

Masculine protest and gender performance among Mexico City's young offenders

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Abstract :

The increase in violence in Latin American cities during the first decades of the XXI Century has caught the attention of the local governments, civil society and international organizations, who seek to explain the phenomenon and provide solutions through public policy. Regardless of local contexts, the main protagonists of social violence in the region are mainly marginalized young men, who convert their neighborhoods into trenches of meaning and make a tool out of violence in order to claim the power of patriarchy they cannot achieve by other means. Based on the testimonies collected through focus groups with 84 young offenders in Mexico City's prison system, I will analyze juvenile delinquency from a cultural perspective that allows us to observe it as a performative act of the gender order, and to describe the symbolic meanings that relate the exercise of juvenile delinquency with a masculine protest, as defined by R.W. Connell.

Key words: Masculine protest, Mexico City, young offenders, young males, violence

Eril Protesto ve Mexico City'nin Genç Suçlularının Toplumsal Cinsiyet Performansları

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Özet :

Yirmi birinci yüzyılın ilk on yıl yılında Latin Amerika şehirlerinde artan şiddet, bu olguyu anlamaya ve kamu politikaları ile çözmeye çalışan yerel hükümetlerin, sivil toplumun ve uluslararası örgütlerin dikkatini çekti. Yerel bağlamdan bağımsız olarak, bölgedeki sosyal şiddetin ana karakterleri genelde kenara itilmiş genç erkeklerdir. Bu erkekler mahallelerini “anlam siperlerine” dönüştürürler ve başka bir yöntemler elde edemeyecekleri ataerkinin gücünden paylarını almak için şiddeti araçsallaştırırlar. Mexico City cezaevlerinde yatan 84 genç suçlu ile gerçekleştirilen odak grubu çalışmasını temel alarak, kültürel bir perspektiften çocuk suçluluğunu inceleyeceğim. Bu perspektif, çocuk suçluluğunu cinsiyet rejiminin performatif bir eylemi olarak değerlendirme ve çocuk suçu eylemlerini, R. W. Connell'in tanımladığı şekliyle, eril protesto ile ilişkilendiren sembolik anlamları tarif etme imkânı tanıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eril protesto, çocuk suçluluğu, Mexico City, genç erkekler, şiddet

According to the 2013-2014 Regional Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (V), Latin America had an 11% increase in lethal violence in the first decade of the XXI century which represents over a million dead people, most of them were young men. In Mexico, the World Bank's Report on Youth Violence (27) showed that between 2000 and 2010, the annual homicides rate per every 100,000 inhabitants was 1.4 for women and 10.8 for men. From 2007 to 2010¹, that number was multiplied by 2.6 for women and 3.4 for men. Young men are also the main perpetrators of social violence. According to the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Security 2013 (INEGI, Tab II), 86.5% of crimes in Mexico were committed by males only². The highest percentage of offenders, 33.5%, were under 25 years old, while the 30.2% was aged 26 to 36, and only 18.5% was over 36 years old.

Statistics show that crime in Mexico is a social problem related to youth and masculinity. This is undoubtedly a multifactorial phenomenon, however, an analysis from the perspective of masculinity studies will overcome the visions that criminalize young men, and will confirm the close relation between the cultural construction of masculinity and the exercise of violence expressed in juvenile delinquency.

Throughout this article I will argue that is possible to observe a gender logic related to masculinity in the exercise of Mexico City's juvenile delinquency. This logic is presented in the form of "masculine protest" (Connell 109) and is a performative act that showcases the cultural discourses associated with social construction of marginalized masculinity.

Focus groups with young offenders in Mexico City

This research arose from a long term fieldwork at a center for young offenders in Mexico City's prison system. In 2012, the period in which

this research was conducted, the center received over 4,000 young men and women who were accused of committing a crime in the city. In that same year, 90.5% of the detained young offenders in Mexico City were prosecuted for theft, 13 % for rape, and 2.73% for murder³.

A total of 84 boys, aged 13 to 20, participated in 18 discussion groups conducted from March to December, 2012. During the discussion groups, subjects were asked to converse about topics such as violence against women, masculinity and community violence in their neighborhoods. The participants also narrated the experience of being arrested. As Canales and Peinado (290) describe, discussion groups allow observing the speech of the research subjects in the context of a dialogue situation, which made this methodological strategy ideal for this research interested in observing the social discourses of masculinity in the context of peer group.

Minimal intervention of the researcher during the discussions was also a good methodological option for this study because young offenders have gone through constant psychological, legal, and social work interviews that make them suspicious and reluctant to cooperate. It's not unusual to hear them say they are tired of telling their life to strangers, that they are bored or that they just do not understand what benefit will come from these interviews.

In recognition of the symbolic violence involved in the interview, especially in the context I have just described, I decided that the boys should act as interviewers, while my role was limited to establishing and briefly presenting the general topic, and controlling the duration of the discussion. They elaborated their own questions and the discussion group was carried on as an informal conversation between them.

This exercise was useful in several ways. First, the boys asked questions that I had not initially considered, as they have a deeper knowledge of the social environment they were referring to in the discussions. In addition, topics took unexpected directions and ended up discussing social phenomena they observe in their communities but do not have any opportunities to talk about in public, such as the

discrimination they receive from adults, the impact that violent events have on them and the tense relationship with the police. Finally, it seems significant to note the change in the power relation, since they ceased to be passive interviewees and became active interviewers.

Social marginalization and masculine protest

Mexico City is the location with the lowest urban deprivation rates in the country, nevertheless, the highest percentage (17.8%) of the participants in this research lived in marginalized neighborhoods of Iztapalapa, one of the 16 boroughs that Mexico City is divided into, and the region of the city with highest urban deprivation: 369, 716 people, 20.6% of the total population of the borough, live in “high” or “very high” levels of marginalization (CONAPO 2010).

Male population in these neighborhoods has a “low” average education level, which means that the typical men studied 8.7 years. Only one of the participants in this research lives in a zone where education level average reaches university. The testimonies of the boys that participated in the discussion groups show a tense relationship with the education system. They perceived school as a place they don’t belong to, and abandoned it very early. On the other hand, many of them were expelled from school after their detention because they were seen as a bad example or because their teachers thought they were too irresponsible and dangerous; others decided not to return to school because they feared rejection.

The percentage of male unemployment in these areas of the city is above the national average, 5.12% in July 2013, and in some cases the percentage reaches 25%. It is worth mentioning that most of the neighborhoods where participants live have been historically associated with crime, insecurity, and informal trade. Most of the boys were working with relatives in temporary or casual jobs: helping at informal food or clothing stands, selling candy on the public transport, working as truck or bus drivers, or as apprentices in manual labour or trades. In

other cases, they accepted risky jobs related to gambling or cockfighting, because these activities represented higher gains.

As Nayak (813-815) argues, these boys face complex transformations in the economic system that impact upon masculine identities, endangered by the uncertainty of labour market. However, precarious conditions in Mexico and Latin America completely alienated marginalized men from the working class, and eliminated their possibilities of accessing the legal labour market because they are excluded from the increasingly specialized training required by the productive sphere.

These structural conditions of historical marginalization that permeate and difficult planning paths of life for young men in Latin America, create a scenario in which the masculine protest is presented with higher levels of violence, elevated social costs and involve a larger percentage of the population. Currently, as the conditions of inequality deepen and the gap between the rich and the poor grows, expectations for young people in marginalized areas become even worst. Labor options for these young people are increasingly being reduced to crime and informality (ILO 1-2).

In order to analyze these specific relations between masculinities in diverse contexts, Connell and Messerschmidt (849) suggest observing hegemonic masculinities at a local, regional and global level. In doing so, we will be able to recognize relations between different forms of masculinity and particularities in the different levels. Young offenders in Mexico City, as observed in this research, perceived hegemonic masculinity as a distant model that do not corresponds to their own lives but still, manages to create an ideal image of what they consider to be “a good man”. As Connell and Messerschmidt explain “these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations.” (838).

In contrast, the performative act of violence shows a close relationship between the exercise of juvenile delinquency and “protest masculinity”, defined by Connell and Messerschmidt as “a pattern of

masculinity constructed in local working-class settings, [...], which embodies the claim to power typical of regional hegemonic masculinities in Western countries, but which lacks the economic resources and institutional authority that underpins the regional and global patterns.” (848).

As we will see in the following pages, young offenders in Mexico City seek access to the power of patriarchy and try to transit from the childhood condition to the male hierarchy of adult males through exaggerated demonstration of masculine characteristics that offer prestige in the local level. The condition of marginalization sets its own cultural codes to acquire prestige and power according to the resources they have access to, which are often limited to the exercise of violence.

The performative act. Masculine practices in juvenile delinquency

The normative dimension of the gender order is responsible for establishing requirements and prohibitions according to the position occupied in gender relations. These requirements and prohibitions can be punished or rewarded socially and, according to Scott, they “set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities. These concepts are expressed in religious, educational, scientific, legal, and political doctrines and typically take the form of fixed binary opposition, categorically and unequivocally asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine.” (1067). According to José Olavarria, in the case of males, compliance with these requirements and prohibitions ensures the membership of the individual to the male world. On the other hand, disobeying the norm can mean rejection from the other men but also from women (Olavarria 123-124).

The existence of a normative dimension of the gender order shows that the acts that subjects perform to meet the standards of masculinity, are involved in a grid of social meanings and power relations that go beyond the subject and precede him in social life. “Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one’s gender,

but *that* one does it, and that one does it in *accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter." (Butler 276).

Youth is a particularly important step for men, since they must undergo a series of tests or performative acts that allow them to entry adulthood and 'become a man'. Norma Fuller understands adolescence as a liminal stage, in terms of Victor Turner, in which young people still lack the attributes necessary to be recognized as men, but are no longer children. In this liminality, "masculinity is defined as a status to achieve and as certain qualities to be developed" (Fuller 73).

Masculinity is not obtained directly but must be earned and constantly proved. Men receive demands and pressures to show their manhood. Olavarria ensures that, in response, young men may justify some practices that are inconsistent with their own moral values, under the arguments of responsibility and honor.

Adolescence is perhaps one of the stages of men's life in which this crossroads are presented with more strength, because it is the period of initiatory tests that permit the passage to adulthood. The terms of the dominant / hegemonic masculinity begin to be consciously embodied and impel them to be tested against themselves and against others. This is one of the stages of men's life in which a series of violent behavior is warranted as responsible practices (124).

Connell coincides with Judith Butler when she says that this staging of the normative dimension of the gender order is not individual but social. However, frustration and helplessness caused by not being able to fulfill the mandates of masculinity do have effects at the individual level and the construction of identity.

The difference is that this is a collective practice, not something within a person. [In the street gangs of the working class] there appears to be no pattern of equal development, except, of course, the level of tension caused by poverty and a violent

environment. Through interaction with this context, the child learns to show a tense facade, strange, claiming a power where it is clear that there are no real resources to obtain it.

These young people have great concern about maintaining this facade; they spend a lot of energy trying to exhibit certain aspect. (Connell 160).

Mexico City's young offenders make huge efforts to maintain the facade, but also take great risks. Awareness of the risks is what confers value to the act, if they were not aware of the benefits that can be obtained and the symbolic capital that involves assuming them, there would be no sense in risking life and freedom.

In the testimonies and discussions that occurred during the focus groups, the practices related to masculinity that young men were mostly concerned about, were related to earning enough money for them or for their family, the ability to protect, physical and emotional strength, respect from peers, and the exercise of violence.

Labour has not the same significance for the new generation, youth does not have the same appreciation that their parents or grandparents gave to it, and however, it still remains relevant in terms of independence. Young people want to work in order to stop depending on their parents, to have a girlfriend, to stop obeying the rules, or to leave home; but the idea of supporting the family in the context of precariousness still persists.

The participants in the discussion groups explained that many of them used to rob for ambition, because they wanted to have 'easy' money to spend on clothes or to afford expensive things when they go out with their girlfriends. They also said that having money made them feel independent. The possibility to consume, rather than the fact of having a job, allowed them to feel the sensation of being adults.

Permanent job is still present in the discourse and imagery of youth when building a virtual masculinity that exists in the discourse but not in the practice. According to the following testimonies obtained in

the discussion groups⁴, this characteristic distinguishes them from 'honest' and 'responsible' men, and separates them from hegemonic masculinity represented in the 'good men' who have 'decent' lives.

An honest man is someone who works and keeps his money.

An honest man knows how to allocate his money: some for his wife, some for his children. It means having your money well assigned, and being able to organize your life.

There was a shared belief that the money 'ill-gotten' they earn, vanishes really fast. They said that sometimes it even disappeared from their pockets or they just spend it all inviting friends to eat or drink, but they should do so because when they did not have any money, their friends invited them.

The money you earn badly, badly disappears. Very fast, it disappears. The money well earned you can give it to your mom and you don't have to hide from the police.

Adolescents who were close to adulthood or those who were firstborns expressed the need to fulfill the requirement to contribute financially to the household. Those who had children of their own felt uncomfortable when living at their father's house, especially when the father was the main provider, instead of themselves. Precarization of labor, exclusion and lack of opportunities, hamper efforts to get money legally.

Changing practices in gender roles is also present virtually in the discourses of these young men, most of them agreed that couples should communicate to share expenses and that it is increasingly common for women to participate as providers in their families. But a large part of them saw things differently when it came to their own life. They sustained that, although they understand the importance of gender equality, society doesn't approve disobedience of gender roles regarding the supply of money and activities at home, and therefore, their image would suffer if they disobeyed. They expressed this change in gender roles as follows:

It is not always the man who holds the family but when it's done by a woman, it's not appropriated.

One thing is that your girlfriend pays for your ice cream or something. That would be different. But I pay when we go to the movies, I pay for everything. That's what men are made for, for paying! Women were made to be treated tenderly, lovingly.

Just as a woman looks bad drinking beer, a man looks bad washing dishes. What will the neighbors think if they see me?

The act of protection is powerfully linked to masculinity and demonstration of strength, courage and responsibility. Several teenagers were arrested for fighting other men in response to what they considered an insult or a threat to a woman. One of them narrated the moment of his detention and explained that he was on the street with his friends when they saw a girl walking alone on the sidewalk and then she was attacked by another group of men. He and his friends decided to defend her, but the other group reacted and caused a pitched fight that attracted the police. Another one claimed that he and his family got involved in an automobile accident that was followed by a heated discussion with the other driver, who ended up insulting the boy's mother. He tried to defend her but the other person called the police and accused him and his mother of injury, so they were detained.

Some of the teenagers committed the crime for loyalty, fear or imitation to those men located at a higher position of the male hierarchy in which they operate and represent the models of masculinity they want to follow. Most of the time it comes to close relatives such as parents, uncles or older siblings. For example, two of the boys were detained because the older brother of one of them assaulted a man in the street. They tried to stop him but he told them it was time they learned and called them 'brats'. The threat of infantilization made them support the crime. In other cases, adolescents defended other men younger than

themselves, whom they considered they should protect, as the next testimony explains:

They caught me with my cousin, he got into trouble because he fought a guy and the guy shoved a cell phone in his backpack to say he had stolen it. When I arrived, the police men were beaten my cousin and they arrested me for defending him.

The exercise of violence and the adoption of risk behaviors for demonstrating courage and gaining respect from the peer group are socially required in the context of marginalization, but they also represent a personal challenge that needs to be constantly demonstrated.

Most adolescents said they were aware that violence does not necessarily make them brave. A recurring phrase in the discussion groups was that someone is brave when he dares to say 'no', referring mostly to refusing to give in to peer pressure that leads them to stealing, drinking or using drugs. Again, this was only in the discourse, but in the practice, their worries for social pressure were evident when they talked about 'defending oneself', 'making people respect you', or 'pulling out the claws'. They spoke of a great need to show that no one can 'mess with you' and if they do, there must be consequences.

Action is what produces the sensation of meeting the demands of gender normativity and, therefore, gives identity. This is exposed by the following testimony, which shows that the act of stealing generates the feeling of courage that the gender order demands. Same happens with the acts of fighting, alcohol and drug abuse, feminizing insults, and the defense of honor.

In order to feel brave I started to rob, I felt that I would never be caught or than if I was caught and they take me where ever they take me, I will resist, for I was brave.[...] When I was high and stuff, I felt brave, I felt badass. I used to put myself in danger because I just went and robbed and

didn't know what was going to happen. Felt brave because when some kids stared at me, I used to tell them things or hit them.

The normative dimension of the gender order not only establishes specific requirements for men to achieve, it also enacts prohibitions. The most recurrent prohibitions in the life stories of young offenders are referred to the demonstration of affection, expression of feelings, and request for help. Their family histories include breakups, violence, terminal illness of close relatives, and consistent losses of affective bonding. At the discussion groups, adolescents commented that instead of expressing how they feel about their family situation, they prefer to avoid the problems by being away from home as long as possible, going to parties or using drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and drug consumption is identified as an indicator of adulthood and masculinity: consumption makes you feel older, it makes you a man, and it makes you brave; but it also allows that during the influence of alcohol or drugs, men express the feelings and worries, which is socially prohibited at other moments.

The space / scenario

The negative implication that has been symbolically assigned to the private spheres of social life generates a rejection of male subjectivity that seeks to distance itself by joining the relations of production, characteristics of the public sphere. The symbolic inferiority of private space not only affects those subjects who, because of their biological conditions, have been socially oriented to reproduction; it also forces out into the public space those who have been historically associated with physical labor and economic productivity.

In "Masculine Domination" Bourdieu explains how the logic of domination manages to instill in women the same negative image the dominant logic has imputed to them, but he also describes men's need to distance themselves from the private sphere associated with femininity, and to strengthen their position of power in relation to women, but

especially over other men regarding dominance within the economic and political order.

This symbolic violence explains the heightened need of men to accomplish a satisfactory performance in rites of passage, even by risking life and freedom, in order to demonstrate their ability to enter the public arena of competition, the relations of production, power and politics, and to abandon the private sphere considered feminine, weak, emotional or childish. Only this demonstration, supported by other men, will allow them to succeed in the public sphere and to be considered competent to occupy a privileged place in patriarchy power.

Masculinity studies have succeeded in describing that the transition from private to public space happens from different rites of passage that are met primarily during adolescence, and whose target audience is the peer group. Teens must show they are no longer children and that they are able to get away from the female domestic sphere. The performative characteristics of masculinity often include violence in the form of fights, violence, unsafe sex and accidents related to alcohol and drugs.

Research on masculinities and violence in Mexico (Rodríguez; Sánchez) show the relationship between masculinity and youth mortality, whose main causes are associated to injuries from fights, murders with firearms, traffic accidents related to alcohol and speeding, and suicides. This occurs in the public sphere and has a direct relation with masculinity, peer group pressure to show courage, and taking risks to establish hierarchies within the group. In the case of suicide, there is often a frustration of being unable to meet the demands of gender structures or a relation with social prohibition regarding the demonstration of sensitivity, weakness, or asking for help (Seidler).

Moving away from the private sphere also includes emotional distancing from family relationships, that is why social relationships established with the peer group become vital in shaping youth identity. Peer group is responsible for establishing behaviors that will be considered masculine or reject and punish –symbolically and physically– those considered childish or feminine. Furthermore, a series of alliances

and emotional ties are built in it, as a result of the complicity involved in transgressing together the rules and regulations established by the adult world.

Among marginalized young men, the neighborhood [*el barrio*] represents the primary peer group with which alliances, hierarchies, meanings and identities are constructed. According to Valenzuela, the neighborhood is one of the most important spaces for youth socialization in Mexico:

The neighborhood is a structured and structuring space for power relations. The street or neighborhoods are important places in youth meeting. Among poor and middle class youth, *el barrio* participates as one of the fundamental components of secondary socialization, where codes, meanings, routines and, generally, cultural praxis from which young people signify life and shape their styles and formations of life (Valenzuela Arce 31).

Olavarria ensures that access to public spaces is one of the many areas in which males have greater resources than women. Since boys have more freedom to go out, they are less required for domestic activities and are motivated by their parents to the appropriation of the street, which is understood as a masculine space where men socialize and conduct tests that allow them to settle in the male hierarchy.

The appropriation of the street becomes central to the formation of the identity of marginalized young men, who cannot compete for public space in the productive and political spheres. The tests required to accomplish the transition in this context involve risky behaviors related to masculine protest, which constantly have as outcome the violation of the law, either on purpose or by accident. Furthermore, the control and defense of territory becomes so relevant that it deserves to risk life and liberty, when threatened by rival groups.

Tests for the appropriation of street in juvenile delinquency involve minor tasks without much responsibility, but relevant enough to show that the actors are able to join the public sphere of the

neighborhood and the gang. Some activities include being 'shoplifters', i.e. stealing products in supermarkets or department stores for a larger band, usually led by adults. They are also responsible to keep an eye or warn if anyone approaches while others commit the crime.

Regarding the confrontations for the defense territory and community violence in their "*barrios*", the boys said there were certain streets they could not walk through because they had problems with kids who gather there. They also explained that one thing that could save them from everyday violence were alliances and loyalties with other men recognized within the male hierarchy. To achieve these alliances they had to go through tests that sometimes involved a fight or an act of violence, but assured them protection of the group for further occasions. Another way to avoid the violence was the family relationship with a man who had an important position in the male hierarchy, as the next testimony explains:

I live in a slum, nobody enters there. Near my house drunks come together and if you go out there they'll yell things at you. But they don't mess with me because my uncle is with them and if they do anything to me, they will have to deal with him.

The neighborhood is the scenario where young offenders present their male performance related to violence. In Spanish, the phrase "*el barrio*" has two meanings, the first one refers to it as space, the neighborhood; and the second one refers to the peer group, the gang. It is constructed from the cultural codes of masculinity but it also confers meaning and builds identities. It is the physical representation of *habitus* and the material expression of gender normativity that is present through peer group in order to evaluate, reward or punish, physically and symbolically, performative acts of its members.

Building a frightening body

Based on the foundations of *Queer theory*, theories of performative masculinity state that being a male consists of series of acts - regulated by gender normative- that make appear as natural what is actually the result of a great performative effort. These acts are punished or rewarded with symbolic capital, which can later be exchanged for other types of capital (Nuñez Noriega 55).

This theoretical posture allows observing masculinity not as something natural, essential or permanent, but as the result of a complex process of everyday performative acts that put on the stage symbolic and normative dimensions of masculinity and build the actor's body during the process. From this explanation, it is easier to understand the relevance of the performative act and its acceptance by the peer group since, without it, the construction of identity, space and the body itself becomes meaningless.

Regarding the status of youth, another element considered biological, José Manuel Valenzuela proposes the need to question what biological elements of youth are actually socially conditioned, and how social and material conditions modify the ways in which the bodies go through the different biological stages, for example, the tendency of young peasants to join adulthood faster than urban young people from the upper classes (22).

The intensity of time allows us to identify unequal forms of aging, for time is inscribed on the face and body, and participates in defining projects and personal and social expectations. The concept of social time allows breaking down the perspective of a linear time and understanding social and individual processes that denote social discontinuities ... (Valenzuela Arce 24).

Mexico City's young offenders are a clear example: bodies, faces and expressions are modified and hardened to show courage, strength and toughness. The constant proximity to danger, marginalization and the conception of death as an everyday possibility, modifies the notion of

vital time and causes accelerated aging that can be clearly seen when comparing the physical appearance of a teenager from any poor neighborhood with one of a higher economic level.

Besides the elements considered biological, as gender and aging, the bodies of marginalized young men are loaded with meanings. Daily life in the neighborhood requires a display of masculine power that exalts strength and courage. Corporal adornment is essential for the performance of masculinity, for resisting the oppression of the adult world, and for sending messages to intimidate authorities and rival groups. Tattoos, piercings, haircuts and specific brands of clothes decorate the frightening body.

The body is the only material possession on which marginalized young men may have some kind of autonomy. Although always restricted by social control, they use their skin to resist oppression from the adult world, to bring the neighborhood wherever they go and to send clear messages, as specified by Alfredo Nateras: "If the body is a territory and a space inhabited, (...) the body speaks and is a kind of map susceptible to reading and interpretation of their validity." (Nateras Domínguez 233).

Foucault's biopower concept states that the mechanisms of power try to steer or impose the will of the people over their own bodies. José Manuel Valenzuela argues that despite the existence of this type of control, people do not assimilate the power automatically; instead, they generate resistance through the same bodies. The use of the body for building opposition, resistance and identities is defined by Valenzuela Arce as bioculture.

Bioculture involves the biopolitical dimension defined from the set of devices established by the dominant groups in order to control, discipline and generate disciplined bodies acting in accordance with their interests, in the sense that Foucault, Heller and Agamben meant, but it also involves bioresistance, defined as the set of ways of living and body meaning by persons or actors and social groups in obvious resistance, dispute or challenge of biopolitical provisions (Valenzuela Arce 27).

The resistance of Mexico City's young offenders consists on performative elements that decorate the actor's body: piercings, haircuts, specific clothing brands and muscular enlargement. Many of them carry colored bracelets they learned to braid in the crafts workshops they assisted when they were detained. These bracelets are an undeniable feature related to former convicts, and are desired even by those members of "*el barrio*" who have never been in prison. Body decoration creates discrimination against youth, however, the same elements that marginalize and exclude, provide recognition and locates marginalized young men in the highest places of male hierarchy.

The body is also a victim of the violence that marginalized young men exert over themselves, young men adopt risky behaviors that endanger their own bodies through "the culture of endurance" (Maffia 195), which consists of using the body to prove their loyalty to the gang or to prove to others they are ready to abandon childhood. It also includes endurance contests, alcohol and drug abuse, and unprotected sexual practices.

The bodies of Mexico City's youthful offenders constantly have black eyes or swollen lips, consequences of everyday physical confrontations. They show scars that reveal ancient fights or accidents, and self-inflicted wounds especially in arms and legs, as a result of the discharge of anger, frustration or depression on themselves; they also use to mark their skin with lines that symbolize the time spent in prison. With alarming frequency, teens have neuronal damage due to consumption of solvents and other highly destructive drugs.

Finally, many young men are parents of unwanted children product of unprotected sex, but also as a result of social conditions that give value to parenthood. Teens said there are two ways to abandon crime: meeting a nice woman that persuades them to change their life, and becoming a father. The illusion of fatherhood is a way 'to become a man' that can exceed the masculine tests related to violence, however, the social construction of fatherhood tends to exclude them from the affective process and the responsibilities involved.

Concluding thoughts

The aim of this research was to observe the presence of gender discourses related to masculinity in juvenile delinquency. By analyzing this social phenomenon as gender performance and masculine protest, it is possible to observe the existence of a communication system composed of cultural codes of masculinity, from which marginalized young men who commit crimes transmit messages in order to get recognition of the peer group, to accomplish the status of manhood, and to position themselves in the male hierarchy in which they operate.

These codes are related to the normative and symbolic concepts of gender order that establish the ways of being a man or a woman. This involves the symbolic construction of private/public spheres that places private space as inferior and public space as superior, this power relation leads young men to take possession of the public space represented by the street or the neighborhood. The criminal act is also replete with codes of masculinity that confer meaning to the action, such as the importance of being a successful provider for family economic needs, honor, courage and loyalty. Masculine codes of strength, toughness, endurance and risky behavior are embodied and define the way in which subjects go across the stages of life.

The exercise of juvenile delinquency is a staging that demonstrates the importance of peer group acceptance for the formation of masculine identity. Under the conditions of marginalization and proximity to crime, it represents a path for social mobility that will allow them to position themselves in the male hierarchy that grants recognition and respect under their own codes of honor and loyalty.

The effectiveness of the performance put on scene by actors is endorsed or rejected by the peer group and social institutions, which reward or punish them socially, physically and economically. This shows that violent acts are not isolated individual acts, but the enactment of a larger cultural structure composed of gender norms, codes of

masculinity and power relations that determine the action. Therefore, public policy designed to reduce crime and juvenile delinquency should include solutions focused on social structures and not on individual acts.

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¹ During this period of time, former President Felipe Calderon conducted the security strategy against Drug cartels. The general homicides rate per every 100,000 inhabitants increased from 8.4 in 2007 to 23.8 in 2010.

² 5.3% was committed only by women, 5.5% was committed by several persons among whom there were men and women, and in 2.7% of cases the victims were unable to specify the sex of the person who committed the crime.

³ Felonies described refer only to those committed by teenagers who were arrested and legally prosecuted by the prison system, but do not represent the total of crimes committed in the city.

⁴ The Law of Justice for Adolescents in Mexico City protects the identity of the under aged population in the prison system. For that reason, the author of this paper is not allowed to provide any private data such as name, nickname, age or address of the informants.