

# A Tale of Dirt and Dedication: An Ethnography of Motocross Culture

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# Overview

- Introduction to Motocross
- My focus for the research
- Discussion of risk
- Methods & Settings
- Personal experience
- Thunder Valley National as an example
- Community of risk – “The Moto Family”
- Reasons to ride
- How to handle risk involved
- Women’s roles
- Conclusion

# Introduction to Motocross

- High-risk sport performed on a dirtbike, involving riding multiple laps racing against other riders, on a dirt track that contains technical obstacles such as jumps, rhythm sections, and whoops
- Here's an example:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aw1pVJsnKs>

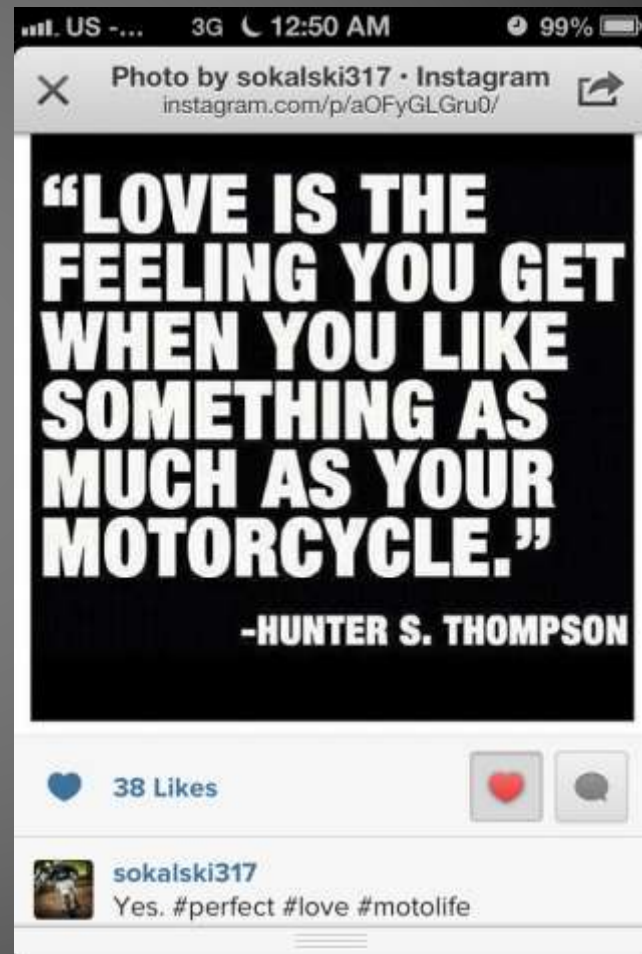
# Focus

- The motivators for riders in a high-risk sport
- Why they take that risk
- What does taking the risk provide for them
- Observations of the track
- Observations of Race Day
- Some personal participation
- What is it like to be a woman rider in a male dominated sport

# Risk

- Sensation seeking
  - But is there more to it than that?
- Emotional balancing
- Helps to deal with interactions between people
- Relieves stress, helps to handle the aspects of life that a person can't control as much

# Feelings Brought from Riding



# Methods

- Observing both a professional & amateur race
- Participant observation
- Online medium – Social Networking
  - Twitter
  - Facebook
- Key informant as entry point
  - Led to snowball method

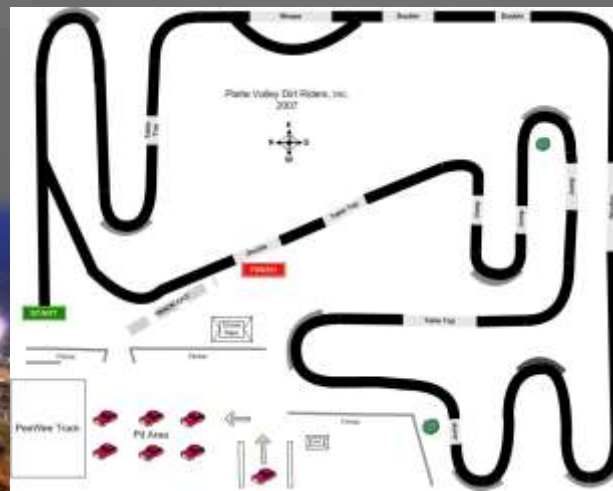
# Tools Used

- Indirect/direct observation
- Questionnaires
- Open-ended interviews
- Visual anthropology



# Settings

- Thunder Valley National – Lakewood, CO
- Amateur race – Mitchell, NE
- Participant observation – Laramie, WY



# Personal Experience

- Have my own dirtbike: Honda XR200R
- Have been riding for about 2 years
- Grown up with a father that rides
  - Now have close friends that ride



# Thunder Valley

- Pro Motocross race in Lakewood, CO
- Round 2 of the 2013 Nationals
- Spent 10 hours there
  - Time in the pits, watching the motos (races), and walking around the venders



# Some Pictures from Thunder Valley



# Thunder Valley





# Thunder Valley



# Thunder Valley



# Community of Risk

## “The Moto Family”

- Those that participate feel a sense of belonging
- The community that forms looks out for each other
- Once a part, always a part
- Strong desire to spend all of their free time riding/racing
- This also takes over their thoughts when they aren't participating
- Never feel more alive than when they are in a situation where they could die

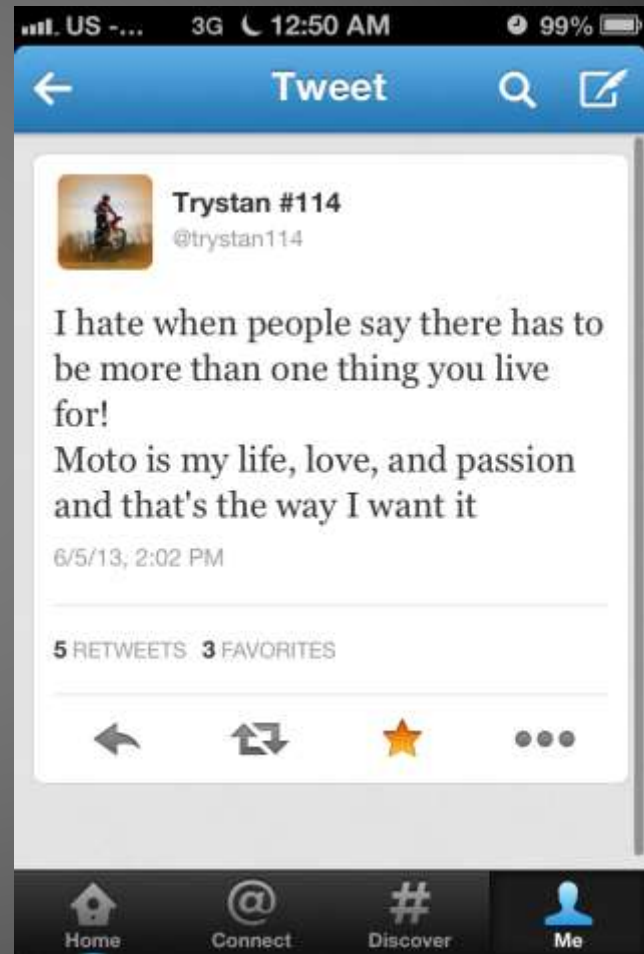


# Riders Know the Risks They Take



# Moto = Life





# Reasons to Ride

- Enjoy the rewards that they get out of it
  - Fun spent with people who also love the sport
  - Relaxation & time away from “real life”
  - Feeling of success when they accomplish their goals
- Stress relief & keeping their emotions level
- Rush from riding

# Reasons in Riders' Words

- “Riding quads is my release and outlet from anything stressful, and I do it because it’s what makes me happy. I have the most fun when I am riding or racing, plus it is a constructive activity in which I can set goals and work towards them. The success after all of the hard work, time, and dedication is the best feeling in the world.” - Mary

# Reasons in Riders' Words

- “It’s hard to explain to people who don’t ride, why we ride. Simply put, for myself, getting on a dirtbike was **life altering**, a love at first fistful of throttle kind of thing. I fell in love with the sport. I don’t really need to be motivated to ride; **riding motivates me to do other things so that I can get back on the bike sooner**. Riding makes me whole, it’s a passion, and without it my life would not be the same.” - Elizabeth

# How to Handle the Risk

- Wear protective equipment
- Don't push beyond the limits of their ability
- Practicing before competing
- Training their bodies physically
- Mentally are aware of the risk involved

# Riders & Risk

- “I understand the risk involved, and do the best I can to protect myself by practicing and wearing the best gear possible. I’m not going to quit doing what I love simply because I can get hurt. Anything could happen to anyone at any time, that’s just part of life, not a reason or excuse to not live each day to the fullest.”  
- Mary



- “The same way I handle the risk of driving a car. I wear protective gear like I would wear a seat belt, and avoid doing unnecessarily dangerous things...Motocross is a dangerous sport. I could easily die, but I never feel more alive than I do when I’m on my bike. It is just part of my way of life.” – Elizabeth
- “When someone close to me is injured or killed, it makes me think about what we sacrifice and risk as motocross athletes, but in the bottom of my heart I love racing and the risk is part of the reward.” - Mary

# Women in Motocross

- Have a women's class, but it's underrepresented & receives a much shorter season, even professionally
- Allowed to race with the men, but rarely make it to the main motos
- Struggle to get the sponsors and recognition needed to be as successful as the men

# Men's Thoughts on Women in MX

- “I think it is awesome as long as they know what they’re doing and they don’t get anyone hurt.” – Jason
- “I don’t have any problem with it, but they need to follow the same rules as the rest.”  
- David

# Women in a Male Dominated Sport

- “It’s definitely challenging at times. I don’t like feeling like we aren’t taken seriously in the sport. The main problem is that we aren’t treated equally. And that frustrates me. We don’t get the same kind of opportunities as male racers and it makes it harder for women to succeed and become well known in the sport.” – Elizabeth
- “We can be just as fast and successful as the men in the sport. When you put the helmet on and line up at the gate, you become a racer, not just a girl.” - Mary

# Conclusion

- The high level of risk does not provide a problem for those participating
- Know risk exists & take precautions to minimize it
- Motocross & it's risks provide more rewards than negatives
- Both women & men would like more equal representation & opportunity for the genders

Questions?

