



Masculinities at play. A sociocultural approach to the practices of risky riding among male motorcyclists in Valledupar, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Background: More than 1.25 million people die worldwide every year because of Road Traffic Injuries (RTIs), a fact that has turned RTIs into a priority on the international public health agenda. In Colombia, road traffic fatal injuries are the second cause of violent deaths, with motorcycle riders being the most vulnerable actors on the roads. In Valledupar, Colombia, the city where this study was conducted, the number of fatal and non-fatal RTIs is higher than the national average.

The study used social representations theory to explore the connections amongst the construction of masculine subjectivities, the experiences of RTIs by male motorcyclists in Valledupar as well as the role of gender relations and the life cycle in this problem. This study was conducted with the goal of informing public policy on traffic safety and contributing to the design of prevention programs.

Methods: This study used qualitative methods and biographical-narrative techniques. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 male motorcyclists in Valledupar. The results of the identification of social representations were validated with two focus groups.

Results: Findings suggest that the risky riding practices of motorcyclists who have suffered RTIs, such as violation of transit regulations, frequent drinking, speeding, and an attitude that legitimizes the lack of care for themselves and for others are associated with culturally legitimized socialization patterns in the configuration of masculine subjectivities in the territory.

Conclusions: These findings help explain the high number of men with RTIs and guide decision making regarding road safety public policies, with particular emphasis on suburban cities in countries with medium-level incomes. We suggest the adoption of diverse and complementary strategies that add a cultural perspective in the long term, in combination with the gender-based and differential approaches in the transformation of dangerous riding.

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P O R T U G U E S E A B S T R A C T S

Precedentes: Mais de 1,25 milhões de pessoas no mundo morrem anualmente de ferimentos causados pelo tráfego (LCT), o que torna esta questão uma prioridade para a agenda internacional de saúde pública. Na Colômbia, as lesões fatais no trânsito representam a segunda causa de morte violenta, sendo os homens motociclistas os atores mais vulneráveis na estrada. Na cidade de Valledupar, onde o estudo foi realizado, os LCTs fatais e não fatais superam a média nacional.

O estudo utilizou a teoria das representações sociais para explorar as relações entre a construção de subjetividades masculinas, as experiências de LCT de homens motociclistas em Valledupar e o papel de gênero e o ciclo de vida desta problemática; a fim de informar a política pública em matéria de segurança rodoviária e contribuir para a concepção de programas de prevenção.

Métodos: Este estudo utilizou métodos qualitativos com um desenho biográfico-narrativo. Entrevistas semi-estruturadas e em profundidade foram realizadas com 11 homens motociclistas em Valledupar. Para validar os resultados das representações sociais identificadas, foram realizados 2 grupos focais.

Resultados: Os resultados mostram que as práticas de condução arriscada de motociclistas que sofreram LCT como a violação das regras de trânsito, o consumo regular de álcool, o excesso de velocidade e uma atitude que legitima a falta de cuidados com relação a si mesmo e aos outros, estão associados a padrões de socialização culturalmente legitimados na configuração das subjetividades masculinas na cidade de estudo.

Conclusões: Estes resultados ajudam a explicar o número elevado de homens com LCT e informam as políticas públicas de segurança rodoviária com especial ênfase nas cidades médias e países de renda média. Sugerimos a adoção de estratégias diversas e complementares que incorporem uma perspectiva cultural de longo prazo em combinação com as abordagens de gênero para redução da condução perigosa.

S P A N I S H A B S T R A C T S

Antecedentes: Más de 1.25 millones de personas en el mundo mueren al año por lesiones causadas por tránsito (LCT) lo que ha convertido esta problemática en una prioridad para la agenda internacional en salud pública. En Colombia, las lesiones fatales por tránsito representan la segunda causa de muerte violenta, siendo los hombres motociclistas los actores más vulnerables en la vía. En la ciudad de Valledupar, donde se llevó a cabo el estudio, las LCT fatales y no fatales superan la media nacional.

El estudio utilizó la teoría de las representaciones sociales para explorar las relaciones entre la construcción de las subjetividades masculinas, las experiencias de LCT de hombres motociclistas en Valledupar y, el papel del género y el ciclo vital en esta problemática; a fin de informar la política pública en seguridad vial y contribuir al diseño de programas de prevención.

Métodos: Este estudio utilizó métodos cualitativos con un diseño biográfico-narrativo. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas y en profundidad con 11 hombres motociclistas en Valledupar. Para validar los resultados de las representaciones sociales identificadas se llevaron a cabo 2 grupos focales.

Resultados: Los hallazgos muestran que las prácticas de conducción arriesgada de los motociclistas que han sufrido LCT como la infracción de las normas de tránsito, el consumo habitual de alcohol, el exceso de velocidad y una actitud que legitima la falta de cuidado de sí mismos y de los otros, están asociadas a patrones de socialización culturalmente legitimados en la configuración de las subjetividades masculinas en la ciudad de estudio.

Conclusiones: Estos hallazgos contribuyen a explicar el alto número de hombres con LCT e informan a las políticas públicas de seguridad vial con especial énfasis en ciudades intermedias y países de medianos ingresos. Sugerimos adoptar estrategias diversas y complementarias que incorporen una perspectiva cultural a largo plazo y los enfoques de género y diferencial en la transformación de la conducción riesgosa.

1. Introduction

More than 1.25 million people die every year because of Road Traffic Injuries (RTIs). Fatalities of RTIs primarily affect men, with a rate of 3 to 1 compared to women. Among young men between ages 20 and 24 the proportion increases four to one (WHO, 2007, 2013). In turn, almost half of the people who die on the roads around the world are vulnerable road users as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcycle riders who have three times more probabilities of suffering RTIs, and sixteen times more probabilities of dying as compared to automobile drivers (Ankarath et al., 2002).

The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development has defined an ambitious objective: by 2020, reducing the world's number of deaths and injuries caused by road accidents by half. Without a sustained change of action, it is expected that by 2030, RTIs will become the seventh leading cause of death in the world.

In the Americas, RTIs claim the lives of more than 154 thousand people every year; the equivalent of 12% of the world's deaths (OPS, 2016). In Colombia, road traffic collisions are the second cause of violent death after homicides, and the fourth cause of death nationwide (Gaviria Uribe et al., 2016). Between 2008 and 2016, the mortality rate by RTIs increased from 12.6 to 14.93 people per 100 thousand inhabitants (INMLCF, 2018), being men the main fatal victims (INMLCF, 2018; Norza et al., 2014; Oviedo-Trespalcacios and Scott-Parker, 2018; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2017). In 2017, 81.3% of RTI's deaths were men and 18.7% were women, that is, for each 4 men, a woman suffered a fatal injury.

In the case of nonfatal injuries, the number is almost double: 60.8% men and 39.2% women. The main vulnerable road users involved are motorcycle riders, who represent 78.8% of deaths and 80.5% injured (INMLCF, 2017).

Valledupar, the city where this study was conducted, is located in the caribbean region of Colombia and it has a population of 493,367 inhabitants (DANE, 2016). Up until 2014, it was among the 10 cities in Colombia with the highest rates of mortality due to RTIs (18.28 per 100 thousand inhabitants), (INMLCF, 2017). The probability of death occurrences by collisions in this city is 4.7 times higher among men than women, being motorcycle riders the largest number of fatal victims (46%) (INMLCF, 2015). These facts overlap with an exponential growth in the number of motorcycles in latter years. In 2010 there were 35.054 motorcycles registered and in 2014 it grew to 47.084 (Consejo Municipal de Valledupar, 2016).

The study on the connections between the variables of gender, age and type of road user contributes to define a more accurate profile of the people who most frequently suffer RTIs. This profile may favor the design of road prevention actions towards some sectors of the population, with higher impact results (Dapilah et al., 2017; Ghasemzadeh et al., 2017; Watsford, 2008).

The quantitative epidemiological studies predominant in the academic literature, use the sex and age variables with the purpose of demographically characterize this problem, establishing sex or age differences to identify the effects that injuries produce in the health and life quality of vulnerable road users (R. N. Geldstein, 2006; Hasselberg et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2015). However, these studies don't analyze the role of gender, vital cycle stage, socioeconomic conditions and other factors in the subjective configuration, specially in men's risky driving practices (Geldstein et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2000).

Other investigations study the relations between "human factor" (drivers' attitudes and behaviors) and the conditions of *being a man* and *being young*, analyzing behaviors like imprudence, alcohol ingestion, infraction of transit regulations, speeding, and inadequate use of safety gear (Ghaffari-Fam et al., 2016; Moskal et al., 2012; Norza et al., 2014; Oviedo-Trespalcacios and Scott-Parker, 2018; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2017). However, these studies do not establish connections between these behaviors and the way masculinity is built and legitimized in western societies.

The risk perception is addressed from the rational calculation risk-benefit or cost-benefit (Douglas, 1996) also, psychosocial influences in risky driving are explored (Trifiletti et al., 2005). Some studies adopt a psychosocial approach focused on imitation learning, to study the influence that fathers, friends, and the police have in young novices' risky driving (DiBlasio, 1988; Scott-Parker et al., 2009). Nevertheless, these studies ignore that driving is a privileged space in which male figures like fathers and friends are closely linked to the youngsters' masculinity recognition and reaffirmation processes; hence, these male figures strengthen reckless behaviors linked to an image socially desirable of a free, machine control and brave man, as it was found in this study.

Even so, the relation between masculinity and health has been documented. In 2002 the WHO in its report Gender and Road Traffic Injuries, points out that "masculinity can be a health hazard" (WHO, 2002, p. 3), due to the socialization process of gender roles, men assume risky behaviors like excessive intake of alcohol and psychoactive substances, the use of violence and risky driving, having a negative impact on their health.

In the same way, it has proven that men assume, in a higher percentage, riskier health behaviors than women, motivated by a denial of pain and vulnerability, as well as the necessity of projecting emotional control, showing themselves brave and daring, which leads them to disregarding the search for opportune assistance (Aguirre and Güell, 2002; Courtenay, 2000). Studies on this line have been made especially in Europe and Australia (Farapi, 2009; Mellström, 2004; Özkan and Lajunen, 2005; Redshaw, 2006; Schmid Mast et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2000) and in some Latin American countries (Geldstein et al., 2011; Merlino et al., 2011; Rivas Sánchez, 2005; Rodríguez Luna, 2015; Treviño - Siller et al., 2014). Specifically in Colombia, few studies have included this perspective for addressing the problem.

This paper presents the results of a qualitative study made with male motorcyclists in Valledupar, Colombia, and enquired the following question "what are the relationships between risky riding practices, RTIs, and the individual's expression of masculinity?"; that is, it explored the existing relationships between the construction of masculine subjectivities in the territory and the experiences with injuries and road collisions. The goal was to contribute in the designing and decision making of traffic safety prevention strategies, aligned with other studies that have suggested that RTIs, as an emerging topic in public health, should be addressed with interdisciplinary strategies that include a gender approach (Gopalakrishnan, 2012).

2. Background and theoretical approach

In the medical and in the public health contexts, masculine self-expression and the internalization of masculine social norms explain the premature death of men by stress or unhealthy behaviors like interpersonal violence, reckless driving, abuse of psychoactive substances, and alcohol intake, among others (Evans et al., 2011). Studies have shown that some men prefer to risk their physical health and well-being rather than being identified as feminine (Griffith et al., 2016).

On the other hand, the use of motorcycles in the past few years has rapidly increased, especially in large cities of Latin America

like Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Caracas and Bogota (citation redacted for author anonymity). This increase is explained by factors like their low cost, the poor quality of public transportation and the possibility to use them as a source of income (citation redacted for author anonymity). To this we may add that motorcycles are preferred over other vehicles due to their speed and agility to ride them, in spite of the risk of road accidents (Aristizábal et al., 2012), an aspect that matches the characterization of the problem found in the city of Valledupar, where this study was conducted (Rodríguez Hernández et al., 2015).

Finally, the use of qualitative methods has been increasingly incorporated in this field due to the advantages that represents the data enriched with the direct experiences of the road users. Also, it leads to an in-depth analysis that contributes to the rigorous construction of knowledge and the promotion of political actions (Peterlini and Geldstein, 2005; Rodríguez Luna, 2015). These methods have been introduced to study the preferences in the use of the motorcycle (citation redacted for author anonymity) with the purpose of understanding behaviors and attitudes towards road riding (Beirão and Sarsfield Cabral, 2007; Peterlini and Geldstein, 2005; Simons et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2007) and designing policies and pedagogical strategies on road safety (Mockus, 1997). Some of them incorporate the perspective of gender, analyzing the role of social construction of masculinity in risky practices like speeding and aggressive behaviors taken up by male motorcyclists (Geldstein et al., 2011; Merlino et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2000).

2.1. Gender and masculinities

In this study, gender is a cross analytical category related to the construction of subjects around their affectivity, languages, thoughts, values, imaginaries, wishes, bodies and senses of themselves (Fraser, 1997; Perkins and Hooks, 1983; Scott, 2011). The gender approach looks for the deconstruction of the binary system sex/gender that creates univocal identities and organizes in hierarchy the masculine and feminine defining unequal relations between men and women, amongst men and amongst women. These particular way of positioning oneself as a subject, establishes a mechanism of power that materializes in social institutions like the family, the school, the workplace, the street and, even in the health field (Balgane, 2013).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, reformulated by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) as a result of prior debates and critiques, makes up a valuable framework for the analysis (Beasley, 2008; Johansson and Ottemo, 2015). First, the concept emphasizes the relational character of gender to indicate that the ways of being and becoming men are built in situated historical contexts, within the framework of power relations with other men and with women. This condition places the analysis in multiple meanings and practices associated with the experiences of being men, and it implies the use of the term “masculinities” rather than “masculinity” (Walker et al., 2000). Second, to shift away from essentialist conceptions that treat masculinities as static and trans-historical identities, focused on toxic traits, we refer to practice patterns associated with ideals, fantasies and generalized expectations about being and becoming a man. All of these elements are associated to a patriarchal order, which is frequently dominant in certain historical and cultural contexts. In this sense, it is not about one single hegemonic masculinity pattern, but a comprised web of several patterns that are mixed to hold that patriarchal social order within a permanent process of negotiation, translation and re-configuration.

Third, regarding hegemony, we point out that it is not attained by force only, but also and especially, through culture, institutions, and persuasion; therefore, these practices operate as regulatory ideals that have an influence on the configuration of masculinities. A fourth element refers to the hierarchical power relations that characterize the gender system, not only in the relations between men and women, but, as the studies have also mentioned, among men, according to the masculinities they embody. This hierarchy is established in combination with other social positions like age, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, among others (Beasley, 2008; Johansson and Ottemo, 2015).

The findings support the idea that analyzing particular social circumstances in which subjects configure ways of being and becoming men through their life cycle, is fundamental to understand and to put in context the reasons why men are the main victims of fatal and non-fatal RTIs, particularly at certain moments in their life cycle (Rivas Sánchez, 2005; Walker et al., 2000).

2.2. Social representations theory

This study uses the definition pointed by Jodelet (1989), whereby social representations have five characteristics: a) they are social constructions of meaning; b) they are addressed to an object of representation; c) they have the nature of an image; d) they have a symbolic component; and, d) they have effects on social practices. Social representations are located on the convergence between a number of dimensions: intersubjective (the individual in context), subjective (objectivated thinking) and transsubjective (the contextual, the social setting and the public) (Jodelet, 1989, 2007). Social representations make up networks of meanings (Villarroel, 2007) made up by systems of beliefs, codes, values and principles that guide action. Hence, they have a normative power inasmuch as they define the boundaries and possibilities of action for people in the world (Araya, 2002).

2.3. Traffic road injuries

In this study, RTIs were understood as events deriving from collisions or incidents affecting health (Peden et al., 2004), as opposed to *road accidents*, because we recognize they are not accidental events, resulting from chance, but preventable situations whose characteristics, nature and risk factors depend on human behavior (Koepsell et al., 2002).

3. Method

A qualitative biographical-narrative study was conducted to identify the life trajectories of motorcycle riders, intersections between the way in which they represent their riding experiences, and, especially, RTIs and the representations circulating around *being a man* in the context of the study. This method introduced the subjective perspective of the persons in the courses of their actions, bringing back the meanings assigned to their experiences at the time of their occurrence and at present – at the time of the interview (Rosenthal, 2004). It also allowed us to include the perceived significance of their particular experiences within the historical, cultural and political context that allowed for their occurrence (Kornblit, 2007).

3.1. Study context

The study was conducted in Valledupar, a medium size city in the North East of Colombia, with an area of 4493 sq. kms. 85.3% of its population live in the urban area. According to the Colombian Statistics Department (DANE, 2017) the labor market indicators show that the city is below the national average, with a global employment rate of 54.4%, as compared with the national average, 67%, for 2014 (DANE, 2014). On the other hand, in 2018, the unemployment rate was 14% and the underemployment rate was 17.8% (DANE, 2018), which places it in the sixth position among 23 capital cities. This situation is directly related with an increase in the informal economy; as a matter of fact, the use of the motorcycle as a source of income (*moto-taxi*) has become an increasing phenomenon; in 2015, around 40,000 motorcyclists circulated with commercial purposes (Rodríguez Hernández et al., 2015). In this context, Rodríguez- Hernández et al. describe how motorcyclists are the main victims of fatal and non-fatal road collisions in the city, and the associated causes are the violation of transit rules, speeding and riding under the influence of alcohol. The conjunction of these factors was decisive to choose this city as a priority territory for this study.

3.2. Ethics

This study was approved by the Research and Ethics Committee at the Institute of Public Health at Pontifical Javeriana University, Bogota, Colombia (Minutes No. 72 of 2015). It did not pose any risk to the health and integrity of the participants, who voluntarily signed an informed consent, thereby authorizing the recording of their narratives and the publication of results. The confidentiality of the data was preserved by using pseudonyms.

3.3. Recruitment

The recruitment criteria were: being older than 18, having ridden a motorcycle for five or more years and riding a motorcycle at least four days a week; having had risky behaviors on the road; having suffered RTIs; and having time to attend the activities planned during the execution of the study.

Eleven motorcyclists between 20 and 53 years of age living in Valledupar took part in the study. Three of them were youngsters (20–25), five of them young adults (26–35), and three were mature adults (36–53). All of them rode their motorcycles seven days a week for several purposes: as a means of transportation, to get an income and for recreation and leisure, like the practice of stunts (acrobatics with the motorcycle), *piques* (illegal drag races on public roads) -mainly in the group of youngsters-, and short trips to neighboring cities. At the time of being contacted, the participants selected had suffered between two and six injuries, referred to them as serious. Of the 23 collisions reported by the participants, other motorcycle riders were involved in 14 of them; in eight of them the impact was against a vehicle, and in one case, a pedestrian was run over by the participant's motorcycle.

3.4. Data- collection methods

The data was collected during May and July 2016 through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, each of which lasted two hours on average. All interviews were conducted by male researchers to establish trust among participants. The semi-structured interview inquired about the meaning of being and becoming a man around daily-life settings: the home; the school; the job; the places of enjoyment; the street/the public roads. and relationships.

The in-depth interviews focused on the question: What is your history as a motorcycle rider, from the moment you felt attracted to motorcycles? This question was also complemented with topics of interest in the study, such as their experience with injuries when riding a motorcycle, *epiphanies* or *turning points* (Creswell, 2007).

3.5. Data analysis

The interviews were fully transcribed. Nvivo11® was used to support the encoding process, based on four categories: masculinities, motorcycle; traffic regulations and figures of authority; and Road Traffic Injuries. The triangulation of the data was performed and codified per participant, until a saturation point was reached. The identification of patterns was relevant to define social representations, which were presented and validated later on via two focus groups: The first one, with 10 of the motorcycle riders who participated, and the second one with 12 female, selected by convenience sampling. The criteria to form the women's focus group were: 1) Being residents in Valledupar, 2) using the motorcycle as riders or as moto-taxi users; 3) having had any motorcycle RTIs, 4) having time disposal for attending the focus group and, 5) having at least a high school degree to facilitate reflexive and analytical

conversations in the validation process.

4. Results and discussion

Social representations identified are presented below, in combination with the literature. These representations are articulated through metaphors that refer to beliefs, values and social practices which dominate the setting of road users. Although each group of representations is presented independently, the analysis shows relations of interdependence that reveal their mutual feedback.

The findings show that the breach of traffic regulations, frequent intake of alcohol, speeding and the attitude that legitimizes the lack of self-preservation and care for others are common among motorcycle riders with RTIs. They represent habitual, culturally legitimated socialization patterns in the configuration of male subjectivities in Valledupar. These findings contribute to explain the high number of men with RTIs and guide decision-making regarding road safety public policies, with special emphasis on intermediate cities in countries with medium-level incomes. It is urgent to develop diverse and complementary long-term strategies that articulate educational interventions with a gender approach, geared to transform cultural practices that legitimize risky riding instead of promoting changes in individual behaviors (Redshaw, 2006); in combination with the means to supervise the regulations (speed enforcement and drink-driving enforcement) (Vecino-Ortiz et al., 2018), upgrading road infrastructure (Noland, 2003; Wang et al., 2013) and strengthening police institutionality (citation redacted for author anonymity), as suggested by the international literature (Araujo et al., 2017).

4.1. Injuries? No way! war wounds!

Participants narrate their experiences of road traffic incidents with enthusiasm, as if they were spectacular adventures, which reveals a tendency to bond with other men through the scars left in their bodies by these injuries. The socialization of these experiences by males, understood as *war wounds* or *honor medals* (Courtenay, 2000), is a privileged setting to reaffirm patterns of bravery and invulnerability. Scars are the material evidence of having faced death and having conquered after this combat; in consequence, they use them as a symbol of honor, together with the stories about medical complications in surgeries and periods on sick leave that were overcome.

“as I survived all of these [referring to injuries and accidents], I realized I can beat death”. (laughing aloud he states: “I’ve had many accidents. So many I lost track” (Participant 8, Interview 2).

These meanings related to road incidents seem to initiate in the teenage years, when men learn how to ride in informal settings such as around the block, the soccer field or the park (citation redacted for author anonymity). Teenagers often fall or crash against objects, and they get a positive response from the male figures accompanying this learning process. Thus, falls or crashes are represented as part of the process of acquiring competence and command over the machine. In the words of a participant, “falls make the motorcyclist” (subject 3, interview 2).

Consequently, although the most serious RTIs, some with associated long-term physical injuries, left a strong emotional impact on the participants, our findings show that in most cases these RTIs do not lead to substantial changes in risky riding practices, nor do they promote the use of road safety gear, such as helmets. A cautious attitude is perceived during the first months after the injury, such as the reduction of speed when motorcyclists have a passenger, especially if the passenger is their child: “I am reckless when riding alone, but when I have a passenger, or my kid, I can’t” (subject 3, interview 2). However, when the emotional impact is overcome, the risky riding practice is resumed (especially among youngsters and young adults), hand in hand with renewed confidence in their riding skills, a situation that leads them to perfect the infringement of traffic regulations.

“I thought I was going to change because the family asked me to change. But I didn’t. We say that at the time: ‘yes, I won’t do it again’. But I’ve done it again! The adrenaline for motorcycles is stronger” (Participant 1, interview 1).

Both focus groups validated the findings; women, for instance, emphasized that RTIs do not necessarily change reckless riding behavior: “they go back to riding after the crisis and make the same mistakes they had made before. I know more than one of them who has crashed many times and has been on the verge of killing himself” (woman 3, focus group).

4.2. Men don't chicken out - they take up challenges

The representation of injuries as *war wounds* is supported by cultural patterns historically bound with hegemonic masculinities and recreated in settings where the daily life of men and their interactions with women develop. Road riding becomes a stage to show their manliness, under the watch of those who demand bravery, dexterity and proof of honor (Aguirre and Güell, 2002; Farapi, 2009). In this setting, one of the predominant representations takes us to the image of a man who does not “chicken out” (or “*no se arruga*” in Colombian Spanish; literally “does not shrink”) in the face of adversity; on the contrary, takes up challenging suggestions from his peers, as these provide an opportunity to show off his control and command of the situation, his emotions, and the vehicle (Lagergren, 2007).

“When we are riding together in a group somebody says, ‘let’s see which runs faster: your bike or mine’. So we go to a traffic light where there are not many cars and we wait for the green light and take off [...] Then we get together to laugh at the crazy thing we just did, riding at more than 110, 120 km per hour” (Subject 1, interview 2).

In the focus groups, this representation was widely validated. Women agreed that this idea is linked to perceiving adversity as a challenge. Men state that they do not “chicken out” of anything as a way of making women feel safe and protected in situations where they express fear or see danger. It is also a resource to show themselves as better or superior than other men, seen as weaker or less skilled:

“When they say, ‘I don't chicken out’, that is their inner macho coming out, their ego; they say that to make us feel we have a real man in front of us, who does not fear anything and that we have nothing to worry about” (woman 4, focus group.)

“They brag all the time, they want to show that they are the best, that they are awesome – I can, I did this, I ...” (woman 7, focus group).

Expertise when riding, identified as a male skill (Özkan and Lajunen, 2005) is characterized by rushing, recklessness, transgression, aggressiveness and confidence; as opposed to insecure, fearful, cautious and law-abiding, which from the perspective of participants are traits related with many women in their territory. As one of the participants points out, “Women are more fearful; a woman who runs a red light has to believe she is a male” (Participant 3, interview 1).

Although the way women ride is associated with a lower probability of collisions, this riding style is not perceived as admirable, but rather as a sign of weakness and disadvantage; therefore risky riding is taken as an assertion of privilege and ownership of the public roads. As a result, streets become the perfect setting for deploying control, strength and dominance to beat the fantasized rival (other male riders), and even conquer one's own limits (Aguirre and Güell, 2002).

“When I'm on the street I take it as my property. I feel it's mine. I feel secure, although not trusting, because you have to be cautious; twice, three times cautious” (Subject 11, interview 2).

To sum up, the male privilege on the use of public space, first taken with enthusiasm and pride, is also felt as a silenced pain regarding social expectations of having to undergo several *testing mechanisms* to reaffirm masculinity (Balgane, 2013) which they can't accomplish in the practice satisfactorily. This finding shows that the category of hegemonic masculinity in context is not fixed, but dynamic. It works through patterns of identification and distancing from power hierarchies; it shows different nuances and it is permanently redefined (Coles, 2008; Connel, 2003; Dale et al., 2015).

“This job is very hard [referring to moto-taxi riding]. We don't like being out in the rain and the sun every day, going back and forth; plus, the money we make is just barely enough for a day. But we have to go on because the child is hungry at home, and in the end, that's what men are for” (Participant 7, interview 2).

4.3. Every law has its loophole

Among the *testing mechanisms* to reaffirm masculinity, the infringement of the law has a prominent place, and it is frequently a factor leading to RTIs. Common practices include exceeding speed limits, crossing red lights, stepping on the pedestrian crossing, going the wrong way and riding under the influence of alcohol. These findings were confirmed by men and women during the validation process.

The infraction appears as an *opportunity* to reaffirm male bravery, as it allows riders to show their skill and control of the vehicle. Moreover, in the same approach of other studies, time management allows riders to reduce the time in traffic in the city, an argument frequently used to ride over the speed limit and break the law (Hagen et al., 2016; Oliveira et al., 2015; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2017). As stated by some interviewees, “we buy the motorcycle to avoid traffic jams” (Participant 8, interview 2); “you get the motorcycle to be able to leave late and get there on time” (Participant 7, interview 1); “If I'm in a hurry, I do not follow the traffic signals [...] That's when the motorcycle serves its purpose” (Participant 3, interview 2).

On the other hand, there is a tendency to place the rider's subjective responsibility for the well-being of themselves and others on social factors perceived as out of their control. One of them is the cultural acceptance of breaking the rules expressed in the idea “In Valledupar we all infringe the law”, which underscores the image that *rules are meant to be broken*: There are no model citizens there, and as they say: “let him who is with no sin cast the first stone” (Participant 8, interview 1). This perception was confirmed by both women and men during validation; even women acknowledged that they had not followed regulations sometimes:

“There is very little citizen culture here in Valledupar ... I ride a motorcycle, and sometimes I run the light even though I know the rules. My son told me one day, ‘mom, you can cause an accident’. I know them, but sometimes I break the rules, and a lot of people do it too” (woman 12, focus group).

Another factor is represented by the belief that *motorcycle rider's safety is in God's hands*, a reason why it is not very important taking road safety measures as required by law (Konkor et al., 2019), (citation redacted for author anonymity). As explained by one of the interviewees, “as I say, the day God may need me, I may have all the safety in the world. If God wishes I die, there is no safety that will stop Him” (Participant 7, Interview 2). The cultural normalization of breaching the norms and the idea that the motorcyclist's safety depends on God, supports a generalized nonchalant attitude regarding the use of safety gear like the helmet, and an inadequate use of these safety measures.

Findings regarding riding under the influence of alcohol, especially amongst youngsters and young adults deserve special attention. Accounts by the interviewees are marked with the idea that *refusing a drink offered by another man* is an offense, and as such, this action is socially sanctioned by males, who see this refusal as a female trait tainted with weakness.

Alcohol consumption takes place at many socialization moments and scenarios in the city, and it is especially associated with *la parranda* (a celebration accompanied by vallenato music and alcohol), a cultural Vallenato expression. *La parranda* is spontaneous and unpredictable, and it may be organized at any time, in any public or private setting, a practice that narrows the close connection between road riding and alcohol intake. As one of the interviewees explains,

“I do drink, but at 12 midnight or at 1 a.m. I leave, first because whenever I drink I'm on my motorcycle, and that's how I get around. Most of us have a motorcycle; you get to a bar and outside you'll find about 70, or 80 motorcycles in the parking area. When they close the bar at 3 a.m., you see a motorcade of bike riders, all of them under the influence of alcohol, riding their motorcycles” (Participant 8, Interview 2).

In these cases, participants described the application of “self-care” measures, like drinking water and eating, which, however useless, provide them with the mythical expectation of curbing the effects of alcohol in the blood:

I'm always very careful with that. There is always the possibility that I have a drink sometimes, but I do it not to reject a drink from a friend; so that he is not mad at me later as I did not accept a drink all night. But then I drink water, and more and more water, and I go home with all my senses” (Participant 1, Interview 2).

These findings regarding the infringement of traffic regulations challenge the idea that motorcyclists break the laws due to their lack of knowledge (Oliveira et al., 2015), and they suggest that this behavior operates under a conscious, intentional decision. Including these sociocultural aspects in similar studies is essential to understand their effect on road riding and improve public policies geared toward the prevention of RTIs (Konkor et al., 2019), (citation redacted for author anonymity).

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that, although in Colombia and in Valledupar, there are road laws, there are also institutional weaknesses which, added to the lack of legitimacy amongst citizens, hinder their efficient application. In this respect, the narratives of participants showed that Traffic Police is perceived as a fragile institution, permeated by corruption (Konkor et al., 2019). This opinion was validated in the focus groups with several examples and daily experiences, questioning the authority of Police forces.

Police actions are seen as persecution, especially against motorcyclists, which often leads youngsters and young adults to perform subtle avoidance practices such as looking for places where traffic police are rarely found; and openly explicit actions like fleeing and being chased. For participants, the image of a traffic enforcement agent is usually of an enemy who is either to be defeated or “negotiated with”. In the former option, the competition takes place on the streets, through fleeing and being chased, experiences that later on become a source of male pride; in the latter, the negotiating skills of the riders are put to the test to dissuade, or even bribe.

Even though both focus groups show low credibility of Police as an exemplary authority, the two groups are different when it comes to relational mechanisms: women question the Police's authority, but do not resort to competition (as men do); they use dissuasive strategies to avoid fines. Future studies exploring risky driving behavior in women should probably take this into account.

4.4. You just “push it to the limit” to feel the adrenaline

Roads and motorcycle riding are ideal to recreate gender norms related with a relationship model that normalizes competition, control and invulnerability as patterns found in practices associated to dominant masculinity. In the narratives, the motorcycle emerges as the privileged device to experience these patterns, as well as freedom and adrenaline through speed; a combination that stimulates the adoption of risky riding practices (Aguirre and Güell, 2002; Farapi, 2009; Walker et al., 2000) and legitimizes the lack of self-preservation and care for others (Joelsson, 2014), thus increasing the probabilities for RTIs (Best, 2006; Lupton, 2013). In this respect, one of the participants states,

“You feel like your blood is boiling at the time. You don't care who's next to you, not the cops, not the controllers. You feel you're flying and that's an exciting feeling. Going 60, 80 on the motorcycle; it runs through my veins (...) When I go home from work I don't slow down, I go up to 70–80, and if I see I can run a red light, I do it!” (Participant 11, Interview 1).

Riding at high speed allows young men to feel *the adrenaline* (pleasure) and with it, risk, recklessness and invulnerability (Bonino, 1992; Özkan and Lajunen, 2005; Rodríguez Luna, 2015). In interviews with adult males, risky riding appears to be a less frequent practice facing the perception of responsibility that is taken up when starting a family. Risky riding practices do not always vanish, but other motivations come into play, associated with the family economy, as in the case of moto-taxi riders.

Focus groups confirmed these results, and women specifically mentioned that even though risky riding decreases with age, especially speeding, men do not stop caring for motorcycles; that interest is passed to the next generation: “I have seen how the fathers' fond for motorcycles lead them to buy one to their 15-year-old sons” (woman 1, focus group.) “What decreases is the way men exert that passion; it is not about speed anymore but about caring for the bike, they watch videos, they try to surround themselves with motorcycle-related material” (woman 4, focus group).

In the validation process, both men and women point out that the connection between speed and adrenaline is a very relevant experience for men:

“... it is uncommon to find women who like motorcycles ... there are a few, but it is rare for women to like adrenaline ... in contrast, men like bikes because men like adrenaline, when they are riding they're as if they're hooked” (woman 1, focus group).

These findings support the association between risk-taking and pleasure (Austen, L, 2009) in young men, and it articulates with a sociocultural perspective of risk (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). It reveals also the overlap between gender and age as a relevant factor of

analysis in road safety public policies that could be reflected in differentiated educational and communicative strategies, as well as in the infrastructure. For example, the construction of controlled settings to practice sports like stunts or drag races, combined with instruction and permanent surveillance on the importance of wearing safety gear like helmets.

Another relevant finding corresponds to the affective bond men often establish with their motorcycle, making their motorcycle an object of personification and humanization (Mellström, 2004). Attributes that provide motorcycles a stronger place as the perfect resource to display masculinity practices prevailing in the territory.

“I take good care of my motorcycle because it is my *pechichona*, as I call it [a female term of endearment] and it is also a machine on the track [referring to the power it shows in drag races]. Even my girlfriend is jealous of it; she says I love my bike more than I love her [laughing]”. (Participant 1, interview 2).

Men establish a close relationship with motorcycles at an early age. Friends, fathers or male relatives promote their passion for motorcycles and encourage teenagers to start riding them, as a sort of passing ritual from childhood to manhood: “turning into men” (Bonino, 1992; Merlino et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2000). As one of the participants reported, at 14, when he became interested in motorcycles, “My father used to tell my mother: ‘This will help the boy turn into a man’” (Participant 2, interview 2).

Both focus groups confirmed the affectionate relationship men have with their motorcycles. When describing this bond, women point out important connections to the ways heterosexual romantic love is experienced, linked to domination-submission gender roles, as expressed in this quote:

“We have a meme here in the Coast: ‘stay with the one who looks at you the same way he looks at his motorcycle’. They get to the point of loving and caring for their bike, and disliking when somebody looks at their bike, or touches it; they don't lend it, and invest more than what you could expect on it” (woman 5, focus group.)

These representations show that gender constructions and masculinities are relational; in this process, the motorcycle has a central spot that demands attention from road safety policies.

Therefore, the bond with the motorcycle seems to be associated with a strong contrast between “hitting it hard” to draw pleasure from it and taking care of and protecting it. These elements of analysis, together with the representations of lesions as war injuries, the naturalization of the infringement of traffic regulations and the idea of challenging the road make up valuable inputs to include the gender approach in the design of road safety policies. For example, introducing messages in communication campaigns related to self-preservation practices and the proper care for the machine: “*I take care of my life; I take care of my motorcycle*”, and providing opportunities for reflection with motorcyclists, their families, and the traffic police on the meaning and value of traffic regulations in road riding.

5. Limitations

The findings of this research require further studies that include women to ensure their transferability, as this only interviewed a small group of men who were victims of RTIs in an intermediate city. Learning about social representations held by women regarding their risky riding behavior and contrasting them with those found here would contribute to better evidence for decision making in public policies with a gender approach.

6. Conclusions

This study showed that introducing a gender approach to the analysis of explanatory factors of RTIs and particularly the relationship between gender, age and road incidents significantly contributes to the comprehension of the problem. There is a close relationship between risky riding behavior and hegemonic patterns of masculine subjectivity, which contrasts with the “feminization” of safe riding practices. That is, attitudes such as competition, domination, invulnerability, expertise and recklessness when riding, traditionally characterized as male, are deemed desirable and positive culturally, whereas more lawful attitudes, including measures of protection and care for the self and others, are felt as weak and fragile, and thus despised.

Likewise, findings show that serious RTIs, knowledge of the rules of the road and recognition of dangerous situations do not predict the adoption of substantial changes in risky riding behaviors, nor do they encourage the use of road safety devices.

Educational strategies have traditionally emphasized a fear-based perspective, presenting people with raw exposure to the consequences of RTIs (Donovan et al., 1999), training them on regulations and traffic signals and giving them information about the advantages of the proper use of helmets and other safety implements (Byrnes and Gerberich, 2012; Yu et al., 2011). In our opinion, it is possible to improve the efficiency of educational actions if we include pedagogical practices from a gender approach (Rodríguez Luna, 2015; Treviño - Siller et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2000; WHO, 2002), directed toward the transformation of social representations associated with versions of masculinity that promote risky riding. We suggest that future researches expand on the impact of these social constructions on men's physical and emotional health from an appreciative perspective (Lewis et al., 2007) and also emphasize the idea of self-preservation and care for others as a strategy to protect the lives of motorcyclists (Oliveira et al., 2015).

Finally, the findings of this study highlight the importance of conducting interventions toward mid- and long-term cultural change, rather than studies focusing on individual behavioural changes. As well, we consider a good strategy to combine these actions with rule enforcement, improvement of roads infrastructure and strengthening police institutionality.

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