This article summarizes qualitative input from right-rider participants in an on-going effort to better understand the therapy and recreation of motorcycle riding with regard to psychology. The particular article focuses on cruiser riders who are male and represent a broad array of life-spans (29-50). The information here is synthesized from rider testimony in prior research as related to core disciplines of psychology including: social psychology, life-span development, cognitive, and personality. The article links a rich description of various aspects of a leisurely motorcycle ride to these core disciplines to serve as a guiding template for future research studies.

From the core qualities of the qualitative interactions with right-riders™, several aspects of the riding experience can be analyzed using general disciplines of psychology. As William James (1904) is recognized for describing the conscious as a flowing stream, the naturalist phenomenological approaches used to capture this baseline understanding demonstrate not only the unique thoughts of riders, but also the undercurrent of interconnectedness of psychological disciplines present in recreational participation. This article is intended to shed light on the riding-experience for clinicians working with riders and set the stage for the necessary research and development required to better understanding recreational therapy, especially with regard to the learning-theory research, PTSD intervention, and well-being goals driving Riding for Right™.

**Social Psychology**

Social psychology seeks to understand group behavior to immediate situations regardless of more stable and consistent personality traits; in other words, it seeks to understand group responses in general to specific events. Kassin and Fein (2008) describe individuals as perceiving subjects and subjects of perception. Rider-S. notes how other commuters perception also contributes to a social community among riders in addition to riders’ natural association with each other while riding. In his words, “You feel like people are looking at you. There might be misconnections. People think you must be a bad ass but when you get to know a rider you know that’s not usually the case. I feel like they stereotype us, though I don’t think most fit that [stereo-type]. Rider-L. provides a reflection of being viewed by outsiders as someone who is an “anti-Christ;” yet goes on to describe his self-perception of riding as a way to love life and being an individual different than how he feels perceived. Such testimony is common in literary authors depiction of struggling between the perceived notions of non-riders, verses their true inner self. In other words, leisure riding may cause social psychological bias: both setting a tone for expected behavior, but also satisfying an inner-desire to be seen in that regard.

Bias seems to create more than a sense of community between riders, but may contribute toward the ultimate experience of uniting as autonomous individuals with mechanized vehicles. The complex dichotomy of the social-perceiver seems to conform to notions that leisure is both an independent and group activity referenced earlier. Observation of the riders highlighted the instant commonality among the riders when encountering situations on the road. Despite the autonomy of the participants, there was instant community and conformity as situational stimulus demanded. In leisure, very few activities allow researchers to understand the autonomous and community relationships of recreation and psychology in non-team settings (Carruther & Hood, 2007). As such, this testimony
provides direction for specific research to better understand the social-psychological stigma of the American motorcycle rider, versus the cognitive-dissonance expressed by riders aware of such stigma, yet still motivated by the incorrect presumptions.

One current trend is to understand riding in a more creative manner by focusing on the expressed motivations (Rand, 2011). Because of the naturalistic approach was used in learning-based coaching, and absent a pre-developed structure for creating a specific theory through a grounded qualitative approach, more emphasis in future investigation should focus on understanding both the perceptions of riders versus non-riders. Such information would provide more descriptive understandings for the social motivations for riding cruisers versus street-bikes: outlaw versus adrenaline junkie, as described by many right-riders. This information can play instrumental in understanding the dynamic multidimensional psychological systems that encompass human psychology.

**Life-Span Development**

The participants contributing to this article range from 29 to 50. However, riding experience was mixed. Several participants were avid riders in their youth. Others felt a calling, or motivation, to learn to ride in their late childhood or early adult years. Ultimately, one can look around at riders in public and see that individuals ride across the life-span.

At this conceptual level, the various references by participants indicate elements of stage theories of leisure participation. Theory of Participation (TOP) identifies stages of participation including awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). Stage models test team and individual activities providing support for this theory (Beaton, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009). Riders often reference a love for the motorcycle, an inability to problem-solve as effectively without riding, and staunch statements about refusing to ever part with a bike. The saturation of comments suggesting levels of attachment and allegiance may provide for more comprehensive understanding of the TOP within a specific population.

The picture presented did not provide a specific understanding of stages of riding. In other words, similar to the development of individuals occurring a multidimensional manner (see Broderick & Blewitt, 2008), the leisurely riding experience seems to not develop according to a specific stage of experience or life-span at this high-level of understanding. This contradicts some theories of leisure, but does not disprove the existence of stages within the experience (see Funk & James, 2001). Because this information is provided from those riding cruisers and not street-bikes, clinicians interacting with clients ought to focus on determining what type of motorcycles is ridden. In other words, assumptions for speed and adrenaline (to date, neither descriptive term have been provided from rider testimony to any level close to what is accepted as saturation for research analysis) are often represented as a common misperception of the riding experience by several riders.

However, it has been noted that age and speed is a common social perception of cruiser-riders versus street/high performance riders. As such, further investigation into the influence of life-span and leisure participation theory is warranted to aid clinicians working with various populations. As one contributor Rider-J. notes, “Street bikes are fast and high performance… [necessary] to get that feeling… of being one with the bike and road. But with a cruiser you get that feeling anytime, at any speed…” This addresses an interesting situation facing clinicians
lacking research support behind the motivations for riding and the therapy-outcomes of healthy riding. As such, clinicians working in recreational therapy may wish to consider the extent of psychological distress a client may possess and educate them toward the outcome possibilities of different types of riding. Further research understanding the core qualities of the riding experience of different bikes is currently underway (e.g., www.riding4right.org). As such, therapeutic recreational experts may wish to help clients recognize their desired psychological well-being with regard to their lifespan influences; ideally, based on the testimony here, the feeling, or desired outcome of riding, might be possible in less high-performance situations of riding.

**Physiological**

Several themes presented through right-rider investigations touch on physiological aspects of riding. The primary redundant theme was increased sensory awareness. From the sounds – both mechanized and external; to the increased demands for visual awareness and attention, a clear area of focus for research could center on the relationship of elements to riding and experiences. This is a common occurrence of flow in therapeutic recreational studies (Rand, 2011; see also Carruthers & Hood, 2007). Unfortunately, likely due to the naturalistic process using in learning settings, little specific analysis can occur on specific elements or awareness. However, some general questions can be raised for future research.

For example, one participant noted the process of breathing while starting a ride. While the cause for such breathing is uncertain, an examination of recent neurological findings suggests a relationship between reduced stress and anxiety based on systematic breathing (see Lawlis, 2009). The visual awareness of conditions was referenced frequently by a few participants as well. Further understanding through structured interviews would be beneficial. Such as research could focus on how visual and spatial rotation of changing stimulus while riding influence the blocking of thought? Or, what relationship exists between the perceived self-reflection described by each participant in relationship to the next psychological theme, cognitive thinking?

Leisure can provide an opportunity for exposure to rural, outdoor, and wildlife settings. Farber and Hall (2007) report significantly higher levels of emotional-positive affect as well as repeated returns to scenic locations in such situations for tourists in certain rural settings. The riders contributing to motorcycle investigations all referenced the motivation to remove themselves from busy urban or suburban roads for leisure. They all referenced the sights, sounds, and outdoor experiences of rural areas as being influential to both the experience and the induced relaxation. Understanding these affects while riding, as in studies conducted on repeated visits to rural sites conducted by Farber and Hall could direct future research into understanding physiological-psychological themes articulated in this study. Moreover, they provide a sound basis for connecting the sport of psychology, namely flow, to the therapy of recreational psychology as will be further argued later in this article.

**Cognitive and affective**

Memory begins with the physiological process of visual sight. When visual images are flashed upon the receptor cells of the eye, the brain processes those images through coding. Conscious processes help individuals link past experiences (memories) with the current sensations of our present awareness (Sternberg, 2008). This process directs attention, thoughts, and perceptions. Moreover, it shares similarities to the general process of this phenomenological investigation.
The mind is defined as being like plastic. The mind, through the creation and pruning of synapses, alters the process through which sensory, memory, thoughts, and experiences are understood and reacted to by the human mind (Broderick & Blewitt, 2008). The mind-processes then alter and affect (emotional) behavior responses to conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorders, anxiety, and stress management (Schwartz, 2002; Lawlis, 2009). As such, the interrelationship between the various core qualities presented makes sense given the interrelationship of biological, physiological, cognitive, and emotional psychology. The riding experiences provide a vivid image of these processes on cognitive and affective psychology.

In other words, riders saturate the descriptions that thoughts stopped as sensory awareness took over. Essentially, the descriptions indicate that various motivators inspire leisurely rides. These motivations, however, become over-taken by the visual and special demands of riding forcing bikers to virtually stop conscious cognitive thinking. In the descriptions, all referenced the feeling (e.g. affective) of becoming one with their machine. Eventually such experience was overtaken by re-emerging albeit it wandering conscious thoughts; arguably a transcendent state often defined as one of seven stages of flow (Decloe, M., Kaczynski, A., & Havitz, M. 2009; see Carruthers & Hood, 2007). In a sense, the physiological influences of the ride gave way to more specific cognitive thoughts and affective behaviors for each rider after blocking the abundance of situational life influences on their conscious minds’.

Problem solving can be compared to critical thinking. Critical thinking is governed by a process for identifying, applying, analyzing, and evaluating a situation (see Bloom, 1984; Ruscio, 2007). Problem solving includes the cognitive process humans apply to handle situations. These strategies relate to the knowledge representation (e.g. schemas) individuals quickly rely on to understand a situation and apply a strategy to increase knowledge or resolve conflict (Sternberg, 2008). Rider testimony provides frequent references to the blocking of mundane thoughts. From this process, they describe psychological outcomes whereby problems were simply resolved. Such resolution is not uncommon in related studies on insight-problem solving (see Stickgold & Walker, 2004). In other words, through a relaxation of mental stressors on various schemas, new possibilities for resolution seemed to effortlessly emerge for the riders. One possible consideration for this occurrence is the application of ACT-R (adaptive control of thought-rationale) theory.

Building on Newell’s (1990) argument that cognitive processes are governed by an overarching process that involves the meshing of various processes, Anderson, Bothell, Byrne, Douglass, Lebier, and Qin (2004) write about their analysis of ACT-R From these perspectives, theory has emerged that the mind works as an integrated albeit governing process of the brain. These cognitive theories rely on available neurological data to operationalize the concepts of preconscious and conscious into cognitive systems. Such a model could explain not only the process of blocking conscious thought and allowing increased levels of sensory perception, but as well as the filtered subconscious processes important to the governing mechanism of the mind (as presented by ACT-R). Further and more specific research and technology is necessary to better understand theoretic cognitive concepts; however, the riders’ testimonies provide interesting information for understanding such psychological processes through leisure.

**Personality**
Personality is defined broadly. Personality includes various traits, motives, abilities and life stories that make each individual unique (Roberts, Harms, Smith, Wood, & Webb, 2006). These constructs, however, are not easily defined; for example, abilities can be measured in aptitude tests, emotional intelligence, cognitive functions, etc. (see Larsen & Prizmic-Larsen, 2006; see also Sternberg, 2008; see also Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009). Essentially, there is not a consistent definition that investigators have captured to defined personality. The general agreement is that while personality might change over-time, personality differs from altering social-psychological behaviors group behaviors or cultural generalities. The act of riding singles out individuals with a leisurely construct. Moreover, personality may best be understood through qualitative procedures (however, there are a handful of personality exams with very high reliability and validity; yet, these exams still often require qualitative expression for clinicians to develop a deeper understanding of the individual personality). Therefore, this section emphasizes aspects of the vast literature of personality to the riding experience.

The difficulty defining personality causes specific measurement of personality to be complex. Multiple-method approaches enable investigators the opportunity to define and measure elements of personality (Eid & Diener, 2006). Elements of personality encompass traits – including mental and emotional, motivations – or needs, desires, and wants, personal and global interpretation of abilities and life experiences. However, the specific elements are vague not only because of the lack of consistent definition but also because of expert disagreements on valid and reliable data-collection and testing procedures.

For example, some elements of testing demonstrate self-report testing provide better data than observer-reported information (see Lucas & Baird, 2006). Conversely, other research indicates that self-reported measures also have inherent flaws depending on what aspect of personality is being tested and measured (Robinson & Neighbors, 2006). Ultimately, while the measurement of personality might seek to define psychological norms that unique individuals use regardless of social or cultural influences, the theory of personality remains malleable as research continues to build toward a more specific understanding of how personality can be generally defined and uniquely measured effectively.

**Personality and leisurely riding**

The vivid descriptions of rider testimony relates to many aspects of personality. Rider-L. describes his earliest childhood memories of riding as a way to be “bigger than my big brother.” Meanwhile, Rider-J. notes his joy for the mechanical aspect of riding having its roots in helping his father restore an old motorcycle which lead him to both his college career and education in mechanical engineering. Moreover, the life long history of riding provided by rider- N. helps to establish not only the life-span of finding joy in riding, but also possible indicators of core values or more constant personality traits than social situational influences upon the motivation to ride. These values tie well with various leisure theories presented throughout this article and should be the subject of more specific and refined research beyond the phenomenological approach in this study. These early childhood relationships are known to impact personality.

These traits arguably paint an internal picture of riders specific to self-esteem. The efficacy required to ride apparent in the early moments of riding when sensory awareness prevails ultimately gives way to cognitive processes and problem-solving. Yet, rider-N. noted, the affects of such experiences really are incomparable to
anything else. In other words, more than simple traits are revealed through these riders’ stories, but a more constant state seems to exist through their shared stories. As such, further research should focus on specific theory development and quantification of riding experiences and self-esteem. Perhaps the ultimate measure of personality is best captured by the words of Rider-N.N. who describes the riding experience “as a dream come true.”

Additional study from the quantitative tradition could further support associations between personality and riding. For example using the various descriptions of rides, measures for self-esteem, positive psychology (or depression), and motivators could be constructed using already established personality index tests. This further links riding and the psychological aspects of leisure such as flow (see Jackson and Eklund, 2002; see also Hood & Carruthers, 2007) to better establish the impacts on self-esteem and continued participation in riding (see Stein, Kimiecik, Daniels, & Jackson, 1995), but requires additional research (Rand, 2011b.). These tests combined with the rich evidence presented qualitative studies could provide clinicians with a more comprehensive understanding about the general, albeit unique, drive influencing clients who motorcycle riders.

Evaluation of the Psychology of Leisurely Riding

Leisure research presents two common approaches to understanding the process of leisurely participation. Clawson and Knetsch’s (1966) present a multi-phase model of recreational experience which is built upon independent stages of anticipation, travel to the site, on-site activity, travel from the site, and recollection. As noted in the participants’ comments, the ride can be broken into dimensions of pre-ride process, early riding process, extended riding processes, and the feeling. However, more information is necessary to build upon this newfound understanding in relationship to aspects both stream of conscious effects of leisure and stage theories. Hood & Carruthers (2007) most specifically call for a renewed investigation at the core-essence: pre-potent experience, and not just the performance common in leisure studies (e.g., flow).

Another common focus of leisure research is capturing the stream of consciousness that occurs during the specific activity (see Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; see also, Hormuth, 1990). Drawing from various heuristic publications, the methodology described for this study established a framework for either approach to be depicted by the participants through various questions. This is currently being undertaken in a comprehensive dissertation (see Rand, 2011c.; see also www.riding4right.org). Even more basic general qualitative research semi-structured approaches could be beneficial based upon the foundation of understanding presented here that reveal the relationship of rider testimony to core disciplines of psychology that have great-gaps which limit clinical intervention at this time. Descriptions of riding provide understand of the leisurely experience in relation to psychological domains; both multi-staged as well as stream of conscious. The stream of consciousness also helps understand the multiple descriptions of immediate problem-resolution strategies while riding.

Participants’ accounts raise present possible questions specifically about affective control theory developed by Heise (1979). This theory (ACT) argues that situational exposure to events influences emotional regulation and has been tested in non-riding activities (Lee & Shafer, 2002). The experience of leisurely riding, however, also raises questions about leisure theories such as the ACT. Psychology has often ventured to capture understanding using stage approaches; but sometimes multidimensional understandings are more comprehensive (see Broderick & Blewitt, 2008; see also Ed & Deiner, 2005). In other words, riding provides a process that mirrors other leisure, but
seems to suggest that opportunity for involvement in the recreation may influence the stages of participation. Furthermore, based on the saturated comments associated with both psychological feeling and value for riding, recent testimony suggests higher level stages are attained very quickly. While this information does not disprove the ACT, the TOP, or other stage-theories of recreational participation, and psychological participation, it presents a different type of regularly available leisure activity that can further add to the theoretic constructs.

Rider’s reflective summaries were rather positive of the leisurely experience. However, many also referenced potentially perilous situations in their individual experiences; yet, this did not diminish their positive emotional reflections of leisurely riding. The riding experience potentially provides researchers with a population encountering both negative and positive situational occurrences in nearly every leisurely event; therefore, this could provide some closure on gaps noted within the ACT investigation (see Lee & Shafer, 2002). A common description, however, seems constant as the value traits describing the drive to be a rider: there are two types of riders – those who have gone down and those that will...

While such investigation does not necessary suggest the ACT theory is incorrect, further investigation of the theory in relationship to riding might provide more accurate understanding of the cognitive and affective influence leisurely riding has over emotion regulation. It may help clinicians better understand the influence of recreation beyond misassumptions that riding is thrill-seeking or economic in motivation (Rand, 2011a). Moreover, understanding the psychological disposition and awareness of riding as a recreation being more extreme than that of hiking might suggest that extreme element of certain sport, such as riding, is not the root-cause but what is necessary to help certain individuals achieve a level of desired therapy through the feeling (Rider-J.). Yet, if that therapy can be delivered through riding, but in a more controlled manner, clinicians would do well by being equipped with much further information.

Saturated comments from the participants suggest that beyond personality, support can be obtained for the sociological aspects of riding as a therapy. Individual feelings of freedom, relaxation, and therapy were used to summarize the feeling resulting from riding experiences. Leisure is commonly associated with the concept, or virtue, of freedom (see Sylvester, 2009). The affective state individual riders associated with the phenomenon were mostly regarded as a sense of recharging, refreshing, therapeutic, and relaxation. Such concepts have been identified in leisurely studies on such topics as post traumatic stress disorder (see Griffin, 2005). Ultimately, there appears to be several psychological domains application to the leisurely riding experience.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to provide active clinicians with a more broad-view of what the phenomenological result of the Right-Rider™ program is providing the field of psychology so clinicians can overcome hurdles and better support their clients. The gaps in literature are substantial, but one aspect is very clear: the literature available in sociological and psychological fields may be inadvertently biased (Clawson, M., & Knetsch, J. 1966; Rand, 2011b). While it is not easy to attract riders for the purpose of study, there is hope (Rand, 2011c.). The continued investigations and articles at www.riding4right.org will update clinicians on findings based on those gaps and qualitative and quantitative testimony from riders, researched by riders, and for the betterment of the riding community.
Presently publication is pending on the “Organic Machine: Strategic Learning for Motorcycle Therapy” which provides an integration of learning-theory, psychology, and well-being built upon concepts of riding. With over 10 million riders and any 1 million seeking psychological assistance a year; this workbook and technical manual will help empower riders and clinicians to better understand the nature of their drive to ride as it relates to their specific psychological distress. Through that process, Riding for Right™ seeks to provide substantial assistance to clinicians fighting syndromes and conditions such as depression, PTSD (Arai, S., Griffin, J., Miatello, A., & Greig, C.; 2008), BPD (Griffin, 2005), and other psychological disorders.

References


Psychology Disciplines and Motorcycle Riding: Where to next?


Psychology Disciplines and Motorcycle Riding: Where to next?


