

**GENDER AND MOTORCYCLES: A STUDY OF
BIKING CULTURES IN KOLKATA**

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Submitted by
SUKANYA PAL

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
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Abstract

This research has been a venture to investigate the hitherto uncharted domain of the relationship between gender, risk, and motorcycling from a sociological perspective in Kolkata, India. This attempts to methodologically explore the rising distinctive culture of motorcycling in Kolkata. It should be noted that this study deals with those individuals who ride a motorcycle either professionally or passionately. The subjective notion of 'riding passionately' here means motorcyclists who ride motorcycles apart from mundane activities. This study has three main objectives. Firstly, to explore the rituals and significant styles associated with motorcycling only, forming a separate community of its own, resulting in a prominent culture. Secondly, to enquire whether motorcyclists are doing gender while riding a motorcycle and it is expressive of a particular kind of masculinity. Thirdly, it would explore what kind of risk men and women perceive and how they negotiate with those risks. This research has followed mixed methods approach which includes both purposive and snow ball sampling and face to face in-depth interviews with observations to understand the non-verbal behaviour. With semi-structured interview schedule hundred motorcyclists, eighteen women, and eighty-two men were interviewed. Conversations were taped at their suitable locations; pseudonyms were assigned to the interviews to protect their confidentiality.

My findings indicate the distinctive rise of motorcycling culture in Kolkata which includes normative rituals, style, specific vocabulary that is being transmitted from senior to junior motorcyclists. It should be also noted that the whole motorcycling community is bonded by the notion of brotherhood, where they would perform gender in various ways to portray their masculinities in order to be 'the one'. Women in motorcycling are rejecting the traditional prescribed roles of being weak, expressive, emotional, and fragile. They tend to construct and reconstruct the notions of gender activities. However, even if women are at par with the men motorcyclists, still they have to face humiliation and taunting. Risks to my respondents are subjective and heavily gendered. They also report that risks are positive as adventure results in excitement or thrill, enjoyment as well as improvement. This helped them to grow more competently. There are various ways both the men and women negotiate the risk that is been associated with motorcycling. An interesting paradox that heavy technology, often associated with masculinity, is labelled as 'She' by most of the respondents in the research. The entire thesis has been divided into six chapters; I will be summarizing each of the chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rising interest in motorcycles and related activities worldwide. Motorcycle symbolizes independence, freedom, power of easy mobility, youth culture. Grounded on the conviction that women and men are ‘differently wired’ and women’s sphere should be limited to private space as a caregiver. Motorcycling is mainly considered to be a male dominated activity which often causes restrictions for women to pursue. The male domination in motorcycling activities has reinforced the paradigm that vigorous participation in motorcycling activities might wield harm on women and her feminine personality traits. Thus, male motorcyclists also symbolize dominance and masculine power over ‘the others’ because there is a materially and symbolically constructed relationship between men and technology that runs quite deep-rooted both historically and in contemporary societies. Such perceptions on pre-determined social roles and expectations are invisibly embedded in the control mechanism. Example of these control mechanism are family, then schools to universities followed by peer groups, workplaces, and media. These control mechanisms also generate a network of impediments for women motorcyclists and other aspirations associated with motorcycling.

In another context, Cohen has defined subculture, while interpreting skinheads and mod styles as a “compromise solution between two contradictory needs: Don't need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents.... and the need to maintain the parent identification” (Cohen 1927). Hebdige states subcultures itself means that are not privileged forms, “they do not stand outside the reflexive circuitry of production and reproduction which links together, at least on a symbolic level, the separate and fragmented pieces of the social totality” (1979: 86). Subculture expresses forbidden contents such as consciousness of class or any social difference in a forbidden form of anti-mainstream behaviour codes or law breaking. They are mainly as “map of problematic social reality” (ibid). However, Raymond Williams (1961) called the ‘Culture and Society’ debate where the quality of life, the division of labour, and how this mass society was created are all being discussed. As the above definition cultivates it shows culture is an ambiguous concept. The concept of culture is not new rather it has been used for centuries. Therefore deflection of culture is quite evident. Hence, I have addressed this thesis topic as a motorcycling culture but not as a subculture since my target population (motorcyclists) under no circumstances are ‘law breakers’ or ‘anti-mainstream’. It is discussed more distinctively in the chapter culture and motorcycling.

This research seeks to perceive an understanding of those motorcyclists who ride these machines both professionally or passionately, that is, just not riding for mundane activities. There is a rise of a distinct culture with rituals that includes behavioural as well as apparel styles mostly encircling males and these practices seem to boost their masculinity. Therefore women are mostly left out from these practices. Woman's profound alienation from technical abilities and technology is the result for historical and cultural construction of technology being masculine. Today's women motorcyclists continue to break down the constructed gendered barriers and stereotypes. Current generation women motorcycle riders are college graduates, and are more likely to work in a professional or managerial occupation. In addition, women motorcycle riders are safety-conscious and educated about their motorcycles. In spite of the above facts women motorcyclists are still undervalued and their ability is questioned now and then. Nonetheless, women's technical skills are rarely defined as technical because technology is pervasively a masculine cultural expression (Wajcman 1991). Masculinity, according to popular notions, is based on physical toughness and mechanical skills that get particularly strong when this is associated with dirt, loud sound and risk, and all of these are mostly present in any motorcycle activities. Walklate emphasizes that there is "a positive relationship between men and risk taking behaviours, and a negative one for women" (1997: 41). Therefore when women in motorcycling challenges the patriarchal ideologies by breaking down the constructive societal role of being feminine; the conservative notion of femininities shifts from 'pleasure' to 'power', or 'soft' to 'hard' or 'emotions' to 'reasons' which is difficult for the patriarchal society to accept this change.

An ideal rider in patriarchal society is one who voluntarily engages in risk, endangering himself to participate in motorcycling. It is highly necessary to achieve the yardstick of ideal manhood by portraying one's masculinities that dominates the weaker individuals. Motorcyclist tends to take risk while gaining certain opportunities to be more masculine, that otherwise would forego. Men are silently competing among themselves for this opportunity of being an ideal rider/man among the group of other riders. In this essence, when men choose to be less masculine, they are considered on equal grounds with women and often judged as effeminate. With this notion, women participating in motorcycling are often considered a lesbian or labeled as 'man.'

Risk factors are a part of any activity that people do in daily lives especially for motorcycling, because it exposes riders to unknown threats and that can be interpreted as

thrill or excitement. In process of minimizing such threats or risks, motorcyclists often develop series of negotiations and strategies. There are some codes and rituals to be maintained and followed distinctively to achieve perfect control over one's machine. As stated above, the risk adhered to motorcycling makes it a male dominated practice. It is a popular conjecture that while riding women may come across series of experiences regarding vulnerabilities and objectifications. Yet women are breaking the stereotypes and are getting into motorcycling with their own set of strategies and defence mechanisms.

Increasingly, Indian researchers have focused less on this seeming uprising distinctive culture all around the country. This research would look into those perspectives of risk, gender, and the motorcycling culture. This chapter further includes a brief overview of the existing global literature on motorcycling culture, which helped this study to perceive the distinguishing difference between the motorcycling culture in the west and motorcycling culture that is prevalent in Kolkata. The review of literature has also helped me in identifying the objectives of this study. It helped me in identifying not only the cultural aspects of motorcycling and the voluntary risk associated with it, but also in outlining the overall methodological parameters.

In the next section I have theorized the approaches I would be using throughout this study, which has guided this research in analysing as well as interpreting the collected empirical data in a more comprehensive and compact way. The results of this analysis will be presented in the following chapters ending with concluding remarks. Hopefully, this study will encourage more researchers to look critically in this area and reduce the gap in existing contemporary researches associated with gender, risk and motorcycling. It will also help in opening up different approaches and discourses to my best belief.

Relevant Literature

It was quite a difficult task to look for literature on this thesis topic. But through extensive research, I could only come up with very little literature. It is also noted the scholarly literature that I found are mainly western literature and none based on India motorcycling whereabouts. Motorcycling started during Second World War the usage of the military motorcycle was at its peak just to deliver the letter to the army personal posted for days in the battlefield and also to carry men and belongings from one place to the other. But soon after the world war was over these military machines were sold off to the civilians. Even those civilian people who were called for the duty in the war were now jobless after the devastating

war. Some even bought those military motorcycles (on sale) and rode from one café to another just for fun and thus how this motorcycling culture began. This culture was found mostly in western societies after the Second World War as a medium of recreation. Men had no other job to look after as soon as the war was over, therefore the motorcycles that were used during the warfare came to help to overcome the boredom and monotony after the war. Since then there were the rise of motorcycling activities in many western societies.

Objectives of Study

Firstly, I would try to describe the various and distinctive ways how the riders follow certain rituals forming an own community and thus resulting a distinctive motorcycling culture in Kolkata. I would also try to explore what motivates people to pursue an activity which generally is perceived as extremely dangerous, in which one risks life and limb.

Secondly, looking at the components of motorcycling culture I would like to explore whether motorcyclists are doing gender and it is an expressive of a particular kind of masculinity. I would also attempt to observe how women riders are getting included in an activity socially perceived as 'male's'. How women riders are constructing their gender identities in this male dominated motorcycling culture.

Thirdly, I would also like to understand motorcycle rider's perceptions of risk and road safety. I would also like to explore factors influencing risk-taking and the use of protective measures. It would also include whether female riders' construction of notions of risk and danger differs that of male perceptions.

Methodological Parameters

The present study has attempted to use both qualitative (QUAL) as well as quantitative (QUAN) approach to explore the motorcycling culture that is prevalent in Kolkata. The research is mainly an exploratory study on motorcycle riders residing in Kolkata. This study is based on both QUAL and QUAN method utilizing mixed methodology. Mixed methods analysis is a process where a researcher can integrate both statistical as well as thematic data analytic process and technique. The QUAN study is an *outcome-based evaluation* where "the emphasis is on whether a program has met its overall goals, typically measured quantitatively" (Teddlie, Thashakkori: 2008). The QUAL is a *process based evaluation*

where it refers to the process of how the program is executed and how it is presently functioning and operating and is processed qualitatively. Whereas in mixed methods both QUAN and QUAL components are studied separately but in a parallel manner or what Teddlie and Thashakkori calls *parallel mixed design*, which helps the researcher in a more comprehensive way for understanding the topic. Parallel mixed design refers to a process where both the phases (QUAN, QUAL) are studied either in a parallel manner or simultaneously.

Hence in this present study '**Gender and motorcycles: A Study of Biking Cultures in Kolkata**' I have used mixed methods research or what is called the third path (Tylor, Gorard 2004) or the third methodological movement or third research community (Teddlie, Thashakkori 2008) to enhance the credibility of the research findings . It has emerged due to an alternative to the dichotomy of QUAL and QUAN traditions (ibid: 04). Mixed methods research is the type of research in which researcher combines both the elements of QUAL and QUAN research approaches. The approach to mixing methods is mainly because to understand the different but *complementarily* data on the same topic (Creswell 2014, Nagy and Biber 2010). Another very important reason to incorporate this methodological approach is 'triangulation' or more specifically *methods triangulation* (Nagy and Biber 2010). Triangulation enriches and fortifies the research's conclusions which make the empirical research more acceptable. Mixed methods intend to bring together the differing strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of QUAN methods (large sample size, trends, generalization) with those of QUAL methods (small N, details, in depth) (Nagy & Biber 2010). It uses both QUAL and QUAN viewpoint and data collection, analysis for better understanding of the topic. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003:711) defined mixed methods as "a type of research design in which QUAL and QUAN approaches are used in types of question, procedures and for inferences". Amalgamation of multiple methodological perspective and practices, empirical reasoning, and observers in a single research would be best because it would include complexity, rigor, richness and empirical depth to the study (Denzin, Lincoln, 2008:07).

This research study has followed the *partially mixed concurrent dominant* status design. Here QUAL approach has given much more significance because this research focuses on respondent's various personal social experiences. These approaches have been used to gain more holistic and naturalistic understanding of the social environment. These above approaches have focused according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005) on understanding the

phenomenon in their natural habitat or setting. Using this approach in this research adhere to the framework of QUAL methods which includes ontological and epistemological principles. The data used for this research come from 100 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with motorcycle riders both young and old belonging to different social classes riding in Kolkata. 18 of them were women and other men motorcyclists. Additional data were also collected from the informal conversation with many other prominent motorcyclists and many motor-mechanics of Kolkata.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Overview

The major theory that I will be using is *doing gender* by West & Zimmerman (1987), then hegemonic masculinity. I would situate the framework doing gender to understand the role of male and female riders in this field of motorcycling. I would explain how men are 'doing gender' while riding a motorcycle and how women are confronting the hegemonic notions of masculinity. West and Zimmermann's notion of gender is not as a trait, a social role or a societal representation, but rather as an accomplishment. Doing gender is a routine accomplishment embedded into everyday interactions. It is a complex form of socially guided perpetual, interactional and micro political activities that constructs the notions of gender roles. The components of doing gender are: Doing gender is an activity which is accomplished instead of just a role and status, Accountability, Doing gender is situational or contextual and agency

The dominant form of masculinities is *hegemonic masculinity*. In this research, the notion of hegemonic masculinity is incorporated. Hence to discuss this term hegemonic masculinity, it generally refers to the hierarchical interaction between diverse masculinities and the weaker individuals. This current ideology of hegemonic masculinity also describes the position of gender relations in contemporary society which is itself a system or a constructed pattern of mundane life, where masculinity or masculine domination is reproduced socially and culturally through the patterns of interactions. Connell postulated that hegemonic masculinity has four types of relations which are largely hierarchical. They are *dominant, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized* (Connell 2005). In my research, I would refer to hegemonic masculinity as I will show that motorcyclists are in contestation with the fellow motorcycle rider to portray hegemonic masculinity in the above said motorcycling culture.

The significant amounts of academic discussion are being held up on the concept of *risk*. I have mainly used the concept of '*voluntary risk taking*' Walklate (1997) and the theory of

'edgework' (Lyng 1990). Edgework essentially means "skirting the age between safety and danger" (Cockerham 2006:11). The central theme in edgework is negotiating the boundaries between life and death, insanity and sanity, and consciousness and unconsciousness within his study. The three stages of edgework pointed out by Lyng, they are edgework activities, skilled edgeworkers and edgework emotions.

Chapter 3: Culture and Motorcycling

To establish a more generalized sense of motorcycling culture, I would like to refer to the emergence of significant "micro-societies" where people of both young and old age groups share their social experiences related to riding or maintaining motorcycles which are expressed collectively and they accumulate under a network of people, commonly referred as 'brotherhood', who share similar essence of particular ideologies along with the construction of a distinctive lifestyle in a more institutionalised way. This adaptation might be from part-time to full-time depending on the magnitude of their personal and professional inclinations. This culture is mainly learnt or acquired and is reproduced by the juniors by imitating the seniors' motorcyclists. To discuss the main significant features of this culture we need to focus on the following points.

1. Choosing of a motorcycle: choosing of a right motorcycle is very important to the respondents as they tend to trust these machines with their lives. It is largely seen, through participant observations that with riding of a heavy motorcycle an individual emasculate or ridicule the non-metal riders in terms of strength and capability. Riding a superbike or a heavy motorcycle or a higher CC motorcycle portrays masculinities which creates hegemony over the other riders using lesser-abled motorcycles.

2. Appearance: the significant appearances are motorcyclist's possessions or protective gears. These possessions are apparels, helmets, leathers, riding boots or gloves etc. These are very similar to armour. These armours also portray the risk that is been associated with motorcycling.

3. Deportment or behaviour: it is largely found that person riding a non-Indian made superbike, extremely costly has an attitude problem towards people riding less costly motorcycles or only commuters.

4. Jargon or dialect: Jargon is the special vocabulary of unparliamentary or non-standard language that helps to maintain a distinctive identity of the members of the motorcycling

community, creating the differentiation between 'us' and 'them'. It is also found that men motorcyclists have greater access or knowledge to such kind of vocabulary than female motorcyclists.

Pre-ride rituals are basically the series of pre-check of the motorcycle before they ignite their bike for any sort of motorcycling activities. These series of pre-check of the motorcycle, after Goffman I would call them as pre-ride rituals. These pre ride rituals are sacred to almost every motorcyclist because these rituals only confirm the smooth running of the machine they only trust. It is generally learnt mainly by imitating the seniors, by experience or sense of belongingness.

Motorcycle Clubs or establishments are groups, networks, informal association, support group where my 100 motorcyclists belong to. It creates a strong sense of belongingness among members and also provides additional information, services and mutual respect among the motorcyclists. It also has a very strict way of selecting their members. The whole motorcycling community is bonded by the notion of brotherhood, where riders would help the other riders, even unknown in difficult times without any expectation in return. Motorcycle events, gatherings are the breeding grounds where they generate the ideologies of biking brotherhood.

Chapter 4: Gender and Motorcycle

'Doing' or performing gender is a routine accomplishment that is rooted in mundane interaction within individuals, hence masculinity is also performed by riding a motorcycle since to riders riding a motorcycle is simply another daily job that they do regularly.

The components are:

Doing gender is an activity which is accomplished instead of just a role and status.

Respondents have reported that they do gender without giving much of a thought or realizing it; or even without resistance. Gender was something constantly performed in variety of ways. This mainly supports the theory of doing gender according to West and Zimmerman as we do gender because of the structural gendered order.

There are four primary way of accomplishing gender in motorcycling community:

1. *Choosing of the heavy motorcycle.*
2. *By wearing the distinctive appearance,*
3. *Department or behaviour with other less abled motorcyclists or commuters,*
4. *or by using abusive jargon.*

Because of these accomplishments and the motorcyclist's willingness to engage in them without questioning, they seem to bring men motorcyclists closer to what Connell call hegemonic masculinity. They are accomplishing hegemonic masculinity by portraying certain dominant traits as Connell defined as aggressive and/or risk taking behaviour. Hegemonic masculinity is dominant cultural ideal of masculinity that is not always practice by majority of men.

Accountability

They are accountable to the brotherhood or to motorcycle fraternity for performing masculinity. These expectations are presented in this motorcycling culture through the agencies of re-socialization which demands men motorcyclists to be real men. This re-socialization are learnt from the motorcycle fraternity or popularized as brotherhood.

Doing gender is situational or contextual:

Performing masculinity is important in motorcycling. They need to portray being strong, aggressive and risk taking attitude while in front of the motorcycling fraternity or brotherhood. Every motorcyclist is constantly rating himself and is obsessed with restless competition of manhood. Respondents tend to maintain a 'macho' front cover of everything they do. What they would wear, where they go for rides, with whom they tend to accompany, what beer they drink contains a coded gendered language. These performances vary from place to place. They will never follow the same routine or won't perform same while they are in a family holiday.

Thus machines and performing masculinity goes hand in hand, it also creates isolation for few less able bodied motorcyclists. Men are always expected to show certain degree of masculine strength in times of despair. Motorcyclists not being able to perform such masculinities in the biking fraternity or brotherhood are often ridiculed or emasculated. This crisis has been listed under masculinity crisis with empirical evidences (narratives). According to Connell in the book, 'Theorizing masculinities' public masculinities means private femininity, where Jung states "No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact is rather, that masculine men have- carefully guarded and hidden- very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as 'feminine'. A man counts is a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible, just as a woman, at least until recently, considered it unbecoming to be 'mannish'. The repression of feminine traits and inclinations naturally causes these contra-sexual demands accumulate in the unconscious" (1994: 20).

That is, men generally repress him and carefully hide his emotions and the softer side to be a 'real man' or to maintain the hegemony.

Slowly but steadily women are overthrowing the male-dominated 'gendered space' in motorcycling. They are now coming forward and confronting the hegemonic masculinities and trying to establish their identity, which is explained in the next sub-head. The feminine 'sexual character' (Connell 1987) that is been identified as an expressive and masculine 'sexual character' as instrumental is being rejected as well as challenged by women motorcyclists on a daily basis.

Women in motorcycling are rejecting the traditional prescribed roles of being weak, expressive, emotional and fragile. Motorcycling community members often tend to avoid women members until they prove their worth. However even if women are at par with the men riders but still they faces humiliation and taunting related with makeup and tidiness and directions sense. Still women do not take on pre-determined set of behaviour rules in motorcycling rather they construct and reconstruct the notions of gender roles; they are basically a part of the construction process. They either have to be 'one of the boys' or 'social men' to be accepted in such field like wearing complete black with skull pints, lifting up heavy motorcycles after a fall or carry own heavy saddle bags and other luggage while checking into a hotel. They portray what Connell calls masculine sexual character as being aggressive, risk taking, fighting over tussles. They perform this willingly sometimes unwillingly too. Few tend to feminize this sport by various ways too. Apparels are often softened with additional pastels colours, floral motifs and other feminizing touches. Some wore pink jackets. Others wore leather jackets in white, blue or black adorned with floral patterns, butterflies and other decorations such as rhine-stones or fringes that determine them as women attire. Even the helmets they wore are not solid colour but with different floral prints.

I would also like to situate, likely a new terminology as '*riderhood*' than sisterhood or brotherhood. The term sisterhood had been sufficed to explain the feminine fraternity of motorcycling but it would also leave 'the others' so rider-hood would include all.

Gendered machine, A Paradox: As Wacjman states the motorcycle is generally considered as a historical symbol of masculine power and dominance; it is masculine and excludes the women. The paradox is that heavy technology and machine are the products of masculinity yet these machines, here in this research, motorcycle, are regarded as feminine. By riding

heavier motorcycle, riders reinforce masculinities and assign feminine gender and names to their motorcycles. This is because it has a bodily connection or sensation, a strong intimate connection between body and their machines which Mellstrom (2004) calls *anthropomorphization* or Jderu (2013) calls *axis mundi*. As Harper (1987) claims “Gaining the kinaesthetic sense, however, reduces the gap between the subject and the object”. Here the subject is motorcyclists or riders and the object is the motorcycle.

Chapter 5: Risk and Motorcycling

There is a dominant tendency to categorise risk as negative, the notion of fear is associated with the interpretation of risk which is danger and unknown. Insecurity, loss of control over the future or uncertainty is associated with risk taking activities. There is also positivity associated with risk such as adventure results in excitement, enjoyment and also self-improvement. In this section I would like to show, the voluntary risk taking activities though are largely masculine, women on the other hand are also entering this space and extracts pleasure from their voluntary ‘risky activities’. These activities in time also help them to grow more competently in both private and public spaces. Motorcyclists are ready to take risk in order to grow.

I tried to incorporate the framework of edgework in understanding the notion of risk for motorcyclists. Edgework essentially means “skirting the edge between safety and danger”. Lyng suggests “risk taking experience can be understood as a radical form of escape from the institutional routines of contemporary life”. The components are:

Edgework activities: the experience of edgework activity will result in death and injury if the individual is not capable enough to perform the hegemonic masculinity or to meet the challenge. Edgeworkers to perform such activities has to push off the limits both mechanical and physical which are similar to that of motorcyclists when they participate professional in race tracks or go for off-roading narrow trails.

Skilled edgeworkers: they confirm that developments of skills are quite valuable aspect of the experiences. Similarly professional motorcyclists and riders at par are also involved in skilled performance; they tend to work beyond the limit to test their capabilities and eventually to excel or to create a prominent identity in the respective field. In creating an identity by stressing one's limit which includes a set of risk which are sometime fatal.

Edgework emotions: Participating in different kind of edgeworks doesn't mean that all of the edgeworkers can relate to the same sensation or emotions. Although the respondents portrayed similar emotions such as self-satisfaction, self-realisation or what Lyng (1990) says “self-actualization or self-determination”. By surviving life threatening challenges one move to the final phase of experience where fear overcomes the feeling of excitement. In such situation an individual feels capable of negotiating with any threatening situations.

Risk for the unknown is also similar for the male respondents but the parameters are definitely not same. They are mainly worried about theft, buglers and dacoits on the way but not sexual violence. They have a preconceived notion that they can never be sexually violated unlike women. This is mainly because the firm ideals of masculinities, constructs that they cannot be sexually violated. While for women, risk is mainly sexual than theft or burglary but for men it is just the opposite. It has to do it with heteronormativity or masculinities.

Risk Management is an important aspect of riding. The concept of rider code is maintained while riding in a group where the rider would signal the following rider through some hand signals about the dangers ahead of the road such as potholes, road kill or oil spill etc. Women produce safety in many different ways. Some carry weapons as pepper spray, chilli powder, asking male escorts, keeping some special number dialled etc. Similarly women motorcyclists also perform safety measures of various types. They mostly ***pre-book the hotels or homestays*** in order to be safe and secure. They also, even have to ***change their location*** if needed. These different strategies function as social control mechanisms that keep women safe and quite literally in place. Women motorcyclists tend to come up with ***misleading and fake information*** even when they are asked; to limit the further conversation. Another dominant strategy of majority women is ***not riding at night***. Most frequently women motorcyclists engage themselves with very simple strategies which are companionship choices. Majority of 44% ***tend not to go alone or on solo rides***. Only a minority of women felt comfortable in riding solo to places. Few of them tend not to stand, take a break in secluded or isolated places while travelling. The other strategies are women prefer ***carrying weapons*** a sharp object, a knife or some spray like peppermint. Apart from that they need to judge the situation before they speak or act. The most common item that they carry for their safety and self-defence is a mobile phone; which they keep few phone numbers dialled and few of them carry a knife too. Helmet and gloves acts as a weapon too. Gloves have knuckle guards which are very stiff and hard which helps in protecting the knuckle in an accident. If a person is punched wearing those gloves, the respective individual would be badly hurt. The

same goes for helmet too. It is a very common trick to avoid a conversation as stated by few women motorcyclists by ***not understanding their languages***. In time of distress, women motorcyclists prefer not to speak in Hindi or any other languages and they strictly stick to *bengali* only. While been asked repeatedly, they keep on showing through sign languages that they don't understand the respective native's languages. To ensure safety women need to adopt some measure even ***hiding their identity on the ride*** especially when they travel alone. They usually tend to wear balaclavas, a kind of mask which are normally used to protect one from cold, covering almost all of the head and face and leaving the only eyes open. Women generally wear balaclavas inside the helmet, if not for cold but mainly for hiding the length of the hair. The apparels motorcyclists wear happens to be fully covered. Ideally apparels are for safety purpose for both the genders but it helps women to hide their identity too.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study has empirically investigated the rituals, the lifestyle as a whole, the culture that is associated with motorcycling. Nevertheless to study motorcycling culture one cannot overlook the gender issues and risks associated with it. Motorcycling includes men and excludes women because of the socially constructed gender differences that men and women are 'different wired'. That is, the private realm is essentially for women while the public realm predominantly for men. Women in motorcycling are breaking the stereotypes challenging men masculinities which are often hegemonic. By riding a motorcycle men often tend to portray masculinities which otherwise may have overlooked.

In the backdrop of the previous chapters an individual to achieve the ideal manhood, a rider needs to take up risk portraying masculinities and be 'a man' by pushing one's threshold off their limits leading them to be edgeworkers. The empirical evidence I have found through this research shows that bodily differences are largely a social product. Bodily differences are being practiced or exercised on a daily basis since childhood. Individuals perform gender via mundane activities. To motorcyclists riding is again a mundane activity. The majority who ride motorcycle professionally or passionately (riding apart from daily conveyance) use motorcycles for daily conveyance too. Men motorcyclists are doing gender while riding motorcycles and also involve a series of risks and life threats. Risk is no risk to those individuals who are into edgework activities by practicing the same risk day in day out. For Lyng (2005) activities related to edgework are skydiving, motorcycling, bike/car racing, bungee jumping, and even drug users. For them, risk has normalized to such an extent that it

overweighs the notion of risk if compared to the non-edgeworkers. Risks that are taken by edgeworkers are predominantly masculine in nature as men motorcyclists perform masculinity while riding a motorcycle. Now since doing gender is a process thus through this process of performing masculinities an individual tries to adapt being hegemonic to stand out from the crowd, performing certain traits of hegemonic masculinity. The structure of hegemonic masculinity includes those men who stand out from performing only masculinity in relation to motorcycling activities. Men motorcyclists are silently competing among themselves to prove to be the 'ideal rider'. Every motorcyclist is constantly rating himself and is obsessed with the restless competition of manhood. As Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity legitimizes men's dominance on women's subordination, by hegemonic he meant risk-taking, rational, and independent attributes of men. Thus edgeworkers that are the risk-takers are largely hegemonic in nature and they are predominately male. Daily exercise of such hegemonic repetition leads to a series of bodily propositions that are eventually transformed in cultural disposition by ritualization of those activities, which is generic in motorcycling and are distinctively found in motorcycling culture. This notion is being carried forward through generation after generation in this culture by the junior following the seniors. Through this notion of (hegemonic) masculinity is being produced and reproduced which is highly gendered as women are hardly found in such places. For example, women motorcyclists are rarely found or are less in Kolkata motorcycling culture. Out of 100 respondents, only 18 were female rest males, thus proving motorcycling as a highly gendered space. This construction of gendered space is also challenged by women through feminizing the male-dominated activity. Every woman in motorcycling negotiates and re-negotiates their gender identity.

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