

ABSTRACT

BUCHAN, JENNIFER L. Under the Helmet and Between the Legs: Images of Women on Motorcycle Magazine Covers from 1937-2011. (Under the direction of committee chair Sinikka Elliott).

Since the enactment of Title IX and the second wave of feminism, many previously male-dominated sports have opened up to women. A huge gap still exists in representation, however, and women are grossly underrepresented as positive role models in these sports. The X-Games, a relatively new annual competition of action sports such as skateboarding, freestyle BMX, snowboarding, and motocross, for example, has categories in which girls and women can compete. Yet the televised version of the X-Games focuses solely on the male participants, excluding coverage of female participants, rendering them invisible (Hardin and Greer 2009; Wolf 2002). When women athletes are represented in the media, sexualized images dominate (Ezzell 2009; Hardin and Greer 2009). Women athletes are often feminized and sexualized for the heterosexual male gaze (Cahn 1993; Ezzell 2009; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Wolf 2002). Girls and women relate to the portrayals of women that are available to them in magazines, television, and movies (Wolf 2002). Modern portrayals of women are still often rife with sexist connotations: one must be young, pretty, and sexually desirable to succeed. If popular culture is like a how-to manual for individuals to follow, then how does the realm of motorcycle media tell women to act? Examining images of femininity in motorcycling is essential to understanding how women are systematically denied access, presented as subordinate to men, or rendered invisible in areas that have traditionally been off limits to them. In order to investigate how women have been portrayed in motorcycle media over time, I conducted a visual content analysis of 50 motorcycle magazine covers depicting women, purposively drawn from a larger sample of 833, spanning the years 1937-

2011. I assess the imagery on these covers using Patricia Hill Collins's theory of controlling images to determine the presence of stereotypical depictions of women that reproduce gender and sexual inequality and reinforce heterosexual male hegemony. I find the presence of three dominant depictions of femininity, two of which represent and reproduce gendered and sexualized controlling images. The third is a more complex image that is potentially counter-hegemonic, yet I contend it still bolsters the gender and patriarchal order. The ubiquity of these images shifts yet persists, as a reflection of social and political changes between 1937 and 2011. I argue that the ways women are depicted on the covers of motorcycle magazines serves to perpetuate a gender hierarchy in which males receive the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2005). This research may apply to women in other sports and leisure activities historically associated with masculinity, such as women in rock and metal music, and women who play full-contact sports such as rugby, lacrosse, and roller derby. Furthermore, this research could also apply to jobs that have been traditionally male dominated: firefighters, police, mechanics, and pilots, to name a few. By recognizing the omnipresence of controlling images, we can begin to question, counter, and offer alternatives to them.

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Under the Helmet and Between the Legs: Images of Women on Motorcycle Magazine
Covers from 1937-2011

by
Jennifer L. Buchan

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the strong women in many fields and sports who dare to break the gender barrier, and participate in traditionally masculine activities. This is especially true of women motorcyclists, and this paper is a token of my admiration for them and their unwavering devotion to the sport they love.

BIOGRAPHY

Transplanted all over the South as a child, Jennifer finally made North Carolina her home in 1999. After working in retail for several years, she decided to finish her Bachelor's Degree at North Carolina State University. After taking one Sociology course, she changed her major to Applied Sociology and graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2009. After taking undergraduate classes with the esteemed faculty there, she was encouraged by Michael Schwalbe, Rick Della Fave, and Brett Clark to pursue a graduate degree at North Carolina State University. Her areas of interest are gender studies, queer theory, violence against women and children, general inequality with a focus on racial issues, global development, and environmental sociology. She resides in Raleigh, NC, with her dog Lucky and her partner Daniela.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	1
Women and Motorcycling	1
Theoretical Framework	3
<i>Hegemony</i>	3
<i>Gender and Sexuality</i>	4
<i>Pornography</i>	6
<i>Controlling Images</i>	6
Data and Methods	7
Analysis	11
Findings	14
<i>The Biker Babe</i>	16
<i>The Ol' Lady</i>	24
<i>The Solo Female Rider</i>	30
Language and Invisibility	38
<i>Language</i>	38
<i>Invisibility</i>	39
Discussion and Conclusion	42
REFERENCES	49

CHAPTER 1

Women and Motorcycling

Since the enactment of Title IX and the second wave of feminism, many previously male-dominated sports have opened up to women. A huge gap still exists in representation, however, and women are grossly underrepresented as positive role models in these sports. The X-Games, a relatively new annual competition of action sports such as skateboarding, freestyle BMX, snowboarding, and motocross, for example, has categories in which girls and women can compete. Yet the televised version of the X-Games focuses solely on the male participants, excluding coverage of female participants, rendering them invisible (Hardin and Greer 2009; Wolf 2002). When women athletes are represented in the media, sexualized images dominate (Ezzell 2009; Hardin and Greer 2009). Women athletes are often feminized and sexualized for the heterosexual male gaze (Cahn 1993; Ezzell 2009; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Wolf 2002). These images might affect how girls and women feel about their bodies and view themselves as potential or actual athletes (Ezzell 2009; Wolf 1991). For example, Daniels (2009) found that sexualized images of athletes led women and girls to self-objectify their bodies, whereas performance athlete images of women in the media positively affected females. The limited portrayal of women as positive role models may discourage girls and women from participating in exciting sports that are traditionally considered masculine.

Girls and women relate to the portrayals of women that are available to them in magazines, television, and movies (Wolf 2002). Modern portrayals of women are still often rife with sexist connotations: one must be young, pretty, and sexually desirable to succeed. If popular culture is like a how-to manual for individuals to follow, then how does the realm of motorcycle media tell women to act? Examining images of femininity in motorcycling is essential to understanding how women are systematically denied access, presented as subordinate to men, or rendered invisible in areas that have traditionally been off limits to them.

In order to investigate how women have been portrayed in motorcycle media over time, I conducted a visual content analysis of 50 motorcycle magazine covers depicting women, purposively drawn from a larger sample of 833, spanning the years 1937-2011. I assess the imagery on these covers using Patricia Hill Collins's theory of controlling images to determine the presence of stereotypical depictions of women that reproduce gender and sexual inequality and reinforce heterosexual male hegemony. I find the presence of three dominant depictions of femininity, two of which represent and reproduce gendered and sexualized controlling images. The third is a more complex image that is potentially counter-hegemonic, yet I contend it still bolsters the gender and patriarchal order. The ubiquity of these images shifts yet persists, as a reflection of social and political changes between 1937 and 2011. I argue that the ways women are depicted on the covers of motorcycle magazines serves to perpetuate a gender hierarchy in which males receive the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2005). This research may apply to women in other sports and leisure activities

historically associated with masculinity, such as women in rock and metal music, and women who play full-contact sports such as rugby, lacrosse, and roller derby. Furthermore, this research could also apply to jobs that have been traditionally male dominated: firefighters, police, mechanics, and pilots, to name a few. By recognizing the omnipresence of controlling images, we can begin to question, counter, and offer alternatives to them.

Theoretical Framework

Hegemony

Hegemony is a crucial concept for analyzing media images. Hegemony involves discourses, ideologies, belief systems, imagery, and norms that dominant groups use to legitimate their privilege and maintain the status quo. Hegemonic groups successfully claim authority, even in the face of opposition and resistance from oppressed groups, by convincing people that what we see and hear is a natural reflection of the way things are supposed to be. Examining gender relations, Raewyn Connell (2005, 77) defines hegemonic masculinity as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” Under the ever-changing conditions of the modern world, women can challenge the dominance of men. However, a backlash often occurs against women gaining more rights and greater autonomy. Media images often perpetuate women’s subordination by using highly sexualized or demeaning images of women (Slawinski 2006; Wolf 2002). Images of this type tell men and women what is “normal” gendered behavior, creating a rulebook on how to act in gender appropriate ways (Arthurs and Grimshaw 1999).

Media images often portray women as weak, emotional, and passive objects, while men are shown to be strong, powerful, logical, reasonable, and agentic (Arthurs and Grimshaw 1999; Goffman 1976; Wolf 2002). The motorcycle magazine covers in my sample portray women in different fashions; yet consistently depict women in ways that maintain men's dominance and women's subordination, with the exception of two images I would consider as outliers.

Gender and Sexuality

Gender can be viewed as a social institution, which includes a conceptualization of gender that emphasizes control over popular thinking and acknowledges its endurance (Martin 2004). The hegemonic attitude toward gender recognizes gender as a binary: masculinity and femininity, with all things associated with masculinity seen as dominant and highly valued in U.S. culture and society (Arthur and Grimshaw 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987). Masculinity is equated with strength, power, and domination. Conversely, femininity is devalued; seen as passive, sensitive, and subservient. This inequality between men and women has persisted over time, despite massive social revolutions for women's rights. West and Zimmerman (1987, 128) note that: "Popular culture abounds with books and magazines that compile idealized depictions of relations between women and men." These idealized depictions take form in the human psyche, and men and women routinely compare themselves to these idealized images. Yet, the differences between masculinity and femininity are largely socially constructed, and are not natural or biological (West and Zimmerman 1987). Once these ideologies become constructed, they take on the appearance

of being normal, natural, and therefore hard to reject (Bartky 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Sexuality is a set of practices intertwined with power relations, and is a key part of the “matrix of domination,” intersecting with class, race, and gender (Collins 2009; Wilkins 2008). Sexuality is a vital component in motorcycle imagery, for both men and women. Men are expected to engage in “girl watching,” or the sexual evaluation of women, usually with other men, asserting heterosexuality and their group’s dominance over women (Quinn 2002). Feminists argue that sexualized media images of women are directed at men and encourage women to look at themselves through the male gaze, normalizing women as sexualized objects (Arthurs and Grimshaw 1999; Davis 1997; Wolf 2002). The motorcycle industry uses hyper-sexualized images of women to sell their products as well as their culture, as can be seen in a wide variety of publications, such as *Biker*, *V-Twin*, and *Easyriders*. The hyper-visibility of sexualized female images implies that women have a place in the realm of motorcycling, albeit an inferior one. These magazines use the concept of helpless women and heavy objects (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987), as women are juxtaposed against hard, heavy steel motorcycles. Motorcycle publications typically depict women half-naked and draped over a bike as ornamentation, rather than as subjects, not using the bike’s power for their pleasure (Pierson 1997). This posturing of deference and dominance harkens back to Goffman’s (1976) “gendered displays” in which highly conventionalized behaviors are structured as two-part displays, with one individual holding dominion over another—

usually the man over the woman. Gendered sexualized images such as this assist in the reproduction of inequality between the sexes.

Pornography

Soft-core pornography has recently crept into many facets of U.S. culture, especially television and movies; motorcycle magazines are no exception (Arthurs and Grimshaw 1999). Biker publications have become more blatantly pornographic in recent years. Beginning in the 1970s and concurrent with the feminist movement, the claim of sexual liberation by pornographers and models has been used to legitimate the use of pornographic images (Pratt 1986). Pratt's (1986) content analysis of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines investigates how these magazines normalize the erotic by placing female models in everyday locations, which makes their sexual availability seem within reach, especially for working-class men. Many motorcycle magazines also employ this trope. The normalization of erotica makes it more mainstream, affecting how men and women view themselves. Pornographic media teaches women that they are second-class citizens in comparison to men (Pratt 1986). Women exist in these magazines as bodies to look at and be admired, not to act as autonomous agents.

Controlling Images

Some of the most compelling images in society are stereotypical images, because they serve a purpose. Their purpose is to create symbolic representations of what different types of people are supposed to be like. Controlling images define what is normal for a certain group, as far as looks, mannerisms, behaviors, and attitudes. Like ideologies,

controlling images serve to mystify the nature of social relations, making inequalities seem natural, normal, and inevitable (Collins 2009). Images of women are ubiquitous, but often serve to reinforce their second-class status. Controlling images are reproduced through schools, news and media outlets, and government agencies, as well as throughout popular culture—which distributes American-made controlling images around the world (Collins 2009). Since controlling images are “hegemonic and taken for granted, they become virtually impossible to escape” (Collins 2009, 78). Only by deconstructing controlling images can we begin to dismantle powerful stereotypes (Ochoa 2009). Collins’s (2009) concept of controlling images can be used to analyze women on the covers of motorcycle magazines. I argue that motorcycle magazines depict women in ways that reflect controlling images to reduce women to a subordinate position in biker culture, all the while making this oppression seem like a natural fact of the social world, revealing the power of hegemony.

Data and Methods

Magazine covers are designed to attract readers to buy the magazine and explore what is inside. Many people, not just readers, are exposed to these covers as they are prominently displayed in grocery stores, gas stations, bookstores, and other retail environments. This broad exposure makes motorcycle magazine covers an ideal place to analyze gendered images. In order to conduct a content analysis of women on motorcycle magazine covers, I subscribed to 13 leading motorcycle magazines from July 2009 to July 2011, creating an archive of 129 total magazines. The magazines I chose for this purposive sample spanned a

variety of different types of motorcycles, from choppers to cruisers, and sport bikes to dirt bikes. I wanted to capture images of women in different segments of the motorcycling population, casting a wide net in my search for images of women on motorcycle magazine covers. I found the magazines by picking up subscription cards from the motorcycle magazines I saw in grocery stores, gas stations, and bookstores in and around Raleigh, North Carolina. After collecting and analyzing the magazines for two years, my collection of recent publications hit a saturation point, that is to say that none of the covers were telling me a different story or providing new information.

In addition to closely examining the covers of recent publications, I also wanted to place them in historical context in order to see whether motorcycle magazines have shifted over time in their depictions of women. Lacking the resources to buy these high priced and highly sought after collector's items, and unable to visit the national motorcycle museums that house many of these publications, I found a website that provided free access to the electronic versions of various motorcycling magazine covers from the 1930s to the early 2000s

(www.dadsvintageads.com 2011). This website has 35 magazine titles and more than 704 covers available to the public. This website is a marketplace and my sample is a snapshot picture, extracted and downloaded from the issues that were available. A limitation of my study is that my sample may not include many of the magazine covers featuring women if they are unavailable due to consumer demand.

I methodically examined each title's offerings and counted 39 images of women on these 704 covers from the 1930s to the 2000s. I printed these 39 covers in order to examine how they portray women and whether and how these portrayals have changed over time. I also examined my own collection of 13 motorcycle publications from 2009-2011, comprising 129 issues, looking for covers that featured women. The magazines in my collection and their annual circulations include: *Sport Rider* (63,044), *Motocross Action* (59,035), *American Motorcyclist* (225,694), *Dirt Rider* (127,983), *Cycle Source* (30,000), *Motorcyclist* (217,848), *V-Twin* (44,590), *The Horse* (250,000), *Women on Wheels* (1,700), *In the Wind* (52,373), *Biker* (38,859), *Easyriders* (109,390), and *Behind Barz* (a free local magazine edited by a female rider; no circulation statistics available). Many of these publications claim a total readership much larger than their circulation, from newsstand sales and from magazines being passed around and shared. Most of the readership, it appears from the databases of the magazines, is comprised of white middle-class males. The vast majority of these covers featured either just the bikes or solo male riders, just as was the case with the historical portion of my sample.

Out of the 129 covers in my recent collection of covers, 42 featured women, about 32 percent, which suggests that women are being somewhat fairly represented on the covers of motorcycle magazines. However, 31 of the 42 covers, or 73 percent, featured women as semi-nude pornographic models draped on, under, or around a bike. Four magazine titles (*Easyriders*, *Biker*, *In the Wind*, and *The Horse*) had scantily clad women posing on bikes on every issue of that magazine, so I captured the essence of these stereotypical images by

making exemplars of these magazines. From those covers featuring women in pornographic poses, I photocopied only one cover from each magazine title. Three of the most pornographic magazines are all owned by one parent company, Paisano Publications. Together, the four magazines can be ranked according to a scale of pornography, with *Easyriders* consisting primarily of “pinup girl” images, *Biker* and *The Horse* showing topless models, and *In the Wind* featuring full female nudity. Many of the magazines I chose for my two-year hard copy sample were chosen via subscription cards from more mainstream publications. I did not realize at the time that several of the magazines I had subscribed to featured so many pornographic images. From my two-year collection, I sampled four pornographic covers depicting women from the four pornographic publications and seven non-pornographic covers from the nine other magazines, representing the total number of times women appeared on the covers of these magazines during the two-year period I subscribed to them. Rather than performing a quantitative analysis, I compiled these images together to qualitatively analyze the messages conveyed by them.

Combining all of the covers from my online source with my print source of 129 covers, I viewed 833 total covers. There are roughly 100 covers per decade, from the 1930s to the 2000’s. Of this total population, 77 covers feature women. As mentioned above, 31 of these 77 covers were pornographic images. To keep the sample from being heavily pornographic and misrepresenting the broader trends in motorcycle magazines’ depictions of women, I used only four of these pornographic images, one from each of the four pornographic magazines to which I erroneously subscribed. Thus, I drew a sample of 50

covers, representing a wide range of magazine types. Recent magazines that were completely left out of the sample were *Dirt Rider*, *Motocross Action*, *Cycle Source*, *Sport Rider*, and *V-Twin*. These magazines were eliminated because none of them ever featured women on their covers; all featured just bikes or bikes being ridden by solo male riders. The invisibility of women in these publications speaks volumes about the powerful social forces that perpetuate inequality and continue to promote motorcycling as an exclusively male dominated pursuit.

Analysis

I systematically coded each of the 50 magazine covers depicting a woman or women for what the depictions said about femininity. I also tried to be attuned to intertwining forces of oppression, including race, gender, class, and sexuality (Collins 2009). I began to find themes within the magazine covers. The theoretical construct that informed my coding is Patricia Hill Collins's concept of "controlling images," which are stereotypical images that are stuck in the public psyche and usually portray women in a negative light (Collins 2009). Controlling images are constructed to "make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustice to appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 2009, 77). I also employ Goffman's analyses of people and situations, as far as depictions of spatial relations and specific actions, from his work in *Gender Advertisements*.

In his analysis of gender advertisements, Goffman (1976) focuses on what ads say about masculinity and femininity through a visual analysis of how women and men are depicted. In my analysis, I use Goffman's (1976) concepts of relative size, the feminine

touch, the ritualization of subordination, licensed withdrawal, and the comparison of women with children. His concept of relative size shows that men are pictured with exaggerated height differences in relation to women, making them seem more important and powerful. The feminine touch tends to show women gently caressing objects, while men's hands are depicted as utilitarian and agentic. The ritualization of subordination illustrates that women are often shown in positions of deference to males; shown at a lower angle, on beds or floors, and using body language that suggests their sexual availability for the male gaze (Goffman 1976). Licensed withdrawal occurs when a female subject is portrayed as disconnected or retreating from her surroundings, making her depend on others for protection in a social situation from which she is disoriented (Goffman 1976). Featuring a woman with her gaze averted is an example of licensed withdrawal (Goffman 1976). Women are often compared with children in advertisements, Goffman observes, suggesting they are unable to take care of themselves and need a man to look after them. These concepts that Goffman developed over 30 years ago repeatedly appeared in my analysis of both recent and historical motorcycle magazine covers.

After systematically coding the motorcycle magazine covers, three themes emerged from the data consistently over time: the "biker babe," the "ol' lady," and the female solo rider. These three themes span a spectrum, from highly sexualized and subservient to more agentic and less sexualized. The "biker babe" image represents women as sexual objects to be used by men. It reinforces the gender hierarchy by depicting women as passive and without agency. The women become mere ornamentation on or near the motorcycle for the

male gaze. The “biker babe” is always depicted as sexually appealing, nearly always white, stereotypically good looking, and young. She is conventionally attractive, thin, curvaceous, and scantily clad, if dressed at all. The “ol’ lady” image depicts a woman relegated to the back of the motorcycle. She is passive and not in control of the vehicle. The “ol’ lady” does not have to be particularly young or conventionally attractive, and is nearly always white. Her placement on the back of the bike suggests that there is a heterosexual relationship between the male driver and female passenger. The couple is a dyad and the female only gains a relationship to the bike through the male, who controls the bike. The female solo rider is a complex image that somewhat counters the “biker babe” and the “ol’ lady”, and can be seen as either a controlling or an empowering image. The woman in this case is in charge of her motorcycle and destination; yet she is also still likely to be young, heteronormatively attractive, white, and middle class. Hair, makeup, jewelry, tanning, fitness, and clothing are markers of her desirability as an object. The woman is made to look appealing and sexually available by smiling, wearing tight-fitting clothing that emphasizes sexualized body parts, and having hair, makeup, and accessories that are inappropriate for riding a motorcycle.

I organized the covers by decade and coded each one according to the controlling image typology discussed above, using yellow flags to signify the “biker babe,” blue flags indicating the “ol’ lady,” and red flags marking the solo female rider. The “biker babe” is usually on or near a bike, but is never shown riding it. Instead she is used to attract potential readers to sell the magazine and the motorcycling lifestyle based presumably on the assumption that men will want her and women will want to be like her. I coded the “ol lady”

image according to the woman's placement relative to the man. Usually she was on the back of the bike, but in some instances she was in another position of relative subordination to the man. I used the solo female rider code when a woman appeared alone riding a motorcycle. Some covers had multiple and conflicting images. For example, a cover with both an "ol' lady" and a "biker babe" would have both a yellow and a blue flag. These double coded images were neither especially prevalent nor problematic to assess.

Findings

Three controlling images—the "biker babe," the "ol' lady," and the solo female rider—appear relatively consistently over the span of my sample. The image of the solo female rider is a complex image but still a controlling image because it suggests female passivity and appeasement to male domination. Historical anxieties, social movements, fashion trends, and new definitions of masculinity and femininity contributed to modifications in the images. Nevertheless, these controlling images are reconstituted in particular social and political contexts, perpetuating the patriarchal dividend. In this way, motorcycle magazine covers can be viewed as a social barometer, illustrating different expectations around femininity and masculinity during different periods of time.

Half of the covers in my sample depict what I call the "biker babe." In contrast to the ubiquity of the "biker babe," I classified just nine of the 50 images in my sample as the "ol' lady" image. The images of both the "biker babe" and the "ol' lady" have consequences; they tell us that women are at their best when they are passive: on their knees, propped up against a man or a motorcycle, or on the back seat of a bike. The image of the solo female rider,

which accounts for about a third of my sample of magazine covers, is a more complex image with the potential to challenge the gender order. Yet more often female solo riders are portrayed on magazine covers as less competent and serious riders than men. The true outliers in my sample are the two portrayals of solo women riders that challenge the gender order. In such cases, the women riders do not wear makeup and wear appropriate riding gear, which would include a leather or textile motorcycle jacket, gloves, boots, and chaps or motorcycle pants.

Before discussing the motorcycle covers in my study, it is important to note that the solo female rider image is an image firmly rooted in history. According to Simmons (2010), women have been riding for as long as men in the United States. Riding the early, small models was a natural transition from a horse or a bicycle, and once women mastered the art of handling one, there was no stopping them (Simmons 2010). In her book *The American Motorcycle Girls: 1900-1950*, Simmons (2010) presents covers from 1917-1929 that feature solo women riders in dresses and hats riding motorcycles with the greatest of ease. The motorcycles of this time were primarily bicycles with small engines, making them lightweight and relatively easy to ride (Simmons 2010). As the industry developed, the bikes began to get larger, heavier, more powerful, and harder to control. The bikes also became more expensive as modes of transportation, pushing women, who historically earn less money than men, out of the leisure pursuit of motorcycling. Stereotypical connotations of women as frail and weak, as well as changing roles in and outside of the domestic realm influenced the development of the sport as a masculine realm, pushing women to the fringes.

In what follows, I select specific covers that serve as exemplars of the controlling images I found within the sample: the “biker babe,” the “ol’ lady,” and the solo female rider. Within each category, I provide a description and assessment of the image, moving from the earliest covers to the most recent, in order to historically contextualize my analysis.

The Biker Babe

About half the covers of my entire sample, from 1937 to 2011, use the “biker babe” imagery. According to this image, women are subordinate to men, who are the real riders, and women should serve to please men. I first encountered the image the “biker babe” on a magazine cover from the 1950s and my sample suggests the persistence of this image over time. The “biker babe” image consists of scantily clad women posing on or near bikes, telling a story of helpless women and heavy objects (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1986).

The June 1953 cover of *Cycle* is the first image in my sample to feature the “biker babe.” This particular cover features a thin model in a swimsuit and high heels posing next to a large motorcycle. The woman wears a halter top and vertically striped swimsuit bottoms as she lightly rests one hand on the throttle of the bike, a perfect illustration of Goffman’s (1976) feminine touch, suggesting deference and submission. The bike faces her and the woman, smiling, looks at the camera. Goffman (1976) says that women’s smile shows subservience, as well as appeasement. The image of a woman smiling suggests her servile nature; that she exists to please and is not deemed a threat. The woman has her hair pulled back in a perfect bouffant and wears a lot of makeup. The bike, a 1950s Velocette, takes up the majority of the page, showing Goffman’s (1976) concept of relative size. The bike, being

much larger than the woman, is seen as the more important subject of the photo—the woman is merely an accompanying object. She is pushed to the right side of the frame, near the swimming pool. Her other hand gently rests on the pool's stair rails. The model wears high-heeled shoes with open toes, not ideal for shifting gears, suggesting her inability to actually ride a motorcycle. Her legs are canted and she looks off-balance, which suggests subservience and passivity (Goffman 1976).

Although a 1950s swimsuit covers much more skin than present day ones, this image marks the beginning in my sample of an important pattern of women being used as ornamentation for the bikes, as well as being presented as sexual objects. This cover also marks the beginning of the mildest end of the pornographic spectrum of the “biker babe”—the pinup figure. The woman is designed as an adornment to make the bike look sexy and attractive to heterosexual men. These types of images also suggest that male riders can obtain these sexually available “biker babes” through their participation in the sport. Although this is the first representation of the “biker babe” image, it becomes increasingly common as time progresses and is ubiquitous today.

The 1960s and 1970s were times of massive social change in the United States. The civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, and the feminist movement coincided as people mobilized in opposition to oppression. I began to see hints of women's liberation on the covers of the magazines, too, even in the “biker babe” controlling image. The July 1966 cover of *Floyd Clymer's Motor Cycle* shows a young woman dressed in white standing next to a large cruiser-style bike parked on the beach. She is dressed in white pants and a white

tank top, with Mary Jane flats—not at all riding attire, yet not as sexualized as other biker babe images. She also grips the handlebars firmly, a change from the feminine touch so prevalent on the biker babe covers. Her short brown hair is styled in a bouffant with curly locks, and she is wearing lots of makeup and smiling broadly as she looks sideways to the left side of the page. The aversion of her eyes and canted angle of her head makes her a less formidable figure; suggesting docility and submissiveness (Goffman 1976). Goffman (1976,62) says of this licensed withdrawal: “turning one’s gaze away from another’s can be seen as withdrawing . . . trust in the source of stimulus seems to be implied.” Presumably, in this case that source is the male photographer or the male viewer. Most of the other covers from the 1960s show women as “biker babes,” although several show solo female riders.

Most of the images in my sample from the 1970s are of the “biker babe,” posing on or near motorcycles, and wearing sexually suggestive clothing. The feminist movement of the 1970s met with some backlash from the biker community, who felt that their exclusively male domain was being threatened (Joans 2001). The February 1976 issue of *Street Chopper* is particularly interesting in that it gives the viewer the impression that a nude model is lying atop a long-forked chopper. However, upon closer examination the viewer realizes that this is not a woman at all. “Tanaya: Life-Like Figure on a Chopper” is actually part of the body of the bike, yet still fits into the “biker babe” controlling image, since she appears to be a woman spread nude atop a bike. Her legs are unfolded and slightly spread so that the rider can sit directly on her pubic region. The gas tanks are her breasts and chest, complete with screw-off gas cap nipples. Her hands are positioned behind her head, stroking the contours of

the bike's frame. The positioning of her hands suggests bondage and helplessness. Again the feminine touch is emphasized with her gentle caress of the heavy steel frame. A fake wig is poised on the mannequin-like head and she faces the rider atop the bike, as one would expect during sexual intercourse. This picture shows the total objectification of the female body: the bike and the model have been molded into one being, to be ridden, dominated, and objectified.

An example of a real woman as a “biker babe” in the 1970s appears on the cover of the November 1974 issue of *Custom Chopper*. A very large custom motorcycle takes up most of the page and a young woman stands over the bike, astride it. This young woman is not smiling and rather seems to be staring at the camera in defiance. She has a serious look on her face, uncharacteristic for models during this time period in my sample (Goffman 1976). She is wearing a bare-midriff-exposing halter-top that also exposes most of her arms, and jeans with a large belt buckle. She strikes an imposing figure, but this cover is yet another variation on the “biker babe” controlling image. She is not in control of the bike or her surroundings. Her defiant demeanor is unusual compared with the affable, demure women prevalent so far in my sample, signaling a change in the way women are being portrayed during the feminist movement. The main twist to the “biker babe” image in the 1970s is that women are not shying away from the male gaze; they are confronting it head on. This cover also advertises a “Full Centerfold Inside” and the reader has to wonder if it is of the bike, the woman, or both. This “biker babe” is designed to make the viewer want to become a consumer to find out what is inside the magazine. It could be speculated that the editors

hoped to entice men to buy this magazine to see the defiant woman on the cover put in her place in the centerfold.

The image of the “biker babe” disappears completely from my sample during the 1980s and 1990s, as does the solo female rider. (Of course, it is important to point out that if my sample included magazines, such as *Easyriders*, during the 1980s, the image of the “biker babe” would persist, given that semi-nude, pinup girls on the covers have long been a defining characteristic of this magazine. I did not include this magazine in my sample because it was not available online.) I will discuss this gap and its implications in my section on invisibility. The next time we encounter the “biker babe” image is in 2010, on the cover of the September-October issue of *Behind Barz*, a North Carolina magazine that is given out at local bike rallies and events. The magazine focuses on local Harley Davidson events. The editor of the magazine is a female rider and local Motor Maid contact that I have made.

Motor Maids is the oldest all-female rider’s organization in the United States, begun in 1940 by a woman rider. The organization’s publications and website fight the negative image of female riders as deviant: not traditionally feminine and potentially lesbians (Cahn 1993). To counter this conception, the organization offers an alternative way for women in the sport to be viewed: as perfect “ladies.” The non-feminist leanings of the organization and Harley culture in general become more obvious as they are played out on the 2010 cover. The cover features three customized, chopped out Harleys parked with two women in bikinis sitting sideways on the seats of the front two bikes. Their bodies are canted: legs, arms, and torsos, suggesting flirtatiousness and passivity. Both women are young, have long blonde

hair and slim but curvaceous, full-busted non-tattooed bodies, fitting the feminine beauty ideal (Wolf 2002). Both women grin at the camera. They definitely do not appear as if they are there to ride; bikinis and high-heeled shoes are not ideal riding attire. Instead, the women appear to be part of the package of the straight male biker lifestyle (Joans 2001). The bikes dominate the cover and the women are pushed to the right side of the frame. The women are much smaller than the bikes, again illustrating the concept of relative size and the importance of the motorcycle in relation to the women. The controlling image of the “biker babe” is thus alive and well in 2010. In fact, it is rather ironic to find this image on the cover of a magazine edited by a member of the leading women’s motorcycling organization.

The exploitation of women has been embraced by outlaw rider culture. Paisano Publications owns three of the most notorious of the magazines that are designed to appeal to this crowd: *Easyriders*, *Biker*, and *In the Wind*. There were four magazines (the aforementioned three plus *The Horse*) that I selected exemplars from because every single cover of every issue in my two-year sample featured degrading, highly sexualized images of “biker babes.” The June 2010 cover of *Biker* depicts a woman with long dark hair in her late twenties wearing heavy makeup. She poses provocatively, head and legs canted, with her rear end barely touching the seat of a dark chopper with the words “Wild Little Bastard” emblazoned on the gas tank. The woman is gently stroking the gas tank with one hand, again showing the soft, powerless caress of the feminine touch. She appears to be giving oral sex to a rose with her mouth and other hand. She licks the rose as a child would lick a lollipop, or as a porn star would perform a close-up “money shot.” The woman wears nothing but a skimpy

leather lace-up bra and a string bikini bottom with stiletto heels. She does not look up at the camera; her head is canted and eyes are averted downward, looking at the rose. She seems removed from her surroundings, psychologically distant, an excellent example of Goffman's (1976) concept of licensed withdrawal. The downward turn of her head makes her appear shorter, and also suggests submissiveness. "For Dissenting Adults Only," the cover warns in small print above the barcode on the lower right hand corner of the page. In large font on this cover are the words "Wild," "Party," and "Freedom." This language lets the viewer know that the exploitation of women comes in a package with other stereotypical biker ideals; it is all supposedly in good fun. I will talk more about the language on these covers and its importance in a moment.

A partner publication of *Biker, In the Wind* is even more misogynistic. The December 2010 cover features two topless females posing on a custom chopper and the headline reads, "A Black Magic Mother-Daughter Act in Iowa? YES!" Both women look young and it is impossible to tell which is the mother or daughter. The dark-haired woman in the passenger seat wears thigh-high black stockings and stiletto heels, and the shaggy blonde woman in the driver's seat wears high-heeled patent leather boots. They both wear lacey black underwear as they embrace each other in a sexually suggestive way atop the elaborately decorated custom motorcycle. The passenger seductively grabs the woman in front of her, pressing her bare breasts into the driver's naked back with her hands caressing the gas tank between the driver's legs. This image could possibly be technically classified as an "ol' lady" image, with a woman on the back of the bike. But I classified it as a "biker babe" image since the women

are not actually riding the bike but rather posing with it. The positioning of these two nearly naked women, who are related, could be read as implying an incestuous relationship; yet, likely the editors intended to convey that they are two randy, sexually available women.

Many iron crosses appear on the chopper the women sit on, and a skull wearing a spiked German helmet is painted on the gas tank, hinting at the racism and discrimination rampant in outlaw biker culture (Joans 2001). Anthropologist Barbara Joans (2001) says of the outlaw biker culture: “Stickers and statements make obvious shows of racism. Then there are all those tattoos of iron crosses and swastikas, pointed helmets and other symbols of Nazi Germany.” These are potent symbols of the homophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and intolerance that prevail in outlaw biker culture. On the top of the page, a banner reads in large print, “Living and Loving the Harley-Davidson Experience,” indicative of this magazine trying to capitalize on selling the outlaw biker lifestyle.

In the Wind is a user-driven content magazine that focuses on Harley rallies and parties, not on the specifics of maintaining and riding a motorcycle. As a result, the magazine is filled with pictures, which highlight rally events and the associated gender relations. Rallies routinely contain blatantly misogynist activities, such as wet T-shirt contests, zucchini runs (in which a woman must run for as far as she can with a zucchini in her vagina), and contests in which a female passenger is slowly driven by her male counterpart toward a hot dog dangling from a long pole (Barrington 1994; Joans 2001). The woman who can deep-throat the most hot dog wins the competition (Joans 2001). The winners do not win prizes, just recognition for their sexual skills among the men present. It is crucial to realize

that these women are active participants in these games and in the lifestyle, revealing the change-resistant hegemonic power of masculinity, which runs so deep it can be invisible. The message of these magazines and of the “biker babe” image in general is clear: if women want to participate in the realm of motorcycling, they must be compliant, sexy, and sexually available.

The Ol’ Lady

The “ol’ lady” image appears in nine of the 50 magazine covers in my sample. Beginning in the 1930s, the “ol’ lady” image is the first controlling image to appear in my sample. In the “ol’ lady” image, women are placed in positions of ritual subordination to men, usually on the back of the bike. A male rider pilots a female passenger and the two are assumed to be in a romantic relationship. The prevalence of the woman on the back of a man’s bike declines over time when the covers are placed in chronological order. None of the images in my magazine archive from 2009 to 2011 contain an “ol’ lady” controlling image, which could be due to the relatively short time period of my recent sample, but may also reflect a changing trend. Compared to the staying power of the image of the “ol’ lady” inside the pages of the motorcycle magazines, it is currently being played down on the covers of the popular motorcycle press. Perhaps due to the increasing prevalence of solo female riders, the ol’ lady image has lost its popularity on the covers.

The October 1937 cover of *Harley Davidson Enthusiast* depicts a male rider and a female passenger dressed exactly the same; the only image in my sample in which a man and

a woman are dressed identically. The man and woman have on the same uniform with matching pants, boots, jackets, shirts with bowties, and pilot's hats. Winged insignia adorns the hats and jackets, although it is illegible. Both the man and the woman are smiling and seem carefree on this cover; he is grinning at the road enjoying driving the bike and she smiles at the camera, suggesting appeasement. Goffman (1976) says that in male-female interaction in modern U.S. society, women smile more and wider than men. A woman's smile is a show of her inferiority, not superiority (Goffman 1976). The woman is not touching the man, as is customary when riding doubled up, which may reflect the sexual norms of the time period. In this pre-WWII era, it was likely inappropriate for men and women to engage in public displays of affection. To the modern viewer, however, the fact that the woman is depicted not holding onto the man could suggest independence on her part. Instead of holding onto her partner, she tightly grasps the handles at the bottom of her seat—known by riders as the “sissy bar.” The back seat of a motorcycle is also known as the “bitch seat.” These terms come to represent symbolically that women belong on the back of a bike, not driving it, and also imply that women who ride on the back are either sissies or domineering bitches who need to be put in their place.

The woman is wearing dark lipstick and eye makeup and her hair is neatly curled and tucked beneath her pilot's cap, suggesting femininity. The man's frame obscures the woman, and he appears larger, signaling his greater social weight—“power, authority, rank, office, renown” (Goffman 1976, 28)—through his relative size to the woman. Although the image appears to innocently show a gender egalitarian couple, the woman is in a position of ritual

subordination to the man, as she has no control over her surroundings. The “ol’ lady” image suggests that women either cannot or do not drive the motorcycles themselves. The photo also suggests that she needs a man to take care of her, to drive her.

Joans (2001) presents an interesting twist to the “ol’ lady” or passenger image: the woman on the backseat is not completely agentless—she has surrendered her power over her own life to the male driver, which takes complete trust. She enjoys riding, but has learned gendered behaviors and thus feels more comfortable on the back of a bike; the thought of riding her own bike scares her (Joans 2001). Many “ol’ lady” passengers are not treated well by their men; they are often used as sources of income and abused mentally, physically, and sexually (Wolf 1991). Yet they are often willing to put up with this mistreatment to enjoy the freedom of the biker lifestyle (Joans 2001). One female passenger Joans (2001, 98) interviewed said that the best times on a bike are worth the bad times: “It’s like someone opens a door and fresh air is rushing through your brain. It’s like I’ve been set free.” The freedom of being on a bike, free in the wind, is a recurring theme in biker culture.

During World War II, the solo female rider predominated on the magazine covers in my sample as many men went off to war, but by the late 1940s and early 1950s, popular media images of women underwent massive changes. June Cleaver became an icon instead of Rosie the Riveter. The boys returned home from war as men, who were supposed to regain their jobs and take charge of their households. Many men returning from the war had become used to action, and some found the excitement they longed for on the open road (Joans 2001). Very few women braved the masculine world of motorcycles during this time period,

although there were always a few (Joans 2001). A woman's place was once again relegated to the home; in spite of any jobs she might have held during the war. Now there were households and children to take care of—both of which women were told demanded a full-time commitment (Joans 2001).

The August 1950 cover of *American Motorcycling* reflects this transition as a family of six poses with the father on the motorcycle. The quote underneath the picture reads, "Champ Headrick and the Family after Bay Meadows National." The father sits on the driver's seat. His helmet and goggles are on his head. He sports a Harley Davidson turtleneck. His youngest daughter sits on his lap, suggesting that she needs to be taken care of by a male role model. The son stands to the left of him, with his father's right arm around his shoulder, signifying a special father-son bond. The wife sits on the back of the motorcycle and the two young girls stand in front of her, obscuring her figure and making her look relatively smaller. The wife's relative size in proportion to the husband illustrates that she is not the important figurehead of the family unit. The girls all have their hair pulled back with ribbons but are wearing pants or overalls instead of dresses or skirts, which is unconventional for the time period. The whole family is smiling; a portrait of white privileged American life in the 1950s. The image conveys the notion, prevalent in this period of time, that the family was expected to go along with whatever endeavor the father wanted to undertake, supporting him without question (Joans 2001). The Headrick family is an obvious symbolic representation of the white male breadwinner family structure. Underneath the picture the

cover reads, “The Greatest Sport in the World,” giving the family further status among their peers not involved in the activity.

The 1960s were an era of sweeping social unrest, but the covers in my sample continued to focus on the cohesion of the family unit and the male breadwinner paradigm. The November 1964 cover of *Floyd Clymer’s Motor Cycle* features a stereotypical white suburban couple on a bike, with the man controlling the bike and the “ol’ lady” on the back. The background set looks like a small town in the Old West, and a man on horseback watches the happy couple whiz past. They both look away from him and the camera, presumably at something more interesting. They are both smiling and laughing. The “ol’ lady” here is young and blonde, wearing a headband, button-up cardigan, plaid pants and tennis shoes—not your usual riding attire. The couple appears to have stepped out of a country club and into the Old West. Their manner of dress suggests that they are young people with a lot of expendable income. This cover attempts to sell the motorcycle lifestyle to a wealthier class of people, much different from the images of outlaw motorcyclists being popularized in films like *The Wild One* (1953) and *Easy Rider* (1969).

The “ol’ lady” image underwent a change in the 1970s. Instead of being relegated to the back seat of the bike, a new trend emerged which put even more distance between women and motorcycles—the sidecar. The July 1976 cover of *Cycle Age* shows two pairs of male-female couples, both featuring the women in sidecars as the solo male riders pilot the bikes. The male riders wear safety helmets, but the women do not, perhaps suggesting that they are not as valuable as the men or not as exposed to danger ensconced in their sidecars.

Another possibility is that the magazine editors did not want to obscure the women's femininity by covering their faces and hairdos with bulky, genderless helmets. The August 1976 cover of *Custom Bike* features an entire family on a bike with a sidecar. A mustachioed man in dark shades pilots the motorcycle, with his eldest son riding on the seat behind him. A blonde woman in sunglasses and a toddler wearing a helmet populate the sidecar. Again, grouping the woman with the younger child shows a lack of power and likens her to a child. The complete removal of the woman from the motorcycle via the sidecar hints at the beginnings of a backlash against feminism in the biking community.

The 1980s heralded in a new pattern of hyper-consumption and new economic policies under President Reagan. The 1980s, known as the "me" decade, were a time for mainstream conservative thought and new traditionalism. This new traditionalism fought vehemently against the gains of the feminist movement and attempted to strip power from newly liberated women. The "ol' lady" image resurged in the 1980s as the backlash against feminism emerged.

The July 1980 issue of *Motor Cyclist* displays a young white couple dressed in leather jackets atop a cityscape lookout point. The mustachioed man with a serious facial expression, long hair, and a black leather jacket stands with his hands on his hips behind the bike, staring at the camera, as the blonde woman sits on the back seat of a Kawasaki cruiser. His stance implies self-satisfaction and ownership of the bike, the woman, and the city beneath them. She smiles directly at the camera and seems to be casually waiting for him to take her for a ride. She waits passively, in a black leather jacket, scarf, and pants, for him to take her

somewhere. The man stands over her, his relative size making him appear more powerful, and “allowing elevation to be exploited as a delineative resource” (Goffman 1976, 43). Once again, the woman is pushed to the right side of the frame. Western audiences read from left to right, and the woman would be the last thing the viewer would look at, another method employed by the editors to deemphasize the woman’s importance.

None of the magazine covers in the 1990s or in my current 2010-2011 archive (which consists of 129 magazine covers out of 833 total covers) feature the “ol’ lady” image, suggesting that this controlling image has become less dominant and perhaps is even viewed as somewhat antiquated today. However, I cannot say this for certain because of missing years in the historical portion of my sample (I do not have covers from the early 2000s), and because the recent period during which I subscribed to several magazines only covers two years and is thus a short time period.

The Solo Female Rider

The image of the solo female rider comprises 17 of my 50 covers, about a third of the 1937-2011 sample, which is a much higher proportion than I would have predicted when I began collecting this data. However, the image of the female solo rider does not always serve to promote gender egalitarianism. These images, at times, depict women riders as odd novelties. Five of these images show women motorcyclists as competent riders. Yet these images still tend to present women as having low skill levels by showing them posing on unmoving motorcycles instead of in action, as men are usually portrayed. When men are not

presented in action, they are shown as being serious, confident masters of their bikes and the road. Both male and female solo riders on magazine covers are presented as riding expensive motorcycles and owning expensive riding gear, implying a certain class privilege. They are also largely white, and portrayed in ways that rarely challenge heteronormativity.

The image of the solo female rider has its roots in the early 1900s, during the formative stages of motorcycle development. The October 1910 issue of *The Popular Magazine* (Simmons 2011), a serial detective magazine, features a painting of a young woman on a motorbike riding past the police in the background. She is blonde, with her hair sweeping back in the wind, and wears a tan skirt, ruffled white blouse, green cardigan sweater, and red scarf to match the red ribbons blowing in her hair. Her face is flushed with excitement as she gazes longingly at the road ahead of her, oblivious to the threat of the police presence. The roots of the female rider as a “bad girl” go back as far as women have been riding. Women became more daring on their bikes in the 1920s and 1930s, some of them even challenging men at all-male races (Simmons 2011). Harley Davidson even encouraged women to compete during the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s. Of course, women were not allowed to compete against men, but that did not stop some of the early female legends from beating men in these races (Joans 2001).

The covers in my sample only date back to 1937. However, I include a discussion of a 1929 cover from Simmons (2011) to give more historical context to my solo female rider analysis. The May 1929 cover of *Harley Davidson Enthusiast* captures the adventurous spirit of the early motorcycle women. In a field with a beaten path and two lifeless trees, a young

woman with dark hair and an aviator's cap pauses astride her mammoth Harley Davidson to pick flowers, showcasing stereotypical feminine behavior. The bike is much larger than she is, highlighting how the size of motorcycles had dramatically increased. The post-WWI economy had made automobiles more affordable, which ended up driving many upstart motorcycle manufacturers out of business (Joans 2001; Simmons 2011), leaving only two major motorcycle manufacturers in the United States by the late 1920s: Harley Davidson and Indian (Joans 2001).

Although not actively riding the bike, the woman on the 1929 cover is actually dressed for riding. She wears pants with the cuffs rolled up, showing off her tall motorcycle boots, and a white button-up blouse under a dark crewneck sweater. Her clothing is more gender neutral than in most of the covers in my sample. She holds a bouquet of what appear to be crepe myrtles. She smiles warmly at the camera with an air of confidence. It seems that Harley was trying to appeal to adventurous young women with this cover (Joans 2001). It is notable that some of these early covers are the most gender egalitarian. After World War II, images of women as athletes changed. "Mannish" women were feared by the public as gender traitors, or even worse, as lesbians (Cahn 1993). This led to a historical transition in the way the popular press portrayed women athletes, with an increasing emphasis on female athletes as sexualized for the heterosexual male gaze. Sporting events including women were toned down to alleviate homophobic fears and often included beauty pageants or employed other ways to present the women participants as unthreateningly heterosexual (Cahn 1993).

An example of this unthreatening heterosexuality occurs on the September 1949 cover of *Buzz: The Motorcycle Magazine* features a large photograph of the president of Motor Maids, Dot Robinson, on her bike. She is known as the first lady of riding for her feats of mileage, speed, and skill (Simmons 2011). In 1940, the Motor Maids, an all-women's riding club that I previously mentioned, was organized. Harley Davidson endorsed them for many years and most famous female riders of the time were members of the club (Joans 2001). The Motor Maids exist to this day. The 2011 Motor Maid Constitution and By-Laws contain the following blurb about etiquette: "members must be of good moral character and willing to work for the betterment of motorcycling in all possible ways" (www.motormaids.org 2011). In a 2011 copy of the Motor Maids annual newsletter, *The Advisory*, the president warns: "As I understand it, Motor Maids are not hard-drinking, black leather wearing, swear like a sailor biker chicks . . . when I am being a Motor Maid, I act properly and according to the image we want to set" (Hickling-Thatcher 2011). Unlike men's riding clubs or outlaw gangs, the Motor Maids pride themselves on being polite and courteous. Women within the group police each other's behavior for what is considered "unladylike behavior" and not a lot has changed since the 1940s—not the attitudes or even the uniforms. The organization does not have feminist leanings, despite advancing women in the field of motorcycling. According to Dot Robinson's history on the Motor Maids' webpage, "Dot set out . . . to show that you could ride a motorcycle and still be a lady. There was never a time you saw Dot without makeup. Away from her motorcycle she looked ready to step in or out of a fashion magazine" (www.motormaids.org 2011). On the same webpage

is the quote: “(Dot) proved that you can be a lady, still compete with men and not be a man-hater,” the phrase “man-hater” being synonymous with the unpopular: feminists and lesbians (Cahn 1993).

The caption on the 1949 cover featuring Dot proclaims she is one of the favorites in the magazine’s “Most Popular Typical Girl” popularity contest. On the cover, Dot smiles with her lips tightly closed, appearing somewhat frozen, forced, and severe. Dressed in her Motor Maids uniform and holding her pilot’s cap, the image is at once empowering and unsettling. It is empowering to see a woman famous for riding her own bike nearly sixty years ago, and she seems very proud of her skill. The unsettling part is her forced smile, coiffed hair, and makeup. The female solo image is a stronger and more positive image of women than the “biker babe” or the “ol’ lady,” and potentially serves to counter them, but, as with Dot’s cover, this image is often embellished with traditional ideals of femininity (Roster 2007).

The 1950s and 1960s marked a change in the demographics of motorcyclists. Men returning from the war as vets flocked to motorcycles as a form of excitement in their now mundane everyday lives (Joans 2001). A major shift in the public’s perception of bikers occurred within this time (Joans 2001). The sport became increasingly masculinized and the solo female rider began to be shown in a diminutive light and infantilized, if shown at all. Beginning with the Hell’s Angels and other outlaw biker gangs, motorcycles achieved a bad reputation as the chosen mode of transport for hoodlums and dangerous deviants (Joans 2001; Thompson 1967). Many stories abounded in the popular press of the time, most of

them about gangs taking over towns, raping women, and causing rampant destruction and looting (Thompson 1967). Many of these stories, while popular in the American psyche and presented in films, such as *The Wild One*, are taken from stereotypes or controlling images of male bikers and appeared in the tabloid print media of the 1950s and 1960s. These negative images have never been proven true (Slawinski 2006), but like all controlling images, had a powerful effect on the public perception of motorcyclists.

The October 1971 cover of *AMA News: American Motorcycle Association* has several different images of women on it, some of which mark the first counter images of the typical solo female rider in my sample. The cover is an artist's rendering prominently featuring the close-up of a woman's unsmiling, make-up-less face, surrounded by several other images showing women in a variety of capacities: as a motocross racer, as a mechanic, as a solo rider on a three-wheeled motorcycle (a "trike," in biker lingo), and as a passenger on the back of a bike being driven by a man. The fact that a drawing is used to convey these images instead of photograph suggests that this was the only way to convey empowering images of biker femininity at the time. Since the majority of these images featured the solo female rider, I classified the cover as such. Two of the smaller images show women smiling, a sign of deference to authority—the "ol' lady" and the mechanic—but in most of the images the women are serious. This cover seems to best represent the strides made by the feminist movement in the realm of motorcycling: the woman biker is no longer simply a passenger or an ornament; she is also an agent in charge of her own destiny. She knows how to ride on and off-road, do tricks, and "wrench" on her own bike (Joans 2001).

This cover marks a genuine departure from the controlling image of a female rider to a counter image that breaks stereotypes of female riders. It implies, for the first time, that a woman can take care of both herself on the road *and* the bike. More than any other factor, the mechanical actions of maintaining and servicing one's own bike have been deemed as historically masculine. Women are usually assumed to be technically incompetent, not only by male riders, but by the public in general. The image depicting a woman working on her own bike is the only image of the sort in my sample. The important thing to realize here is that the image of the solo female rider is a more complex image than the "biker babe" and the "ol' lady" and may be a controlling or an empowering image.

Reagan's fiscal policies in the 1980s, such as "trickle-down economics," benefitted large corporations at the expense of smaller ones. The progress of late capitalism wounded the small business entrepreneur and many of the motorcycle magazines from the 1970s went out of print. It was difficult to find any covers featuring women in the 1980s in my sample. Of the three covers I did locate, none of them featured a solo female rider, suggesting a strong backlash against the feminist movement of the 1970s. The absence of solo female riders is curious, however, given that in the 1980s the Japanese began to make cruisers that approximated Harleys for a fraction of the price and introduced smaller models designed with women and shorter riders in mind. Harley Davidson also introduced a smaller model during this time period. So even though more and more women began riding motorcycles at this time, my sample suggests that they were rendered invisible through a lack of prominent media coverage.

The solo female rider did not re-emerge in my sample until the July 2009 issue of *American Motorcyclist*. The cover features a close-up of an attractive woman with long blonde hair smiling directly at the camera. She is dressed in a mesh, padded riding jacket and is sitting astride a racing bike, leaning over the gas tank, wrists crossed, and hands resting lightly on the tank. Her crossed arms detach her from her surroundings, another example of licensed withdrawal, and her hands illustrate the feminine touch (Goffman 1976). However, most of the bike is not in the frame; she is the focus. The headline reads “Fast Forward: Seven Women Who Don’t Wait Around.” Although this is a seemingly positive image of a female rider, she is what Ezzell (2009) would call “heterosexy-fit”: an appearance designed to be attractive to men, including being slim, wearing makeup, and having styled hair instead of hair that is messed up from the wind or her helmet. Even though she is a rider, she is posed in a way not unlike a model would be for the male gaze.

Of relevance, out of the five images in my recent sample of the solo female rider that seem like the most positive portrayals of women, four of them, including one of the counter-hegemonic images, appear on the cover of *American Motorcyclist*, a magazine that the American Motorcycle Association sends out to its members. Given this audience, the editors of this magazine may not feel forced to portray women in a highly sexualized manner or solely for the heterosexual white male gaze. Perhaps the editors have more leeway to present women as agents and less like caricatures, and, indeed, this goes along with their mission statement to make the sport open to riders of all ages, skill levels, and sexes (americanmotorcyclist.com 2011).

Language and Invisibility

Although my analysis focused on the visual imagery on the covers of motorcycle magazines depicting women, I also observed patterns in the text of these magazines that support the message that women do not belong in the realm of motorcycling, or only belong if they are willing to be sexualized objects. I also grew increasingly aware of the absence of women on magazine covers in certain time periods, as well as the invisibility of women of color and lesbian bikers on these magazine covers.

Language

The use of language on the covers of *In the Wind*, *Easyriders*, *Biker*, and *The Horse* magazines is worth mentioning because it evokes mental images. Words such as “badass,” “sinners,” “freak-out,” and “live the dream” suggest the hardcore image of Harley bikers. Harley-themed magazines such as *Easyriders* also use sexually suggestive language, such as “hardtail,” “rigid,” “glide,” “lubricant,” “hot action,” and “hardcore.” The use of this language further sexualizes the covers of *Easyriders*, which all feature a woman in a bikini and the words “Titillating Topless Tech.” Most of these covers illustrate custom Harleys made by motorcycle enthusiasts, not professional bike builders. Harley Davidson has made customization easy; it usually involves just a few bolts. In contrast to Harley-themed magazines, many of the covers of sport bike racing magazines (*Sport Rider*, *Cycle World*, *Motor Cyclist*) feature words like “shootout,” “rocket,” and “bullets.” It is important to note how the editors’ description of bikes includes warlike language, with frequent references to weapons (Cohn 2009). This discourse of war is the language of domination and is used to

appeal to men. The language of warfare begins in my sample in the 1990s, concurrent with the U. S. occupation of the Middle East, and continues to this day. It helps naturalize a culture of oppression.

Invisibility

In the 1990s, I found a gap in my sample. All of the 1990s covers that I found online were either of the bikes themselves, or of the bikes with male riders. Out of 99 covers (www.dadsvintageads.com 2011) that span the nineties in three magazines, *Cycle*, *Cycle World*, and *Motorcyclist*, there were no images of women either riding the bikes (the solo female rider), on the backs of bikes (the “ol’ lady”), or posed to embellish the bikes (the “biker babe”). All three of these publications shifted their focus to action covers, usually portraying a man in full riding gear, which consists of a full-face helmet, riding suit with matching pants and jacket, gloves, and boots on a racing or sport bike. These covers from the 1990s are rife with the aforementioned discourse of war being used to appeal to men.

According to figures from the American Motorcycle Association, the 1990s saw a tremendous growth in the number of female riders (www.americanmotorcyclist.com 2011), so why were women not being represented? The lack of images of women in motorcycle publications during this decade creates a series of questions. Perhaps those who control the sport were lashing back at women who were buying bikes in droves (Joans 2001). Too many women on too many bikes may have threatened the male domination of the sport, so the editors chose to select racing themes on their covers, warlike language, and close-up action shots of the bikes, appealing to male riders in a different way than the previous covers. The

absence of sexualized images of women on the covers may also have been an effort by the editors to appease the growing market of women readers and riders and separate their publications from increasingly pornographic ones. It is also possible that the editors of the mainstream publications may not have known exactly how to deal with the increasing presence of women in the sport. Of course, there is another explanation, a shortcoming of my sample. Pornographic motorcycle magazines like *Easyriders* and *V-Twin* were in publication at this time, still presenting sexualized images of women, but I could not locate any of these covers for my sample.

Representations of women of color or lesbians were also rare in my sample. The invisibility of these groups is significant because although they comprise a good portion of female ridership, they are excluded in representation. The one exception in my sample, the December 2010 cover of *American Motorcyclist* (Appendix 40), includes both the only woman of color and the only lesbian couple in my sample, and they are all very young. The cover is split into four large, equally sized photographs. Men dominate the top half of the page: a bald and bearded serious looking entrepreneur in his thirties sits astride a bizarre looking folding motorcycle, and a police officer grins as he sits astride his BMW. The entrepreneur's hands forcefully grip the handlebars of his invention and the police officer rests his left or clutch hand on his knee. The caption reads "Dream Jobs: Seven Riders Who Mix Business With Pleasure." On the left side of the lower half of the page is a young black woman, heavysset, with her hair pulled back into a ponytail. She wears a motocross-racing jacket and leans on an off-road bike. She smiles at the camera as she lightly rests her right

hand on the left handlebar, not gripping it. Her smile suggests appeasement and the light delicate feminine touch makes this image more palatable for the male gaze. The space for the mailing address label obscures the bottom part of her body, suggesting marginalization. Biker culture is notorious for its intolerance and racism (Wolf 1991). Next to the young motocross rider is a picture of a young lesbian couple in their early twenties, smiling coolly with closed lips at the camera. The young woman on the left has the sides of her head shaved and the hair on top is styled upward so that it stands straight up. She is wearing thin wire framed glasses, a black leather riding jacket, and tall riding boots with lots of metallic buckles over her dark pants. She sits astride a late model racing Suzuki, which is also prominent in the picture, with one hand on the gas tank and the other arm around a young blonde woman with long hair. The young blonde woman also wears a riding jacket and has her arm around the short-haired woman, suggesting intimacy and indicating that they are a couple. This cover is one of the most interesting of the sample because it promotes the inclusion of two groups that had previously been invisible.

The sheer neglect on the part of most of the non-pornographic motorcycle magazine editors to include women, lesbians, and women of color speaks to the all-encompassing power of hegemony. The number of publications that were not included in this study because they failed to represent female riders is disturbing, leading to the invisibility of women in the sport bike and motocross realms. Women are generally absent from my sample, but when they are presented, controlling images of women reinforce the gender hierarchy and underscore how men want women to be seen: as objects of desire that exist only to please

men. This dominant theme is recurring through time, even though modern images may tweak the controlling images to give a nod to women's gains. This analysis shows how gender is fluid and dynamic; changing over time, yet patriarchy persists and keeps women in the shadows of the hegemonic white male.

Discussion and Conclusion

The controlling images of the "ol' lady" and the "biker babe," and the complex, but often still controlling image of the solo female rider tell a story of the subordination of women while simultaneously creating a dialogue about women's rebellion and attempts at freedom. The "ol' lady" image suggests that women need to be controlled by men by putting them on the back seat of the motorcycle. The "biker babe" is sexually objectified and treated as part of the package that comes along with the biker lifestyle. The solo female rider has the potential to be a counter image, but is often still portrayed in ways that reflect and support men's domination of the sport.

Throughout the twentieth century, images of women in control of motorcycles emerge as men are shipped off to fight in World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. On a recurring basis, once men return home, women are relegated to the back seat or written out of motorcycle history altogether. The power of a male hegemony renders women invisible or presents women as submissive to men when they are included. The invisibility of women creates a sense of exclusion from this particular realm. The controlling images I have discussed in this paper illustrate the systemic repression of women.

The feminist movement may be finally gaining ground in the traditionally masculine world of motorcycling, as evidenced by the growing predominance of empowering images of women on motorcycle magazine covers within my sample. Five of the 17 more empowering images of solo female riders come from my 2009-2011 sample of covers. This leads us to the question: what would a truly gender egalitarian or empowering image of a woman rider look like? Would the rider be elderly? Overweight? Would she ride with her husband on the back of the bike? Perhaps she is dressed in full motocross gear, appearing dirty from actively participating in the sport and not stereotypically feminine. A powerful counter image would depict femininity not as passive, but as active, as these women are in charge of their bikes and their surroundings. The countering images of the solo female rider are meaningful because they disrupt the gender structure, upsetting the male power hierarchy and thereby reducing the patriarchal dividend. These countering images are not made for the male gaze. While males are routinely depicted as agentic and powerful, females are usually sexualized and degraded and presented as passive and deferent. There is nothing natural or inevitable about this: in fact, the fact that empowering images of males exist tells us that these images can be and are being produced. It is possible to create images of women outside of the male gaze, as strong and in control of their own destinies.

Women who do not fear to tread in a realm in which men have traditionally been dominant are breaking down walls. Many of these women are everyday riders who do not appear on the covers of magazines. Some of them are even gaining fame as women riders. A recent Red Bull commercial features dramatic music as a bird's eye camera angle descends

on an outdoor motocross track. A lone rider appears atop a peak and kick-starts the large Honda 250 dirt bike. Grinding through dark dirt banks, blazing the trails and twisting the throttle, the rider encounters a mountain. Not stopping, the rider accelerates up the mountain and whips the bike's tail out on jumps. The rider then pulls up to the camera, takes off her helmet and says, "Red Bull gives you wings" in sign language. Ashley Fiolek is not only the number one women's motocross rider in the world, but she is also deaf. Breaking down barriers of sexism and able-bodiedism, Ashley Fiolek cannot hear the tremendous roar she has caused in the motorcycling world.

By highlighting images of submissive femininity, this project documents the persistence of the gender order. Insight into the gender terrain of motorcycling is crucial to understanding how women and oppressed groups are systematically repressed in many realms of U.S. culture. Controlling images are a part of the operation of male hegemony and my research shows that these images establish and reproduce women's inferior position in relation to men. This research has demonstrated the persistence of controlling images historically in motorcycle culture, and has also shown how they change over time. The social and historical context of the time period, as well as popular culture, influences the plasticity of controlling images. Hegemony is not static; it constantly evolves in relation to external social forces.

The three controlling images analyzed here arose from the data, providing a unique contribution to the conceptualization of Collins's theory of controlling images, by expanding and adding nuance to her work. This study suggests some parallels in the controlling images

of white women in motorcycling and Collins's historical analysis of controlling images of black women, in particular the "mammy," the "matriarch," and the "Jezebel." However, there are some important differences. As Collins documents, black femininity has variously been labeled and controlled as: asexual, too independent, hypersexual, and animalistic. The "mammy" controlling image is somewhat reflected in that of the subservient "ol' lady." However, asexuality is a key component of the mammy controlling image: by playing down her sexuality, she is seen as less than feminine (Collins 2000). In contrast, white femininity is often linked to white masculinity and heterosexuality. We see this in the ol' lady's deference to and pairing with men by her position on the back of a man's bike. The mammy controlling image also involves deference, yet it is deference in an employment context: she is deferent to a white employer, and race is a crucial barrier between her and the white employer (Collins 2000).

Another controlling image Collins identifies is that of the "matriarch." The matriarch's supposed domineering demeanor is seen somewhat in the "solo female rider," however the solo female rider's independence and power are often downplayed in the magazine covers I analyzed, whereas the matriarch is portrayed as too strong and independent for her own good. Another important point about the matriarch is the intersection of gender and race in an economic context. The matriarch, as the controlling image goes, is said to repel the father of her children and, in her strength, to be a threat to masculinity (Collins 2000). Often the head of the household in a single parent family in poverty, the controlling image posits the matriarch as the cause of her low economic status

by driving a male provider away (Collins 2000). The solo female rider, in contrast, is not linked to family life; yet she may also be viewed as a threat to masculinity and thus magazine covers sexualize her and downplay her autonomy and riding ability in ways that diminish her as a threat.

Collins's "Jezebel" is a controlling image that portrays black femininity as animalistic, dehumanized, and sexually aggressive and has historically been used to justify assaults on black slave women (Collins 2000) and continues to be used to minimize the extent of sexual violence black women face. There are parallels between the Jezebel and the "biker babe" image I identified, particularly in terms of assumptions of raw female sexuality. Yet the biker babe, like other hypersexualized images of white femininity, is often presented as an object of desire, although, particularly in the pornographic magazines in my analysis, her sexuality may be portrayed as "freaky" and transgressive and she too is susceptible to sexual assaults at large bike rallies (Joans 2001). The positioning of some women as hypersexual "bad girls," is used to maintain the purity of white "good girl" femininity in the good/bad girl dichotomy (Elliott 2012). Some user-generated biker magazines have men submit photos of their "babes" and their bikes, as things they own. Through this show of ownership, the women are seen as attainable adornments for the bikes but also as partnered with men, who, presumably serve as their guardians and protectors. Biker magazine covers consistently display white middle class riders, leaving out black riders and riders of lower incomes, a substantial portion of the riding community. Through the matrix of domination, men hold power over women and factors such as race, sexuality, and social class are

important to consider when examining how men maintain power and justify their privileged position in the matrix. One key way men reproduce inequality is by fracturing oppressed groups, so that they are less likely to see their commonalities and to come together to challenge the status quo (Schwalbe 2008). Building off of Collins's concept of controlling images, my research shows both commonalities in the controlling images of white women in motorcycle imagery and the three main controlling images of black women identified by Collins, as well as significant differences.

The intent of this project was to examine images of women in motorcycling to understand how they are depicted. I found that in all 50 covers of my sample, women were depicted in feminine ways, and mostly in ways that help to bolster patriarchy. These depictions can also help us understand how women are incorporated into areas that have traditionally been defined as masculine. Through equal opportunity legislation such as Title IX, women can now be athletes, firefighters, iron miners, mechanics, pilots, and more. However, when granted access into these realms, women are routinely made subordinate or rendered invisible. When women are incorporated into these areas, they are often seen as novelties, objects of desire, or back seat passengers, which maintains their marginalization and subordination (Cahn 1993). The predominance of sexualized images of women in sports, for example, shows women as feminized and sexualized for the male gaze (Cahn 1993; Ezzell 2009). Men's resistance to incorporating women into a leisure pursuit, competitive sport or occupation that is male-dominated allows men who participate in it to make claims about their masculinity on the basis of their involvement. This project has highlighted

images of submissive femininity in motorcycle media and thus documents the perpetuation of the gender order.

There are limitations to my research; including relying on a convenience sample, breaks in my sample, and the fact that many older motorcycle magazines went out of business. Future research in this area should utilize the National Motorcycle Museum's archives in Ohio to provide a more comprehensive and continuous sample. Future research should also examine how women who participate in the sport of motorcycling are portrayed through other media content: advertisements, articles, television and other coverage of events.

This research has most importantly conducted an historical analysis that shows how controlling images are modified to respond to current sociopolitical events. However, these images are fluid and ever changing, so the original controlling images are not discarded, only altered. My research clearly shows the construction of female inferiority, and hence the reproduction of male superiority, over more than 70 years. Examining images of femininity on motorcycle magazine covers can help us understand hegemony in action and over time. Motorcycle culture developed as a masculine pursuit and is an excellent point from which to document hegemonic efforts to uphold gender inequality and respond to challenges to male domination.

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