, 1988; Spiggle, 1994) and included the “interviewer’s questions and prompts” (Glesne, 2011, p. 117). Audio recordings, transcripts of the interviews, and subsequent data analysis files were stored in CyBox, a university sponsored data cloud, for security and privacy reasons.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Schwandt (2015) identified data analysis as the “process of organizing, reducing, and describing the data” and “drawing conclusions or interpretations of the data and warranting those interpretations” (p. 57). Creswell (2013) outlined several steps for coding and analyzing data. The first step, coding, involved breaking the data down into smaller pieces of information (Creswell, 2013, p. 184; see also Spiggle, 1994; Strauss, 1987). Saldaña (2014) defined codes as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 584). Rather than using a pre-conceived set of codes, I employed open-coding, which means that the codes were developed out of words and ideas in the data, most repeated to some extent across more than one participant (Maxwell, 2013). In-vivo codes emerged as a result of coding and were integrated into the
analysis. Charmaz (2006) explains that *in vivo* codes reflect special terms used by participants and can be used to “preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (p. 55). Charmaz (2006) stated, “Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (p. 46).

A qualitative codebook was created from the codes that emerged during data analysis. The codebook contained definitions of the codes and was used for coding the data. Development and refinement of the codebook was completed through a process of cross-checking (Creswell, 2014). The researcher enlisted the help of another person who was not connected to the study to cross-check the codes to ensure maximum coherence among the codes (Creswell, 2014). The two individuals each coded sections of interview transcripts and compared their intercoder reliability. This process was repeated five times; each time the intercoder reliability was over 90 percent. Once the intercoder agreement reached 98.77 percent, the codebook was considered reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding guide can be found in the appendix.

Once the codes were identified and refined, the second step was to use *axial coding* (Strauss, 1987). In axial coding the data was brought back together by linking related codes (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2014; Strauss, 1987) to create themes (also called categories). Themes are “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Axial themes in essence organize *in vivo* and other identified codes into larger meaning groups or under headings that group two or more related codes together as subthemes. Axial coding seeks recognition of relationships among codes. Strauss and Corbin (1998a) suggested that different themes are created in the axial coding phase with the goal of explaining or understanding a phenomenon.
Maxwell (2013) suggested three approaches that would allow the data to drive analysis and creation of themes. Maxwell’s (2013) three approaches were organizational, substantive, and theoretical. In creating organizational themes, codes are classified based on the research purpose and answering research questions (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2014). Substantive themes are created by linking codes that are descriptive or “represent the participants’ own meanings and understanding” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108). A theoretical approach, also known as theoretical coding, seeks to identify relationships between codes and obtain an abstract understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Glesne, 2011; Strauss & Glaser, 1998a).

The final step in data analysis, was the process of interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Warren, 2002), which “involves abstracting out beyond codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). Interpretation is a subjective process that involves making sense of participants’ experiences, behaviors, and stated meanings to achieve a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994). In qualitative research, it is common for interpretations of the data to be supported by verbatim examples of participant narratives (Creswell, 2014).

**Theory or Model Development.**

The purpose of this study was to understand Harley branded apparel’s role within the Harley community. The findings of this study may be used to better design and market Harley’s branded apparel. To achieve this goal, this research employed a grounded theory approach. Explained previously, the purpose of grounded theory research is to “demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 675). Thus, the aim was to arrive at a theory or model that explains the data. Straus and Corbin (1998b) defined theory as “plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts” (p. 168). In addition to understanding apparel’s role within the Harley community, this study also sought to explore
women participants’ perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism, the Harley community, and their potential role in shaping the identity for these women. Essentially, this study sought to understand women’s identity formation and the motivations that drove their consumption behaviors. In Chapter 2, I introduced several existing theories that proved useful in understanding patterns in the data. Most had been identified in preliminary stages of developing the study as potentially useful; they were helpful in alerting the researcher to themes that might be relevant to understanding the participants lived experiences. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, these theories were used inductively and not in a positivistic manner. Preliminary theories that were not useful or did not fit patterns in the data were excluded from use. In addition, some concepts were added after the data was analyzed and were included because data emerged that pointed to the relevance of the previously unconsidered concept. The concept of experience marketing, was added and focused on consumers’ consumption related experiences with the brand (Schmitt, 2010). Brand loyalty was also found to be relevant, as were additional concepts such as switching costs and word-of-mouth.

Reliability & Validity: Trustworthiness

For qualitative research it is important that the reader is able to determine if the study method is rigorous and the findings are valid. To do so, the reader must be able to evaluate each step the researcher took in the research process (Merriam, 2002). Unlike quantitative research, findings in a qualitative study are bound by context and generally cannot be replicated completely. Therefore, qualitative studies are not assessed on their ability to be replicated, i.e., external reliability, as in quantitative methods. Qualitative studies are appraised on criteria of trustworthiness such as internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability components of trustworthiness refer to whether the findings and conclusions drawn fit the data that was collected (Merriam, 2002). Validity components of
trustworthiness focus on “the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 249-250). Maxwell (2013) identified two threats to validity—researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias is combated with “understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be positive or negative)…” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). Reactivity is defined as “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). For instance, it is important to consider how I might have impacted participants’ responses during the interview process.

To address concerns of trustworthiness, recordkeeping was completed during data analysis to create an audit trail that documents decision making and maintains researcher accountability (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2002). Documentation included memos or other documents that tracked decisions for data manipulation and interpretation (Spiggle, 1994). Documenting how the study was conducted and how the data was analyzed bolster the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam, 2002).

Other strategies were employed to address trustworthiness concerns (Creswell, 2013; Guba, 1981). For this study, I employed at least three strategies to ensure trustworthiness. First, I engaged in peer review by soliciting continual reviews of the process from my major professors (i.e., advisors) and dissertation committee. Regular interactions with my advisors ensured that I was acting in an ethical manner, employing rigorous methods, analyzing data appropriately, and generating reasonable interpretations of the data. Second, I developed a detailed description of the findings as another means of providing documentation to support validity claims. “Thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) that help in deep interpretation of the case. Finally, I
presented a self-reflexive discussion of the potential bias that I may have brought to the study. I also discussed researcher-participant interactions to address concerns regarding reactivity.

**Ethical Considerations**

Participants in this study were asked to sign an informed consent document prior to participation. The informed consent document described the purpose of the study and informed participants of their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time, any risks or benefits associated with participation, and measures that would be taken to protect their confidentiality (Creswell, 2013). For security and privacy reasons digital recordings, transcripts of interviews, and subsequent data analysis files were stored in CyBox, a secure cloud-like storage system with password protection.

**Researcher Positionality**

As this is a qualitative study, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that my role as researcher might have impacted data collection methods and interpretation. For example, my background and knowledge of the motorcycling community may have influenced how I shaped my interview questions and flow of conversation during the interviews.

I had been an active participant in the motorcycling community for over 30 years. Additionally, I was employed at a Harley dealership for 12 years. It is possible that my background may have impacted certain elements of this study. Demographically, I would be considered Harley’s average female motorcycle enthusiast (Harley-Davidson. Inc., 2016b). I am a White, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual female. I was married and held a post-graduate degree. Like most female riders, I was exposed to motorcycling through a male biker, my husband, who rode a Harley (Roster, 2007; Schouten et al., 2006). I started out as a passenger,
and then through encouragement from my husband, I learned to ride my own bike. I had been riding for 16 years and currently ride a Harley-Davidson Street Bob, which was a member of the Dyna family of Harley motorcycle models.

The motorcycles in the Dyna® family trace their roots to the original Harley-Davidson® factory customs… These are motorcycles sprung from a long riding tradition, with a strong emphasis on the riding. Post-war bobbers. Rebellious 70s choppers. Motorcycles where the theme was riding hard and the only rule was nonconformity… There is no denying the powerful message sent by such a machine. (Harley-Davidson, Inc., 2017)

As a motorcycle enthusiast, I had attended many types of local motorcycle events and gatherings as well as national motorcycle rallies such as the Black Hills Rally in Sturgis, SD. In 2007, I earned an Iron Butt award from the National Iron Butt Association for riding my motorcycle 1,000 miles in 24 hours.

It is possible that my motorcycling background may have impacted elements of this study, such as interviewer/respondent relationships (Warren, 2002). Participants may have viewed me as an insider and, thus, felt more comfortable interacting with me. In contrast, however, I possibly may have assumed some insider meanings held on the part of participants when the assumptions were not entirely warranted.

I had been an apparel manager for a Harley motorcycle dealership for 12 years. For five (2006 – 2011) of my 12 years of employment with Harley, I held a position titled Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.) Liaison. Harley Owners Group is a corporate-sponsored motorcycle club. In addition to the national club, each dealership has its own local club. The liaison position required me to work closely with club officers and members of a local club to facilitate a friendly relationship between the club and the dealership. As the liaison, I participated in group activities and formed family-like bonds with many members.
I also had minimal exposure to outlaw motorcycle clubs. My experience working with Harley and H.O.G. members may have impacted which people I had access to interview as well as interviewer/respondent relationships. Participants may have felt compelled to respond more or less favorably toward Harley and/or the Harley community if they were aware of my employment status or that I considered myself to be a part of the community. Because I interviewed people with whom I had previous relationships, it may have impacted participants’ comfort and their willingness to share thoughts and experiences (Warren, 2002). I clearly discussed in the consent form and in rapport-building phases of the interview that I was open to and wanted to hear positive and negative attitudes and perceptions of Harley that may be held. I needed to make clear that I was an independent researcher and was not representing the company.

It is important to understand that my background and values may have impacted this study. My participation in the motorcycling world may have influenced my methods and interpretation of data that were collected. Because I had been an active member of the motorcycling community for so many years, I may have been at risk for the effects of “going native.” Going native is defined as becoming over-involved with participants (Guba, 1981). A researcher is at risk of “going native” when they spend a significant amount of time conducting research, usually ethnographic, in the field (Creswell, 2013). Given my years of employment with Harley and participation in the community, it was possible that my personal experiences made me more or less subjective during the research process. I was, essentially, a native before beginning the study.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction and Overview

This chapter includes a presentation and discussion of the findings. The chapter begins with a summary description of demographic characteristics of the participants in the study, followed by the qualitative analysis findings. In this chapter I define the four main themes: Harley business strategies, experiential aspects of consumption, social and relational aspects of consumption, and social roles and personal identity and sub-categories for each theme. Verbatim examples from participants’ interviews are provided to validate the study’s findings. Additionally, findings are linked to previous literature and theory.

Overview of Participants

Participants in this study included 23 women who resided in central Iowa. All self-reported White ethnicity. All of the participants owned and wore Harley branded apparel items. The ages of the participants ranged from 33 to 65, with an average age of 52. Fifteen of the participants were married, four were single, and four were divorced. Five of the women graduated from high school, three completed some college courses, 13 held bachelor’s degrees, and two had earned master’s degrees.

Table 1. Participants’ Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Participants’ Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Participants’ Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Graduate Courses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifteen of the participants operated their own motorcycle, and eight rode as passengers. The number of years that a participant had been riding motorcycles as operators or passengers ranged from 1 to 45 years, with an average of 13 years. Sixteen of the women in this study became involved in motorcycling through encouragement / exposure by a male individual (i.e., husband, boyfriend, father). As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, Martin et al. (2006) coined the term *riding beside boys* to describe women that became interested in motorcycling because a male introduced them to the sport. The other seven participants were either self-influenced or introduced to motorcycling by a female friend. Martin et al. (2006) coined the term *boys on the side* to describe these types of women. Ten of the women in this study mentioned that they grew up around motorcycles. At the time of the interview, 20 of the women were operating or were a passenger on a Harley motorcycle; three women were riding competitors’ brands of motorcycles,
such as, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, Yamaha, and Can-Am. Some participants had only ridden Harleys, some had ridden other brands prior to purchasing a Harley. Sixteen of the participants were members of the local Harley Owners Group (HOG), three were members of the local chapter of Chrome Divas, one was a member of the V-Twin Vixens, and three were not members of any motorcycle riding organizations.

Table 4. Participants’ Number of Years Riding Motorcycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Riding</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Operator or Passenger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operator</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Participants’ Brand of Motorcycle Currently Ridden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harley-Davidson</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honda</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CanAm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Participants’ Membership in Riding Organizations

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harley-Owners Group (HOG)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrome Divas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-twin Vixens</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harley describes its average female consumer as a white, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual female that is married and holds a post-graduate degree. While the women in this sample do reflect Harley’s stereotypical female consumer, it is important to note that this sample is not lacking in diversity. The women in this study were both motorcycle operators and passengers; therefore, they were able to provide views and experiences from both the front of the motorcycle and the rear. They had experience riding a variety of motorcycle models and brands. There was a large range in the number of years that these women had been riding motorcycles, which may have impacted their experiences in the motorcycling community. The women represented three different motorcycling organizations. Diversity among the participants was most found among their social statuses: married, single and divorced. Finally, they had achieved a variety of educational degrees and held varied status levels in their work organizations and occupations.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the purpose of this study was to understand the role of Harley branded apparel for women within the Harley community. This research explored the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley branded community in shaping the identity of these women. Moreover, this study, building on past research, explored their
perspectives on brand symbolism and the community surrounding the Harley brand. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What role does Harley apparel play in the female Harley community?
   a. Does Harley apparel provide a means for these women to communicate their identity as a motorcycle rider?
   b. Does Harley apparel signify their position or status within the group?
   c. Do these women use Harley apparel as a means to signify accomplishments or to validate personal experiences as a rider?

2. Does Harley apparel play a role in shaping female Harley-Davidson subculture of consumption (HDSOC) member’s identity?

3. Do identification and affiliation with the HDSOC play a role in these women’s market place decisions, including Harley product and brand preference?
   a. Do these women use Harley apparel & related products to communicate a connection and affiliation with the brand?

4. What perceptions of the Harley brand’s symbolism are held by these women?
   a. What are their perceptions of the outlaw image?
   b. Does their use of Harley apparel reflect their connection to past symbolic images of Harley riders, or are there new or expanded symbolic connections reflected in use of Harley branded apparel?

### Qualitative Themes

Based on analysis of the participants’ responses to qualitative interview questions, four key themes were identified: Harley business strategies, experiential aspects of consumption,
social and relational aspects of consumption, and social roles and personal identity. The following taxonomy was developed and organized the presentation of themes:

1. Harley Business Strategies
   1.1. Dealerships
   1.2. Relationships with H-D Employees
   1.3. Harley Owners Group
   1.4. Harley Events and/or Social Activities
   1.5. Corporate Advertising
   1.6. External Communicators of Corporate Identity
   1.7. Brand Loyalty
      1.7.1. Switching Costs
      1.7.2. Word-of-Mouth
   1.8. Logos and Trademarks
      1.8.1. Symbolic Meaning

2. Tourism, Vacation, and Travel
   2.1. Products as Memory Markers

3. Experiential Aspects of Consumption
   3.1. Cognitive Learning
   3.2. Challenges Associated with Riding
   3.3. Hedonic Consumption Experiences
   3.4. Sensory Stimulation and a Connection to Nature
   3.5. Relaxation, Personal Freedom, and Flow

4. Social and Relational Aspects of Consumption
4.1. Communitas and Camaraderie

4.2. Meeting New People

4.3. Cliques

4.4. Consumer Social and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

5. Social Roles and Personal Identity

5.1. Roles and Identity

5.1.1. Appearance Labor, Performativity, Impression Management

5.2. Status

5.3. Dress as an Expression of Gender

5.4. Self-confidence and Self-esteem

5.5. Self-definition


**Summary of Thematic Findings**

The data indicated that appearance plays an important role in the motorcycling community, because it allows for identification and recognition of riders. The women in this study wore Harley apparel and related products as a way of communicating a connection and affiliation with the brand to themselves and others. Wearing Harley apparel also provided the women with feelings of connectedness with members of the Harley/motorcycling community. Their identification and affiliation with the HDSOC played a role in their marketplace decisions, including Harley product and brand preference. Overall, Harley motorcycles and apparel were viewed as status symbols and as superior products in the marketplace. A majority of the women incorporated Harley apparel into their daily wardrobe, which helped them manage their appearance to meet social expectations for the different roles they played. When wearing apparel
to Harley or motorcycle cycle related activities, the women showed a preference for conspicuously branded merchandise. Apparel that had more subdued logos, symbols and trademarks was preferred for other types of social engagements such as work or church. The women were extremely brand loyal. The social relationships fostered by motorcycle and apparel consumption included interactions with Harley dealership employees, other consumers, HOG members, and the general public and contributed to building and maintaining brand loyalty.

For the women, wearing the Harley brand symbolized freedom and rebellion. Wearing Harley apparel made them feel more confident, tough, and sexy. Few women spoke about outlaw motorcycle clubs. However, the ones who did had little interest in affiliating with them. The outlaw image came from their awareness of local clubs and images portrayed by current TV shows. Some women were concerned about the general public’s stereotypical perception of motorcycle riders as outlaws. They engaged in impression management behaviors as an attempt to educate the general public that not all Harley riders are outlaws. The women also were concerned with managing their wardrobe to match the expectations of the different roles they played in society (e.g., motorcyclist, employee, and/or church-goer). Because they were exposed to the weather when they rode, they also focused on wearing apparel that would perform well under different weather conditions and would be comfortable. They did not show interest in wearing Harley apparel to reflect a connection to past symbolic stereotypes (e.g., outlaw motorcycle clubs) of Harley riders.

Although understanding the experiential benefits women gained from consumption of the motorcycle and apparel products was not a goal of the study, this topic permeated the conversations with participants. The social and relational aspects of consumption were the most frequently mentioned and sought-after benefit from riding and wearing the apparel. The women
wanted to feel a sense of connection to a community, and they wanted to interact with other like-minded individuals. They enjoyed participating or volunteering for community events, which afforded them opportunities to interact with others. They liked meeting new people and talking about their travels and motorcycling adventures. In addition to the social/relational aspects of consumption, the women also enjoyed the freedom that motorcycling provided. They enjoyed being able to relax and “check out” from their daily responsibilities and enjoy “me time.”

The second most mentioned experiential aspect of consumption was sensory stimulation and the sense of connection to nature when riding on a motorcycle. The women described feeling immersed in the sensory environment of the road. Finally, they talked about the feeling of enjoyment and sense of empowerment that came from learning to ride a motorcycle and/or master a new skill. They had an awareness of the challenges associated with riding and showed immense concern for safety.

Harley apparel played an important role in the female Harley community because it provided the women with a means to communicate their identity as a motorcycle rider and as a member of the Harley/motorcycling community. Harley apparel was worn at both motorcycle-related and non-motorcycle related activities. Wearing Harley apparel promoted social and relational aspects of consumption and created a feeling of connectedness (i.e., comradery) among members of the motorcycling community. Wearing Harley apparel often resulted in opportunities to meet new people and interact with people who had similar interests. Harley apparel did not emerge as a signifier of a woman’s status or position within the group. The women in this study were aware of various ways that Harley apparel and related items (pins, patches) could be worn to signify accomplishments, but most showed little interest in doing so. A primary motorcycle consumption activity was traveling and vacations. Thus, most women were more interested in
wearing apparel items that signified their travel experiences, such as t-shirts that advertised particular tourist/travel destinations. Wearing these types of apparel items provided the women with a means of communicating their travel experiences to others.

Finally, wearing Harley apparel does play a role in shaping female HDSOC members’ identity. Some of the women in this study viewed Harley apparel as an extension of their self. A majority of the women incorporated Harley apparel into their daily wardrobe and engaged in appearance labor and performativity to manage their different roles. Wearing Harley apparel gave the women a sense of greater self-definition and provided the women with a way to communicate their self-image to others. In-depth discussion of themes and content from the interviews validating the themes follows.

**Harley Business Strategy**

The first group of categories that emerged from the analysis of the data centered on the Harley-Davidson Motor Company. Participants talked about the company’s network of dealerships and employees, Harley events and activities, corporate advertising, and external communicators of corporate identity. Conversations involving the company also included mentions of products, such as the motorcycle and apparel; the brand, including its name and logos; brand loyalty; switching costs; and word-of-mouth. These topics will be explained further in the following sections.

**Dealerships.** Participants spoke about Harley dealerships, both locally and nationwide. Harley dealerships can be a welcoming place and a great support system for riders, as the following comments illustrate:

If I wanted to know where decent gasoline was close by, they’re always by Harley shops, and they’ll always tell you. If you are concerned about riding by yourself, employees will ask: “Is everything ok, do you need this, do you need that, what can we do?” I felt like if I was getting a little spooked by drivers or something, if I go to a Harley shop, I’d be in a community that would help me with anything I needed or any questions that I had. In
some ways that stuff was very instrumental earlier on, less so now. I just don’t feel the need to plug into that as much right now, but I know it’s there. (Rachel)

Regarding our relationship with our local dealership, you know most everybody there. When we walk in, they might not remember my name, but they remember my face. That’s just a nice, comfortable feeling when you walk into a store, and it feels like home. (Katie)

I am comfortable walking into any Harley dealership anywhere and striking up a conversation with the people behind the counter and even walking out without buying anything, and everybody just talking. (Sheryl)

The findings suggest that Harley dealerships are not only a place to sell products, they are also a place where the company can connect with customers and build relationships that can enhance customer loyalty. The bonding that participants described is a form of relationship marketing, which creates an emotional connection between the customer and the company (“Connecting Consumer and Product,” 1990). As Joans (2001) acknowledged, “belonging to the Harley family is one of Harley’s strongest selling points” (p. 32). As participants’ comments illustrate, store employees play a large part in building relationships with consumers.

**Building relationships with H-D employees.** Several participants in this study spoke about relationships that they had formed with employees of the local Harley dealership. Consumption-related social interactions and experiences primarily occurred while shopping at the local dealership or attending dealership sponsored events. Customer-employee relationships were formed during participation in or volunteering for dealership events. Personalized service and employee assistance also facilitated relationship building and sales:

It is really neat to walk in there, to be called by name, and have an employee say “We’ve got this cute thing. You’ve got to look at it.” So, I’ll go look at it, and maybe it is or isn’t something that I am really interested in, but it does become more personalized. Yeah, it’s really nice to walk in there and have somebody know who you are. It was always that Cheers bar for me, where everybody knows your name. (Nancy)

It’s the people and the store too. I mean the gals in the store know me by name. They treat me well. They kind of know my style, and they’re willing to show me, and they’re
always willing to order it for me if it’s not there. Or I can call up if I have guy or
girlfriends that are looking for something, and I can call up the store and say hey, I have a
friend that’s looking for this, you know, and they help me. (Heidi)

When I walk into the [store] they’re like “Hi, how are you doing?” Most of them know
my name and they wave. I definitely am in there, and it’s because I’ve got a relationship
with them. I mean they greet you when you walk in and say, “How are you?” I can ask
them their opinion and I can talk to them. I see them all the time. (Paula)

As the comments point out, participants enjoyed personalized service. They liked it when
employees knew them by name and greeted them as they entered their local store. When
employees engaged in personalized service, customers experienced feelings of friendship and
comradery, which may result in customer loyalty and repeat purchases (Price & Arnould, 1999).

**Corporate advertising.** Participants’ responses were mixed when it came to purchasing
apparel items advertised in the HOG magazine or monthly fashion mailers distributed by Harley.
Most of the women enjoyed looking at the items advertised in the corporate mailers; some
participants were stimulated to shop and/or purchase items, while others were not.

I will look at those books, and if I see something in there, I’ll either take the book or tear
that page out and then go see if you’ve got it. (Jamie)

We look through those, too. That’s where I saw the coat first, actually. I had an idea that I
wanted to look at it, but then I went in and saw it in the store. (Emily)

Yep it comes, and I always open it up and look through it, and once in a while I will
visualize something in there. I’m like “That’s kind of cute,” and I’ll make a point [to]
stop by the store and see if it’s in there and try it on and see if it looks ok on me,
especially some of the sleeveless stuff. (Paula)

I usually don’t buy anything in them. A lot of it is just not something that’s attractive to
me. I find that often, which is fine. Again, millions and millions of people will. Lots of
different things are going to attract most of the people. (Rachel)

I have my own style. I get my little books that they send out every month and go through
and be like “Yeah, not me, not me.” Or I’ll go into the store and try it on and hope that it
looks the way I want it to in my head. You know it’s just not consistent. That’s good and
bad. It’s not like you can look at it in the magazine and say, “ok, I’m an extra-large in
that and I’ll be able to buy it.” I’ve got to hurry up and get there, and make sure they still
have them. I would say that is kind of frustrating. I’ve done that a couple of times when I
really, really liked something, and it comes in the store before you get the book, so the
people that frequent the store more than I would, you know, buy it first. A lot of those
things are gone, and you get the book, and they’re like “Oh yeah, that came out a month
ago, and it’s already gone, sorry.” So, that’s a little frustrating at times. (Megan)

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Harley’s marketing practices include providing
new bike owners with a one-year membership to HOG magazine. Additionally, Harley sends out
monthly advertising pieces featuring fashion apparel items. Schouten and McAlexander (1995),
who focused primarily on male Harley consumers, found that new motorcycle riders are
influenced by Harley corporate mailing efforts. They also proposed that as riders become more
comfortable in their roles that they will likely adopt a more individualistic style. It is not known
if the participants in this study were more influenced by Harley’s advertising efforts earlier on in
their rider/passenger lifestyle. What was uncovered was that the women are currently hit or miss
when it comes to responding to Harley’s corporate mailers. The mailers clearly maintain a
connection with customers, however, albeit not always effective in producing sales.

**External communicators of corporate identity.** Conversations with participants
illustrated how the media and outlaw motorcycle clubs have played a role in shaping their
perceptions of the company’s identity and society’s perceptions of the motorcycling community.
Almost all of the women had no experiences with or interaction with outlaw motorcycle clubs.
Those who did speak about outlaw motorcycle clubs showed little interest in being affiliated with
members of outlaw clubs. The following examples illustrate participants’ perceptions of the
media’s portrayal of the motorcycle community and outlaw motorcycle clubs:

Sons of Anarchy didn’t help. They all think that we’re gang bangers and that we’re full of
tattoos and we’re just riding around causing trouble, robbing assorted banks, whatever. I
don’t know, I mean, movies and TV have really ruined it, and people are easily
influenced by what they don’t understand. Yes, there are gangs. There are bike gangs
and everything like that in certain cities. (Sally)
Sons of Anarchy, I hate that show. I hate what that show has perpetuated because I know those people are out there. I don’t want to deal with them, and I don’t want to have anything to do with them, and I don’t want any of my friends to have anything to do with them, because I think they’re dangerous. Sorry, but I think they’re bad people, you know, a lot of them. I’m sure I probably know people here in Des Moines who are sort of on the fringe of that culture that I don’t consider bad people, but the ones that are deeply embedded in it, I don’t respect a lot of the things that they have done. Unfortunately, we have programs like Sons of Anarchy that do for motorcycling what the Sopranos did for the mafia, you know, it just kind of glamorizes it. And, oh yeah, the drama is really intense. It’s really a good show. It’s well written. Yeah, but look at what they’re doing. I mean, who is that close to so much death. Who can stomach that? Who can be part of that? You know, who can look in the mirror being part of that culture? (Nancy)

We love that show [Sons of Anarchy] because they rode Harley’s, and I even felt like a connection with them. Like, if I rode past them out in California, I’d wave and they’d wave back. I don’t know if they would. They probably wouldn’t, but I know a lot of them did ride in their personal lives. (Helen)

The Harley Davidson mini-series totally put it in context you know, so, that was pretty cool. (Emily)

The people that are part of a MC, I know a few of the ones from the local motorcycle club. Shows like Sons of Anarchy kind of glorify the MC, but it’s a completely wrong depiction of it because anyone who has been part of that part of the biker community can tell you that it’s all bogus. I think the mystery about that closed off group of motorcyclists gets people’s attention more. I don’t want to say “gang,” but the motorcycle clubs, most of them have a certain look, they all have the patches for their club, and you can tell that they’re part of that group. I mean, not that you can’t with other people in the biker community, but I’d say the people that are part of MC’s you can look at them and tell they’re a biker. (Linda)

In the motorcycling community there is the one-percenter faction that I really don’t want to give any glory to. They call themselves “one-percenters” because they have that outlaw attitude. I respect law enforcement. I respect the law. (Nancy)

Unlike previous studies that contended that the outlaw history and biker stereotype influenced subcultural characteristics such as norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Allen et al., 2008; Joans, 2001; Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), this study discovered that the women were less likely to subscribe to outlaw biker subcultural characteristics. Very few women discussed outlaw motorcycle-related topics, which may indicate that the majority have had little or no interaction with outlaw clubs. The few women that did
discuss outlaw motorcycle clubs and their members seemed to have a stereotypical perception of the clubs and their members. Recent television series seem to perpetuate the outlaw biker stereotype. Later in this chapter, I will present information that shows some women engage in impression management behaviors that are intended to counter the public’s stereotypical perception of bikers.

**Brand loyalty.** The women in this study were very loyal followers of the Harley brand. The following comments illustrate participants’ brand loyalty: “100%” (Audrey), “Very loyal” (Beth), “Very” (Sheryl), “As loyal as you can get” (Amanda), “Hmm, looking at my closet, probably pretty loyal” (Laurie), “Pretty Loyal” (Jenny). At some point, almost all of the participants had ridden a Harley or a competitor’s brand of motorcycle, such as Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, Yamaha, and Can-Am; yet they still claimed loyalty to Harley. Even the riders that were currently riding a competitive brand claimed loyalty to Harley. Harley is an aspirational brand; owning a Harley is desirable. Participants attributed their brand loyalty to the motorcycles, the brand / company’s image, camaraderie, and consumption experiences. For participants, Harley branded apparel offers them a way to communicate to others their loyalty to the brand, the motorcycling community, and the Harley lifestyle. As a result, many participants are also loyal wearers of Harley branded apparel. The following quotes illustrate participants’ loyalty:

I love, love, love the Harley name, and I love Harley apparel. (Heidi)

I ride, and it’s important, and I like the brand name. (Beth)

I don’t know if there’s any other motorcycle brand out there that can give you everything that Harley can give you. I mean, from the experience to all the clothing, plus I think Harley bikes have a different sound to them. To me it’s a motorcycle. It’s an old school motorcycle, the revving of the engine and the rev, rev, rev, rev the engine, and I just don’t think the other motorcycles have that necessarily, and I think it’s also the brand. You know, you grow up thinking I want that good, yeah I’m not going to get a motorcycle.
I’m going to rent a Harley, even though Harley is a motorcycle. I think everybody just assumes if you have a motorcycle, you have a Harley ‘cause that’s what you think of. The two go hand-in-hand together. (Katie)

Honestly, if it was just me, it’s not necessarily the Harley. It’s the guys that have the attachment to Harley and our friends that have the attachment to Harley. For me it’s the comradery with other Harley friends. (Laurie)

I’d say the sound; does that sound weird or what? Um, it’s, I don’t know… maybe it’s the brand. Maybe it’s all about the brand. I don’t imagine that any other bike is built that much better than Harley, but maybe it is the brand, novelty. In my head everybody wishes they could ride a Harley; everybody wishes they had one, and I have one. (Sheryl)

At the time of the interviews, some participants had only ridden Harleys. Many had ridden other brands prior to purchasing a Harley, three participants were riding a competitor’s brand, and they all proclaimed their loyalty to Harley:

Uh, is there another brand? I don’t know, once you’ve had the Harley, I don’t know that I would want to do anything else. Although, the other brands certainly are having some nice styles, and they’re doing a lot of cool things to the bikes. There are some really pretty bikes out there, but no. (Sheryl)

I’ve heard good things about others, but there are definite things that I would miss about Harley. They’ve gotten better at building the creature comforts into their motorcycles. They’re getting better with the competition that’s out there that really focuses on that with their motorcycles. But Harley’s still have the soul of the Harley, yet they’re putting some of the comfort in. I would really miss the look of the Harley. Looking at Hondas and the others, I don’t like the way they look. Harley does a pretty good job with designing their motorcycles. You don’t get that sound with the others, I mean, you can if you put the right pipes, but then it’s just not the same. Not the same. Those are the primary things that I’d probably miss (Sally).

Oh, I’m still 99% loyal. It’s half my wardrobe. It’s everything we stand for. So, I can’t say that I wouldn’t own a Harley again you know, by any means. (Megan)

The women exhibit extraordinary brand loyalty and strong brand identification, similar to people in Schembri’s (2009) study. Their brand loyalty stems from the characteristics and
features of the motorcycles, the brand’s strength and recognition, and the camaraderie and experiences that result from product consumption.

**Switching costs.** In this study, participants implied that social relationships they have formed with other consumers may impact their decisions to switch brands or leave the Harley community.

I think if we would sell our bike, and we would stop doing it, it would leave a big hole in our lives. We’d have to find something else to do. I see this being our life for a long time, and if it was gone, a big piece of it would be gone. (Katie)

I’m pretty sure if we stopped or if we got rid of our motorcycle, I’m pretty sure we would miss it. Not that our friends would disown us if we got rid of our motorcycle, because they’re our friends. We built those relationships, they’re established. But something would be missing, and I know it would, and I know talking to those friends about their rides, seeing their pictures on Facebook, I would really, really miss it. I would miss the family, the Harley family. I guess if I got a different motorcycle, I would feel less of a HOG member and feel, you know, like I don’t belong in the Harley family owning a different motorcycle. Harley has built a really good family of connections, and good people that being part of the HOG chapter has really helped introduce me to. Also going into the [local Harley dealership], I find myself in the [store] like every week. I just do, just to come in, look around, say hi to people. I’m like, “Why am I here again?” I was just here but, I just do, you know it’s just like oh, let’s stop at the [Harley dealership] today. Ok, and go look at some bikes and walk around. (Sally)

Women in this study indicated that relational switching costs (Burnham, Frels, & Mahajan, 2003) -- the potential loss of personal relationships they have formed with other consumers of a brand -- might impact their decision to quit riding or to switch to another brand of motorcycle. Previous studies have identified similar barriers to leaving the Harley subculture or switching brands (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Shi, Ma, & Fi, 2015). Brand loyalty research contends that social ties and reference groups influence an individual’s product preference and lead to enhanced brand loyalty (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009; Shi et al., 2015).

**Word-of-mouth.** The women indicated that participating in motorcycle-related activities and being an active member of the motorcycling community provided them opportunities to
learn about Harley products and travel experiences from other consumers. They are able to learn about products by talking with another consumer (word-of-mouth) or by observing others using the product. Nitzan and Libai (2011) claimed that these are common ways for consumers to receive information about products. Research on switching costs indicated that being socially connected with other customers may lead to reduced purchasing choices and increased uncertainty associated with switching (Shi et al., 2015). By sharing information the women are reducing the time and effort that can be associated with trying out new products or switching brands (Burnham et al., 2003).

Participants identified four types of information commonly shared among members of the Harley community. Topics included (a) H-D products, (b) competitor’s products, (c) ways to make riding more comfortable and convenient, and (d) travel tips regarding destination settings and activities. Many women credited “other riders” as mentors that guided their motorcycle accessory and apparel choices. The women also indicated that riders share travel related knowledge and advice.

You meet a lot of great people. I learn a lot of great things about the bikes. I learn a lot of great things about, um, ways to make riding easier, the best cup holder to have, the best way to hold your cellphone on your bike, or some of these little tricks that other people have done over time that help you make your ride a little more comfortable. (Sheryl)

I don’t know if I have Harley-Davidson style. I buy what I like, um, because we are in the HOG club, you do see a lot of different clothes out there. You see your friends wearing stuff. Like “oh, where did you get that? I really like it.” You know, it’s a lot of sharing. Not just the apparel but, you do that with the accessories for the bike too. (Emily)

I’ve gone to Harley events and stuff. I mean we’re always chit-chatting each other, “Where did you get that? How old is that?” You know, “What year did you get it? Is that new? Where can I get it?” We all kind of stick together. We have people that we know and talk to, share our Harley items, and talk about where we got them and what they are, it always comes up, I think. (Heidi)

When I first got a bike, I took my phone around with me everywhere, and I’d be like “Oh, what kind of pipes do you have?” “You want to hear them?” “Yeah. What are
those?” And I would write them down and make a note on my phone. I learned a lot about stuff. You can learn a lot by hanging around people. (Kathy)

They share the stories of the places they’ve been, whether it’s cautionary tales, I haven’t heard too many of those, thank goodness. I hear you’re going to so-and-so city or state. “Hey, check this out,” or we like that or don’t do this. Even just in a casual conversation I think that’s part of what this community is, not just a local meeting and doing things local or doing local rides. I might gain some knowledge because I talked to you, and you’re plugged into this community. On a trip that I’m not even taking with you, but it was a great advice. And then I can come back, and I can share what we did or what we found and if it was similar or different than what they tell. So, I think that helps you immediately be comfortable when you’re meeting folks. (Rachel)

**Logos and trademarks.** Participants in this study shared a desire for two types of logo designs on apparel garments, inconspicuous and conspicuous. The first design preference, inconspicuous, included subdued logos that would allow participants to wear Harley apparel at social engagements where wearing logos is typically frowned upon. Inconspicuous logos could also be worn when a participant does not want to actively promote their affiliation with Harley or motorcycling. Second, some participants showed a desire for designs and logos that were conspicuous, clearly branded as Harley. Product price was a common topic discussed by participants. In the case of logo apparel, participants felt that the Harley branded apparel commanded a premium price.

Audrey and Jamie pointed out that on some garments the HD initials are probably not very recognizable to non-Harley riders. This can be a benefit for Harley apparel wearers in some social situations. Sheryl had a similar observation:

The two cotton shirts, actually I don’t even see Harley-Davidson written on them. On the one I do, but they probably wouldn’t even notice that I had anything with Harley on it. No one would think twice about it, just that I have a denim plaid shirt or a cotton plaid shirt on. No one would know its Harley until you point out the little HD at the bottom of it.
The following are examples of participants’ desire for more recognizable logos:

You know if I’m buying Harley, I want it to be recognizable somewhere on the item. (Kathy)

If I wore a pair of Harleys [jeans] I would really want it to stand out that they were Harley. (Susan)

Just so they know its Harley-Davidson, you know, I like logos on my shirts. (Wendy)

When I buy Harley, I want people to see that it’s Harley. I want to show my Harley. Yeah, when I wear Harley, I want to make sure you can see my Harley. (Heidi)

Mine say Harley. My chaps say, I paid, they say Harley-Davidson on them. All the way down the leg, they are Harley-Davidson. I mean if they can’t tell it on my bike because my bike even says Harley-Davidson, they can read it on my leg. (Paula)

The following quotes illustrate participants’ opinions that Harley products command a premium price:

“My first comment is, the reason they’re so expensive is because they have a Harley graphic on them. There are a lot of things I like but, because it has Harley on it, it gets so expensive. But I like some of the Harley stuff because again, it’s kind of like an identification thing for people.” (Jamie)

“You are paying for any Bar and Shield that’s on there. You can wear this, and I do occasionally when I’m riding, but it’s really more just for the Harley name and, you know, [to wear to] dinner.” (Rachel)

This study extends understanding of the role of brand prominence (Han, Nunes, & Dre´ze, 2010). Brand prominence implies that wealth and a need for status influence a consumer’s desire for products that are more or less brand conspicuous. Contrary to Han et al.’s (2010) study, the present study found that the women were concerned about complying with social norms and wearing appropriate attire for different social situations. Han et al. (2010) also claimed that wealth or need for status might lead consumers to want to associate or disassociate with certain groups of consumers. When engaging in motorcycle-related activities or hanging
out with friends from the motorcycle community, a majority of the women in this study wanted
to wear clothing that clearly communicated their connection with the Harley community. When
engaging in non-motorcycle-related social situations, participants preferred a more subtle
expression of the brand to fit in with outsider expectations. Therefore, they were more apt to
wear Harley apparel that had less conspicuous brand symbols. More examples of this will be
provided later in this chapter.

**Symbolic meaning.** Participants talked about three common graphics or images -- skulls,
wings, and eagles -- used on Harley apparel and their perceived meanings. Many participants did
not like skulls and associated them with negative connotations.

I just have always associated the skulls with bad things. I wouldn’t say I’d never wear a
skull. If somebody gave it to me, I would probably wear it, but it’s not something that I
would run out and buy. (Audrey)

I’m not a big fan of skulls; this is kind of morbid. I’m more of a sparkly kind of person
rather than the morbid dark side of the biker. (Helen)

I don’t do skulls. So, there are an awful lot of t-shirts and caps and jewelry that I’m not
interested in, simply because of that. Whether it be somewhat negative or hardcore, I’m
not going to say fully gang related, but sometimes that’s the case. I’m not into the whole
visual of death or dying or any of that. It’s just not anything that’s ever been a part of my
persona or my look or my interests. So, that’s usually a turnoff. I think there’s only one
shirt I have that happens to have a skull, and it’s because the design actually takes you a
few seconds to figure it out. (Rachel)

I don’t do skulls. I’m superstitious. It reminds me of death and how dangerous it is to
ride. (Emily)

I prefer the wings, to me, that shows freedom. (Leah)

I have a tattoo. It’s an eagle in flight. My son’s in the military and my brother’s in the
military. It’s patriotic. (Sheryl)

I like eagles. I like some of the graphics that they make with the eagles. I have a tattoo
with an eagle. I put a rose and eagle, for freedom and love. Skulls, was that always a
Harley thing with skulls? To me the skulls are just more of a gang type of a logo, and
that’s why I don’t like them. (Wendy)
The skull is a common symbol used in the Harley subculture. Symbols acquire definitions and meaning through the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969). In the Harley subculture, the image of a skull represents death, and it symbolizes tempting fate or facing mortality. In regard to Harley graphics or images, the women overwhelmingly associated negative meanings with skulls. The women indicated that they did not purchase items with skulls on them because of the negative associations that they held for the symbol. This seems to suggest a rejection of some of the Harley brand associations. According to semiotics, the meanings that consumers associate with brand names, logos, and trademarks can influence their intentions of owning and using products (Mick et al., 2004). Symbols associated with freedom, love, and patriotism were more popular. The symbols were not only found on apparel; many women incorporated them into personal tattoos as well.

This study advances knowledge in semiotics as applied to Harley products. Specifically, this study provides insight into the meanings that female Harley consumers associate with common graphics or symbols used on Harley apparel and how that meaning impacts purchasing behavior. As recommended by Mick et al. (2004), this study examined material qualities of brand names, logos and trademarks and helped to understand the function of those meanings and qualities for female Harley consumers.

Tourism, Vacation, and Travel

Harley motorcycles are recreational vehicles. As such, primary consumption activities identified by participants centered around recreation, tourism, vacations, and travel. It is through consumption that social interactions occurred, experiences were lived, and memories were made. It appears that distance does not impact the experience for the women. Participants described travel that involved both long and short distances, travel that included family and friends,
destinations and tourist attractions, and experiences they encountered when traveling. As evidence of these themes:

A lot of our time is planned around what we’re going to do for trips or Harley stuff. I mean, you know, a lot of our vacations are motorcycle vacations, so it’s a big influence (Jenny).

I just got back in June from a 2,100-mile trip to Tennessee and then North Carolina and back, and I did that solo. I went to the Tail of the Dragon… I ride with the HOG group at least a couple times a month. I go on the dinner rides or the breakfast rides. I usually try to go to breakfast and the dinner rides, welcome to the family, or the hump day dinner ride. (Audrey).

The first year I bought the Street Glide, I rode with my brother to Myrtle Beach. My brother lived out there in North Carolina, so we rode out there to see him. He was in the military at that time. We rode out there through the Appalachian Mountains. We went to Wisconsin. We rode to San Antonio one year, and it rained on us almost the entire down and back, and then I rode as a passenger to Telluride last year (Sheryl).

We went up to Pike’s Peak and all sorts of cities, and it rained, snowed, iced, and fogged, but we had a good time. We had wet underwear, more than anything, the whole time. We went without rain suits, bought rain suits, and then it stopped raining (Carol).

We spend a good amount of time in Missouri. There’s a lot of pretty roads, and we do like some activities down there. We’ve been on week-long ride to the Outer Banks and back in ten days, North Carolina coast, and we’ve been to Colorado. We’ve been to South Dakota, Montana a little bit, we’ve been to the Smokey Mountains and the Rocky Mountains. So we’ve spent some time in Gatlinburg, Tennessee; north central Arkansas, a couple places in Arkansas actually. I have done the Pig Trail. I have not been to Sturgis. I have not been to Daytona. We may someday get to Sturgis, but it’s just not a big draw for me. We did go, and I rode to Milwaukee for the hundred and fifth [anniversary celebration] (Rachel).

We went from Iowa to Arizona; I had a nephew getting married. So, it was me and my husband, my brother-in-law and his bike, my two nephews on their bike. My sister couldn’t leave so she flew there, but then she did the ride home with her husband. Once we got to Arizona, we stayed there for a few days and had the wedding. We shipped our wedding clothes there and got them pressed at the hotel. We boxed them back up and we shipped them back home, so we didn’t have to take them with us. After we left Arizona, me and my husband went south through New Mexico to Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to meet up with his family for a reunion. My brother in law and my sister and their two boys headed north to go through Yellowstone and come home. We stayed in Alabama for a couple days, did our laundry, regrouped and then we headed home from there through Tennessee, stayed in Memphis, and then Missouri, and came home. So, it was 5,200 miles total. It was our first long trip. We learned a lot about packing, what to
pack, what not to pack. You tend to not realize in that along the way you’re going to buy t-shirts that you can wear. So, you don’t really need to pack as many things because you’re going to buy things as you go… That was our first big, long trip and that was one of our best vacations. We’ve done the Colorado trip, which was like five days. Last year we went to Arkansas for a week and did the Ozark Mountains. We’ve done some long weekends, I guess, for the HOG rallies. We went to Oklahoma twice for a long weekend for HOG rallies. We went to Omaha for a HOG rally. We did the Missouri State HOG rally. This year we went to Michigan for a week. We went up through northeast Iowa, through Wisconsin, stayed and did the Harley museum, and then we took the ferry across the lake with the motorcycles and then spent the night and then headed down to Holland, Michigan. We spent some time with my brothers and their wives, and then we took the bikes home. Yeah, so, pretty much all of our big vacations we want to do on the bike. Every once in a while we’ll have a wedding, and we’ll have to fly somewhere for it, but we’re really trying to plan all of our vacations around the bike (Katie)

We went to a [Iron] Warrior national meeting in Atlanta. We started down in Hot Springs, Arkansas, went over to Atlanta and then we had a wedding in Orlando, Florida. So, we dropped down to Orlando and then went to Pensacola and then came home from there. We have a toy hauler, and that vacation we hauled the bike, but we have ridden. I rode from Iowa down to St. Louis, through St. Louis, straight east, and came up the Blue Ridge Highway into Virginia, and then the D.C. area. Then we dropped back down and went across almost the same highway straight over to Kansas City, up into the Omaha area. There we met up with our son for a night and then came back to Des Moines. We’ve been to the Tetons and Yellowstone. I’ve ridden to Deadwood last year and up to northern Minnesota. We’ve tried to go around Lake Superior, to do the Lake Superior circle ride. We always get derailed, so we always say the third time is the charm. We do some sort of trip that constitutes either being the entire trip on the motorcycle or bringing the motorcycles along. We usually do two vacations a year, and one of them is motorcycle-related. We do a lot of riding local. We’ll hop on and go to Winterset or down by Osceola. Any back road that’s around here we’ll ride. We’ll go over to the River Road and go up to Stillwater or someplace like that and then come back down. We’ve been to Kansas City. I think in September, weather permitting, we’re going to ride over to Chicago for a couple of days. We’ve hopped on the bikes and went to the Omaha area (Tracy).

The following quotes illustrate experiences from participants who were more focused on touring around their home state rather than traveling long distance:

Any place there’s a small town with a weird thing or a good diner, a historical marker or something like that. I have any number of methods of figuring out where I’m going to go, where we’re going to go, but it’s usually some place that has some kind of draw. Like Brooklyn, Iowa, has the display of flags from every state, Tama has the Lincoln Highway Bridge, Audubon has the big cement bull, you know, things like that. I love stuff like that. So, any place that I can find that has something that the town considers theirs, this is the thing that puts us on the map, that’s what I want to go see. I also know there are lots
of little towns, for example, Lineville, where there’s nothing except that it is on the state line with Missouri and technically you can ride in two states if you cross the line and come back. The town itself, the buildings are mostly boarded up, and there’s just not much going on. But even that, to me, is interesting because of the history of the buildings and things like that. Any place there’s a little bit of Iowa history and any place that has, when you unfold the map and look at it, if it has a nice twisty road to get there, that’s where I want to go. That is how I found Lineville, because it had a really interesting looking squiggly road going down into it, and I said “ok,” I want to ride that road, and it goes to Lineville. So, I guess I’m going to Lineville. The only things I’ve done out of state is just if we happen to be going somewhere that took us out of state on a ride. Several years ago, I went with a group of women and our ultimate destination was Galena, Illinois, so, we rode up to McGregor and then crossed over the river into Prairie Du Chen, Wisconsin, and rode the river road down back into Illinois. So, really just pretty close around Iowa. I’ve been down in Missouri a couple times and, of course, across South Dakota (Amanda).

I like going to different places and seeing what I call the beauty of Iowa. I love to ride. I’ve lived here my entire life, and really the last 15 years that I’ve been riding is when I finally appreciated how beautiful this state is. Even in November when everything’s brown, you know, it’s like shades and textures of brown. So, it’s taught me to appreciate details, temperature and smells and the look of things, what makes one town unique over another, and road surfaces, I mean all the details. I really find that I have been able to notice details about my home state. Although I never really had any intention of leaving Iowa, it has really made me appreciate how beautiful and how not flat and not boring this state is from a landscape perspective. The things that small towns have offer perspective. It’s not what people from the outside think it is. I love the engineering of roads. I love curves. I love to ride the curves (Nancy).

**Products as memory markers.** Previous studies found that male members of the Harley community used apparel and related items (pins, patches) to signify their accomplishments and commitment to the Harley lifestyle The women in this study were aware of various ways that Harley apparel and related items (pins, patches) could be worn to signify accomplishments, but most showed little interest in doing so. The women were more interested in wearing apparel items that signified their travel experiences, such as t-shirts that advertised particular tourist/travel destinations. Wearing these types of apparel items provided the women with a means of remembering their travel experiences and communicating those experiences to others.
Possessions, such as souvenirs or memorabilia, can store feelings or memories attached to our past (Belk, 1988). Thus, products can act as memory markers; they can act as a retrieval cue, jog memories, or evoke thoughts about a prior event (Belk, 1988; Solomon, 2011). Apparel can also evoke personal memories (Twigg, 2012). Harley t-shirts are one product that participants purchased as reminders of their travel and consumption experiences. Harley t-shirts are designed so that dealerships can put their own unique design on the back complete with their dealership name and location. As evidenced in the following quotations, Harley t-shirts not only act as memory markers, they can also stimulate social interactions with other consumers:

It shows where you’ve been, and there is that assumption that when you see somebody you know, they have been there [location/dealership]. In fact, the other day, we had somebody come up and say, “Oh, you’re were at the Colorado Harley dealership?” They were like, “Oh yeah, you know it was about five or six years ago we were blah, blah, blah.” “Oh, did you go here? Did you go to this one?” No, we just went to this one, and we talked about riding in Colorado for a while, which is an amazing place to ride (Tracy).

People do look at your shirts and say, “Oh, have you been to Alaska?” And I’ll be like well, yeah. So people do look at your shirts to see where they’re from and to see if you are from there or where you have been… We do travel a lot and that’s our souvenir, right? Coming back and it’s like, oh wow, we went here you know, that kind of thing. I don’t have as many clothes from the local dealership as I have from other places and that comes back to, that’s our souvenir when we travel (Emily).

We tend to wear all the t-shirts when we’re out on the motorcycle. If you’re out on the motorcycle and you come across other motorcyclists, then it becomes a topic of conversation, “Oh, have you been there?” Or that kind of thing (Jamie).

It’s a memory. It’s a reminder of some place you were. When the oldest child graduated from a school in San Antonio we went to the Harley dealership down there. So, we’ve got a t-shirt from that, and the whole experience, that memory, can be triggered by wearing that t-shirt (Helen).

It helps you mark the places that I’ve been. It’s kind of common for a lot of people who do take trips and go to dealerships to just remind you. Because to be honest, there’s stuff I like a lot and somebody will say, “Oh my God, I love that. Where did you get it?” I’m like, I don’t know, look on the back. Once they tell me I remember the trip, when we were up at the store or the sections of the store, where I found it and all. It kind of brings back being there and I like that. And sometimes my memory just isn’t that great (Rachel).
I have a clothing fetish. I have so many clothes. Every time I see a Harley store when I’m out of town I have to stop. I usually have to have something that has the store location, a shirt typically that has the store location. I want to show that I was there. I can’t refuse; they always have such cute stuff. So, I’m always able to find something (Heidi).

Patches, poker chips, lapel pins and charm bracelets, which can be customized to promote the local dealership and its location, were other types of Harley products that participants collected.

**Experiential Aspects of Consumption**

There is a saying in the Harley community “If I had to explain, you wouldn’t understand.” This quote is aimed at answering the question, why do you ride or why do you like riding? Thompson (2012a) claimed that female riders were drawn to motorcycling for the same experiential benefits as male riders--freedom, fun, excitement, stress reduction, and risk-taking--but the women in this study professed much more. In describing what they like about riding, participants in this study described many experiential benefits of riding. While the experiential benefits that participants identified primarily revolved around consumption of the motorcycle, some applied to apparel consumption as well. Schmitt (2010) defined experience as the “perceptions, feelings, and thoughts that consumers have when they encounter products and brands in the marketplace and engage in consumption activities—as well as the memory of such experiences” (p. 60). The findings in this study closely mirror Schmitt’s (2010) experiential aspects of consumption. However, additional experiential aspects (e.g., challenging experiences, connection to nature, relaxation/escapism, flow, and communitas) were identified that reflected the findings of other studies. Nancy’s comments illustrate women’s motivations for riding:

I think everybody probably rides for different reasons. I’m sure there’s a contingent out there, just like me, that rides because they want to do something that allows them to appreciate the details of life, what I call the sights and sounds and smells of the road. There are other people that I think ride specifically to clear their head and for therapy. I
think there are other people that ride because they want to go fast and they’re kind of
daredevils. So, there’s different factions out there certainly.

The dimensions of experiential benefits that were identified were cognitive learning
(Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Schmitt, 2010), challenging experience (Triantafillidou &
Siomkos, 2014), hedonic/emotional experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Hirschman & Holbrook,
1982; Schmitt, 2010), sensory experience (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Schmitt, 2010),
connection to nature (Loeffler, 2004), relaxation/escapism (Woodruff, 1985; Pine & Gilmore
experience (Gentile, 2007; Schmitt, 2010), and communitas (Arnould & Price, 1993). The
following short descriptions define the experiential benefits of riding:

1. Cognitive learning involves the use of creative thinking or problem-solving skills as well
   as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Loeffler,
   2004; Schmitt, 2010).

2. Challenging riding experiences include participants’ concerns and feelings of risk/danger,
   fear, adventure, and adrenaline. These may also involve overcoming physical and mental
   challenges or testing personal capabilities (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014).

3. Hedonic experiences invoke feelings such as pleasure, fun, excitement, and enjoyment
   and/or emotions such as love, hate, and joy (Schmitt, 2010).

4. Sensory experiences involve stimulations of sight, sound, touch (i.e., comfort), taste,
   and/or smell (Gentile, 2007; Schmitt, 2010).

5. Connection to nature refers to a close interaction with the natural environment (Loeffler,
   2004).
6. Relaxation is defined as one’s ability to “escape from reality and the responsibilities and routines of real life” (Woodruff, 1985, p. 25). Relaxation benefits of consumption include time to focus and mental revitalization (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007).

7. Flow, a term originally adopted by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), is defined as total absorption, involvement, deep focus and attention in the consumption activity or experience (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014).

8. Communitas is defined as feelings of camaraderie, belonging, and support (Arnould & Price, 1993). Schmitt (2010) explained that the social aspect of consumption is concerned with the “social contexts [activity, environment or setting] and relationships that occur during common consumption as part of a real or imagined community or to affirm social identity” (p. 69).

Participants described apparel consumption from two perspectives: (1) apparel worn on the motorcycle, and (2) apparel worn off the motorcycle. When discussing wearing of apparel for riding, participants focused on the functional benefits that the apparel brought to the activity of motorcycling -- protection and comfort. When participants’ discussions involved wearing apparel off the motorcycle, they were focused on the social aspects of consumption. This theme is similar to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) finding that Harley branded apparel served two functions for riders: protection and identification.

**Cognitive learning experiences.** Participants talked about learning how to ride and operate a motorcycle and the steps they took to become a rider. Similar to Martin et al.’s (2006) study, many participants had taken a motorcycle training course for beginning riders. Two training courses that were mentioned were Harley’s Riding Academy conducted by the local Harley
dealership and a course offered through the local community college. Previous research on Harley found that learning to ride a motorcycle provided women with increased confidence levels (Schembri, 2009; Martin et al., 2006) and a sense of empowerment (Roster, 2007).

Participants in this study spoke about their personal growth, becoming a better rider, and the enjoyment that riding offers:

I like operating the machine. I love the fact that I have learned to do this. In midlife, I learned how to do this, and I had challenges learning how to do it. I persevered, and I learned how to do it. I always enjoyed it really from day one, but I like having learned and then operating the machine, the mechanics of it, and then doing it. I love feeling like I’m operating a machine correctly, and I love doing something right, which is a weird thing to say. Because if you do something wrong on the motorcycle, you generally know it immediately. (Nancy)

I didn’t feel like I was a member of the community until I felt extremely comfortable riding my bike. Going through that process, I would meet people and ask, “Can you help pick my bike up? Can you help push my bike back?” But once I got through all those issues, now I feel like I’m a rider, an operator. (Tracy)

I rode for about a year on the back before I took the class and got my own bike. It was my thought that I wanted to maybe take the class to be a better passenger, because even after a year, I’d still get real tense if he would take a curve. You lean over quite a bit, and I didn’t know how they worked. I still didn’t have that comfort level. When I said, “I’m thinking about taking the class to be a better passenger,” he was very excited for me. He thought I’d love it. He said, “You’re going to want your own.” I said, “I don’t have any intention to ride my own. I just want to understand how they work and balance and all of that stuff.” So, that’s how that got started, and he was right. I took the class, and I wanted to practice more. It wasn’t totally awful, and I wasn’t as scared, but I was on a much tinier bike. I turned 40, and I wanted 40 to not suck. I wanted to look back and feel like I had done something or tried something that I would think was great when I turned 40. I thought it was one of the best things I did for myself, not only from a confidence level, but learning a skill that I didn’t have. Now I have lots of time that I love with my husband and lots of friends that I didn’t have before. We, to this day, do activities winter, spring, summer and fall together on and off bikes. (Rachel)

I decided this year that I need to pick something that I’m not good at on the motorcycle and get past it. The thing that I’ve kind of picked is riding on gravel. I don’t want to dump my beautiful bike. So, I don’t know how I’m going to do it. I don’t want to take my bike over there and do it. So, I’ve even been sitting around here lately looking at Craig’s List, going OK, “Are there any old Yamahas on here I can buy?” Yeah, then if I dump it, I’m not going to cry. I might break my arm, but I’m not going to ruin the motorcycle and so, I don’t know how I’m going to do it. But that’s the thing, that’s got to be my next
thing. I want to do something to get better because I’m pretty comfortable riding and I’ve certainly reached a plateau. The only other thing to practice is figure 8’s, and I’m just not too keen on practicing that. (Nancy)

Learning how to operate a motorcycle, understanding the mechanics of the motorcycle, feeling comfortable operating the motorcycle, and increasing their riding skills level all provided the women with hedonic experiences of pleasure, fun, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). These experiences also provided them with an increased sense of connection to the Harley community. Previous studies contended that riders are often judged by their ability to ride and handle the hazards/dangers associated with motorcycling (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012b); this might explain why the women linked being a member of the community to becoming a better rider/passenger. Rider safety, confronting fears, and overcoming challenges/hazards associated with motorcycling are discussed next.

**Challenges associated with riding.** The women in this study discussed their awareness regarding the hazards of motorcycle riding and shared concerns about death, dying, and rider safety. Riding a motorcycle is dangerous, as Thompson (2012a, p. 62) noted:

Riding a motorcycle is dangerous, As a rider, you must be constantly alert and vigilant, watching for debris on the roadway, animals, people, and vehicles that might dart into your path, articles being thrown from vehicles or blowing out of the backs of trucks, and the biggest threat: cars and trucks whose drivers either do not see you or do not respect that you have as much right to be on the road as do they.

Riding on the freeway or interstate was a common fear shared by the women. Participants admitted that riding in big groups both increased and decreased safety concerns. Familiarity, or lack of, with the riding skills of other individuals that were participating in group rides could make them feel more or less comfortable participating in the activity. The women also spoke about overcoming fears and challenges associated with riding. Common themes were riding
alone, riding your own bike, and handling the motorcycle on challenging roadways. Two things provided participants with a sense of protection against the dangers of the road (a) riding in a group with people they were familiar with and (b) wearing appropriate riding attire.

The following quotes illustrate participants’ fear of riding on the interstate/freeway:

It’s scary. I mean, I’m still kind of scared on it a little bit. You know, getting hit by somebody or a deer jumping out or something like that, but apparently not enough to keep me off of it. (Amanda)

Riding a bike isn’t exactly safe. I mean, you can be as safe as you can, but there’s always that other guy out there on the road that you have to look out for. That is the one thing that bothers me about riding because you can’t control what somebody else does. You can be the safest rider in the world, and then you have some guy with the horse trailer that pulls out like an idiot. So, that’s always kind of in and out of my mind. (Emily)

I can’t stand hardly being on the freeway in my car let alone on my motorcycle. When I see a motorcycle on the freeway, I’m scared for the person because that traffic is a nightmare, and people are rude. I mean, they just cut you off, and I’m just paranoid for the bike riders on there. I’m just wondering if they’re going to go down because people just pull over in front of you. (Paula)

The women in this study were acutely aware of the dangers of motorcycling. Many participants had friends or relatives that had died as a result of a motorcycle accident. It is not uncommon for riders to encounter individuals from the general public that have known someone whom was killed or injured as well, and comments usually follow about how unsafe motorcycling is:

Unfortunately, based on my experience, whenever I tell some random person that I ride a motorcycle, the response is: “Oh, my God, my cousin’s brother was killed when he crashed his motorcycle, he hung on for dear life for four days in the hospital, and he finally died.” “Oh my God, my brother in law lost his leg,” this or that, you know, horrible story. You’re kind of left thinking, I don’t even know what to say, “Thanks for sharing your story.” But those are the people walking around with the negative attitude. Somebody they know has been hurt or killed on a motorcycle, and they just say, “Nope, it’s dangerous,” and they don’t like it, and they think you’re crazy for doing it. You can’t change that; I don’t think that it’s really even my place to change that. It’s my place to say, “Well, please look out for me when you’re on the road driving your car because I do ride, and I do enjoy it. I try to ride so that people don’t turn left in front of me or try to
change lanes into me or anything, but I don’t see everything so, I just ask that you look out for me because motorcyclists are me, your coworker. They are your mom, your sister, your brother; it’s not just that person who got killed. There’s a lot of us out there, and if everybody would look for us, maybe so many of us wouldn’t get killed.” To me that’s probably the most depressing part of talking to other people about riding is just that their immediate response is, you know, some terrible thing that happened. (Nancy)

One of his dear friends was actually killed on a motorcycle accident, but I think most of us have probably known somebody. (Sheryl)

I don’t know if it’s been seven years ago, maybe longer, our son’s best friend got killed on our son’s motorcycle. He loaned it to his friend, and he unfortunately got hit and didn’t make it, so we thought never again. Our son hasn’t ridden since. When my husband said he wanted a motorcycle, I said, “You might want to check with XXXX first, because I don’t know if that’s a good idea or not.” But he was all for it. (Amanda)

I rode a neighbor of mine’s 125 when we were kids. I think it was a Honda. He got killed on it, so I didn’t ride for like 25 years. After going to Sturgis for a couple of years, I went home and decided, I’m doing this. I need to get past this, and I went and bought my own bike, got my own license and my own bike. (Paula)

My best friend will have nothing to do with them. Her dad was a military policeman and was killed when she was in fourth grade on his motorcycle. She hates that I ride, but they all know how much I like it. (Susan)

Another safety concern was charity motorcycle rides. Many of the participants had participated in a charity ride. While participants liked to support charitable causes, most did not enjoy the rides and no longer participated in them because of the large numbers of people that attend, the fact that most rides involved drinking and visiting bars, and the fear of other riders’ skill level and their ability to control their motorcycles. Participants had similar safety concerns about bike nights and motorcycle rallies:

I won’t do the benefit ride for dogs anymore, and I know the organizer, and I’ve told her I won’t do a ride anymore. There are too many drunks. The last time I did it, people were literally stumbling to their bikes and getting on and taking off. It’s like nope, we’re done. I just have a problem riding with that many people because I’m afraid somebody’s going to be stupid and cause a chain reaction. (Audrey)

We stopped going after three times because it got so big, it got dangerous, and people were just racing, and it’s not a race. (Beth)
I do drink, but I don’t like to drink and ride. On all of these rides people are drinking. You get to the end of the ride, they’re acting crazy, and you are scared to be on them. Accidents happen, and I just don’t care to be around that. People who go on the rides and drink, and at the end of those fundraising rides are sloppy drunk and on their motorcycles; that’s not something that I condone or that I would ever do. (Sheryl)

I used to go to a number of bike nights. I don’t even really do those anymore. The thing I didn’t like about that was coming home at night on the highway. I didn’t like doing that because there seemed to be a lot of accidents on that road, and there were always deer. I’ve done some pretty big group rides, but I haven’t really gone to a lot of rallies. Sturgis is really about the only one. I feel bad that I don’t do a lot of charity rides. I don’t do the typical charity rides because I feel like they’re bar to bar. There’s so many people, and they all have different skill levels of riding, and then they go to the bar, and they have a beer, and then they go to the next bar, and they have another beer, and then they go to the next bar. I don’t understand why some of the charities don’t say, maybe a bar to bar is not quite right for us. I don’t want to be on my motorcycle with a bunch of people that have been drinking all day. I enjoy my adult beverages another way, and I don’t on the motorcycle. So, it’s just one of those things that I don’t do very often. (Nancy)

I don’t have a huge drive to go to Sturgis or Daytona or anything like that. My husband keeps saying, “Just once I’d like to go.” I can’t envision wanting to be there a whole week because you have people of all different riding abilities and drinking. I don’t have a real strong urge to go to the huge rallies. I’m not a huge fan of group rides. I somewhat avoid them. (Tracy)

Participants spoke about overcoming fears and challenges associated with riding.

Common themes were riding alone, riding their own bike, and handling the motorcycle on challenging roadways. The following quotes illustrate participants’ feelings about riding alone:

I’m glad to say that I did it, and it’s behind me, and I can do it if I have to or want to, but I don’t look at riding for a week by myself as the best experience. (Rachel)

I don’t ride alone too much. I have a hard time getting my mind right when I ride by myself, so I don’t do it very often. I tend to get to thinking about what if something happens and I’m by myself, and then I get a little freaked out, and I feel like I’m going to make a mistake or something. I’m not looking at what I’m supposed to be looking at; I’m thinking about what if I’m lying in the ditch, and nobody finds me for a week, and the animals get me, and all that kind of stuff. When this year started out, I forced myself to go ride by myself because I really wanted to ride, and my boyfriend didn’t ride. I didn’t want to wait. (Nancy)
I think it’s helped push me forward. Initially I’d be like, well I’ll ride, but I need to ride with somebody. You need to ride with somebody. After hooking up the women’s riding groups, it’s like no, I don’t have to ride with somebody! I pull my bike out and down the hill out of our driveway by myself, and I can go out riding by myself or hook up with another woman. We can be independent, and you know, this gets you outside your box. Makes your box bigger, and I have found that belonging to a group like that has helped me as a rider. (Tracy)

Two women were passengers and were considering becoming operators of their own motorcycles. The women appeared to be concerned about learning the skills associated with operating their own motorcycles rather than being worried about the dangers associated with riding. The following quotes illustrate those participants’ feelings about riding their own motorcycle:

I’m very apprehensive. I’m nervous about it. The shifting makes me nervous and the balance. I like to space out and do nothing on the back of the bike and not have to be worried about every stop and every corner and everything like that. I’m very happy on the back. (Laurie)

I’m thinking about getting my own bike. I see so many women riders, and I think: “Oh, that’s kind of cool.” But for me, I’m hesitant because I don’t know how to shift. I’ve never learned how to shift the gears. I’m thinking about doing the riders’ ed class. So, I don’t know. I’m unsure of it. I think that’s my biggest hang up is I just want to get on the bike, and I want to ride it. I don’t want to have to concentrate on when I should shift and when I should downshift, and everybody tells me it’ll become second nature. (Katie)

Participants spoke of challenging roadways and testing their personal riding capabilities and skills. Again, mastering their riding skills and controlling the motorcycle seemed to be their main focus. In this first example, Rachel describes riding The Tail of the Dragon located in North Carolina. The road has 319 curves in 11 miles:

I built it up in my head, and I was sort of scared, but we were going to go with people that would keep me safe. I finally got down there, and it was so easy and so much fun. We got done, and I’m like, “Can we turn around and do it again?” So I’ve probably done it three times by now, just different trips have taken us to that area. But it’s not what I built it up to be, and it was enjoyable. Now, there are semis on there, and that was a little bit tricky sometimes, and there’s people who ride how they shouldn’t ride on that road, and that can also be a little bit nerve wracking, but the way we did it, I was fine.
In this second example, Nancy describes riding Iron Mountain Road in South Dakota, a road with several switchbacks and curves:

We were out in Sturgis, and we were riding the Iron Mountain Road, and I was so nervous to do that because everybody said it was so difficult. But you get out there, and two things they don’t tell you when they’re telling you how scary it is. One, you’re not expected to go 50 mph doing all this. There’s posted speed limits, and they’re 20 and 25 mph. So you really can do it, and you’re not doing it at this crazy speed. You’re doing it at a safe speed. The other thing they didn’t tell you was that when you have a switchback, you might be going up, and then now it’s a hairpin turn, and now you’re going down. You come around that curve, and you’re going down, and there might be a blind curve. You can look at the map and see that it’s kind of a switchback and a curve, but the hills and valleys are in there, too. When you’re done, you just get off your motorcycle, and you go: “I can’t believe it did that! I can’t believe I just did that,” and to me that was really amazing.

Two things provided participants with a sense of protection against the dangers of the road (a) riding in a group of riders that they know and are confident in other riders’ skills and (b) wearing appropriate riding attire. The following comments illustrate participants’ perceptions of safety as a result of riding in a group:

I feel it’s safer. Maybe cars can see us better, and we can look out for one another. (Amanda)

I think the safety. I feel safer in a group even though I feel completely comfortable on the back of my husband’s bike. I think when you’re in a group, you’ve got a little bit more of a safety feeling because there’s safety in numbers. (Katie)

In the following quotes, participants stressed the importance of wearing proper riding gear when riding on the motorcycle:

Visibility when you’re riding, it’s nice to have the bright colored stuff on when you’re riding so people can see you. The bike is dark. I have two taillights in the back is all, and when I have my black jacket on and my black helmet and there’s nothing reflective on my back, I feel like I’m not very visible. I don’t wear my leather jacket all the time. I do wear jeans. I do wear my boots. So, if I were to go down, I’ve got jeans on. I don’t always have long sleeves on. So, while I say safety is important, I don’t adhere to it because I don’t wear my leather jacket all the time. It’s too hot. I would be too hot. I would overheat. I don’t wear my chaps all the time, though it does keep you from getting the snot beat out of you. (Sheryl)
I like wearing the jacket, especially on the highway or the interstate, when we’re going high speeds, I want to make sure I’m protected. I like to be safe on my motorcycle. I wear a helmet. I wear boots and jeans all the time. I’ll never ride a motorcycle in flip flops and shorts and/or boat shoes or anything like that. So, it’s always boots and jeans. I’ve seen way too many pictures and heard way too many stories to not wear anything else. (Sally)

I’m a gear believer, so I wear gloves, my helmet, my coat, everything, boots. I don’t play around with being skinned alive maybe. When I was a passenger I wasn’t probably as geared up as I am now, being the driver, and I should have been. I mean you can still get hurt. I would still wear my helmet and my chaps, weather depending on the chaps, and I would wear my coat even at 90 degrees. I would still wear my leather for protection. I would wear gloves. (Heidi)

I think we have a lot more distracted drivers these days, so I try to be more reflective and bright when we’re on the bike. My coat is very reflective; it has the reflective stripes. (Megan)

The way I look at it, if I go down, I’m going to get road rash. If it goes down on my leg, I’m already burned, at least I might be able to save my legs. And I want to keep my toes, because your toes is how you walk. I’ll wear a tank top, but I wear jeans and my boots and no helmet. I’ve got to get that sun on the top half. So yeah, I wear my jeans and my boots in case I put the bike down. (Paula)

I think there’s certain things that you should definitely wear on the bike at all times, like long pants and boots. I can’t stress enough how important that is just for burns and even just rocks coming up and hitting you. Some sort of eye protection is important as well. You only get one pair of eyes. So, those are the three, like, absolute musts. (Linda)

The hazards associated with riding motorcycles such as riding alone, riding in groups, and properly operating the motorcycle are examples of challenging experiences that riders/passengers face. The women in this study shared similar concerns for rider safety. Primary dangers associated with riding focused on “others,” other riders, and other people on the roadways. The women were afraid of the “other guy” pulling out in front of them and/or cutting them off in traffic. You have to look out for the “other guy,” many of the women warned.

When discussing riding in groups, participants shared similar sentiments. The women were concerned about the “other guy.” They were primarily concerned about other riders’ ability
to control their motorcycles and other riders who drink and drive. Participants felt more comfortable when they rode with groups of individuals whom they knew well and were confident in their ability to ride safely. The women were quick to remind “others” to keep an eye out for them on the road because they are more than just motorcyclists, they are mothers, coworkers, sisters, aunts, neighbors, etc.

Fears related to riding skills were also key observations. Roadways that tested their personal riding capabilities provided the women with a sense of fear and also a sense of accomplishment, once they successfully overcame the challenge. Women who were considering becoming riders rather than passengers were concerned about their ability to master the skills associated with operating the motorcycle.

Finally, wearing proper riding gear was important to all of the women in this study. They felt it was important to be protected when riding, and wearing proper gear provided them with a sense of safety. Key apparel items that were identified as a requirement when riding were gloves, helmets, boots, and jeans. All of these are items that previous research has identified as the stereotypical “biker” uniform, which both protects the rider and communicates their identity or a sense of belonging to the Harley community (Schouten & McAlexander, 1993).

**Hedonic experience.** A motorcycle is foundationally a hedonic product; consumers don’t need it, they want it. As mentioned previously, the women had a great love for the Harley brand, motorcycle, apparel and the motorcycling community. Participants described hedonic feelings such as pleasure, fun and enjoyment that were derived from experiential aspects of motorcycling and apparel-related consumption, such as social activities, friendships, a sense of freedom, and traveling. In conversations with participants they identified sensory experiences and feeling a connection with nature as part of the hedonic experience. In the following quotes,
participants’ love of motorcycles, apparel, and the motorcycling community are apparent. The quotes also illustrate participants’ hedonic experiences related to motorcycle consumption:

I like being a HOG member because, when I go there, I don’t think about anything else. I just go, and I have fun, hang out with them. We sit around like family and talk about anything. That’s my getaway for stress relief. (Beth)

When you’re out on the bike, you can be a little louder. You can laugh a little more, you know. We’ve ridden for many years, and it’s always nice to have more friends. It’s a hobby. It’s something we both enjoy. We enjoy our bike. We enjoy the people. It’s fun! (Carol)

I like my bike. I’ll love looking at it and love riding it. I get so much joy being with people and doing stuff with people, finding new places with people, and sharing that. (Rachel)

It’s just a fun community to be in. I’ve met a lot of nice people. (Amanda)

I just like to do things with groups of people. We always have fun, and it’s a fun activity. (Emily)

I like the feeling as you’re going down the road and the wind. It’s pure enjoyment to go down the road on your bike. (Paula)

Riding Harleys is all about the fun and enjoyment. Roster (2007) proposed that “a key factor that motivated women’s participation in motorcycling was the pure hedonic pleasure they experienced when riding a motorcycle” (p. 449). As participants explained, feelings of pleasure and fun are derived from the different aspects of consumption. As a hobby, motorcycling and traveling provides the women with feelings of freedom and fun. Relationships formed when socializing or participating in activities with other members of the community, added to the sense of joy for riders/passengers. Wearing apparel facilitated bonding among community members.

**Sensory stimulation and a connection to nature.** When you ride a motorcycle, you don’t have four walls surrounding you like you do when riding in a car. Motorcycle riders are
exposed to nature and are more vulnerable to the elements (e.g., sun, rain, wind, weather). Riding a motorcycle therefore results in greater sensory stimulation and a close interaction with nature.

Participants in this study described sensory experiences such as sights and smells that they encountered when riding. For example, Sheryl described,

It’s the smells. With the windows down in the car you can smell things, but you don’t smell them like you do when you’re riding a bike. Good and bad things are just so much more pronounced. Everything you look at is more pronounced. Why, I don’t know.

Here are example quotes from participants who expressed feeling a close connection to nature and the elements:

I like the adventure, and it’s just, it’s so free. It just, it’s hard, it’s hard to describe to people that have never been on one... When you’re on a motorcycle, it just feels like, it just feels like you’re completely open with everything around you, and it just frees you; and when you’re on vacation, and you’re taking in like the mountains, it’s so different than being in a car. I mean, in a car you feel like you’re boxed in, but when you’re on a motorcycle, you feel like, you know, and I know this is weird, but you feel like the mountain is right there. It’s like you could just reach out and touch it. And I know it’s the [same] distance away as in a car, but it’s not the same feeling. You just feel like you’re completely in tune with your surroundings, but yet, at the same time, my mind can go completely off of everything that’s going on in my personal life or work life. It’s just so stress free. You can feel it, you can feel it, and when you’re in a car you really don’t feel it. I mean, you look out your window and go, “Oh, there’s a mountain.” But when you’re on a bike, you take it in. You’re like, “wow!” It’s the smells and the sounds and the feeling of it. It’s just completely different. (Katie)

It’s like the freedom of riding, the wind in your face, the scenery uninhibited by a car, by windows and the roof and everything like that. You just get on it, riding through curves, oh man, hills and curves are so much better on a motorcycle than in a car. Maybe a sports car could do a pretty good job, but just the motorcycle. The feel of the rumble, and you know, as you go. It’s all the usual things that people probably say. I mean it’s just a different experience you can’t get in a car or a bus or whatever. A plane probably could do a pretty good justice, but you know, because then you’re flying there, you wouldn’t get the hills and the curves. You get the turbulence. For some reason it’s easier to decide to get on a motorcycle and go on a random journey and just pick a direction and go than it is to get in your car and do the same thing. That’s what I like about riding. (Sally)
I love the feeling of the wind and everything. The wind in my hair, the sun on my face. (Amanda)

We’ve got a lot of nice little county roads out in this general area. Especially this time of year as they begin to harvest is just beautiful, the smells when you’re riding. (Sheryl)

You get to see nature that you don’t pay attention to in the car. If you’re sitting in a car and not paying attention to sceneries too often. If I’m driving, or if you’re a passenger, I’m often times reading or doing something else. I’m not always paying attention. And if you’re on a motorcycle you’re paying attention to everything. You get the scents, you know, good or bad. You get the fresh air. You feel the cold change or hot change. You get hooked. Not that you like that, but you just feel it all, and it’s a pretty country to ride in. (Jamie)

This is going to sound so weird, but I like the smells, all the smells. I don’t care if it’s a hog confinement, it’s only for a couple seconds, and it’s gone. But, you know, you can drive by a farm place, and you know there’s someone there smoking because you can smell the smoke, but you can’t see anyone. I just love it. I don’t know. (Susan)

Exposure to the elements impacts riders and passengers apparel choices and how they dress for riding. Comfort when riding becomes a focal point for riders. As such, comfort was discussed by participants repeatedly in the following contexts: (a) the motorcycle, (b) apparel, and (c) weather:

If I’m wearing Harley or non-Harley or the combination of both, it is usually on comfort and temperature. You wear for comfort more than impressing somebody else, I think. (Rachel)

We don’t like to ride when it’s super-hot. It’s just not fun. Your bike just gets you that much hotter. (Emily)

I have a riding jacket for when it’s cooler; it’s a Harley riding jacket. I’ve got a heavier jacket that I wear in the fall when it’s cooler. I wore that all winter long too because it’s pretty comfortable… I always wear a helmet. Depending on the weather, like now, I wear my half helmet, and then when it’s cooler, I’ll wear the full face modular… If it’s a hundred degrees, I’m not wearing that jacket. It’s too hot… I rode yesterday and had the vents [feature of riding jackets] open, and I have to be at work at 7 o’clock, and it’s like yeah, I should probably close those vents. It was a little chilly yesterday. (Audrey)

You get a little bit smarter about how you dress. I have been stung by bees on three occasions while riding. Sadly, that hasn’t changed my attire completely, but there might
be more times when I might have long sleeves or something that comes up on the neck versus a, you know, an open V-neck like I have on now. You know if I’m going to get stung, I’m going to get stung, and this last time it lodged into here and stung my earlobe… I have found, sadly through experience, that I need to not buy a lot of black. I need to stop buying black or mostly stop buying black because I almost passed out riding. I was so hot, and it was humid, and we were in another state. When we stopped for break my friends said, “Well don’t you know, you shouldn’t be wearing black in this kind of weather?” I’m like clearly, I didn’t, and you did, and you should have told me that when I got dressed this morning! A lot of things are black in Harley, and so I didn’t pay attention early on. (Rachel)

I know my best friend would wear blue. She lives in San Antonio and it’s super-hot down there, so she would be inclined to get light colors. They try to not wear black because it’s always so hot, so I think kind of the same. (Heidi)

You layer a lot of times, because in the mornings it could be colder. By the time you get into afternoon it can be hot. If you’re getting up early in the morning, and you’re going to meet at seven o’clock, it’s going to be a little bit cool. It’s amazing how much difference it is if you’re on your bike or in your car. Then, by ten o’clock you’re shedding. By noon, you’re in short sleeves. It’s almost a given if you’re getting up early, you’re layering because it’s cool to ride. (Paula)

When motorcyclists travel they feel a greater connection to nature and the elements because they are not surrounded by the four walls of a car. The women explained that when they are riding on a motorcycle versus a car, they are more “present” or living in the moment. They are more aware of their surroundings, the scenery, and the roadway. Riding stimulates their senses, and they are more in tune with the elements such as the sun or fresh air. For the women, the wind provides them with feelings of freedom. Finally, the women expressed a need for comfort. They need motorcycles that can be ridden for many miles comfortably and clothing that performs well in the elements, protects the rider and keeps her cool or warm as needed.

**Relaxation, personal freedom, and flow.** Participants explained that they liked riding motorcycles because it provided them with feelings of freedom and relaxation. Previous research on Harley defined freedom as liberation, the freedom from constraints such as norms and everyday demands, a license to feel free to escape social norms and daily demands or to relax
(Roster, 2007; Martin et al., 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Relaxation benefits of consumption include isolation, time to focus, and mental revitalization (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). The women enjoyed the ability to escape from life’s daily demands. The following comments illustrate the feelings of freedom and relaxation that participants experience when riding a motorcycle:

Maybe that’s why I like to ride so much, because it gives me that time to stop and just be free. Nobody’s calling me, nobody’s nagging, nobody’s this, and nobody’s that. It’s just my time. (Tracy)

There’s something freeing about it, like when I ride to work, just getting on the road. Having that freedom to just go, put on my music, and get out in the wind. (Helen)

The freedom, it’s peaceful, it’s quiet, well other than the wind, it’s quiet… it’s just fun. You feel like you’re flying almost. (Linda)

I just feel free. I like being able to just sit there and enjoy the view. It seems like you see more on the bike than you do in a car. I don’t know why, but I just feel like it. Maybe I’m just more alert when I’m on the bike than in the car. We both enjoy the freedom you feel when you’re on the bike; you can go where you want easily and just ride. (Leah)

I would say the freedom. I mean, there’s that me time. There’s no cell phone, and there’s no expectation. There’s no limit. There’s nothing. It’s just me and the wind, and that’s how I like it. (Megan)

You know it’s my stress relief, because I find that you have to pay so much attention to the road that you don’t have time to think about your problems and, you know, the stressors and things like that. Once you get out on an open road, I think you can really work some problems out, or you can really do some quality think time, you know? That you don’t get on your day-to-day, either at home or at work. (Kathy)

Riding or being a passenger on a motorcycle provided the women with a sense of freedom and relaxation. As mentioned previously, the connection to nature allows the women to become absorbed in the activity. They become focused on the road, the scenery, and nature and forget their daily stressors. Many women described motorcycling alone as “my/me time” with the focus of being alone.
Flow is defined as a deep focus or absorption in the consumption activity (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014). Participants focused on the activity of motorcycling, which involved focusing on the operation of the bike, the road, and the environment. Feelings of escape often resulted from the intense focus. The following comments illustrate the concept of flow:

When I’m riding I’m just riding and I’m appreciating the ride. (Nancy)

When you’re on a motorcycle it just feels like you’re completely open with everything around you and it just frees you. (Katie)

Take people who have worked in an office indoors all the time. I see you go on a vacation for a week, and it takes you like three or four days sometimes to just wind down and not think about all of the stuff you have going on at work so you can actually feel relaxed on vacation. I can understand that, but you can do that in thirty minutes on a bike. It doesn’t make you forget completely, but it lets you just concentrate on, well, being safe, number one, but number two, the sights, the smells, the curve of the road, you know, the condition of the road. When you’re out there, you’re just not thinking about the things that kind of bog you down mentally. (Audrey).

Social and Relational Aspects of Consumption

Social and relational aspects of motorcycle and apparel consumption were a common theme throughout this study. The sub-themes that emerged for this category were organized around the different social contexts and relationships that occur during consumption. Participants experienced feelings of communitas and comradery as a result of engaging in motorcycling related activities and described experiences that included family, friends, significant others, new acquaintances, and cliques. Several of the women gained enjoyment from participating in and volunteering for charity rides/events and local dealership rides/events.

Communitas and camaraderie. Participants in this study experienced feelings of communitas (Arnould & Price, 1993) and camaraderie when they participated in motorcycle consumption related activities. Activities included riding with others as a group and belonging to motorcycle enthusiast organizations (e.g., HOG). Participants commonly referred to the
motorcycling community as a brotherhood and sisterhood. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) explained: “The appellation of ‘brother’ or ‘bro’ commonly bestowed on one biker by another signifies membership in a community of shared belief, purpose, and experience” (p. 51). The concept of brotherhood also includes sisterhood as well (Thompson, 2012a; Schembri, 2009). Feeling a sense of connectedness with others was an important aspect of being a part of the Harley community/family. For participants, the next quotes illustrate the feelings of communitas and camaraderie that comes from being a member of the Harley community:

It’s a brotherhood/sisterhood. Every time I see another Harley rider, they make a comment, “Hey, nice ride,” or “How are you?” They just speak out to you, but if you’re in your car and you get out of your car, you’re not going to hear somebody, “Hi, how you doing?” It seems like another motorcycle rider, regardless if it’s a Harley or Suzuki or whatever, they’ll say, “Hey, nice ride or keep the shiny side up.” Just a general compliment to acknowledge you’re even there. You’re in a car, nobody does that. (Audrey)

I think it just means that you have this built in network of people that you feel like you can count on. I think if you’re on the side of the road somewhere, it’s probably going to be another Harley rider that stops and helps you, because everybody else is going to drive by and go, “No way.” I mean there’s just so many weird people in the world these days that, I have to be honest, I don’t even know if I want strangers to stop and help me along the side of the road anymore. But, I do feel that if friends and I were on the side of the road, the person who stopped to help us would probably be a fellow motorcyclist and probably a Harley rider. I don’t think the kid on the sport bike zooming by is probably going to stop and help. But, maybe I’m prejudging him or her. Like I said, it gives you a built-in network of people that understand you. It’s kind of like the wave, you know, the little wave that bikers do when you’re on the road. You don’t do that because you know everybody. You do it because you know that that person coming at you, whoever they are, is taking the same risks you are, and they’re out there on the same road that you’re on, and they’re dealing with the same hazards and the same distracted drivers, and it’s like you share this willingness to pursue this activity in spite of all of the potential danger. So, you know that they’re just as vulnerable as you are, and you appreciate the level of risk that they’re taking just to be out there, so you give a little wave as kind of a comradery thing. That’s kind of like the thing, the signal, that as motorcyclist, we’re kind of all in this together. (Nancy)

It’s a good bunch of people that come from all different walks of life, but you feel like they’re your brothers and sisters in one way or another, kind of a silent connection with people. (Heidi)
The Harley community makes everyone that rides feel very welcome, regardless of what you ride. There’s a comradery that comes with riding and that just shows in every aspect of the Harley community. We’re very inclusive. We accept everybody no matter your age, your gender, your ethnicity. We are very inclusive, very accepting, and we want everybody to be friends. (Linda)

Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 51) offered this observation of communitas:

Perhaps the most sublime manifestation of brotherhood lies in the shared experience of riding in formation with a large group of other bikers; the formation moves like a single organism, the sound of a single motorcycle is caught up in a symphony of pipes, and individual identity is subsumed by the group (cf. Celsi, Rose, & Leigh’s [1993] description of “communitas,” or shared flow, among skydivers).

Similarly, women in this study indicated that riding with others in large groups created a spectacle that gained attention from the general public, and this attention gave riders/passengers a sense of pride and enjoyment:

It also looks cool when you’re riding in a group, and it’s a big group and you’re going up a hill and you see all the bikes, and you’re part of that. That’s just a cool feeling of being in that group and the noise and the sound the motorcycles make with being in that group. And when you’re in a group like that and you’re passing by and cars are passing you on interstate all the little kids waving at you, they go “Oh, look at all the motorcycles!” It’s not just one motorcycle. It’s like, look at all the motorcycles. So, we wave at them, and you smile at them, and people think it’s a cool sight to see. (Katie)

I like going down the highway and being part of a big spectacle, and when it’s all women, even better, because people don’t expect that, people do not expect that. I like being part of a group, because it does create this really cool image or what I call a spectacle. I mean, anytime a bunch of motorcycles is going down the road, it’s loud and it’s neat. I think it’s just kind of a neat image, and I think it’s kind of unexpected for people, and particularly when it’s all women. It’s fun to see a little girl riding in the backseat just giving that little tiny wave out through the window, and you can wave back, and she knows that she saw a bunch of women riding motorcycles, and maybe she thought it was pretty cool. Then when you get somewhere, you’ve got a bunch of friends around you, and it’s just a lot more fun to share food and cheesy tourist attractions and things like that. It’s just more fun in a group of people. (Nancy)

A majority of the participants in this study were members of the local HOG club. HOG provides opportunities for Harley to connect with customers. HOG also offers customers an
avenue for meeting and connecting with other consumers with similar interests. The women in this study spoke about how the club made them feel welcome and supported. Feeling supported by other riders provided participants with a sense of comfort. Many women noted that joining the HOG club was a great way to meet new friends. The following observations illustrate participants’ experiences with the local HOG club:

From the day I stepped in the door to join the HOG team, or the HOG group, they were all welcoming. To this day, two years later, they’re still very welcoming and it’s a fun group to be around. (Audrey)

We decided to go to a meeting, and then we decided we can meet new friends. This is a different place to have new friends to hang out with, and we all ride Harley’s, so it was good. You have more friends to go out with and have fun. You get a lot of support if anything is going on with you; if you’re having any issues, you get a lot of support from them. (Beth)

I am comfortable going to the meetings by myself. I’m comfortable going on any of the rides, with my husband or without, with any of them that are in the group. I’m comfortable now to the point that if I needed someone to come pick me up because my car broke down, I could call them and say “Hey, can you come pick me up?” and they would. (Sheryl)

The following comments from participants illustrate the feelings of communitas and camaraderie that result from riding or being part of a group:

I like the camaraderie, that connection, that you can have with the group that you’re riding with, especially if they know how to ride in a group. When we ride in a group, we’re either on a ride, all supporting the same benefit, or we’re with friends and we’re riding somewhere to make memories and see scenery. (Helen)

We all kind of take care of one another, you know. It’s more the community. So that comes back to family, which kind of makes me chuckle because it sounds corny. It is true though. (Emily)

It just seems like we’re all friends and family. When we go on our rides and stuff we care about each other. I see more of them people than I see my own family. (Beth)
The women talked about feeling a sense of connectedness with other members of the motorcycling community. This is a common characteristic of subcultures of consumption (Kates, 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993; Thompson, 2012b) They used the terms brotherhood/sisterhood, which are common terms used in the motorcycling community, to denote a sense of comradery with other riders (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Quitting motorcycle riding might weaken ties of relationships with other riders, but even switching to another brand of motorcycle could have negative relational effects. Previous literature found that feeling a connection with like-minded customers can enhance a customer’s loyalty to a company or brand (Shi et al., 2015). Social ties, or the relationships formed among consumers, can contribute to a form of “switching cost” (i.e., social cost). The consumer would incur a cost in terms of weakened or lost social ties if they switched brands. This leads to a reduction in a consumer’s desire to leave a brand (Shi et al., 2015).

**Meeting new people.** Meeting new people was cited by many participants as a benefit of riding Harley motorcycles, wearing Harley apparel, or joining motorcycle enthusiast organizations (e.g., HOG, V-Twin Vixens, Chrome Divas). Many participants identified this as a motivation for consuming Harley products; they were actively seeking out new friends or riding partners, people with similar interests as their own (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995):

As far as like Harley family, I feel like when we’re out riding our Harley, we have on our Harley gear, and we’re on vacation, you definitely feel like you’re part of the Harley family because you’re on a motorcycle, and I think it’s the Harley name. Sometimes you sense people are afraid to approach you, but a lot of times they’re not. They just want to ask about your bike and who you are, especially if they’re another biker. They’ll come up and talk to you, and they’re not afraid to say, “Hello, how are you, where are you guys from? Yeah, I’ve got a bike too.” Being on that bike makes you a friend to another biker automatically. (Katie)

I think Harley has a presence. I mean Harley is just an iconic brand and everybody recognizes it. It’s a conversation starter too. When you go somewhere, at work or wherever, people will usually comment on it. “Do you ride your own?” “Yes.” “What do
you ride?” So it’s a conversation starter, but it also helps you find your own people that are like you. (Kathy)

Sometimes it will encourage a conversation with somebody you might not even know, somebody sees a shirt or a logo from where they’ve been, or they got the same shirt or whatever. It brings up a conversation that you may not have ever had with somebody before. (Jenny)

It is fun to ride around to small-town bars, and it just seems like that connects people. If there are other motorcycles there, you instantly gravitate, and conversations start. It seems like it is somewhat by default, a group. (Tracy)

Riding a motorcycle and wearing Harley apparel makes a statement to others. As the women pointed out, the Harley brand is very recognizable. It identifies the women as users of the product/brand to others, which encourages conversations and opens up opportunities for meeting new people and sharing stories and experiences with people with similar interests.

**Cliques.** Participants mentioned that cliques or smaller groups of riders often formed tight bonds from within the larger motorcycle enthusiast organizations (i.e., HOG). The smaller groups tended to form based on other similar interests besides motorcycling, such as a love for wine or having similar riding interests or patterns:

I’m speaking more from my experience with the HOG chapter, because that’s really where my family started with Harley, was with that. Like any group there’s cliques. There are obvious cliques in the HOG chapter, too. The first night we joined, we arrived a little late to the meeting; we sat by ourselves over in a corner. We weren’t feeling any love, we weren’t feeling welcome. It was very uncomfortable; we felt like outsiders. Had not one person walked up to us to say hello and start a conversation with us and invite us to the traditional dinner after the meeting to get to know them better, we probably would have been back. We probably would have just been single riders out and about. Someone took that initiative to come and say hi, welcomed us to the chapter. He was really the only one. (Sally)

When I first joined the HOG group, I felt a real sense of acceptance and comradery with the club. I don’t feel it as much anymore. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be part of the club because it’s super clickish. I think it’s like congressmen, there should be terms, and they should get some new blood every once in a while. (Kathy)

I do see some cliques just like you do in school. You do see the riders who have campers, and they always go camping together. You see the group that likes wine, so you
see them hang out more together, and then you see other people that don’t have anything in common that hang out together. When I get there [HOG meeting], I try to go to the tables and talk to everybody. I am more friends with certain ones than others, because I don’t know them very well. (Beth)

It’s more than just the riding. We’ve become so close to a group. We’ve got people in the HOG group that we say are friends, but we don’t do things with them. We wouldn’t just call them up, we just don’t do things as much with them, but we certainly say “hi” to them at the meetings and made friends with them on Facebook. But it’s those closer ones, that small knit of people, we have the Harleys in common, but if we all sold our Harleys, we would still be friends. (Laurie)

I mean that kind of develops as you become friends and hang out longer, I think. Somebody might say “Oh, let’s do this,” and then next thing you know that’s what you do all the time. Then different groups have formed; you get those people that just click together… mesh well together. Different riding styles, different activities, similar interests. (Jenny)

Thus, several women spoke about cliques that have formed among members of their local HOG group. They explained that the cliques made them feel less welcome as new members trying to join the group. Women who had been members of the club for a long time also indicated that the cliques made them feel excluded as well. Cliques appear to undermine the feelings of comradery that often come with belonging to a group.

**Consumer social and organizational citizenship behavior.** In this study, social and organizational citizenship behaviors (Groth, 2005; Gruen, 1995; Fowler, 2013) were exhibited by several participants. Consumer citizenship behavior is defined as a consumer’s voluntary engagement in societal, cultural, or firm-related activities (Fowler, 2013). When engaging in citizen-like behavior consumers voluntarily do things that are not expected of them, called extra-role behaviors. Organizational citizenship behavior focuses on a customer’s relationships with the organization, other customers, and employees (Groth, 2005; Gruen, 1995, Fowler, 2013). Organizational citizenship behavior tends to promote the firm’s interests (Groth, 2005), whereas social citizenship behavior benefits the community. Social and organizational citizenship
behaviors include community involvement and volunteering. As mentioned previously, a majority of the women in this study belonged to the local HOG chapter and exhibited social and organizational behaviors. This finding aligns with that of Schembri’s (2009) study, which observed HOG members as active participants in philanthropic efforts, such as volunteering their time and raising money for charities, including charities supported by Harley such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Many of the participants in this study had attended charity motorcycle rides at least once. Several participants had volunteered for events held at the local Harley dealership and other charitable or non-profit events:

Harley, motorcycle people in general, but especially Harley people, they’re good hearted people. They’re giving. People that have fallen on hard times or going through a medical situation where’s there’s expenses, the Harley community pulls together and does a ride to raise money or puts together a raffle. A couple weekends ago, there was a little girl; she has brain cancer, and she had a wish that she wanted to go on a motorcycle ride. Her mom put the word out and, oh my gosh, there were so many people there. I mean, that wasn’t even about money. She wanted a motorcycle ride, and she gets this whole group of motorcycle people that are there to support her, and literally the next day she had to go in for brain surgery. I think having that, having that in her head, all of these biker people supporting her, and she came through with flying colors. I like the giving, the good people. Some of the roughest people that you’ve ever seen, tattoos and beards down to here, wild hair, they have been some of the nicest people I’ve ever met. So, I appreciate that, I guess, about the biker community. (Helen)

I volunteered to run the Jump Start at the state fair for the dealership. I got a lot of strange looks from men like, you ride? Yeah, I ride. Women do ride. It’s one way for me to express my love of motorcycles, especially Harleys, and it gets the Harley brand out there so more people will be aware of it. We try to do a lot of volunteering for the dealership and the HOG chapter. I volunteer for the dealership sometimes just as much as the HOG stuff, and I do that because the dealership has really embraced the chapter and the family, and they’re all just a nice bunch of people. (Sally)

I like volunteering. I think it’s a great time. I just like it. I think it’s a good time. You get out of what you put into stuff; I put one hundred percent in, and I feel for the most part I get one hundred percent back. (Paula)
As the women commented, volunteering for Harley branded events and participating in local charity rides/events provided them with feelings of enjoyment and opportunities for socializing with other people.

**Social Roles and Personal Identity**

Social roles and personal identity permeated participants’ conversations about Harley apparel. Comments by several women indicated that wearing Harley apparel was a part of their identity. Participants shared behavioral expectations regarding types of apparel worn to motorcycle and non-motorcycle related activities. They spoke about feelings of status, achievement, self-confidence, self-esteem, and an enhanced sense of self that are derived from owning and riding a Harley motorcycle and/or wearing Harley apparel. Participants were aware of the general public’s negative stereotypes of motorcyclists and exhibited concern for cultivating a positive social image of motorcyclists. Public perception regarding gender roles was also mentioned by some participants who had encountered negative comments from the general public about riding a motorcycle and being a female and/or a mother. Finally, participants described body image concerns related to wearing Harley apparel.

**Roles and identities.** Participants were most concerned about behavioral expectations regarding the types of apparel worn to club (e.g., HOG, Chrome Divas) activities, Harley sponsored events, or events at the local Harley dealership. Most participants felt that Harley apparel should be worn at Harley and non-Harley sponsored motorcycle-related events. As noted earlier, roles are social positions within society, and patterns of behavior, such as dress, are expected of people based on their social positions or roles within society (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). Identity theory asserts that an individual’s self is a result of socialization and is comprised of several identities (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). Thus, an individual’s identity is formed
through social interactions with others (Friese, 2000). Harley apparel is considered a necessary component of participating in Harley and motorcycle-related events, indicating that Harley riding is a social role with dress expectations (Styker & Burke, 2000). This aligns with Reed II, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop’s (2012) assertion that identity-related possessions allow an individual to perform behavioral-related expectations of an identity.

In the interviews, participants described how they felt when they wore their Harley apparel and what they liked about wearing it. Responses from several women indicated that Harley apparel was considered a part of their self-identity. Belk (1988) explained that material goods become an extension of the self when a consumer considers a possession to be a part of their self-identity. For instance, Heidi commented “Of course, this is cute because it’s a skull and yeah, that’s me.” They identify as members of the Harley community, and wearing Harley apparel provides them with an opportunity to show others that they are motorcycle enthusiasts. Appearance plays an important role in the motorcycling community, because it allows others to identify Harley riders and brand enthusiasts. Wearing Harley apparel to motorcycle events can communicate to others that wearers are a member of the Harley community. Participants might feel they are a part of a local, national, or international motorcycling community based on the context of the event. By wearing Harley apparel to these types of events, the participants become brand representatives and also reinforce the brand community.

Like part of a family, part of a group, and you’re getting the recognition that you own a Harley. (Carol)

To show that I’m a member of the club. (Katie)

It’s part of my person, that independence is part of my personality. (Tracy)

I was on the back of the Harley Davidson when I was 5 years old. I don’t know any different really. (Megan)
At a HOG or Harley event, you’re Harley. You’re representing Harley. Just like the stuff that I’m getting from my Jingle in July, it’s Harley, because they know I’m Harley. You’re drawn to that because you’re into that. It’s a big part of your life and so it encompasses you partly. (Paula)

I don’t think that I hold myself any different or think differently whether I have Harley or not on. I did earlier on just because it was new, fun. It was kind of fresh, and it was a world I didn’t grow up being in. I was wearing it because it was also something that I did. (Rachel)

Participants were less concerned about types of apparel worn during activities that were not motorcycle-related (e.g., dinner, movies, dates). Yet, most wore Harley apparel for these types of activities as well, indicating that Harley riding was embedded in their personal identity. They were, however, concerned about balancing different role-related expectations regarding dress. For example, they spoke about their desire to wear Harley apparel to work and how they managed two competing elements—workplace expectations regarding proper attire and their desire for self-expression.

The following quotes are examples of the participants’ expectations regarding wearing Harley apparel to club events and social activities:

I wear it [vest] whenever I’m out representing the chapter. I’ll wear it to the chapter meetings, on rides, if we’re riding around town, I’ll put it on. Like I said, if I’m representing the HOG chapter. One, it helps get the word out there that the chapter exists, and two it’s not full of people that are of a certain age group. (Sally)

I just think wearing the vest when you’re together, it forms comradery and that we’re all motorcycling enthusiasts. With the mileage rockers you get to see how much people ride and you get to see how long they have been a member, because of the membership rockers. It gives you things to talk about with them. (Kathy)

The following quotes are examples of participants’ expectations regarding wearing Harley apparel to Harley corporate or dealership sponsored events and social activities:

I think it’s nice when we are working an event for the local dealership, and we’re representing HOG, that you wear something that says you’re a member of HOG, whether it is your vest or a t-shirt or both. (Audrey)
I try to wear stuff that has the local dealership’s name on it when I’m there volunteering. I feel kind of funny wearing another dealership. On the flip side of that, we do travel a lot and that’s our souvenir, right? Coming back and it’s like, oh wow, we went here, you know. But I do feel funny about not wearing something that says the local dealership’s name or something that’s just general when we are representing the local Harley dealer. I do feel funny about that. We do have HOG chapter shirts too that we wear at some of those events, but usually when we’re at the dealership, we’re always in something that says Harley. (Emily)

I go to some Harley events and don’t wear Harley, not too often though because most of my clothes are Harley. If I was going to a HOG event, I would probably wear Harley or HOG. (Paula)

The following quotes are examples of participants’ expectations regarding wearing Harley apparel to non-Harley events and activities that are not motorcycle-related:

I like wearing some of the [Harley] dress shirts for going out and not necessarily on the bike. I would wear them to go out to eat. In a way it’s making a statement, and it’s not a blank statement. I get a lot of compliments. (Jamie)

I wear my Harley clothing to family events depending upon what it is. For picnics or something, I might put a tank top on. I wear it out to do errands. I’ll throw a t-shirt on or a tank top, whichever. I wear it to all the HOG events. Friday’s for work. Every now and then I’ll pull out a Harley shirt and wear that. I wear whatever fits my fancy, really. (Sally)

The women identify as Harley enthusiasts and members of the Harley community. For them, riding is a part of their identity; it is one of the many roles they occupy in society. Wearing Harley apparel communicates this identity to themselves and others. As discussed previously, wearing Harley apparel acts as a stimulant for initiating conversations. The women enjoy wearing Harley apparel because it aids the social process. The apparel can tell others that the wearer has traveled to interesting destinations; it can tell others that the wearer is a supporter of the local dealership. As Jamie described, “It is not a blank statement.” Wearing Harley apparel provides the women with a sense of connectedness and comradery.
Appearance labor, performativity, and impression management. Many participants did not ride to work primarily due to the fears associated with riding on the freeway/interstate, which was a part of their route. Some participants in this study did ride to work and talked about how it impacted their wardrobe choices. Regardless of whether a participant rode to work or not, they all shared a desire to wear Harley apparel to work. Similarly, Sklar and Delong (2012) found that individuals that identify with the punk subculture attempted to meet workplace expectations and still express their identities as a punk through their dress and appearance. Several participants also talked about the appropriateness of wearing Harley apparel to church. This is in line with Reed II et al.’s (2012) claim that individuals seek to maintain harmony between their many identities.

The women were aware of the negative stereotypes that can be associated with motorcycling and being a motorcycle rider. This compelled some participants to engage in impression management. Two examples of impression management emerged in the interviews. First, participants were concerned about riding their motorcycle or wearing Harley apparel at work and how that might impact others’ opinions of them. Second, participants attempted to manage the public’s perception of motorcycle riders.

Participants spoke about balancing a desire to wear Harley apparel and workplace expectations regarding proper dress. Many participants were able to wear Harley apparel on casual days, such as jeans day or Friday/Saturday. Logos, emblems, or large graphics were usually avoided. Many participants had jobs that required them to meet with clients or interact with the public, and some held executive positions, all of which impacted their workplace attire.
The following are examples of workplace expectations for proper attire:

We have to wear collars during the week. (Audrey)

They won’t allow us to have any emblems or anything to advertise anything like that. (Beth)

They don’t like logo clothes at work. They’re pretty particular about that. We don’t have casual Friday. We’re all casual; we wear jeans to work every day. They will let you wear stuff with little logos; we can get by with that. But, if I would wear a Harley t-shirt or a sweatshirt, they wouldn’t like that so much. (Emily)

The following comments illustrate the participants’ perspectives on dress choices and managing work-relevant expectations (Sklar & Delong, 2012; Kimle & Damhorst, 1997):

I wear it on Fridays for jeans day at work. We’re supposed to be limited on what our stuff says. When I was hired, they said you’re not supposed to wear stuff that has a brand’s name on it, but I ignored that from day one and wore my Harley on Friday, and nobody said anything… They look nice. They’re dressy and kind of appropriate. I have a sweater that has Harley-Davidson clear across the front. It’s a sweater. I wear it. They don’t say anything. So I don’t worry about it. (Paula)

I don’t normally wear my club stuff to work. I usually just wear the Harley stuff. What I have for the club are more just t-shirts. Being in the position I’m at, I’ve grown beyond wearing t-shirts and jeans on my Fridays. I try to stay a little classier, so I don’t normally wear my club stuff to work. (Sally)

I’m fortunate that I can wear jeans to work. That makes it nice. However, I do not want to wear just a t-shirt to work, except for Fridays. I could wear a t-shirt that says Harley-Davidson or anything else appropriate any day of the week; it would be fine. I am a manager, I’m vice-president, so I need to have a little bit of authority where people pay attention or set an example. (Sheryl)

Many participants did not ride their motorcycles to work. One of the common reasons for not riding to work was the location of their work place. A couple of participants mentioned that they lived close to work, so there wasn’t enough time between home and work to enjoy the ride and to justify the time it would take to get ready to ride. Several participants chose not to ride to work because of the route they had to take; many traveled the interstate and did not like riding their motorcycles on the freeway. For the participants that did ride to work, it impacted their
apparel choices. For most riders riding to work required two sets of clothing, one for the ride and one for work, and they would change attire when they arrived at work:

I just wear my riding boots and my dress pants. (Audrey)

If I ride to work, I typically don’t wear the Harley-Davidson shirts. I wear my bright pink top. I’ll have it on, and I’ll wear my dress shirt. I might happen to wear it with my jeans, or if I happen to have a pair of dress slacks on, that’s fine too. I’ll just wear those with my boots and take my boots off in the parking lot, stick them in my saddle bag. If I decide to ride, I’m going to wear what’s appropriate for work. (Sheryl)

I’ve probably ridden my bike to work twice, and I have worked there over 17 years. I don’t really consider myself somebody who rides to work. I might alter that if I had a longer commute. If it really gave me some riding time, but I live really, really close, so it doesn’t make a lot of sense. I ride with a helmet exclusively. Washing my hair and blowing it dry and curling it and then it gets flattened by a helmet, and I’m not going to do all my hair and makeup when I get to work. (Rachel)

I change shoes. I had tennis shoes today, but I can wear flip flops to work. (Wendy)

Well, luckily tomorrow is a jeans day, I wouldn’t ride if it wasn’t jeans day. Earlier this month I was like, I’ll just ride. So I wear my pants and put my boots on and change my shoes when I get to work, or I’ve taken jeans too and changed into work pants and at the end of the day put my jeans back on and ride. It’s just kind of a pain. (Helen)

I can’t wear skirts. Uh, I would basically have to pack my dress clothes with, in a backpack and wear my jeans. I would normally wear my shirt like this underneath my jacket, but I’d have to wear jeans, and I’d have to go, you know, get in the bathroom and change into my bottoms when I got in. The days I rode my hair would be in a ponytail, because I’m like I’m not curling my hair, straightening it, the wind will just mess it all up. (Sally)

I’m not comfortable wearing dress clothes on a motorcycle. It’s not safe, and I don’t want to have to mess with trying to change clothes. I rode it once on a casual day to work, so I did dress casual. (Jamie)

I do occasionally, not very often, unless it’s jeans day, because I don’t like to ride in dress pants. I could put my chaps on, but it’s just easier not to have to put all that stuff on and then come to work and allow time to change clothes. (Jenny)

I never have in the past because I didn’t want to look like a biker at work. Not that I mind, but I think in my position, my hair, I just didn’t want that look. (Susan)

Several participants talked about wearing Harley apparel to church:
I do have an all-black one [shirt] that’s got just HD on it, and sometimes I’ll wear to church. It’s a thin, light weight collared shirt. I didn’t want them to know its Harley-Davidson, it doesn’t have all the graphic stuff on it. (Wendy)

I’m not going to wear that to church. Don’t ask me why. I mean, I could, but it’s just not something that I would wear to church. But this tank top, if it was 90 degrees outside, I’ve dressed that up actually with my black pants before, and it looked very nice with these shoes. It looked very nice so, I would wear that to church. (Megan)

I’ll wear them to church, not all the time, but every now and then, I’m like, “I’m wearing Harley today.” I’m the only one there that rides a Harley that I know of. (Paula)

The women balanced many roles: motorcyclist, employee, manager, church-goer, etc. They enjoyed including Harley into the different facets of their life but were very cognizant of social roles and norms. They were careful to balance their enthusiasm for Harley with the other roles that they occupy. Where appropriate, they tried to incorporate Harley apparel into their wardrobe. Despite Joan’s (2001) assertion that female Harley riders reject authority and rebel against societal rules, the behaviors of the women in this study belie that assertion.

Previous research indicated that motorcycle enthusiasts are stereotyped by society based on the outlaw biker of days gone by (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009; Schembri, 2008). Similar to Roster’s (2007) findings, the female riders in the present study had an awareness of negative social stereotypes. The women did not show interest in wearing Harley apparel to reflect a connection to past symbolic stereotypes (e.g., outlaw motorcycle clubs) of Harley riders. They were more concerned about cultivating a positive social image of motorcyclists. One form of impression management that emerged in the interviews was participants’ attempts to manage the public’s perception of motorcycle riders. For example, Audrey described:

When I’m on the bike, I try to represent the right way to ride a bike, because I’ve seen so many idiots. I’ve been with friends that go, “Oh, look at that idiot.” Yeah, he’s giving Harley, he’s giving motorcycle riders, she’s giving motorcycle riders a bad name. You see the guy that pop a wheelie on one of those crotch rockets at the stop light and stuff. So, when I ride, I try to ride safely so people get the perception: “Oh well, he or she’s not
riding like an idiot.” So, we get a better rap than the idiots that are, you know, popping wheelies or cutting cars off and driving too fast.

Self-image congruity theory (Claiborne & Sirgy, 1990) asserts that consumers are concerned with a product’s image and the product’s usage in relation to their self-concept. Consumers are motivated to consume products/brands that enhance their self-concept. The women know that society stereotypes them based on the image of motorcyclists as outlaws, but they also know that this is an outdated stereotype. Martin et al. (2006) noted that the Harley subculture had evolved into a mosaic of micro-cultures. This evolution has resulted in a broader range of meanings attached to motorcycle riders, less conformist styles and personal expressions among riders, and a softening of the public’s view of bikers. The motorcyclists of today, for the most part, are not outlaws, so the women engaged in impression management techniques to counter society’s expectations that motorcyclists are outlaws.

**Status.** For the participants in this study, owning and/or operating a Harley motorcycle was viewed as prestigious; this is similar to the findings of Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Because of the low numbers of female riders in the motorcycling community, the women viewed themselves as a part of an elite group. Owning a Harley motorcycle was perceived as superior to owning a competitor’s bike; the difference in retail prices among different brands of motorcycles perpetuated the image of Harley as superior:

I feel like it’s neat and sets me apart from other women, because when somebody asks me, “Do you ride a Harley?” “Yep, I sure do.” For a lot of people that’s still a pretty cool thing that person A rides a motorcycle and B rides a Harley, as opposed to anything else. (Nancy)

You feel like you’re part of a special group, a special part of society. (Katie)

After I got my Harley, then I felt like I’m really a member because I’ve got that status bike. I’ve got the Harley bike. (Tracy)
When I decided to get my own bike, the first bike I ever bought was a Harley. I never owned a different one. I went straight and bought myself a Harley. I guess because of its name. I wanted to own a Harley-Davidson because of its prestige and where it sat in society. Because riding a Harley is different than riding a Honda. When you say “I ride a Harley” it puts you at a different level. Even though I ride a Sportster, I still am above a Honda, Yamaha, or Kawasaki. When you say you ride a Harley-Davidson, it puts you in a bracket above the others. You don’t get the same respect that you do on a Harley.
(Paula)

**Gender and dress as an expression of gender.** Some women in this study talked about the public perception of gender roles. A few women had encountered comments of disbelief from members of the general public regarding their passion for motorcycling. Dress as an expression of gender (Butler, 1990) was also discussed in interviews; for example, participants associated the color black with Harley and the color pink with being a girl or with breast cancer awareness. The following quotes illustrate the participants’ understanding of others’ responses to women riding motorcycles and underlying societal assumptions about gender roles:

It always shocks some people when I say I ride a motorcycle, and they’re like, “What?” I’m like, girl’s ride motorcycles too! (Sally)

I have been asked on numerous occasions, “Do you even ride?” Like rolling their eyes at me, thinking that since I’m a woman and I have a child that I don’t have a motorcycle. But I tell them, “Yes, I do,” and then I tell them the different bikes that I’ve had over the years. (Linda)

Some of the participants in this study had passionate opinions about the color pink:

Girly-girls, that’s kind of what I think of when I see pink in stuff. (Jenny)

I don’t like Harley in pink. I don’t know why, but I don’t like the Harley-Davidson name in pink. (Wendy)

I know some would love it because it’s pink, but I already know I’m a girl; I don’t need to wear pink. (Katie)

I have an issue with pink, because I feel like brands of anything from tools to clothing to car seats make it pink and say it’s for women. I love flowers and floral motifs, and I could go over [and] buy a little set of screwdrivers that have a real pretty floral pattern on them, but they’re cheap terrible tools. So, the problem with me not buying your product is not because it didn’t come in pink, it’s because it’s a terrible product. They don’t take
the time to really figure out why women aren’t buying what they’re selling. They just
make it pink and say it’s for ladies. Look, it’s for ladies, and it’s always pink. Well, I love
pink. I love to wear pink, but you can’t just take a crappy product and paint it pink and
say it’s for women and expect me to buy it. (Nancy)

One of my biggest setbacks is that a lot of companies think that because it’s female it has
to have pink on it. I could do without pink. I mean, I can’t find hunting gear for women
that doesn’t have some type of pink on it. Why do you need to put pink on it? I want to
blend in with the trees and everything. I don’t need pink on any of my stuff. (Sally)

The quotes from the women illustrate that they do not feel gender restraints when it
comes to riding a motorcycle. They feel they have just as much right to ride as their male
counterparts. Thompson (2012a) suggested that “Women who ride feel a sense of freedom,
excitement, and empowerment as they maintain their femininity while participating in what has
traditionally been viewed as a masculine endeavor” (p. 58). People who adhere to tradition in
society, however, may be likely to question their lack of adherence to gendered norms.
Additionally, the women embraced their femininity, but did not feel the need to signify their
gender just because they ride a motorcycle. According to Roster (2007) female riders have
formed a new image of femininity, which incorporated a new definition of machismo and
rejected stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity. This new philosophy of femininity
“included women acting tough, bold and aggressive, and at the same time, sexy in an inclusive
way that did not define sexuality in stereotypical heterosexual or homosexual terms” (Roster,
2007. P. 451). As they described, they do not need to wear pink to feel feminine or to prove their
femininity to others. The women associated pink products as a blatant attempt at marketing to
women.

**Self-confidence and self-esteem.** A few participants mentioned that riding a motorcycle
and/or wearing Harley apparel have given them more confidence and boosted their self-esteem:

I feel it’s helped my self-confidence. It’s helped me feel stronger and self-sufficient. You
know, that kind of stuff ties into my everyday life. It gives me confidence. I’m just
stronger internally and not necessarily physically. Well, kind of physically too, because you’ve got to hold up that big ass bike. (Helen)

I feel like I’m showing the world that I’m not just a person who works in an office. I have kind of a wild side, and I have learned to do this really complicated thing. It makes me feel confident. It makes me feel proud of myself that I’ve learned how to do this. I feel I have earned the badge, so to speak. I can wear this clothing because I actually ride a Harley, and I’m not just wearing a shirt because it’s cute. (Nancy)

I’m confident and proud that I own a Harley. I can wear the apparel because there’s a stigma that you can’t wear the Harley-Davidson apparel if you don’t own a Harley. I don’t see why. I think you can buy Harley stuff and not own a Harley, but I guess that’s just me. It goes back to me being a woman and riding; I wear the stuff that shows. (Sally)

It has been good for my self-esteem. I would say it’s given me more confidence in myself. (Susan)

Riding a motorcycle adds to the complexity of the women’s identity. Martin et al. (2006) maintained that:

Mastering the machine gives them [female riders] greater self-confidence. It tells the world that they are more than just their jobs, their responsibilities as parents and their roles as spouses. The motorcycle is a rolling celebration of self, and it is the anvil on which they fashion new, more complex, and more powerful femininities. (p. 189)

Adding the role of motorcyclist to their identity increases their sense of self and boosts their self-esteem and self-confidence. Thompson (2012a) noted that “Most women in today’s motorcycle subculture are very confident and independent” (p. 64). Marking their identity as a Harley rider with branded clothing helps them express and actualize this identity.

**Self-definition.** For participants in this study, both the activity of riding and wearing of Harley apparel provided individuals with an enhanced sense-of-self. The words used by the women to describe themselves and their descriptions of Harley’s image (provided earlier) align. Previous research found a connection between consumers’ identity and their purchase intentions, product/brand preference, and product ownership and usage (Friese, 2000; Malhorta, 1988; Sirgy
et al., 1997; Solomon, 1983). Previous research has also shown that through the consumption of brands, consumers can define themselves to others (Aaker, 1997; Cova et al., 2007; Holland, 2004; Schmitt, 2012). Additionally, consumption of products/brands provides individuals with a way to increase their sense-of-self. As, the women’s descriptions indicate, wearing Harley apparel and riding motorcycles is a part of who they are and a part of their self-definition. This is contrary to Thompson’s (2012a) assertion that for women “riding motorcycles is what they do, not who they are. Rather like most Americans, their strongest sense of identity is related to their age, race, sex, family roles, and their occupation” (p. 64).

The following are self-definitions provided by the participants, which help paint a picture of the female Harley rider:

I’ve always been the-wind-in-my-hair kind of girl. (Amanda)
I’m a woman rider. (Audrey)
I’m too big of a tomboy. (Sheryl)
I’m good with who I am. (Sheryl)
I look tough. (Beth)
I feel pretty sassy most of the time. I feel confident. (Nancy)
I have a sense of badassness. (Helen)
I’m a people person. (Emily)
I’d say a little bit sexy. (Katie)
I’m more of a rebel. (Katie)
I’m a very independent person and strong willed. (Tracy)
A bit more radical. (Tracy)
Confident… sexy. (Megan)
Edgier, cooler. (Linda)
Badass. (Susan)
I ride a bike. (Rachel)

Previous examples from the women have shown, and previous research points out, wearing Harley apparel and riding a motorcycle allows them to define themselves to themselves and others.

**Body image and cathexis.** Body image is defined as the mental picture that an individual has of him/herself at any moment in time (Fisher, 1986). Body cathexis refers to a person’s
feelings or degree of satisfaction with his/her body or parts of the body such as the waist, buttocks, or breasts (Fisher, 1986). In conversations about Harley apparel, participants shared their feelings about their body shape, size and weight and body parts such as, buttocks, breasts, arms and calves. The women’s comments may suggest that they feel they do not live up to some sort of cultural or Harley ideal that Harley clothing expresses in its fit. The women also discussed ways in which they made garment adjustments to accommodate their individual body concerns. The following comments illustrate different participants’ feelings about their body:

I got fat calves, so I never really thought I could wear any kind of boots. (Amanda)

I have a big butt, and the extra stitching will draw attention to my butt. I don’t think it needs any more attention. (Kathy)

I like these jeans because I don’t like the fancy stuff on the back of the pockets. The back end is big enough. I don’t need to draw attention to it. (Audrey)

This girl’s got junk in the trunk. (Emily)

I never tried the jeans because I don’t know that I could wear them. I have a big booty. I haven’t even attempted to try a pair on because of my fat legs and my big butt. (Susan)

I have yet to find a jacket that compliments my shape, and my arms are huge. I mean there’s fat there, don’t get me wrong, but they’re also muscular. So they’re big. So, if I get a jacket to fit my upper body, then it’s huge down here. So, I have to be careful of that. (Megan)

I don’t like to have my upper arms really exposed. If I were out riding, I’ll wear a tank top, but if we stop or go in somewhere, I’ll throw on either a mechanic shirt or a longer sleeved something. (Kathy)

I don’t need to have you be looking at my chest when I’m walking down the street. (Sheryl)

I don’t wear tank tops much. I’m self-conscious of my boobs. (Helen)

The following comments illustrate different garment adjustments or desired features of garments that participants require for accommodating their different body concerns:
These darts in the front provide a little shape; I kind of need that because I’m pretty much one shape. (Nancy)

I have what I call my vanity layer, which is a tank top or a cami or something that I can tuck into my pants. Then I can wear something else over the top of it and not have to tuck it in, because when I tuck something in, I tend to look like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, because I’ve got to have high waisted pants. I have the vanity layer so that my spare tire doesn’t hang out. (Nancy)

I’ve got a big butt and big thighs but a smaller waist. So, I end up having to take in the back of my jeans to make them smaller in the waist but, that’s an easy fix for jeans that actually fit me. (Helen)
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand Harley branded apparel’s role within the female Harley community. This research sought to explore the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley branded community in shaping the identity for these female participants. Moreover, this study sought to expand previous research by exploring women’s perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism and the Harley community. The findings may aid in understanding the motivations influencing women’s consumption of Harley branded apparel and may be used to better design and market the apparel.

An inquiry into the Harley subculture is warranted because the motorcycling industry is facing a drastic reduction in new motorcycle sales in the United States. Harley is the leader in this stagnant industry; it has expanded its clothing and accessory lines as part of its current branding strategy. The Harley subculture represents a unique phenomenon itself, because it embodies a culture that revolves around the consumption of a luxury item, the motorcycle. To date, most scholarly research had sought to understand the male-dominated subculture that revolved around the Harley brand (e.g., Schembri, 2008; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993, 1995; Thompson, 2012b). However, the motorcycling community has become more demographically diverse, and women are playing a larger role in the motorcycling community. Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences and socialization with motorcycle brands. An inquiry into female Harley riders is warranted because they represented potential growth in a market that is currently stagnant. Also, it appears that no research had been conducted to understand Harley branded apparel’s potential role in defining the identity of female participants within the Harley community. The most recent research (Thompson, 2012a) found that riders’ commitment to riding and the biker lifestyle differs from motorcycle riders of the past (Schouten &
McAlexander, 1995). As such, their identities are not tied to motorcycling; they do not want to be outlaw bikers or look like outlaw bikers (Thompson, 2012a). Thus, it is possible that the stagnation in Harley branded apparel and other product consumption could be attributed to a change in riding’s role in the identity formation of participants and their commitment to the brand community. An exploration into the possible connection of apparel consumption to female participants’ identity formation and commitment to the Harley community is warranted and may benefit the company in strengthening market share and company viability.

In addition to providing practical business implications, the present study also adds to the body of scholarly knowledge related to identity and social identity theories. This study provides an interesting look at the thoughts of a group of women who reflect changing identities and roles of women in society. In addition, this study gives an important look at females who maybe post-postmodern feminist consumers. Finally, this study provides information about building identity through a community of consumption, which could be useful for other brands.

In this chapter, a summary of the methods and findings will be provided, contributions of the study will be outlined, limitations of the study will be identified, implications for the results will be shared, and areas for future research will be introduced.

**Summary of the Methods**

This study employed interpretive qualitative research with the goal of understanding how the participants experience, interpret, and construct their social world (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2006), Utilizing an inductive, qualitative approach allowed for deeper understanding of sociocultural factors that influence participants’ identity. Additionally, this study benefitted from employing a qualitative approach because it provided a more holistic understanding and contextualization of Harley brand symbolism and the Harley community (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2006). Because this study explored
participants’ perceptions, which were related to many concepts (e.g., self-concept congruity, social identity, symbolic consumption, gender identity), grounded theory was an appropriate methodology to employ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b). Grounded theory provided for flexibility in the research process, which allowed the researcher to adjust her data collection and analysis procedures throughout the research process to explore new ideas and issues as they emerged (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 41; Charmaz, 2002). Grounded theory allowed the researcher to focus on particular individuals and strive for contextual understanding (Maxwell, 2013).

This study used purposive sampling to select participants. Individuals were chosen because they could provide information relevant to answering the study’s questions and goals (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Participants for the present study were identified using two sampling strategies—convenience and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

Data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews between the researcher and participants. Interviews lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in a private home or in a meeting room at a local library. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. An interview protocol was used to guide the interview, but a semi-structured approach allowed the researcher flexibility during the interview to adapt as needed to explore new and emerging concepts as well as adapt to order of ideas generated by the participants (Charmaz, 2002).

Interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to solicit the participant’s perceptions of self-identity and explore the role of community, brand, and apparel in identity development. Conversations also explored the participants’ attitudes toward and perceptions of the brand, its symbolism, and the brand community. In addition to the interview questions, the technique of photo elicitation, or interviewing with photographs (Collier & Collier, 1986;
Harper, 2002), was employed. For the present study the interviewer chose 25 images of women’s Harley apparel under the assumption that the design features of the images would portray different roles within the Harley subculture. The interview stimuli consisted of images of the apparel presented in a random order to each participant. Interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist (Creswell, 2014) and checked in detail by the researcher.

Analysis of the data involved open-coding, which means that the codes were developed out of words and ideas in the data, most repeated to some extent across more than one participant (Maxwell, 2013). In-vivo codes emerged as a result of coding and were integrated into the analysis. A qualitative codebook was created from the codes that emerged during data analysis. The codebook contained definitions of the codes and was used for coding the data. Development and refinement of the codebook was completed through a process of cross-checking (Creswell, 2014). Once the codes were identified and refined, axial coding (Strauss, 1987) was used to bring the data back together by linking related codes (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2014; Strauss, 1987) to create themes (also called categories). The different themes were created in the axial coding phase with the goal of explaining or understanding the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). The final step in data analysis, was the process of interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Warren, 2002), which involved making sense of participants’ experiences, behaviors, and stated meanings to achieve a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994).

**Summary of the Findings**

Harley dealerships are not only a place to sell products, they are also a place where the company can connect with customers and build relationships that can enhance customer loyalty. Consumption-related social interactions and experiences primarily occurred while shopping at the local dealership or attending dealership sponsored events. Personalized service and employee
assistance facilitated relationship building and sales. The women in this study enjoyed walking into their local dealership and having employees know their name.

The interviewed women were extremely brand loyal. Participants attributed their brand loyalty to the motorcycles, the brand / company’s image, camaraderie among employees and customers, and consumption experiences. The social relationships that resulted from motorcycle and apparel consumption also played a large part in building and maintaining the loyalty. The women wore Harley apparel as a way of showing their loyalty to Harley and affiliation to the community. Therefore, it may be possible that a decision to quit riding or a change in their level of participation in the motorcycling community might impact their decision to purchase and wear the apparel.

Media and outlaw motorcycle clubs have played a role in shaping perceptions of the company’s identity and society’s perceptions of the motorcycling community. The participants were less likely to subscribe to outlaw biker-influenced subcultural characteristics. Very few women discussed outlaw motorcycle-related topics, which may indicated that the majority have had little or no interaction with outlaw clubs.

A primary motorcycle consumption activity was traveling and vacations. It is through consumption that social interactions occurred, experiences were lived, and memories were made. Distance did not impact the experience for the women; they had similar observations from both long and short distance riding. Most women wore apparel items that signified their travel experiences. Apparel not only acted as a memory marker, it also stimulated social interactions with other consumers.

Learning how to operate a motorcycle, understanding the mechanics of the motorcycle, feeling comfortable operating the motorcycle and increasing their riding skills level all provided
the women with hedonic experiences of pleasure and fun and a sense of empowerment. The experiences also provided them with an increased sense of connection to the Harley community.

The women had an awareness of challenges associated with riding and showed immense concern for safety. They spoke about the hazards of motorcycle riding and shared concerns about death, dying, and rider safety. Riding on the freeway or interstate was a common fear shared by the women. Participants shared that riding in big groups both increased and decreased safety concerns. Riding alone, riding their own bike, and handling the motorcycle on challenging roadways were also topics of concern. Primary dangers associated with riding focused on “others,” other riders, and other people on the roadways. The women were concerned about other riders’ skill level and the ability of others to control their motorcycles. Participating in local charity rides/events provided them with feelings of enjoyment and opportunities for socializing with other people. However, the same rides often involved drinking and visiting bars, which resulted in an apprehension toward participation. Participants had similar safety concerns about bike nights and motorcycle rallies. Two things provided the women with a sense of protection against the dangers of the road (a) riding in a group with people they were familiar with and (b) wearing appropriate riding attire. Gloves, helmets, boots, and jeans were identified as a key requirement when riding.

Riding Harleys offered fun and enjoyment. Socializing and participating in activities with other members of the Harley community brought riders/passengers joy from relationship connections. They also liked riding motorcycles, because it provided them with feelings of freedom and relaxation. They felt freedom from constraints and a license to feel free to escape social norms and daily demands or to relax and “check out” from their daily responsibilities. The sensory stimulation and the sense of connection to nature allowed the women to become
absorbed in the riding activity. They became focused on the road, the scenery, and nature, and forgot their daily stressors and were living in the moment.

Exposure to the elements impacted riders and passengers apparel choices and how they dressed for riding. Comfort when riding became a focal point for riders. As such, comfort was discussed by participants repeatedly in the following contexts: (a) the motorcycle, (b) apparel, and (c) weather. They needed motorcycles that can be ridden for many miles comfortably, and they wanted clothing that performs well in the elements, protects the rider, and keeps them cool or warm as needed.

Feeling a sense of connectedness with others was an important aspect of being a part of the Harley community/family. Common topics related to the social and relational aspects of consumption were feelings of belonging to a brotherhood/sisterhood, camaraderie, belonging, and being supported. Meeting new people was cited by many participants as a motivation of consuming Harley products or joining motorcycle enthusiast organizations (e.g., HOG, V-Twin Vixens, Chrome Divas). They were actively seeking out new friends or riding partners and people with similar interests as their own. Several of the women gained enjoyment from participating in and volunteering for charity rides/events and local dealership rides/events because it provided them with opportunities to interact with other like-minded individuals.

Harley apparel did play a role in the female Harley community. Because the Harley brand is very recognizable, wearing Harley apparel made a statement to others. Harley apparel communicated the wearer’s identity as a motorcycle rider and as a member of the Harley-Davidson/motorcycling community. The apparel communicated to others that the wearer had traveled to interesting destinations. Wearing Harley apparel also indicated to others that the wearer was a supporter of the local dealership. It identified the women as users of the
product/brand to others, which encouraged conversations and opened up opportunities for meeting new people and sharing stories and experiences with people with similar interests. Wearing Harley apparel provided the women with feelings of connectedness with members of the Harley/motorcycling community.

This study provides an interesting look into a group of women who reflected changing identities and roles of women in society. Riding was a part of their identity; it was one of the many roles they occupy in society. Both the activity of riding and wearing of Harley apparel provided individuals with an enhanced sense-of-self and boosted their self-esteem and self-confidence. Wearing Harley apparel and riding motorcycles contributed to their self-definition. Marking their identity as a Harley rider with branded clothing helped them express and actualize this identity.

The women indicated that Harley apparel was an extension of their self. A majority of the women incorporated Harley apparel into their daily wardrobe and engaged in appearance labor, and performativity, as a means to manage their different roles. This study found that the women were concerned about complying with social norms and wearing appropriate attire for different social situations. They were careful to balance their enthusiasm for Harley with the other roles that they occupy. Apparel details such as logos and trademarks were an important aspect of managing roles and norms. Apparel items that were less brand-conspicuous provide more opportunities for the women to incorporate Harley apparel into work or church settings. Apparel items that were clearly branded as Harley with recognizable logos provide them with opportunities to clearly communicate their connection with the Harley community and were preferred for Harley or motorcycle-related events and activities.
Harley is an aspirational brand. Owning and/or operating a Harley motorcycle was viewed as prestigious, and the women viewed themselves as a part of an elite group. Retail prices among different brands of motorcycles perpetuated the image of Harley as superior.

The women knew that society stereotyped them based on the image of outlaw motorcyclists, but they also knew that this is an outdated stereotype. The motorcyclists of today, for the most part, are not outlaws, so the women engaged in impression management techniques to counter society’s perceptions of motorcyclists.

This study offers insight into the thoughts of women who may be post-postmodern feminist consumers. They did not feel gender restraints when it came to riding a motorcycle. They believed that they had just as much right to ride as their male counterparts. The women embraced their femininity, but did not feel the need to signify their gender just because they rode a motorcycle.

**Contributions of Existing Theory**

Several theories were useful for understanding (a) the women’s perspectives of the Harley brand and the Harley community (b) the role of Harley branded apparel within the female Harley community, and (c) the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley community in shaping women’s identity. As mentioned previously in this paper, these theories were used inductively and not in a positivistic manner. As such, additional theories were added after the data was analyzed and were included here because they have relevance to this study.

The basic finding of this study is that a participant’s purchase motivation and brand-related behavior is identity based. As such, analysis of the results benefitted from reflecting on identity and social identity theories. It is also important to note that identity theory and social identity theory are grounded in symbolic interactionism (Hogg et al., 1995). The following theories,
which stem from social identity, were also useful: symbolic consumption, self-image congruity and feminist. Further discussion follows.

**Symbolic Interaction, Identity, and Social Identity Theories**

According to symbolic interaction theory, an individual’s identity is formed and emerges through social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Davis, 1982; Malhorta, 1988). Previous research has shown that an individual’s *self-concept* is both personal and social and contains multiple social and personal identities which intersect in different ways (Oyserman, 2007):

> Depending on the situation, the self can be seen as separate, unique, and distinct from others, as a part of a single social identity, as part of a multiple overlapping, or conflicting identities, or as part of a merged and connected set of identities (p. 435).

Identity theory and social identity theory, descendants of symbolic interaction theory, were useful for understanding the women’s identity formation, their identification with and membership in the motorcycling community, and related consumption behaviors. Identity theory (Stryker, 1968) is grounded in symbolic interactionism and is concerned with predicting an individual’s role-related behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). Identity theory asserts that an individual’s self is a result of socialization and is comprised of several identities (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). These different identities are referred to as *role identities* and are linked to the different social positions an individual holds within society (Hogg et al., 1995; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1995). Role identities influence both an individual’s sense of self and the individual’s behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity occurs when an individual’s identity is defined by belonging to a group (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory, originally conceived by Tajfel (1959), is concerned with the influence of group belonging/membership and normative behavior on an individual’s conduct (Hogg et al., 1995). According to social identity theory, an individual’s behaviors will align with that of the group to which they feel a sense of belonging (Hogg et al.,
1995). Social identity theory asserts that individuals’ behavior is directed at achieving and maintaining their in-group status or membership/belonging (Hogg et al., 1995).

Because symbolic interaction theory focuses on communication, social relationships, and identity (Crotty, 1998), it was particularly useful in understanding women’s relationships with the Harley brand and the Harley community. The women were actively seeking a community where they could socialize with other like-minded individuals. Owning a Harley motorcycle, wearing Harley apparel, participating in motorcycle-related activities, and interacting with other members of the Harley community provided the women with a sense of community. The social relationships that the women built as members of the Harley community strengthened their brand loyalty and formed a barrier to leaving or switching brands. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge about the role of community for female members of the Harley subculture of consumption.

Symbolic interaction, identity and social identity theories aided in understanding the role of the Harley community in the women’s identity formation. Identity theory was helpful in understanding that the women in this study identified as members of the motorcycling community in addition to other roles they held within society such as mother, sister, employee, manager, co-worker, and church-goer. According to social identity theory, when individuals become members of a group, their social identity becomes linked to the traits of their social role and the characteristics of the group (Chowdhury et al., 2014). This helps understand why the women, who identified as members of the Harley/motorcycling community, used similar terms to describe both themselves and the brand/community to which they belonged. It also helps to explain why belonging to the Harley community provided the women with a greater sense of self. This study provides an interesting look into a group of women who reflect changing
identities and roles of women in society. Thus the findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge about the role of the Harley community in women’s identity formation. This study also provides information about building identity through a community of consumption, which could be useful for other brands. Finally, this study also adds to the body of scholarly knowledge related to identity and social identity theories.

Furthermore, symbolic interaction, identity, and social identity theories were helpful in understanding the role of Harley branded apparel within the female Harley community and its role in identity formation. In particular, the women wore Harley apparel as a means of identifying themselves as a member of the Harley branded community. Harley apparel was the catalyst for conversations and social interactions with other members of the community, which further supported a feeling of community and comradery. Both identity and social identity theories were helpful in understanding how the women interpreted group norms and expectations for an individual’s behavior as it relates to apparel consumption. Identity theory contends that appropriate behavior is learned through socialization with the group (Solomon, 1983) and that the group’s members are driven to conform to role expectations and norms in order to preserve the group’s existence (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). According to social identity, in addition to influencing an individual’s sense of self, reference groups also pressure individuals/members to conform to social norms (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). A reference group is any group to which an individual feels a sense of belonging. Social identity contends that an individual’s behaviors will align with that of the group to which they feel a sense of belonging (Hogg et al., 1995). These theories aided in understanding why the women showed a preference for wearing Harley apparel to Harley-related motorcycle events. It was expected that group members would wear Harley apparel to Harley/motorcycle-related events. Wearing Harley apparel appeared to send a message
to others that an individual is a part of the Harley community and that they liked to ride; it also helped build a connection and sense of comradery/community among its members. By wearing Harley branded apparel, the women acted as representatives for the company and also the Harley community. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge about the role of the Harley branded apparel in women’s identity formation.

Finally, social identity aided in understanding the influence of other Harley consumers on the women’s consumption behaviors. According to social identity, reference groups may influence an individual’s marketplace decisions, including product and brand preference (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009). The women relied on other members of the Harley community for product related information. They shared tips and tricks for making riding more comfortable and enjoyable. This advice included apparel products that would withstand the harsh weather-related elements of riding and keep a rider safer on the road. The women showed a preference toward Harley branded products. This study contributes to the body of knowledge related to apparel consumption behaviors and identity of female customers of the Harley branded community.

**Symbolic Consumption**

Symbolic consumption is a component of symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction is concerned with an individual’s communication of identity through social interaction, whereas symbolic consumption focuses on the individual’s use of objects (products/brands, as well as services and experiences) to communicate their identity to others in social interactions. In addition to symbolic interaction, identity and social identity theories were also useful for understanding the women’s portrayal of identity through clothing. As discussed previously in this chapter, the women in the present study enjoyed wearing Harley clothing, because it sends a message to others that they enjoy motorcycling and are members of the Harley community.
In addition to communicating identity, symbolic consumption also aids in the formation of an individual’s identity (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009) and allows individuals to define themselves (Aaker, 1997; Cova et al., 2007; Holland, 2004; Schmitt, 2012) and increase their sense of self (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009; Richins, 1997). Therefore, symbolic consumption facilitates understanding of how wearing Harley apparel aids in the women’s identity formation. By wearing Harley apparel the women feel a sense of comradery with other members of the Harley community, which helps to build their sense of connection and identification with the brand. Wearing Harley apparel and riding motorcycles is a part of who they are and a part of their self-definition. Adding the role of motorcyclist to their identity increases their sense of self and boosts their self-esteem and self-confidence. Marking their identity as a Harley rider through branded clothing helps them express and actualize this identity.

This study found that the women wear Harley apparel to not only express social relationships but to signify accomplishments and validate personal experiences, which can also be understood through the application of symbolic consumption theory (Friese, 2000; Millan & Reynolds, 2014). The women wore Harley apparel to communicate to others their consumption experiences and travel destinations. By communicating with others, they are able to validate and remember personal experiences.

**Self-Image Congruity Theory**

Self-image congruity theory focuses on how identity drives behavior. The matching of a product’s image with a consumer’s self-image is defined as self-image congruence or self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997). Self-image congruity theory (Claiborne & Sirgy, 1990) asserts that consumers are concerned with their self-image when they consume a product. Individuals have a tendency to behave consistently with their self-image and are motivated to consume products/brands that enhance or reinforce their self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). For the present study,
self-image congruity theory was helpful in understanding why the women engaged in impression management techniques. The women felt that society stereotyped them based on the image of motorcyclists as outlaws, so they engaged in impression management techniques as a way of showing others that this is an outdated stereotype and to disassociate themselves from the negative stereotype.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is a form of critical theory that centers on the idea that we live in a patriarchal society in which women are viewed as subordinate to men (Tyner & Ogle, 2008). The patriarchal structuring of gender has been identified in the Harley SOC (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012; Wolf, 1991). Feminist theory was useful in understanding women’s roles and experience in the Harley community. More specifically, postmodern feminism aided in the understanding of gender roles, and post-postmodernism aided in understanding the women’s preferences toward Harley apparel.

According to symbolic interaction theory, gender is socially defined (Deegan, 1987). Social interactions shaped the participants’ perceptions of their femininity and what it means to be a female (Deegan, 1987). The women in this study encountered comments of disbelief from members of the general public regarding their passion for motorcycling. Being female and riding a motorcycle may be viewed as non-conforming to traditional gendered role expectations. Previous research has indicated that the Harley subculture is a male-dominated community that has a patriarchal structure, whereby women are viewed as subservient to men (Joans, 2001; Thompson, 2012; Wolf, 1991) and are typically associated with stereotypical and subordinate roles (Thompson, 2012b). The views of women in the study do not align with patriarchal conclusions about women. It is possible that the increased diversity resulting from more women, ethnicities, and generations such as Gen X and Millennials joining the Harley community has
created new perspectives, changing definitions of riders, and expanded rights for women. As Martin et al. (2006) noted, the Harley subculture has evolved into a mosaic of micro-cultures. They claimed that this evolution resulted in a broader range of meanings attached to motorcycle riders, less conformist styles and personal expressions among riders, and a softening of the public’s view of bikers.

From a postmodern perspective, dress is a central feature of culture and social interactions (Morgado, 1996). Dress is a part of an individual’s socialization (Kaiser, 1991; Tyner and Ogle, 2008) and plays a critical role in how gender is created or “performed” (Twigg, 2012). Just as society has constructed gendered identities, it has also prescribed feminine and masculine gendered appearances (Kaiser, 1991; Tyner & Ogle, 2008). The women in the present study had passionate opinions about the color pink and its association with traditional notions of femininity. They do not need to wear pink to feel feminine or to prove their femininity to others. The women embraced their femininity but did not feel the need to signify their gender just because they ride a motorcycle. The women do not feel gender restraints when it comes to riding a motorcycle. They feel they have just as much right to ride as their male counterparts.

**Post-Postmodernism**

Recently, researchers (Morgado, 2014) have begun to note a shift in fashion trends, and they have focused on identifying the characteristics of a new era described as post-postmodern fashion. The concept of a post-postmodern cultural era is fairly new and still emerging, and consistent terms and labels have not been established. Additionally, there is no consensus as to when the post-postmodern era of fashion began to emerge. To date, it appears there has been little research exploring post-postmodern apparel. However, Morgado (2014) identified post-postmodern characteristics of dress and consumer consumption behaviors.
The findings of the present study illustrate that the aesthetic features of Harley fashion and the consumption behaviors of the female participants align with post-postmodern fashion characteristics outlined by Morgado (2014). First, Morgado (2014) proposed that post-postmodern consumers prefer excessive decorative details on products such as rhinestones, buckles, multiple pockets. Participants in this study showed a preference towards garments with excessive embellishments and features. Second, Morgado’s (2014) introduced the concepts of fluidity or boundlessness whereby individuals are constantly shifting, creating, and manipulating their appearance. The women in the present study wanted to incorporate Harley apparel into their daily wardrobes, which meant they had to manipulate and adapt their dress to different contexts, stretching the appropriateness of that dress in a fluid way. Finally, Morgado (2014) suggested that post-postmodern fashion included garments and accessories that integrated contemporary technology into their design. The women in this study were looking for apparel and accessory products with features and functionality that would provide comfort and protection when riding. Thus, this study offers insight into the thoughts of women who may be post-postmodern feminist consumers.

Explained previously in this paper, the purpose of grounded theory research is to “demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 675). Thus, the aim of this study was to arrive at a theory or model that explained the data. The findings of this study resulted in the creation of the Contributers to Consumption Model for the Female Harley Community. The model illustrates the interrelationship of major themes identified in the data including subthemes and theories that aided in understanding the data.
Figure 1. Contributors to Consumption Model for the Female Harley Community

Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationships among the themes in the data and theories used to interpret the findings. The center circle represents women’s consumption of Harley products. Lines are used to connect the five main themes (i.e., HD business strategies; experiential aspects of consumption; tourism, vacation, and travel; social / relational aspects of consumption; and social roles and personal identity) that contributed to females’ consumption of Harley products in this study. Subthemes are nested in light gray boxes adjacent to their corresponding main theme. Finally, theories that were relevant for understanding the data are listed within a box drawn around each of the themes / subtheme groups to which they applied.
Limitations

While the sample in this study exhibited diversity in a variety of role characteristics, it still provided only a small degree of representation of women within the motorcycling community, which limits generalizability of the findings. First, the sample of 23 central Iowa participants were all White. While the women in this sample do reflect Harley’s stereotypical female consumer, the sample does not represent all ethnicities and all regions of the US within the motorcycling community. Also, a majority of the women were baby boomers, so the experiences and perceptions shared by participants may not reflect those of other generations such as Gen X and Millennials. Sixteen out of 23 participants were members of the local Harley Owners Group (HOG), which does not have an outlaw biker mentality where women are viewed as subservient. The orientation or “mentality” of the local HOG community may have impacted participants’ experiences in the motorcycling community. Additionally, the motorcycling community, once male-dominated, has become more demographically diverse because women, and people of different ethnicities and age have joined the sport of motorcycling. Finally, to the knowledge of the researcher, the sample does not represent members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Including members of the LGBTQIA+ community could also offer a different perspective of the motorcycling community. Because of the nature of qualitative research and the defined population under study, the generalizability is limited.

Participants for this study were identified by using two sampling strategies—snowball and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). I reached out to people that I knew from my employment as an apparel manager and HOG liaison at a Harley dealership and asked them to participate or suggest potential participants for this study. A limitation of this approach is that people from the same social group were interviewed, thus possibly biasing the data.
Finally, data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which may have been impacted by interviewer effects. Many participants knew that I had previously been employed by Harley, which may have affected their level of comfort in sharing their true feelings about the company, brand, products, and community; it is possible that they were more or less honest in sharing their opinions. Interviewing with photographs (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002), or photo elicitation, was also employed. Twenty-five images of women’s Harley apparel were chosen under the assumption that the design features of the images would portray different roles within the Harley subculture. Thus, it is possible that responses were influenced by the images and the features of the apparel depicted in the researcher selected images.

**Implications**

Despite some limitations, this study has implications for understanding the important role of apparel for women in the Harley community. The present research is valuable because it offers an understanding of the role of Harley branded apparel and the branded community in shaping identity of this participant group of female consumers. The findings of this study provide a greater understanding of women’s perspectives of the Harley brand’s symbolism and the Harley community. Harley branded apparel is unique because it is an extension of the Harley brand which is well established. The Harley SOC represents a unique phenomenon because it embodies a culture that revolves around the consumption of a luxury item, the motorcycle.

A major finding of this study was that the concept of community motivated individuals’ behaviors. Participants wanted to feel a sense of connectedness to members of the motorcycling community and other like-minded individuals. Social interactions with Harley dealership employees, other consumers, HOG members, and the general public fostered a sense of community. Consumers not only created bonds with each other, but also built an emotional connection to the brand as well. Personal identity and social identity were closely tied to
perceptions of connectedness to other members of the community. Feeling a sense of community contributed to building and maintaining brand loyalty and acted as a barrier for switching brands or leaving the branded community.

Creating a sense of community is a consequence of Harley branding and marketing efforts and consumer engagements with the brand. Therefore, Harley should continue to find ways to foster and grow relationships with customers. Personalized service and employee assistance facilitated relationship building and sales. Therefore, it is recommended that Harley provide dealership employee’s with customer service training to ensure a consistent friendly experience throughout the network of dealerships. Employee training should focus on how to provide customers with personalized level of service. Harley might also benefit from employing secret shoppers or customers who would provide feedback to corporate about the level of service provided to them during a visit to a dealership.

Motorcycle sales are stagnant, and Harley is struggling to attract new customers to the market. For example, recent data suggests Gen Y is less interested in motorcycling (Franck, 2017); hence, Harley is struggling to attract Millennials. Therefore, Harley should identify ways that the company and dealerships could interact with potential customers outside of the motorcycling community by participating in events that are relevant to the Millennial market niche. Second, previous research has shown that apparel allows non-riders an opportunity to “try on” the Harley lifestyle (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, Harley should determine Millennials’ apparel preferences and needs so that they can actively market apparel products to them as a way to introduce them to the Harley lifestyle. Harley could collaborate with a fashion designer to create a Gen Y line of apparel. Additionally, Harley should consider collaborating with a Gen Y fashion influencer or blogger. According to a study by Engagement Labs,
conversations about brands among consumers can on average drive 19% of sales (Berthiaume, 2019). With that in mind, Harley should ensure that both the company and the dealerships are actively using social media to engage consumers. The more conversations Harley can generate among customers online through social media influencers and bloggers could result in increased sales.

The results of this study showed that the women liked riding motorcycles, because it provided them with feelings of freedom and relaxation. They felt freedom from constraints and a license to feel free to escape social norms and daily demands or to relax and “check out” from their daily responsibilities. The women described how they become absorbed in the riding activity and forget their daily stressors while they live in the moment. Therefore, Harley dealerships should consider organizing women-only rides during the week in the early evening that would provide women with opportunities to release stress from their day. Women-only rides could be organized on the weekends as well. The present study also found that the women’s primary consumption activities centered around recreation, tourism, vacations, and travel. Therefore, female consumers may be interested in participating in Harley-organized motorcycle tours to tourist destinations around the United States, Canada and Mexico. Additionally, this study found that women like to purchase items, primarily t-shirts, as souvenirs to commemorate places they have visited. Thus, Harley should ensure that dealerships are located near major motorcycle tourist destinations throughout the world.

Participants showed substantial concern for safety. Riding on the freeway or interstate was a common fear shared by the women. Participants shared that riding in big groups both increased and decreased their safety concerns. Therefore, it is recommended that organized rides have a cap on the maximum number of attendees and avoid routes that involve heavily trafficked
areas such as interstates. Providing designated drivers for riders who drink and transport of their cycles after a charity ride might increase the sense of safety among riders and people in the community.

Overall, participants in this study were very supportive and loyal to Harley. They were very excited to be a part of this study so they could share their concerns and needs with the company regarding apparel product offerings. This knowledge may help Harley to better market its branded apparel line and strengthen riders’ brand loyalty. In conversations, participants talked about topics such as variety of products offered, the younger target market, consistency in product sizing, pricing, and fit. The findings of this study indicate that Harley is accommodating the older consumer through the design and marketing of the bike but not through their apparel. Some participants felt that Harley offered a wide selection of apparel merchandise that would appeal to a wide variety of customers, while others felt that the clothing selection was more targeted toward a younger demographic. Because Harley is trying to market their apparel products to several demographics, they should consider creating lines that reflect the needs of each niche.

The results of this study also showed that the women enjoy including Harley apparel in the different facets of their life. However, the women were very cognizant about complying with social norms and wearing appropriate attire for different social situations. They were careful to balance their enthusiasm for Harley with their other roles. Apparel details, such as logos and trademarks, were an important aspect of managing roles and norms. Apparel items that are less brand-conspicuous provided more opportunities for the women to incorporate Harley apparel into work or church settings. Based on the findings of this study, Harley should work to build two unique lines of apparel for women based around the concept of brand prominence (Han et
al., 2010). Brand prominence implies that consumers’ desire products that are more or less brand conspicuous (Han et al., 2010). One line of Harley apparel should be styled for motorcycle-related events and activities and include visible and recognizable logos. The second line of apparel should be more career-oriented and include less recognizable logos.

Participants were frustrated about the selection available for the plus-sized woman and expressed a need for styles that fit bustier and fuller-figured women. Harley currently produces plus-sized apparel for women, but because dealerships are franchised, it is up to each individual dealership to decide what products they offer in store. Thus, it is possible that a dealership could choose to not offer plus-sized apparel in its store. The findings of this study show that many female Harley consumers need plus-sized apparel. Harley should recognize the consumers’ needs and make it a priority to ensure that that all dealerships carry plus-sized apparel selections. In recent years, Harley has begun requiring dealerships to offer certain apparel assortments that should be expanded to include plus-sized apparel.

The findings of this study suggest that Harley apparel and licensed products are very inconsistent in sizing. This inconsistency impacted the amount and frequency of items purchased as well as where garments were purchased (i.e., online versus store) by participants. Many of the women in this study did not feel comfortable ordering products online due to the inconsistency in product sizing. Recently, Harley made the decision to sell Harley branded apparel through Amazon.com (Tita, 2018). Given consumers reluctance to purchase Harley products online, it is recommended that Harley work to establish a consistent sizing system for their products. Also, implementing an easy online return policy in stores could thwart customers concerns about fit. Harley dealerships are concerned that the decision to sell products through Amazon.com could diminish foot traffic to their dealerships (Tita, 2018). It is therefore recommended that Harley
work to ensure that their Omni-channel retail model creates a seamless shopping experience for consumers and encourages store visits.

Almost all of the women in this study did not wear Harley jeans. Many had never attempted to try on or purchase a pair of jeans because of fit and pricing concerns. A couple of the participants had worn Harley jeans in the past but no longer wear them because Harley had discontinued their favorite style. Because the women like to incorporate Harley apparel into their everyday wardrobes, there is a need for affordable Harley jeans that fit properly. Harley should study its past sales data and consider reintroducing discontinued styles that were previously best-sellers. If they are not already employing these strategies, Harley should involve customers in the product design process by asking consumers to provide design ideas and evaluate styles (i.e., crowdsourcing, focus groups). Harley could also analyze consumers’ online product reviews which might provide insight into design, fit and price point issues. Harley should develop both a fashion and basic line of jeans that fit properly and should promote a jean try-on event to get customers to try on a pair. A jean trade-in event might also work to introduce customers to a new line of jeans.

The women in this study were concerned about the high retail price of Harley apparel. Price impacted the frequency, amount, and/or types of items participants purchased. High prices motivated women to shop the clearance sections of the Harley dealerships. These women want to purchase and wear Harley apparel, but the high price restricts their purchases. Because Harley is a premium brand, it should command a premium price. However, the prices may be precluding consumers from purchasing. Given the importance of apparel in creating comradery and a sense of community, Harley should review their pricing strategies and consider whether offering a
more affordable apparel line fits with their merchandising mix and their image as a premium brand.

The findings from this study indicate that participants believe in wearing proper riding gear when riding a motorcycle. Functionality and performance was a primary concern when purchasing apparel and gear used for riding. Comfort and safety when riding were a focal point for the women. They need motorcycles that can be ridden for many miles comfortably and clothing that performs well in the elements, protects the rider, and keeps her cool or warm as needed. Riders were not shy about wearing other branded products if the functionality was the same as a Harley product but cheaper, or if the other brand’s product outperformed Harley’s. Harley should continue to develop products with increased functionality and focus on comfort. It is important that products for women riders are as functional and comfortable as the products for men. Involving customers in the product design process (i.e., crowdsourcing) by asking them to provide design ideas and evaluate existing and prototypes of styles should help accomplish this goal. It is also important that female riders have the same level of product selection as their male counterparts.

The findings of this study may provide useful insights for other brands or subcultures of consumption. For example, this study provides information about building identity through a community of consumption, which could be useful for other brands attempting to strengthen their SOCs. Other brands could apply knowledge from this study and identify ways to influence or promote customer identification and affiliation with their brand. Other brands may be able to uniquely apply the knowledge from this study to promote a sense of community and camaraderie within their own brand communities. It is possible that female members of other subcultures of consumption might exhibit similar characteristics as the women in this study. As such, other
brands could look for ways to promote the concept of community and individuals’ identity formation. Finally, other brand communities that consist primarily of male consumers may be able to apply this knowledge to recruiting and attracting female consumers.

In addition to providing practical business implications, this study also adds to the body of scholarly knowledge related to identity and social identity theories. This study provides an interesting look into a group of women who reflect changing identities and roles of women in society. The study also gives an important look at women who may be post-postmodern feminist consumers, lending insights into new trends in consumer behavior and identity.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Findings from the present study suggest that appearance plays an important role in the motorcycling community, because it allows others to identify Harley riders and brand enthusiasts. Wearing Harley apparel provides a sense of comradery among female members of the Harley community, which helps to build their sense of connection and identification with the brand. Because the demographic make-up of the Harley community is changing, future studies are needed to explore the perceptions and attitudes of other generations of motorcycle enthusiasts, such as Gen X and Millennials. Future studies should also explore other non-stereotypical Harley customers such as persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ or riders of diverse ethnicities.

Given the downturn in Harley apparel sales, future investigations should explore what male riders think about the Harley community, because they are the company’s main demographic. If a disconnect exists between the company and the female consumer, there may also be a disconnect with the male consumer as well. A survey could be developed using the knowledge gained from this study and distributed to a larger sampling of the Harley community.
so that the company can more effectively market to its diverse mix of consumers. Therefore, it is recommended that future investigations include a larger sample size with more demographic and geographic diversity so that broader generalizations can be made.

According to Schmitt (2010), “Understanding how consumer experience brands and, in turn, how to provide appealing brand experiences for them is critical for differentiating their offerings in a competitive marketplace” (p. 56). Thus, this research is not only useful for Harley, other brands could benefit as well. Future research should build on the findings of this study by looking at other lifestyle brands and subcultures of consumption. Future investigations could explore the role of branded apparel in other branded communities. Future research could also explore apparel’s potential role in defining the identity for consumers in other subcultures of consumption. Understanding consumers’ motivations behind consumption behaviors will allow other brands to effectively market to their consumers, enhance customer loyalty, and strengthen their market share. Expanding understanding of subcultures of consumption may strengthen marketing opportunities for some unique companies as well as deepen understanding of development of new types of consumers.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.  IRB APPROVAL LETTER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 6/29/2017
To: Amy Shane-Nichols
522 6th Street, Colo, IA 50056
CC: Dr. Ann Marie Fiore
1062 LeBaron
Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst
1068 LeBaron Hall
From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: A qualitative exploration of female Harley-Davidson apparel wearer’s symbolic expression of identities through dress
IRB ID: 17-297
Study Review Date: 6/29/2017

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

• (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  ◦ Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  ◦ Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:
• You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
• You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required.
by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4586 or IRB@iastate.edu.
Attention: Harley women

I would like your input in a research study!

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of the study is to explore women’s perspectives of the Harley-Davidson brand, the Harley community, and Harley apparel. The goal is to use the information gained in this study to benefit female members of the Harley community by ensuring the type of apparel offerings meet their needs and expectations.

What will you be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, an interview will be scheduled for a date, time & location that is convenient for you. During the interview, you will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your experiences as a Harley fan. As a thank you, interviewees will receive a $20 gift card courtesy of Big Barn Harley-Davidson.

How do you participate?
If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me to set up an interview:

Amy Shane-Nichols
Email: Amys@iastate.edu
Phone: 515-339-4545

Participants’ identities and responses will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. To participate, you must be 18 years or older and be able to read and understand the informed consent form written in English. Gift card valid at Big Barn Harley-Davidson.
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: A qualitative exploration of female Harley-Davidson apparel wearer’s symbolic expression of identities through dress

Investigators: Amy Shane-Nichols, Ann Marie Fiore, Mary Lynn Damhorst

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—young participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the role that Harley branded apparel plays for females within the Harley community. This study seeks to understand the potential role of Harley branded apparel and the Harley community in shaping women’s identity. Additionally, this study explores women’s perceptions of the Harley-Davidson brand and the Harley community.

To qualify for participation, you must be over the age of 18 and be able to read and understand the informed consent form written in English.

Description of Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your experiences as a Harley enthusiast. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately 1-2 hours.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

Benefits
At the end of the interview, participants will be compensated with a $20 gift card for use at a local Harley-Davidson dealership. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit female members of the Harley community by ensuring the type of apparel offerings meet their needs and expectations. Additionally, the information gained in this study may benefit Harley-Davidson in strengthening market share and company viability.

Participant Rights
Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115.
Confidentiality
Your interactions with the interviewer will be audio recorded with field notes taken by the researchers only with your consent. Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Only researchers of this study will have access to the data. Consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for three years after the study is completed. If the results are published or presented, your identity will remain confidential.

Questions
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact us: Amy Shane-Nichols (amys@iastate.edu), Dr. Ann Marie Fiore (amfiore@iastate.edu), or Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst (mldmhrst@iastate.edu).

Consent and Authorization Provisions
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

_______________________________  _______________________
Participant’s Signature          Date
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW ID: HD#

Reminders:

- Consent form- Discuss, have participant sign and provide participant with a copy
- Explain interview process- I will use recorders to catch the conversation, but will also take some notes as reminders to myself (example: avoid asking about things that have already answered)
- Let participants know that I want to hear what they think. I am not promoting Harley. Positive & negative ideas are OK and wanted.
- Start recorders!

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS [Take very specific notes on answers]

Interviewer -- First, I need to get information on who you are:

1. What year were you born?
2. What is your level of education?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your marital status?
5. What is your occupation?

[For the rest of the interview, if the respondent starts answering a later question, try to get notes down on what was said so that you can use verifiers later rather than asking a question already answered again; otherwise, specific notes aren’t as necessary.]

RIDING BEHAVIOR
Interviewer -- Now I want to find out about how and whether you ride your own bike or if you are a passenger:

6. Do you ride your own motorcycle?
   a) If no, are you a passenger?
   b) If neither applies ask - Do you think you will ever ride a motorcycle as a passenger or driver? [Then, skip to question # 13]

7. How long have you been operating your own motorcycle / riding motorcycles as a passenger?

8. Tell me what influenced you to start operating your own / riding a motorcycle?

   PROBES:
   - [For drivers only] Were you a passenger before you started operating your own motorcycle?
   - Who, if anyone, influenced you to ride a motorcycle?
     - Tell me how they influenced you.

9. How often do you ride a motorcycle per month?

10. What is the average distance that you ride per year?

12. Where do you ride?

   PROBES:
   - [For drivers only] Do you ride to work?
     - If yes, how does this impact your apparel choices?
   - Do you take weekend trips on a motorcycle?
     - If yes, where have you traveled?
   - Do you take longer vacations on a motorcycle?
     - If yes, where have you traveled?
• Do you attend rallies, events, bike nights, charity rides?
  o If so, which ones?
• How often?

13. Do any of your family members or close friends ride motorcycles?
   a) Who?
   b) Do they ride Harley-Davidson motorcycles or another brand?
   c) [For drivers only] How often do you ride with them?

14. Tell me what you like about riding a motorcycle?

15. What brands or brand of motorcycle have you ridden or do you ride?
   a) Why did you choose this/these brand/s of motorcycle over others?
   b) Would you ever switch brands?
   c) [If Harley is mentioned] How loyal, or not, would you say you are to Harley-Davidson?
   d) [If Harley is mentioned] What is it about Harley-Davidson that you like?

H-D APPAREL

Interviewer -- Now I will ask you about clothing related to riding and the Harley brand:

16. Do you wear Harley clothing?

17. What Harley-Davidson apparel do you own?
   a) How would you describe them?

   PROBES:
   • Style?
   • Colors?
   • Features (functional or decorative)?
• Graphics?

18. Where do you purchase Harley clothing?

**PROBES:**

• online, in-store, at motorcycle-related events, at tourist destinations

19. Where do you get your ideas about Harley-Davidson style from?

**PROBES:**

• Store display?
• Employee recommendation?
• Advertised?
• Friend’s suggestion?

20. Do you collect any Harley clothing or related items? (i.e., pins, patches, poker chips, t-shirts)

   a) Why do you purchase collectible items?

21. When do you wear Harley clothing?

**PROBES:**

• Work?
• Non-Harley related activities (i.e., going to the movies, doing out to dinner)?
• Social activities with non-Harley friends?

22. Would you wear non-Harley clothing when you

   a) Hang out with your Harley friends?

   b) Attend a motorcycle related event?

23. Compare your current riding apparel wardrobe to what you wore when you began riding and/or participating in the community.

**PROBES:**

• Have the types of items you purchase changed?
• Has the styling changed?
• Has your purchase frequency changed?

24. How do you feel when you wear HD clothing?

PROBES:

• Why do you like wearing Harley clothing? Is there anything you do not like about it?
• How important is having the newest Harley fashion to you?

25. Do you have any favorite apparel items?

   a) What makes them your favorites?

26. Do you think it is possible or not possible to identify Harley-Davidson people by their style?

   If so, why?

IMAGES OF H-D APPAREL

Interviewer – Now let’s look at some Harley items currently on the market

[Take time to spread them out, in a different order for each respondent]

27. Would you wear any of these apparel items? [Note items selected]

   If so, which ones? Let’s pull the ones you like or want to wear out.

28. Would you not wear any of these apparel items? [Note items selected]

   If so, which ones? Let’s pull the ones you don’t want/wear or like out.

30. [Ask for both liked & disliked] Tell me what you like about these apparel items. (e.g., Fit, Style, Design features)

   a) Tell me what you don’t like about these apparel items.

31. [For styles not chosen] Tell me why you didn’t choose these other styles of apparel items.

   a) Do you like anything about them?
[Ask the following about each grouping – liked, disliked, and not chosen]:

32. Describe the person that you think might wear these apparel items?
   a) What would you think about someone who wore these apparel items?

33. What do you think other members of the Harley community might think about you if you wore these apparel items?

34. What do you think the general public might think about you if they saw you wearing this style of clothing?

35. Are there certain apparel items that you feel should be worn at certain events?

Apparel pictures in general: [Refer to the entire collection shown]

36. [May have already been discussed] How do you feel about Harley graphics? (e.g., skulls, bar & shield logo, #1, eagles) Some are shown in these examples.

37. Do you feel the current products being offered to women by Harley-Davidson accurately represent you?

   PROBES:
   - Is the product/brand consistent with how you see yourself
   - Does the product/brand reflect who you are?

38. Are there any changes to Harley clothing that you would like to see? If so, what are they and why?

HARLEY SUBCULTURE

Interviewer – Let’s talk more about the Harley community and your relationship to it.

39. Do you consider yourself a part of the Harley family or group?
Why or why not? [If clearly not, skip to question # 43]

Do you consider Harley family / community to be synonomous with HOG?

Is there a community outside of HOG?

a) How long would you say you have been a member of the HD family or group?

b) Is being a part of a Harley-Davidson community important to you? Why or why not?

c) Can you describe what led you to link up with the motorcycling community?

d) Did you feel like you went through a process to become a member?

e) Do you feel like an accepted member? Why or why not?

f) Tell me why you see yourself as fitting in to a part of the community?

PROBES:

- Where do you fit in?
- What is your role?

g) How does being a member of the Harley community influence your everyday life?

40. [May have already been discussed] Describe what it means to be a member of the Harley community.

41. What do people in the Harley community have in common?

How do they differ from other riders and non-riders?

42. Do you think that there are certain members of the Harley community that are more or less admired? Why or why not?

43. [Non-group members continue here] Do you think the Harley community is made up of different kinds of people and groups? If so, describe them/explain.

44. Do you feel that people outside the community stereotype Harley riders and people who wear biker symbols? If so, how?

a) Do you agree with those stereotypes or think they are true?
45. Do you ride (as a driver or passenger) with a group, whether you are an HD member or not?

[If no, skip to #47]

a) Which group(s) do you ride with?

b) How often?

c) Have you ever gone on a motorcycle trip or vacation with a group? If so, where?

d) What do you like about riding with a group?

46. Do you belong to any motorcycling clubs or organizations? [If no, skip to question #47]

a) Which ones?

b) Do you consider yourself an active member?

c) How often to you participate in the club or organization-related activities?

d) [May have already been discussed] Do you own any club or organization-related merchandise (e.g., apparel, pins, hats, emblems)

i.) If so, what do you own?

ii.) Why did you buy it?

iii.) When do you wear it? Why?

e) Are there certain apparel items that you feel others should wear to belong in your group?

PROBE [only if not mentioned yet]

- What do women in the club typically wear?

Ending Questions

47. Is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?

48. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
APPENDIX E. CODING GUIDE

1. Harley-Davidson

   A. Brand name, logos, trademarks- For example, Harley-Davidson, HDMC, H-D, Bar and Shield (logo).

   B. Corporate Advertising- Corporate advertising (i.e., HOG magazine, monthly mailers, social media).

   C. Corporate Facilities- For example, H-D museum, factory tours, website.

   D. Dealerships- Franchisees locally positioned throughout the United States & worldwide.

   E. History & Heritage- Associations regarding past and certain noteworthy events in the brand’s history.

   F. Expertise & Credibility- The company’s ability to provide quality products that satisfy customers’ needs & wants (e.g., technological innovation, manufacturing expertise, industry leadership).

   G. Corporate Social Responsibility – The company’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations (e.g., environmental friendliness, community involvement, philanthropy, employee relations).

   H. External Communicators of Corporate Identity- Communication of company identity that is not controlled by the company (e.g., media).

   I. Word-of-mouth Information communicated informally by individuals to individuals (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014).

      i. HD Products

      ii. Non-HD Products

      iii. Travel tips regarding destinations, settings and activities

   J. Brand & Brand Loyalty- “Repeat purchasing behavior that reflects a conscious decision to continue buying the same brand” (Solomon, 2011; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978).

   K. HD Products- Motorcycles (Models: Touring, Sportster, Dyna, Softail), General Merchandise (e.g., apparel, licensed products), HOG Merchandise (e.g., apparel, patches etc. sold exclusively to HOG members), Harley-Davidson financial products (e.g., HD Visa, motorcycle loan financing) Riding Academy.
i. **Utilitarian / pragmatic** - Functionality, usability and performance of the product (e.g., riding or wearing to work).

ii. **Quality** - Consumers’ expectations and perceptions of a product’s structural integrity (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

iii. **Product Design elements, principles & details** Details, or characteristics (i.e., “looks”) of the product (e.g., Graphics, design, zippers, hoods, embellishments, color, packaging).

iv. **Country of origin / Ethnocentrism** - For example, made in the USA.

v. **Product Price** – The financial cost to purchase a product.

vi. **Size/fit** - "A garment harmonizes with the body and that one can move without hindrances" (MacDonald, Kallal, Keiser, & Mullet, 1998).

2. **Competitors** - Non-Harley motorcycle brands/companies, after-market parts & accessories brands/companies, non-Harley apparel brands/companies, non-Harley retailers/stores, online discounters or resellers, swap meets. DMACC (Motorcycle safety course).

   A. **NON HD products** - Motorcycle, financial services, or apparel products that are not manufactured by or distributed by Harley-Davidson.

      i. **Utilitarian / pragmatic** - Functionality, usability, and performance of the product. (e.g., riding or wearing to work).

      ii. **Quality** - Consumers’ expectations and perceptions of a product’s structural integrity (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

      iii. **Product appearance, attributes, & features** Details, or characteristics (i.e., “looks”) of the product (e.g., Graphics, design, zippers, hoods, embellishments, color, packaging).

      iv. **Country of origin / Patriotism** - For example, made in the USA.

      v. **Product Price** – The cost to obtain a product.

      vi. **Size/fit** - "A garment harmonizes with the body and that one can move without hindrances" (MacDonald, Kallal, Keiser, & Mullet, 1998).

   B. **Side bets** - “Barriers (e.g. possessions & social relationships) to leaving the subculture or switching to another brand of motorcycle” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 56).

3. **Identity**
A. **User profile or brand-user image**- “The *stereotypic* image of the generalized user of the brand” (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009, p. 160). (Bullet points are utilized to help coder identify definitions. They are not intended as subcategories).

- May result in a profile or mental image of customers, of actual users, or more aspirational, ideal users (e.g., stereotype).
- May be based on demographic factors (e.g., gender, ages, race, income, marital status) or psychographic factors (e.g., attitudes toward life, careers, possessions).
- May focus on the characteristics of more than one type of individual and center on broader issues in terms of perceptions of the group as a whole.

B. **Role/Role identities**- Socio-cultural expectations and norms regarding patterns of appropriate and inappropriate behavior (i.e., act, dress, speak) of individuals. Expectations for behaviors can be based on an individual’s position in a group, their age, gender, etc. An individual’s many identities that are linked to the different social positions an individual holds within society.

C. **Social identity**- When an individual’s identity is defined by belonging to a group.

D. **Self-definition**- Is a sense of oneself as having permanent qualities. Can be defined by human qualities & characteristics (e.g. tough, sexy, trendy, unconventional) OR defined by recreational activities, occupation, and social positions (e.g., biker, manager, mother).

E. **Normative behaviors**- When an individual engages in behaviors that enhance membership or status within the group. (purposeful behavior).

F. **Myth**- “A story or fable that reflects important values shared by members of a culture and that is used to teach one or more of these values” (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2009, p. 381).

G. **Self Concept / Self Assessment**

   i. **Body cathexis**- “Refers to a person’s feelings about his/[her] body” (Solomon, 2011, p. 192) ALSO parts of the body- e.g., arms, waist, buttocks, breasts.

   ii. **Social comparison**- “How people develop self-knowledge and make social choices based on their comparisons with others” (Richins, 1995).

   iii. **Symbolic consumption**- An individual’s use of products/brands to communicate their identity to others in social interactions.

   iv. **Symbolic meaning**- What a product/brand communicates about the consumer to the consumer and to others.
v. **Material goods as an extension of the self** - When a consumer considers a possession to be a part of their self-identity.

vi. **Self-esteem** - “The extent to which a purchase [or belonging to a group] enhances the worth of a person in his or [her] own eyes” (Pohlman & Mudd, 1973, p. 167) (i.e. confidence).


viii. **Achievement** - The perception that a product, service, [or activity] signifies success or evidence of an achievement to the self and/or others.

H. **Consumers’ Social and organizational citizenship behavior** – Consumer engagement in societal, cultural, or political activities (Hilton, 2007) (i.e., Community involvement, volunteering, volunteering for dealership or HD events).

I. **Appearance** - “That phase of the social transaction which establishes identification of the participants” (Stone, 1965, p. 21).

i. **Dress as an expression of gender** - The idea that clothing can communicate, reproduce, and reinforce gendered identity.

ii. **Appearance labor, performativity, and impression management** - (Bullet points are utilized to help coder identify definitions. They are not intended as subcategories).

- **Performativity** - According to Tyner and Ogle (2009), performativity “explores dress as a form of bodily practice that allows one to manage identity in terms of social appropriateness, or the ways in which dress choices are made and bodily practices are performed in accord with cultural demands or specific social contexts” (p. 19). It is also involves “how one negotiates both conforming and non-conforming appearances within this system and how resistance and accommodation are balanced within this context” (p. 19).

- **Appearance Labor** - “The struggle between competing identities and the perception of a need to make appropriate dress choices” (Sklar & Delong, 2012). (i.e. concerns regarding proper dress in the workplace and how their identity is being portrayed to others). Work-relevant expectations (e.g., professionalism).

- **Impression management** - A process whereby an individual tries to manage what others think of them by engaging in behaviors that portray themselves in a good light.
4. Experiential aspects of consumption:

A. **Cognitive learning**- Acquiring new knowledge & skills. Using creative thinking or problem solving skills.

B. **Challenging**- Concerns & feelings of risk/danger (e.g., death, dying, safety), fear, adventure, and adrenaline rush. Overcoming challenges physically & mentally. Testing personal capabilities.

C. **Sensory aspects**- Sight, sound, touch (i.e., comfort), taste, smell.

D. **Hedonic / emotional aspects**– Feelings of pleasure, fun, excitement, and enjoyment. Opposites- (i.e. Hate).

E. **Socialization / relational aspects**– “Social contexts [activity, environment or setting] and relationships that occur during common consumption as part of a real or imagined community (i.e., subculture, brand community) or to affirm social identity” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 63).
   
i. HD Events or social activities- HD corporate or local dealership sponsored/organized events (e.g., group rides, meetings).
   
ii. Non-Harley sponsored motorcycle groups (clubs) and related events / activities.

iii. “Social relationships that consumers create through consumption” (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014, p. 527) i.e., Cliques..

iv. Meeting and talking with new people with similar interests. Sharing stories about their consumption activities.

v. Building relationships with family, friends, and significant others.

vi. Building relationships with HD employees.


F. **Communitas**- Feelings of camaraderie, belonging, and being supported (i.e., brotherhood/sisterhood).

G. **Relaxation and personal freedom** - “To escape from reality and the responsibilities and routines of real life” (Woodruff, 1985, p. 25), E.g., freedom. Escape from norms & everyday demands. Isolation, time to focus, and mental revitalization. Opposites- (i.e., inability to escape daily demands or relax). Also- hobby, magical.
H. **Flow** - Feelings of total absorption / involvement, deep focus and attention in the consumption activity or experience.

I. **Connection to nature** - “Close interaction with the natural environment” (Loeffler, 2004, p. 538). Feeling a close connection to nature and the elements (e.g., Sun, rain, wind, weather).


K. **Episodic memories** - Experiencing or remembering “events that are personally relevant” (Solomon, 2011, p. 106).
   
i. **Products as memory markers** (mnemonic qualities) - Products act as a retrieval cue and jog memories or evoke thoughts about a prior event. “Dress can be an entry point for personal and private autobiography, a springboard for the narration of personal memories” (Twigg, 2012) (e.g., souvenirs).