

Depicting outlaw motorcycle club women using anchored and unanchored research methodologies

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Entry of researchers into a subculture can be fraught with personal and methodological problems resulting in researcher ill health, poor data and corrupt analysis. Based upon the literature a method was developed to avoid these outcomes. The technique was used during a major community psychology intervention requiring a researcher to become deeply immersed into the subculture of Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs (OMCs). We coined the term Insider – Outsider to describe the technique. The technique allowed a complete re-framing of the role of women involved with OMCs. Previous research of women associated with OMCs is scurrilous as the women are defined only by their sexual and economic values to the OMC members. We came to the conclusion that previous research was one of the last bastions of sexist research. Our findings normalised the role of OMC women as, in our methodology, women were actually interviewed, observed and a replicable methodology was used.

Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs (OMCs) have been variously defined by researchers as a deviant group, a subculture, a tribe, and a minority group (e.g., Quinn, 1987; Quinn & Koch, 2003). The OMCs are known by their club names like Hells Angels, Rebels, Gypsy Jokers, Coffin Cheaters and Bandidos. These clubs reject the value set of middle Australia and are governed by their own codes of behaviour. Recent research by Quinn (2001) in America, and Veno (2003) in Australia report OMCs have patriotic ideologies and are defined in terms of extreme masculine concepts such as brotherhood, loyalty and an enforced code of silence.

In an unprecedented move, the president of a major international motorcycle club approached Veno to assist in defusing a serious conflict that had developed between the OMC and the state government and its police. A series of violent events had occurred between OMCs and police over the previous year, and tensions had escalated to such an extent that OMC members were planning violent retaliation against police. As a result of this serious situation, the authors orchestrated a community-wide conflict resolution strategy based on neutralising moral panic initiated by the state. Details other than methodology used during this media based conflict resolution intervention are reported elsewhere (Veno & van den Eynde, 2007). This paper reports on the unique methodology

developed to conduct the community intervention. We coined the term ‘Insider – Outsider’ anchored research methodology to describe the technique developed.

We also report on unintended and surprising consequences of utilising this methodology. For amongst the drama and danger of the ethnographic field work in a cultural setting of extreme masculinities, the researchers came across perhaps one of the last bastions of unbridled sexist research.

Designing the Research Methodology

Similar to Miller (2004) who worked with refugee communities, and Scheper-Hughes (2004) who researched the underworld of organ trafficking, we realised traditional sole researcher roles were not suitable for use in the current study. Traditional research roles were limiting and perhaps dangerous in this highly volatile setting. Consequently attention was turned to develop a methodology which would

- (i) produce outcomes based on social justice, non-violence and peace making,¹
- (ii) be culturally appropriate for the extreme masculine and secretive culture of OMCs,
- (iii) maintain an anchored research methodology technique, steeped in research, rigid in data collection, and provide the means to record the

- immersion of the researcher, and
 (iv) maintain the value base of the professional researchers.

We began our search for methodology in the 'space between' the major social science disciplines – i.e., with an interdisciplinary methodology. We were guided by recent scholarly conversations (e.g., Newell, 2000; Nowotny, 2003) summarized by Smelser (2003) who stated "if we are to understand context, we are forced to be interdisciplinary" (p. 653). This necessity drew us into considering methodologies encompassing anthropology, sociology, psychology, and to recent social evaluation work²

For example, our attention was drawn to the early traditions of anthropology established by Malinowski (1922), who presented an argument that researchers in foreign cultures need to emphasize their role as 'participants' rather than as 'observers'. Malinowski and subsequent researchers using ethnographic exemplars enabled anthropologists and other social scientists to discard distortions of cultural values being studied by viewing the researched through the researchers' values of western, anglo, masculine, 'rightness' of behaviour and thought. More recently, in the community psychology field, Maton (1993) concurs, to an extent, as he suggests research that is not a culturally anchored methodology often results in

...weak, inconsistent, or unimportant research findings. At worst, findings from such research strengthens negative stereotypes about subcultures, reinforce victim blaming, and contributes to the development of continuation of social policies that negatively impact on subcultural groups or populations.
 (p. 748)

We reasoned that a methodology encompassing ethnography and participant observation would enhance our cultural understandings, as we predicted our experiences would be embedded in a 'foreign culture'. We believed we would be culturally challenged at all levels by this foreign culture.

Snow, Benford, and Anderson (1986) suggest numerous roles for ethnographers. One role suggested was that of a 'controlled sceptic'.

This terminology was used to describe the role for ethnographers studying a proselytizing Buddhist movement where "... the researcher acted as if he were a naïve, curious, and moderately willing but sceptical member who needed to be coaxed and instructed each step of the way" (p. 382). Another ethnographic role discussed by Snow et al. (1986) is that of the 'credentialed expert' where the researcher worked as an activist, and become so immersed in the setting that the researchers life was taken over by activities as an activist in a disarmament organization (p. 385). However, either of these ethnographic roles were not a realistic option for Venno to utilise in the setting. In OMC culture he could not role play - deception would be dangerous, as well as unethical. Venno had to be 'honest' and 'staunch' as these are some core values of the OMC culture. Adler, Adler and Rochford (1986) reinforced this perception by Venno as they persuasively argue that in ethnographic research roles, in general, "role playing and using deceptive strategies does not constitute 'good faith' " (p. 371).

Tewksbury (2001, 2002) concurs with the ethical imperative for ethnographic researchers to be 'true members' of the subculture to achieve culturally valid results. He conducted research in gay bathhouses and recorded sexual activity, ritual, negotiation of anonymous sexual interactions, and the environmental features of the bath houses that facilitate different sexual activities. By full participation, he gained access to the secretive and hidden social setting of gay bathhouses; he achieved special permissions, knowledge of rites-of passage, filtering procedures, ceremonies and gatekeeping processes. Tewksbury (2001) claims ethnographic investigators must fully immerse in the culture being studied and this requires full participation as a member. He goes on to state that researchers achieving full membership is particularly important in criminal and/or deviant social settings, not only to achieve deeper knowledge, but also to increase validity. He warns that "the possibilities of skewed interpretations may be especially true when the subculture being investigated is a stigmatized, or hidden, population and/or a population that is built around 'deviant' activities" (Tewksbury, 2001, p. 8).

A further refinement to our methodology came from Miller (2004) who worked with refugees and produced a compelling argument for the need to reject notions of the neutral observer, and work towards, and earn, “an authentic interpersonal relationship” (p. 220) with participants, built on authentic trust and respect. So, with guidance from these colleagues who have experience in participative ethnographic methods, we took heed, and as a result, Veno eased into the OMC world, taking on the role as the anthropological ‘inside ethnographer’ (Kanuha, 2000; Messerschmidt, 1981) gaining acceptance from OMC members, and establishing close, authentic relationships with key OMC members (Miller, 2004). Veno developed an emic-stance, i.e., a subjective, informed, influential and powerful standpoint rich in new ethnographic knowledge of OMC culture (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990).

The decision ‘to walk a mile in OMC shoes’ was not taken lightly – a great deal of attention was taken of colleagues’ experiences and recommendations on how to conduct deep participation and immersion in the field. Colleagues warned of a series of costs involved in deep participation ethnography – these are noted below.

Cautions for ‘The-Insider’

Working alone as an insider – researcher, Marquart (2001) warned of the emotional cost to researchers utilising deep participatory research methodology. His research setting was in a prison and the participative role was enacted by being ostensibly employed as a prison guard. Marquart reported that “the participative or outside-inside role is emotionally and physically taxing because the researcher, in any scene or setting, must in essence wear ‘two hats’ ” (Marquart, 2001, p. 40) – in this case the guard, and the insider-researcher. He cites instances where these dual roles meant he felt compromised as he often obtained ‘guilty knowledge’ (Marquart, 2001, p. 44), and often witnessed many illegalities but he ‘did not see them’. His reaction was “to block or neutralize the moral predicament of seeing ‘too much’, I kept quiet and simply observed” (p. 44). Marquart (2001) succinctly reports on the heavy emotional toll on himself as he conducted this intense research methodology.

VanderStaay (2005) also reports on the

dangers of deep participatory techniques. For his research, he actively engaged with a drug dealing society which was culturally foreign to the researcher. He befriended a young teenage cocaine dealer, and became involved with his family. His stated goal was to “acquire empathy for local ways of acting and feeling” (p. 399). VanderStaay became a ‘big brother’ to the young drug dealer, but the young man ended up in jail for murdering his mother’s friend. The research project was abandoned.

As with Marquart (2001) above, VanderStaay (2005) was ‘haunted’ by the participant’s demise. He was guilt ridden, and suffered emotional distress and secondary trauma. He reported he did not have the “capacity to negotiate the emotional trauma and ambiguity of his fieldwork” (VanderStaay, 2005, p. 400). He experienced stress and trauma at every stage of his fieldwork, which obscured his “focus on the concerns and goals that first led me to initiate the study while inhibiting my capacity to make sound judgements in difficult circumstances” (VanderStaay, 2005, p. 402).

These warnings from high participatory researchers were of crucial importance in devising our methodology. They not only discuss ongoing emotional trauma; they also report emotional responses of the researcher which caused them to lose focus and lose sight of the goals of the research (Marquart, 2001; VanderStaay, 2005).

Of course, weaknesses of ethnography (according to classical psychological methodologists) are well documented. Tewksbury (2001) warns against losing analytical perspective through the use of such deep immersion techniques. Maton (1993) argues that by using ethnographic methodologies without other corroborating evidence “researchers personal and cultural biases may lead to inaccurate ‘translations’ of a subjective culture” (p. 749). To transcend these concerns, Maton corroborated his ethnographic research into religious subcultures with a linked empirical-ethnographic methodology. Whilst this may be possible in some settings where participants are likely to comply with empirical methodologies; we did not have this luxury with the OMCs. Compliance with neither quantitative techniques nor any other technique which would divulge

information about the OMC is “against what we are all about” as Veno was told by a senior office bearer of a major international OMC. Empirical techniques having been ruled out, we had to find other ways to avoid the validity dangers and pitfalls of deep immersion ethnographic techniques.

High emotional costs and the abandoning of research methodology are not often reported, but, in the instance of working with OMCs, we believed these researchers were reporting highly salient findings. As well, we needed to devise a technique which provided at least some checks and balances to the insider-researcher’s ethnographic data. Hence, we needed to devise a methodology to avoid psychological harm to the insider-researcher, to alleviate the ramifications on the researchers’ analytical perspective, and to devise a research procedure which provided some degree of methodological rigor.

We hypothesised that the disadvantages of deep participation and ethnographic techniques might be offset by designing a research team for this setting. That is, could the problems Marquart (2001) VanderStaay (2005) and others encountered be magnified because they were working solo and thus, neutralised or at least minimised by working in a team setting?

Constructing a Research Team

The academic literature is rich and stimulating where researchers report their immersion and deep participation into cultural settings very different from their own, by collaborating with colleagues to form teams. There are several variations of such research teams, each with different aims and purposes.

Brodsky and Faryal (2006) refer to the technique they developed for a team as ‘constructing bridges’ to enable entry into other cultures. These authors formed a team to research the culture of Afghan women who resisted oppression during the Soviet invasion, the subsequent Taliban rule, and finally, the USA coalition’s bombing and invasion of Afghanistan. The insider-researcher was an Afghan woman, whose roles included key informant, translator and collaborator. The outsider-researcher was a non-Afghan woman academic, with rudimentary Dari language

skills. The insider and outsider researchers worked together on data collection and rudimentary data analysis. This fascinating ethnography provided us with hints about using two researchers in the OMC setting - one as an imbedded ‘Insider’, and a complementary role for the other as an ‘Outsider’. Similar to Brodsky and Faryal (2006), only the Insider (i.e., Veno) had permissions, access to OMC culture, and credibility with OMC leadership. Van den Eynde, like Brodsky, is a female academic. Within the OMC research setting, the parallels to Brodsky and Faryal (2006) were powerful in shaping our methodology.

Another variation of the role of Outsider came from Bartunek and Louis (1996) who formed teams consisting of outsider academic fieldworkers and insider community members, who jointly worked together in taking action to manage, improve or solve their problems in the community. Bartunek and Louis (1996) strongly recommend that the Insider-Outsider research teams are most advantageous when composed of members of “complementary dissimilarity” (pp. 17-18). The authors, Veno and van den Eynde qualify as ‘dissimilar’ on grounds of religion, gender, class origins and amount of experience in the OMC setting. Bartunek and Louis (1996) state “...the more diverse the experience histories of the individuals composing a research team, especially in terms of their relationship to the setting, the more diverse should be their perspectives on and potential interpretations of any particular observed event there” (p. 17-18). Consequently, it appeared van den Eynde would be an ideal ‘Outsider’ as she had no exposure to OMC culture while Veno was an ideal Insider with his access and long term exposure to OMCs.

Affirmation for our proposed team model came from research literature in the program evaluation field (e.g., Hurley, van Eyk & Baum, 2002). Using evaluators language, insider evaluators are defined as people who are involved with the implementation or outcomes of the program, have intimate knowledge of the organisation, culture, norms and key contacts, whereas; outside evaluators are external to the goals and outcomes of the program, bring a fresh view to the situation, and have a mandate to raise sensitive issues, and the ability to critique the insider ethnographer. Van den Eynde took on the

role of the external researcher with an anthropological etic-stance characterized by deeper levels of objectivity, distance, and removed from the subject matter or project (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). This inside-ethnographer/outside-researcher team allowed Venó to cross into the OMC world with a degree of confidence with respect to not 'going native' and having a colleague to whom he was responsible for the production of data, refinement and targeting of research questions, and most importantly critiquing and debriefing.

Insider-Outsider Methodology

Venó, as the Insider moved into the OMC culture and over time took on many of the attributes of the OMC culture. Similarly, Wolf (1991) a graduate anthropology student, immersed into OMC culture and noted "I watched my own identity change as the result of experiences I had on my own as a biker and those I shared with Rebel club members" (p. 216). He went on to describe that he needed to keep track of himself and be cognisant of how he had changed as a result of being drawn into the club (The Rebels) and drifting away from 'the establishment'.

At an operational level, Venó as the Insider reported back to van den Eynde as the Outsider almost daily. Van den Eynde as the Outsider took extensive field notes from all conversations. Conversations between Insider and Outsider were often digitally recorded for later reference. 'Complementary dissimilarity' (Bartunek & Louis, 1996) was a powerful dynamic in these sessions. That is, as Venó immersed deeper into the culture, van den Eynde would question, argue, probe, disagree, debate, and/or listen to ensure her understanding of the culture, and the ongoing events. These sessions also provided a debriefing function for both the Insider, and the Outsider.

Feedback loops were constant, and bi-directional. As in action research, the Outsider held sessions with the Insider where goals were set, actions were planned, results were analysed, and later the goals were again revisited and reset. This kept the project on track with clear goals and outcomes to work towards. The Outsider was constantly

researching and collecting data, and feeding back the preliminary analysis to the Insider – allowing informed decisions to be made, and enabled planning to be conducted with solid supporting evidence. For example, as we were trying to neutralize a moral panic, newspaper reports were collected and analysed, and transcripts from television news reports were collected. This media analysis allowed us to determine which media mode was most effective in slowing the moral panic, and critically, we could determine when the OMC spokesman was successful in taking control of how the media was representing OMC culture. This research and analysis was a critical function of the success of the community intervention.

Whilst Venó, in his role of Insider, immersed deeply into the OMC culture, van den Eynde maintained her role as objective, distanced and watchful. Horowitz (1986) detailed how she maintained her role as 'lady reporter' and an outsider, and resisted any attempts from USA street gang members to re-negotiate her role to an 'insider'. In this Outsider's case, no approach was made to renegotiate her role – this was a culture of extreme masculinity, and as a consequence there was no way van den Eynde would be approached to come closer to the OMCs. Very early in the research project, the OMC leadership spoke to van den Eynde privately and checked if she could handle their swearing and cussing, and checked she was not overly offended with 'substance use'. At this conversation, the OMC leadership told her she 'was under OMC protection'. When she replied that she never wanted to be in a position where she needed protection from anyone, she was told 'you need protection'. No further clarification or negotiation was possible!

The Outsider made no attempt to fit-in with the OMC culture – this was not her role, and most definitely was her preference. In this environment of extreme masculinity, she neither swore, nor drank alcohol, nor used drugs. She never rode a Harley Davidson, nor asked for a ride. She did not go to OMC club houses, and never approached an OMC member. In fact she became an 'invisible person' when around OMCs, and certainly in the shadows when OMCs' 'business' was happening. But she was working hard - seriously listening, intensely

observing and gathering ‘deep data’ Upon reflection, one wonders how successful this role would have been if the Outsider was a man – would the same dynamics be successful?

Outcomes

As noted previously, Veno’s immersion into OMC culture was primarily to enable working with members of the OMC to develop culturally appropriate conflict resolution strategies. This was achieved and is reported elsewhere (Veno & van den Eynde, 2007). Meanwhile, this deep participation in OMC culture meant Veno was being drawn into all facets of biker life, including biker social life, biker ‘business’, biker family life and coming into contact with all kinds of groups who loosely associate with motorcycle clubs.

The strategy was effective but so was the technique. Veno was able to maintain a reasonable continuity to his non OMC life and whilst there were significant challenges experienced to his identity similar to Wolf (1991); he maintained an overall ability to interact with academic environments and social settings. Admittedly, he did move towards regarding the world much more as an OMC member. For example, he became completely unintimidated by positional authority.

While attending community psychology events he felt much more comfortable arriving early and ‘hanging out’ at Harley Heaven, trying to get his mind space able to deal with the major culture shift being experienced. Old friends and colleagues were shocked to see him light up a cigarette during one Community Psychology Professional Development Activity as he had quit twenty years previously and only taken up smoking and other ‘undesirable habits’ since living the OMC lifestyle. Notwithstanding these peccadillos, the research relationship was strong and anchored by the Outsider to keep him on track with the job at hand.

This Insider role allowed Veno a gradual introduction to the women who associate with OMCs – for example family members (i.e., wives, girlfriends, partners, children, mothers), business associates to the OMC (i.e., waitresses, strippers, madams of the local

brothel) and women who liked to ‘hang out’ with the men from the clubs. This was an enlightening and unintended consequence of deep participation, as Veno as an Insider, found the reality of the women who associate with OMCs incongruent with the reports in the academic literature. These inconsistencies were reported to van den Eynde and she targeted key women to speak with and set other data collection tasks for Veno to collect data about the women who are associated with OMCs.

Profane Methodology: Politics, Self Advancement and the Illusion of Scientific Method in the Study of Biker Women.

Fatal flaws exist in previous research into women who associate with OMCs. A primary concern is that all the research was conducted by male researchers (Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990; Montgomery, 1976; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Watson, 1980; Wolf, 1991). As well, the methodologies employed by these researchers are vague and hazy. Most of the research was focussed on male members of the motorcycle club (e.g., Quinn, 1987). The authors of these previous studies were not particularly interested in the associated women except when discussing men’s activities related to club sexual rituals, earning of merit badges, and the economic survival of the men or clubs. One exception is Hopper and Moore (1990) who specifically focused on women associated with outlaw clubs. These researchers engaged in a crude form of participant observation and conducted unsystematic interviews with club members and their female associates over seventeen years, in four states within the USA. Unfortunately, no account was given of the number of women interviewed, the critical demographic information of the participants, or details of the settings in which the women were observed.

Similarly vague methods of participant observation and interviews were conducted by Montgomery (1976) in Canada over 2 years, and Watson (1980) in USA over a three year time frame. Hopper’s (1983) research methodology was unclear other than stating he had studied motorcycle clubs for the previous ten years with his friend, the former president of an OMC. Quinn and Koch (2003) make

elusive statements claiming they had thirty years of “intermittent interactions with bikers” (p. 282).

The concern with this earlier research is not only related to the loosely stated methods, but more critically, to the concomitant validity of the research results. All of the aforementioned research on women associates of OMC members has vaguely stated methodologies and unstated participant demographics. Yet, without exception; each research report still makes clear statements, analyses and firm conclusions about the women who associate with OMCs. Only Watson (1980) made any attempt to address the weak methodology issues when he bravely stated “I must admit that my interviews with biker women were limited least my intentions were misinterpreted” (p. 42). Notwithstanding this admission of little contact with women, much of his paper continued to report on women in this setting in considerable detail and with authority.

Whilst their affiliations may have afforded these previous researchers greater access to the male culture of OMCs, their gender excluded entrance into most of the women’s world (Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990; Montgomery, 1976; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Watson, 1980; Wolf, 1991). A clear example of this point occurred when the Insider in this current study participated in a weekend ‘run’ organised by an OMC which was open to family members and the public biker community. Approximately 100 bikers (as well as media cars, media helicopters and numerous police escorts – motorbikes, marked and unmarked cars) rode from pub to pub through a picturesque historical rural area. At each pub stop, the men congregated at the pub, drinking, eating snacks, and forming primarily male discussion groups. Interested village people tended to collect at a distance, watch the bikers, admire the impressive show of Harley Davidson’s, and take photographs. Police, after tending to their video surveillance machinery, retreated to eat lunch and take breaks in discreet eateries, and wait for the next stage of the bikers ride.

At each village, the women who were riding with the bikers tended not to congregate

with the men around the pub - women had their own business to attend to and male researchers are not privy to it. For example, the women’s rest rooms were a hive of activity, as were the local antique shops. The women tended to wander through the village in small groups searching for trinkets and souvenirs for their children and family who were not on the runs. Some women searched for the police contingent so they could take photographs. These events occurred far from the so-called ‘centre of activity’, i.e., at the pubs where the men were. The depth of information about women’s participation in biker sociality gained from these informal conversations is not available to male researchers – this is women’s business.

We argue it is audacious of male researchers to claim validity of their data from weak research methodologies, unstated participant demographics and a lack of access to women’s settings and informal conversations (see Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990; Montgomery, 1976; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Watson, 1980; Wolf, 1991). Unfortunately, the relevant academic literature relevant to OMC culture provides shocking information based on such techniques. In light of these shortcomings, the following discussion reports on the current available research on women who are associated with OMCs – deeply flawed as it is.

The existing academic literature reports that most women associated with OMCs come from dysfunctional family backgrounds where many suffered abuse as children, and their alcoholic parents had separated (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 376). They were generally “from lower class families in which the status of the female is not remarkably different from that they currently enjoy” (Watson, 1980, p. 42). Many women believed “they deserved to be treated as people of little worth” (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 378), and consequently displayed low self concepts (Watson, 1980). The research claims that the combination of a dysfunctional family environment as children, and the low status afforded to women in lower class families meant for the women that “their family background had prepared them for subservience” (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p.

378). The result of this alleged acquiescence is that “biker women were completely dominated and controlled” (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 383). Further, Watson (1980) reports that “many are mothers of illegitimate children before they resort to bikers and may view themselves as fallen women who have little to lose in terms of respectability” (p. 42).

The above research chronicles women’s preparation for complete domination by the biker men. Astonishingly, the male researchers report that “the women attracted to such a scene are predictably tough and hard-bitten themselves. Not all are unattractive, but most display signs of premature aging typical of lower class and deviant lifestyles” (Watson, 1980, p. 42). Biker women were not interested in brand name clothes and fashions, were politically conservative (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 380), and similarly to their men, worshipped the Harley Davidson motorcycle (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 369). Importantly, at no stage is any evidence provided which supports any of these salacious claims other than retrospective “quotes”.

The consensus seems to be that “bikers treat women as objects of contempt” (Watson, 1980, p. 38). Claims are made that bikers are not capable of sustaining relationships with women, are unable to demonstrate or express love for women and children, refer to women in derogatory terms and are tolerated as a necessary nuisance (Watson, 1980, pp. 41-42). Women are owned by the bikers, and branded or labelled as belonging to a man on the women’s riding jackets (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 371). Not only are the women ‘owned’ by the biker, women are chattels who can be sold to the highest bidder (Hopper & Moore, 1990, pp. 371-2), or sold for a packet of cigarettes (Montgomery, 1976).

However, biker women are not portrayed by the researchers as idle women, as “all work to keep their mate and his motorcycle” (Watson, 1980, p. 42), and “all turned their salary over to their old man on payday” (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 375). These authors claim biker women are money makers who are expected to be engaged in economic pursuits for their individual man, and sometimes for the entire club’s benefit

(Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 374).

Some had ‘straight’ jobs as secretaries, factory workers and sales persons (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 375), but it is claimed many biker members pressure their women into prostitution (Hopper & Moore, 1990; Quinn, 2001; Watson, 1980), or work in nightclubs as topless and nude dancers – under close scrutiny of the biker men to ensure the women were not keeping money on the side and/or to ensure they were not being exploited by the bar owners (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 375). Indeed, Watson claims that “some outlaws live off the income of several women and, in this sense, are dependent on them but only in the sense that a pimp is dependent on his string of girls” (Watson, 1980, p. 46). According to this research, clearly the “average biker woman was expected to be economically productive” (Hopper & Moore, 1990, p. 381) and she performs a critical role in relation to the club’s and individual members’ financial status.

Other than focusing on women as ‘money makers’, the research defines women in relation to their sexual role in the clubs. In this literature, the women who associate with outlaw motorcycle clubs are categorised into three groups – mamas, sheep, and old ladies. A mama is a “promiscuous girl who is willing to ‘pull a train’ or have sex with all members of the gang. The term is used only for girls who regularly associate with a club” (Hopper, 1983, p. 61). A ‘sheep’ is defined by her sexual role in the club. A sheep is a new woman who is bought to the club by an initiate. All members have sex with the sheep as part of the new members’ initiation ceremony (Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990).

Ol’ ladies refer to the more or less permanent partners of the biker men. Whilst the term is a North Americanism used to describe one’s spouse by working class men of the 1960’s – 1980’s, in the hands of previous researchers, the term becomes pejorative. Ol’ ladies are said to be ‘hands off’ for other members but this can change at any time with sole power or ownership residing in the men’s hands.

Continuing with the focus on women and sexual rituals in the clubs, previous authors

provide detailed reports of how club members earn merit badges, or 'wings', by performing particular sexual activities with women (Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990; Montgomery, 1976), e.g., specific badges (called Red Wings) are awarded to club members "who perform cunnilingus on a menstruating woman ... performed before a group of onlooking members" (Montgomery, 1976, pp. 339-40). Further, there are many reports of notorious 'gang-bangs' (pack rapes as we know the term here in Australia), and women being penalised for breaching 'biker rules' by being made to 'pull a train' (i.e., have sex with all members of the club who are interested in participating) (Hopper & Moore, 1990).

In summation, the previous male researchers have reported that women who associate with biker men are largely from dysfunctional working class families, whose upbringing prepares them for domination in their relationships with biker men (Hopper & Moore, 1990). They are tough in character, mostly unattractive and show signs of premature aging in appearance (Watson, 1980). Their roles in the clubs are as objects used for club sexual rituals, and they are required to perform work tasks which bring economic rewards to the man or OMC (Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990). The women are portrayed as powerless pawns, submissive and meek, who are bullied into demeaning roles within the male domain of OMCs.

The research reported above from the current academic literature, presents a drastically different picture of women who associate with OMCs, than that noted by Veno in his role of Insider as guided by van den Eynde as the Outsider. It is true, like previous researchers, Veno could not participate and access the women's world. However his deep participation into the extreme masculinities of the OMC world did provide him with the **same** access as the previous researchers and extensive social contact with women who associate with OMCs. However, the Insider-Outsider technique itself served to powerfully shape the research as he was guided by van den Eynde's values and gender differences to

his. The results of this procedure will be reported in detail elsewhere. However, presented below is a brief summary of these rich data.

The I-O method is still profane in the depiction of women who associate with OMC members as it does disempower women, i.e., the technique still reflects a man's view of what women say. The results could be very different, again, if a woman researcher utilised feminist research methodologies designed to elicit women's voices and views. It is a hope of the current authors that a woman researcher will pursue this research to present a credible picture of the role of women who associate with OMCs.

Stories From Women Who are Associated with OMCs Using Insider-Outsider Methodology

Normally at this juncture in an article, authors would now begin to address the previous literature, using their new data to accept or reject the past knowledges and arguments, with the aim of working up new knowledges. Upon reflection, this paper will not 'talk to' the previous literature in any great depth – we argue that trying to address the previous literature is fraught, on two grounds. Firstly, on methodological and sexist grounds we have discarded much of the previous literature. Secondly, we felt that if we addressed the previous literature, we will be allowing the sexist literature to run our agenda – this would only add insult to the women from the OMC culture. Simply, we believe we need to start afresh.

Consequently, we present some short stories of the women who Veno, as the Insider, interviewed. These include indepth and intimate conversations with family members of OMCs, business women who are an integral part of OMC life (e.g., Sam the stripper, and Veronica the manager of a strip business), and a rare report from a self proclaimed 'bikie-slut' – Grandma.

Little analysis has been done with this data. The data is deliberately left in its raw state because the authors recognise the data is 'incomplete' – i.e., this is material about women who are associates of OMCs, gained by the (male) Insider. We realise that much

detail, and other knowledges are likely to be gained from 'women talking to women', and then analysed through a women's-lens.

However, we do present these stories as examples of powerful women in their own cultural setting.³

Veronica

Veronica is the manager of Richo's – a strip club located directly across from Parliament House. For several months, Veno worked out of Richo's back room as an office during the course of the main research. As such, he came to know staff reasonably well. One striking example of women who associate with OMCs was Veronica. Veronica commenced working as a performer (i.e., as stripper and a pole dancer) at Richo's five years previously. When Veno met her, she was the Manager. Richo has the reputation of being the kindest and most gentle nightclub owner in the city. He tries to get the women who work for him to resolve their personal issues and strongly supports their obtaining training and education to further their career prospects prior to when they age past the point that they are employable as strippers. Veronica had taken advantage of these opportunities, for when Veno met her; she was in her third year at university studying Psychology and Business. Veronica was stunning in her intellect and her beauty – she was accomplished, urbane and confident. Part of her job was to manage the OMC members when they attended the premises. She said it was easy work, and her prime management technique was to 'flatter the male ego'. The only real problems in respect to OMCs were times of interclub wars and intoxication from 'whizz' (methamphetamines). The solutions were formulized for Veronica - she used the OMC club structure to intervene, if any intervention was necessary. She had the personal telephone numbers of all office bearers of OMCs and would simply telephone the Clubs' President if one of his members was behaving badly. She most definitely felt that OMC members were quite easy to manage.

Sam the stripper

Strippers, stripper enterprise managers, prostitutes and brothel madams all indicate without exception that working 'a bkie

function' is much more preferable to working a 'suits party'. The consensus is that the bikies are much better behaved and much more respectful of the women than the intoxicated 'suits'. Veno wanted to find out the details of this relationship, and was directed to talk to 'Sam the stripper'. Veno interviewed her where she wished to be interviewed- at the nightclub where she worked. He arrived at the specified time with his tape recorder, and he was of course dressed appropriately for the occasion. He asked for her and was told she was working behind the bar serving drinks. The interview was a difficult one as she was naked except for a pair of cowboy boots and a fake gun and holster. In spite of the setting, he was able to ascertain that she did not work at a particular OMC club as her brothers both were members of a rival OMC and they would have been 'overzealous' in their defence of her should any problem occur. As Veno eased into the interview environment, he sought her story about her life, her occupation in providing voyeuristic sex to OMCs, and her relationship with OMCs more generally. She was guarded in her responses and Veno felt the 'iron curtain of women's business' drop between him and Samantha. It became patently obvious that she wasn't going to tell a male researcher what he wanted to know about women and the OMCs. Clearly this is a job for a female researcher - preferably a feminist as Samantha defined herself as a feminist.

Grandma

There are also a very few women who are 'groupies' or as the previous researchers would call them 'mamas'. They have strong allegiances to the club and for one reason or another are keen to be identified as 'belonging' to the club. One particular woman who stood out in Veno's mind was a grandmother – with a difference. She had a club tattoo which she happily showed Veno and the President of an OMC by hiking up her skirt, pulling down her panties to reveal a 15 cm tattoo of a dagger and the OMC colours tattooed on her upper thigh and hip. As this was done in a five star city hotel, the incident was striking due to the context! Veno had a further opportunity to interview this woman. She had recently moved from interstate and had moved to her new

residence specifically to be near the OMC. She had left her husband, children and grandchildren based in a small rural town in Victoria and said her family unanimously agreed that “I am a bikie slut.” She went on to say that she couldn’t explain it, but, she was simply overwhelmingly attracted to the OMC and had literally “given up her life to be with the club”. Veno suspected party drugs may have been part of her motivation to be near the club. When he put this to her, she replied “I can get drugs at any club or many, many other places. That’s definitely not the reason. It’s more like the club gives me a cause and a meaning in life. I feel like I am a part of something now”. Veno came across only two such women in his many years of studying OMCs and the behaviour is highly unusual in the OMC context. Nevertheless, such women do exist and they have a fascinating story to tell.

Family members

By far and away, however, women partners, sisters, mothers, aunties and children, particularly female children are the central meaning of an OMC member’s life. In the vast majority of cases, the children and partners of the OMC members are the reason for their existence as men. The job of the men is to protect the women and children.

The women are fiercely proud to be partners of OMC members. They are aware of the sexual proclivities and goings on at the clubhouse and are not distressed by the situation. Most believe that their men are no more likely to cheat on them than other men. The women partners seemed to particularly enjoy the scheduled ‘runs’ that the men went on. This was seen as a time when they could have their own space and do their own thing. The same attitude was held by the women about the long hours spent at the clubhouse by the men. The women enjoyed their freedom.

Many women partners and family members held a wide variety of jobs and professions including public service jobs, childcare duties, lawyers, medical technicians, graphic designers and a variety of other middle class and some factory occupations. Many had achieved significant levels of education and training. In some cases, the men were the child

minders and the women were the primary source of income. No biker women (OI’ Ladies) Veno came across worked as a stripper or prostitute. The women generally earned their own money and most generally, the money was family money, where the earnings of both the man and the woman were pooled and used as the total family budget.

The main complaint by the women was the police harassment that they experienced as family members of OMC members. A second was distress experienced during times of war between the differing clubs of the OMCs. In one notable example, the women and children of one club were taken to several ‘safe houses’. The location of one of the safe houses was leaked to the opposite club and the women had to leave urgently. As the women left, laser dots from gun sights were shone on them by persons unknown. The women were livid. Later, as they drove through town to another safe house, the woman who had leaked the information was discovered. The women pulled the car over and gave ‘the dog’ or in North American terminology ‘the rat’ a severe flogging. The women can be very violent and seem to accept violence as a viable means to ‘payback’, or as a means to punish others for their misdemeanours. A deeper analysis of this acceptance of violence would be a fascinating exercise – much could be learnt about the justification of violence, and the rituals and rules surrounding punishment etc.

Whilst Veno, in his Insider role gained many new insights into the women who associate with OMCs, a deeper exploration of these women’s lives and experiences would be illuminating. For example, how do the women negotiate their lives and the lives of their children whilst their men and their cultural lifestyle are under threat from the state and the police?

The next narrative is a remarkable recording of intimate events in OMC family life. It is worthy of inclusion as it provides rich knowledge of this culture, provides many pointers to further research, and begs the answer to many other questions.

Mothers and sisters and daughters

One particular OMC member wanted Veno to meet with his mother. His club

nickname was Terrible (“Why?” Veno asked another member of the OMC. “Because he is f...n terrible” was the response). At 35 years of age, Terrible had a long history of convictions for assault and possession of narcotics. Veno was at a bikie function with him on the night we were to meet his “Mum” as he called her. The function was to end at 9:30 pm but; it had dragged on until nearly 11:00 pm. Terrible came over to Veno in the middle of seven people and said “Hey, Arthur, its time to go.” “Can’t we put it off for another night?”, Veno said as he was feeling tired and had some unfinished business to attend to with the crowd gathered around him. Terrible’s eyes narrowed and his heavily tattooed arms flexed as he said directly to Veno “What, you don’t want to meet my Mum?” We departed immediately for Terrible’s apartment which was located in a notorious brothel. His Mum had already gained entry and was waiting for us.

It became apparent why Terrible had wanted me to meet his Mum. She was a nurse and her former husband (Terrible’s father) was a senior school administrator. After exchanging pleasantries, Veno asked Terrible to go down to the pub and get him some Tasmanian beer. This was done as it was obvious that Terrible’s Mum wanted to speak to Veno directly about Terrible.

Upon Terrible’s departure, she said “Arthur, all I really want to know is what happened to my little guy. He was so sweet and loving and then something happened to him when he went to his first school. He was never the same after that.” She had brought along three large notebooks full of memorabilia and pictures from Terrible’s life.

It seems that Mum had recently asked Terrible to write down what he saw as having ‘gone wrong’ with him. His sister was a lawyer; his brother was an ambulance driver and an ex-rugby star. When Terrible got the request from his Mum, he worked on it for months and finally produced a letter which his Mum wanted me to read, and to comment upon. The letter indicated that an incident had occurred in his third grade class in which Terrible believed he had killed a child. He claimed that he then split into two characters –

one character was benevolent, the other whom he called ‘The Punisher’ emerged whenever situations became threatening for the ‘dominant persona’. The Punisher was mean and vicious.

Terrible re-entered the room as Veno finished reading the letter and started to address the issues with Terrible’s Mum. After only moments of conversation, both were crying profusely, Terrible made amazing admissions, including a ‘need’ for sex up to 13 times a day, etc. Later in the evening ‘Mum’ tearfully admitted she was very proud of him, but, she just wished he could rid himself of the pain that caused his aggression and his profuse drug use.

Terrible’s sister came by at about 1:30 am to pick up her Mum. After speaking with his sister at some length, it became clear that they were as two apples from the same tree. One apple happened to fall on the outlaw side of the fence (Terrible) and the other on the law side of the fence (his prominent lawyer sister). There were several other meetings with Mums and families which could be discussed here, but; hopefully the point is taken. The families are not, necessarily or even mostly dysfunctional. Much could be learned by spending time with Terrible’s remarkable mother and his sister, and listening to their stories. Once again, this is the realm of the female researcher.

Finally, daughters are a special case, indeed. On her first day of high school, the OMC daughter can expect to be taken to school via Harley Davidson with several members of the OMC.⁴ She will dramatically be dropped off by ‘Dad and a few of his mates’ just so that the boys in school get the clear picture – “mess with my daughter and your arse is grass”. Again, it would be fascinating for a feminist researcher to interview the daughter and perhaps some children at a school which the daughter attended to get a more complete and meaningful picture, and the true story of what it means to be a female child associated with an OMC member. Using the techniques of Insider this was not possible as Veno was immersed into the extreme masculinity of the subculture.

Conclusion

The Insider-Outsider methodology seems effective in preventing many of the problems of deep participation research. Admittedly, there was significant impact on the Insider and it took about 18 months to recover fully from the experience. However, this long recovery was compounded by the fact that the Insider-Outsider technique ended with the completion of the intervention. Events subsequent to the termination of the intervention included the spokesperson for the OMC going missing and presumed dead. Unlike other authors (e.g., VanderStaay, 2005) this did not affect the researchers to the point reported in the literature whereby the data could not be reported. It also did not personally affect either the Insider or Outsider to the point where we could not function effectively at work or at home (see Marquart, 2001). We tentatively conclude from this single case study that the use of the Insider-Outsider methodology is a powerful and effective research methodology which effectively prevents the researcher from 'going native'. Additionally, an unintended consequence of the Insider-Outsider methodology was the researchers 'discovering' of new knowledges because of the immersion and ethnographic techniques employed.

One explanation for the incongruence between the previous literature on women who associate with OMCs and the current research could be related to the concept of mythology construction. According to May (1991) myths are the narration of stories which cement a community (p. 53), and which underpin our moral values (p. 3). Not only do we need to create myths to create our own sense of personal identity; we create a set of myths for others ostensibly to make sense of what we do not understand. That is, we need to construct a set of myths surrounding others to define 'what we are not', therefore defining 'who we are' (pp. 30-31).

Another explanation, perhaps intertwined with May's (1991) notion, is that earlier researchers failed to focus on women's experiences. Similar research practices have occurred in the field of criminology, where women's experiences are often suppressed or distorted. For example, behavioural

explanations for young women who are associated with youth gangs are reported primarily through the interests, values, and behaviours of male gang members. As a consequence, a narrow range of behaviours are attributed to women – more often related to women as sexual toys for men, or as instruments of gang destruction (see Curry, 1998; Deschenes & Esbensen, 1999).

Taking into consideration the criticisms of research on young women gang members, we argue a similar flawed process has occurred with women who affiliate with members of OMCs. This preliminary research suggests a set of myths have been propagated concerning women who are associated with OMCs. These include the myths that OMC women are:

- (i) subservient working class woman,
- (ii) used as objects for club sexual rituals
- (iii) hard bitten, unattractive, and politically conservative, and
- (iv) 'money makers' for biker men, and the club – i.e., the women are either prostitutes, topless barmaids, lap dancers or strippers, who are forced to hand over their money to the club

(See Hopper, 1983; Hopper & Moore, 1990; Montgomery, 1976).

We suggest previous research on women affiliated with OMCs is one of the last bastions of unbridled sexist research. The myths perpetrated by previous authors used deeply flawed methodologies and can be seen as serving two highly political purposes. First, the myth maintains dominance over women by men. It disempowers women and reduces them to sexual 'vassals' or slaves – having no agency. Women's roles were considered only in relation to men's sexual and economic needs, and their own experiences as women with agency are not examined. Secondly, the disempowerment of OMC women amplifies the deviance of OMC men. After all, how can these 'deviant men' be portrayed as partners and fathers to 'normal women'? Were they at all 'normal', they would behave towards women in a 'normal' fashion. In the ongoing conflictual environment between OMCs and the state, these misconceptions and falsehoods

are unhelpful and do not work towards a just and fair society, and a respect for diversity. Rather, the myths amplify the deviance of the whole subculture and further define them as 'Outsiders' (Becker, 1963), 'evil doers' (Cohen, 1980) and deviants.

Rappaport (2000) argues that a central task for community psychologists is to turn tales of terror into tales of joy. We believe that the unintended consequence of the major project of neutralising moral panic generated by the state towards OMCs created fertile ground for such an enterprise. Indeed, the comments by one OMC woman who described the previous research by men about women of the OMC men were "the men that wrote that must be meatheads". Her latest comments indicate that a new narrative has been established for the OMC women. They now have agency, political savvy and have reframed the narratives of themselves. "We did it. We showed them we are real women dealing with real men. I'd much prefer to be living with an OMC member than some dork who is a pawn in the system... we have set the record straight". There are many other subcultures where young researchers can be involved in accomplishing similar objectives and our Insider – Outsider methodology may go some way in facilitating this process.

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Notes

¹This was in the tradition of Community Psychology's value sets of the researchers

²The authors acknowledge that the use of Anthropological data collection techniques are currently a matter of ethical debate in the community psychology profession and the stance we take is likely to be controversial. Given the dearth of literature from community psychology dealing with violent and 'deviant' subcultures, however, we decided to utilize proven techniques from other disciplines.

³Please note, full details of participant recruitment details, participant demographics etc. will be reported elsewhere. In this case, the women's stories mentioned here are used to demonstrate the breadth and depth of women's lives who associate with OMCs. Also the stories show the need to delve

further than the previous sexist and simplistic efforts.

⁴The majority of OMC members and their partners opt to send their children to public school. A few, however, choose to send their children to private schools. Those choosing to send their children to private schools tend to try to keep the Father's and Mother's involvement with an OMC 'below the radar' or invisible. Due to this, the daughter will go to school like her private school peers.

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