The story of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club is the story of a very select brotherhood of men who will fight and die for each other, no matter what the cause. (Barger, Zimmerman and Zimmerman 2001: 67). Ralph ‘Sonny’ Barger is the founding member of the Oakland (California) chapter of Hells Angels in 1957.

The federal government calls the HA the largest outlaw motorcycle club. There are thousands of us all over the world and over a hundred active chapters, about a third of which are in United States. Hells Angels Motorcycle Corporation owns the famous trademarks and licenses them to the chapters of the club. The apostrophe is used in the name of the club and the corporation, but not on the patch. There are Hells Angels Motorcycle Club chapters in Denmark, Australia, Germany, Canada, the UK, Switzerland, Brazil, South Africa and several other countries. (Barger, Zimmerman and Zimmerman 2001: 37)

Many of the post World War II outlaw clubs actually relished their denial of acceptance by the AMA (American Motorcycle Association) and took this denial even further by forming, a loose association of truly outlaw motorcycle clubs known as One Percenters (Dulaney 2005). These One Percenters considered themselves the one percent of motorcyclists that did not abide by the law. They wore a diamond shaped one percent patch to signify this ‘exclusive social status’ (Dulaney 2005). The main philosophy of these one percent clubs is that the demands of the club always come before the demands of the individual.

MEMBERSHIP

Who can become a member of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club?

Officially, Hells Angels state that anyone can become a member as long as they have a valid driver’s license, they own a working motorcycle, they are not a child molester and also they have never applied to be a police officer or a prison guard.

BUT!

No women are allowed to become members of the club. Moreover, members must be white, but the club, as a whole, is not racist but we probably have enough racist members that no black guy is going to get in (interview with Sonny Barger). Racial feelings varied from member to member, but in general the club stood for redneckism and white supremacy (Wethern and Colnett 2004: 31). The Hells Angels never had a black member.

How do you become a member of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club?

The club revolves around the individuality of its members. Those who want to become members must first be accepted as an official friend, who is sponsored by a full member and must receive majority approval in a chapter vote. These
It demands respect by other biker gangs and demonstrates the member's loyalty to the club. The Hells Angels also wear their colors in order to intimidate other biker gangs and the general public, either directly or indirectly.

Many of the clubs realize what a powerful symbol the outlaw back patch is and claim copyright on them. The Hells Angels announce on their website that: Hells Angels Motorcycle Club has copyrighted the name Hells Angels (in any form of spelling) in the United States and internationally along with variations of the ‘deathshead’ insignia of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. These trademarks and copyright are aggressively protected by HAMC, Inc. (Drewery 2003: 33).

→ Therefore, their patches and ‘uniform’ are creating a cohesive and united club!

**COHESION AND UNITY**

In one of the interviews with Sonny Barger, he explains what made them such a cohesive group: *Because that’s the kind of people we are. That’s what draws us together. We stick together; we defend each other, to the death if it’s necessary.* Moreover, *my friends are my family.* (Barger 2005: 21)

Nobody pleads out. Some might do time, but nobody points the finger at another friend. Nobody testifies against another part of the team. It’s stick together, even if it means hard sacrifice (Barger 2005: 26). It’s very important that members stand up for themselves, when they get in trouble or in any other situation. They feel they have a moral obligation to defend the other members when they get in trouble.

Loyalty is the fundamental principle of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. This principle is so important that acts of betrayal are punishable by severe sanctions ranging from a beating to even death.

*Organizations which extend over a large geographical area, perhaps across different countries and languages, have always had difficulties in maintaining their cohesion* (Forty 1986: 223). But Hells Angels proves to be the opposite of this. They prove to be very cohesive even if they extend in more than twenty countries.

*When a member dies, everybody does to his funeral. It’s out of respect for the man and his chapter, part of it’s a show of strength.* (Barger, Zimmerman and Zimmerman 2001: 79). This shows how united they are for each other; they go to funerals even if they didn’t personally knew the person, because they fell obliged to do it.