Migration Letters

Volume: 20, No: S3(2023), pp. 1197-1206 ISSN: 1741-8984 (Print) ISSN: 1741-8992 (Online) www.migrationletters.com

Speeches by Young University Students on Alcohol Consumption: A Reading from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

The phenomenon of alcohol consumption in young people has been closely related to the cultural and social, this complexity means that its approach is given from different perspectives and one of them is the study from the gender perspective that guides the present study. The objective was to identify, from a gender perspective, the senses and meanings of alcohol consumption among young health science students. Sociohermeneutic discourse analysis was used, from which the dialectical sense unit of control in alcohol consumption originated. This unit is based on five dimensions of control that weave dialectical relationships and are the interpretive axis: Being under control (implies the participation of an external gaze that monitors normative and stereotyped behaviors for being a man and for being a woman); Getting out of control (it is related to an internal look that can call for the breaking of stereotypes) Self-control (recognition of one's own limits regarding consumption); Not being in self-control (the need to get back under control when alcohol is consumed in excess) and Re-being under control (go back to complying with what is regulated or what is under surveillance by the external gaze); which are part of the ways in which young university participants, both men and women, recover, relate and signify and give meaning to the diversity of situations of alcohol consumption and how these are part of the way of subjecting themselves.

Keywords: *Gender*; *youth*; *Alcohol*; *Control*; *Sex.*

Introduction

The World Health Organization defines alcohol as a psychoactive substance with dependence-causing properties, and its consumption in the population is classified as a public health problem, due to the complications and outcomes that it can cause, such as the fact that it generates a considerable health, social and economic burden for society as a whole. (WHO, 2022)

The population of young people and adolescents tend to consume alcohol due to the pressure exerted by their group of friends, lack of self-control, family disintegration,

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stress, and developmental changes mainly at this stage of life (Martin, Medina, & Calixto 2022; Soriano and Jiménez 2022, 73). Likewise, in Colombia, the Ministry of Justice reports that during 2013 and 2020, 24,723 deaths were caused by alcohol consumption, followed by cocaine, with 3,469 (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2022).

According to the study on alcohol consumption in children under 18 years of age in Colombia, 54.5% of young people consider it easy or very easy to get alcohol; And stores are the most accessible place, putting younger populations at greater risk. (Pérez et al. 2022)

Similarly, among the departments with the highest prevalence of alcohol consumption were Boyacá, which ranks first with 92.9%, and Bogota, third place with 87.0%. In addition, Bogotá is the city where teenagers consume alcohol the most days in a row; while Tunja (capital of Boyacá) is the city where teenagers generally consume with their parents and other relatives. In both cities, young people prefer to drink at home; (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2022); These data are important given that these cities are the focus of this study.

Likewise, it is relevant to point out that the university environment is recognized as lonely, stressful and facilitating alcohol consumption and that students of health sciences are a population of interest due to their commitment to this area, which is why the population participating in this study is made up of young students of health sciences.

On the other hand, there are few studies that analyze the phenomenon of collective alcohol consumption from a gender perspective, beyond pointing out the differences by sex. (Pérez et al. 2022; Elipe et al. 2021, 109). Different research shows that gender roles include in the learning of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, as well as in the motivations and expectations that young people have about these practices. There are also differential aspects, in relation to the processes of initiation of consumption, experiences of intensive consumption and risk control, which are essential to propose strategies in accordance with the values and beliefs of young university students. However, gender studies have pointed out that it is necessary to refer to the place of enunciation of the personal experience of each subject, therefore, it is necessary to treat the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of consumption without fragmentation. (Fernández, Demas and Fontanil 2018, 260; Fernandez 2018, 1).

Thus, the guiding principle of gender analysis should be the understanding of the aspects that distinguish the ways of being men and women and how they position themselves in their circumstances. (Cáceres et al. 2020; Chilet and Hernández 2022, 45). It is clear, then, for this project, that consumption not only exposes sex differences (male-female) – an aspect already studied before (Fernández & Corral 2018, 1; Romo et al. 2015, 13) but understands heterogeneity and complexity as a guiding principle of any analysis with a gender perspective.

Method

Qualitative research with a socio-hermeneutic discourse analysis method; information was collected through 10 focus groups, 15 interviews, and 44 participant-observation field diaries in consumer spaces, conducted during 2020 and 2021 with prior informed consent to young people aged 18-24 years, students of Health Sciences at two universities in Colombia; Convenience sampling was carried out, in the focus groups of the most representative key informants in the experience of the phenomenon were detected for the conduct of the interviews and observation of the spaces and scenarios of collective alcohol consumption around the universities and the places identified as having the highest consumption in the city; A total of 24 men and 49 women participated, 14 from medicine, 51 from nursing and 8 from psychology. It had the ethical endorsement of the two university institutions.

1199 Speeches by Young University Students on Alcohol Consumption: A Reading from a Gender Perspective

Each interview, focus group and field diaries were analyzed individually and coded by a researcher and then triangulated with the group of researchers. Likewise, the partial results were presented to the participants with the aim of triangulating with them the initial understandings on the subject. From this last triangulation, some elements were refined, especially the relationships that emerged between the preliminary units of meaning.

The analysis was carried out based on what was proposed by (Ruiz & Alonso, 2019), giving rise to the units of meaning tied to the intentionalities of the discourses. Finally, the dense description is organized based on understanding a sociocultural context called consumption culture, in which the unit of meaning is framed: dialectics of control in alcohol consumption based on five dimensions.

Results

The 5 dimensions of control as an interpretive axis are: Being under control; Getting out of control, Self-control; Not being in self-control and re-being in control. Each of these dimensions arises from the ways in which men and women recover their memories, experiences, reflections, and bodily sensations while in situations of alcohol consumption.

The context called consumer culture responds to how young people have acquired consumption patterns in accordance with the Cundiboyacense culture, which is characterized by patriarchal and colonial persistence. (Chaparro and Guzmán 2017)

Figure 1. Dialectics of control in alcohol consumption: the dimensions of control as an interpretative axis.



Source: Authors.

The consolidation of alcohol consumption from early stages, leads to setting the guidelines in adulthood, where the first inciter or inhibitor is the family, it is there where a transgenerational incitement can occur, which we understand as that which has been transmitted from education in the family and society; It is an immaterial learning that unites us and identifies us as a culture. (Álvarez 2011)

This culture of consumption is not the same for both sexes, in the case of men it is encouraged from an early age to drink, recognizing it as a subject suitable for

consumption; But for women, it usually occurs from inhibition or conditioned teaching, which implies that it is a subject not suitable for consumption. In the case of men, it is evidenced in this excerpt:

I've met friends who sometimes, for example, the uncle, the father or x person at a family gathering are drinking and "have a beer" and one "No', "there is that you are not a man, it is that you are already so old, you have to start drinking beer" and that is, you are initiated with that and after the fact I don't know, how it affects you mentally, because to be told to you, forgive the word and I'm going to say it, that you're a faggot or something like that, because at the moment you're going to feel bad and also that they say it with all your family present because it's worse (SH. GF, 25/06/2021)

The conditional teaching for women can be seen in this excerpt: [speaking of the father] I'm going to let him have a beer first, then well, I'm going to let him have two, then three, ... [It wasn't] exercising that self-control, but rather he [the father] exercising it over me. (SM. Ent,19/08/2021)

And from inhibition: My mom has also instilled in me that she doesn't. You have to be careful, because you can't do this because you're a woman, because if, I mean, like him, they put that fear in me, that let's say, if I get drunk something bad is going to happen to me and that's it. (SM. GF,29/06/2021)

Understanding the body as a center of social control over which power is exercised in order to discipline it in coherence with what society has determined, we can see that loading bodies with the possibility of consuming or not consuming alcohol also generates different control devices.

In the context of the culture of consumption, the dialectical unity of meaning of control in alcohol consumption emerges, which refers to how the experience of a sexed body from the binary has implications for the meanings and meanings of alcohol consumption. For either of the two sexes, consuming alcohol represents experiences in permanent tension that activate ways of being in the world from the stereotypes of each sex, but also from the ruptures or escapes from those norms.

These experiences from stereotypes or in rupture with them are traversed by the concept of control: on the one hand, it implies the participation of an external gaze that monitors the normed and stereotyped behaviors for being a man and for being a woman (Being under control), and on the other, it is related to an internal gaze that can summon the breaking of stereotypes (getting out of control) or the recognition of one's own limits (self-control). to the loss of limits (Not being in self-control) or the need to enter back into control (Re-being under control), framed in returning to comply with the norms or what is under surveillance by the external gaze.

Next, each of the meanings of control is pointed out in the dialectic of its understanding and in its relation to data.

Being under control means staying in the norm, in what is expected from the stereotypes pointed out by society in the consumption of alcohol for a man and a woman.

On the one hand, for men, consumption is a sign of belonging to the gender that regulates or norms their experience of being a man; another meaning of being under control for men is to end up reproducing to their female peers the role of protector-caregiver in consumption; for women, on the other hand, being under control implies the denial of drinking or the duty to do so in a controlled way. "Because I'm a man, people see it as more normal to consume alcohol; like the woman is taking that is an easy or well any term they put to that" (SH. Ent, 23/08/2021)

On the other hand, getting out of control means getting out of the norm, for women from the simple fact of drinking, to achieving a moderate and conscious consumption, which 1201 Speeches by Young University Students on Alcohol Consumption: A Reading from a Gender Perspective

allows them to experience freedom without guilt. On the other hand, for a man to get out of control implies exceeding the limits of consumption, since the norm is that he drinks.

For example, for the man when he overindulges, he can be more emotionally expressive with another man and for the woman to release her corporeality from an uninhibited sensuality or simply drink.

The break to the norm in women implies allowing sexual initiative, explicit bodily manifestation, which ranges from seduction, the free expression of laughter, the loud voice, among other ruptures to the stereotypes imposed on femininity, "one knows that she gets drunk and she kind of gets more turned on and is as she herself says, And he kind of has more freedom in terms of sexuality or I don't know; like what can happen to me and that I'm not aware that they're doing to me or what's happening to me." (SH. Ent, 06/09/2021)

For them, getting out of control is an option for emotional relief, but at the same time, this release has also been stereotyped to the extent that alcohol consumption is sold so that men cry or open up emotionally, although few understand where this cultural element that is exclusively consolidated on television comes from. through novels, series or movies. Not really, no one tells me to take this and it's going to feel good no, I think it was sometimes I watched movies, soap operas, videos on youTube or something like that that made it seem that when there is a disappointment in love they drink and are supposed to feel good (SH. Ent, 11/09/2021)

Regarding self-control, the participants mention it as the feeling of fullness, awareness and tranquility they feel when, despite being in a consumption environment, they do not consume or do so in a controlled way by themselves or by another person (friend), or simulate consumption.

Men state that their position against non-consumption is violated with phrases that threaten their masculinity, in this case, self-control is related to getting out of control, as it breaks with the norm.

In the same way, when the refusal to drink is not respected, simulation tactics such as hiding the bottles, watering the drinks, or drinking slowly to always have a bottle in the hand, these two elements, the denial of consumption and the simulation tactics are used for self-control.

For them, their acceptance in the face of non-consumption depends on their position in the social circle in which they are, a position that is granted by conditions of beauty and seriousness, that is, it is easier to say no to drinking, if you are pretty, if you have a strong character or reputation for being a "serious" woman but they tell me a lot that I am very brave, that I'm very serious, and so I don't think it's that hard for me, because they know that if I tell them no, that is, if I put myself as I would be and tell them no, that is, I don't want to. (SM.GF,30/06/2021)

Women also often resort to simulation tactics, such as drinking water, spitting the drink into a glass, or handing the drink to a friend.

Likewise, both men and women can cede control to a friend with which they seek to stay within the limits of consumption and behavior, as expressed by one of the participants: Then one becomes vulnerable and on top of everything loses the shame [...] I tell a person I'm dating, I say, when you see me too happy, [...] make eyes at me and I'll kind of notice. (SM. Ent, 06/09/2021)

Another dimension of control is not being in self-control implies passing the self-imposed limits during alcohol consumption, it is the feeling that the person has that he or she has broken with the norms for himself. An example is shown from the behaviors or behaviors that men can assume as rapists and lose their role as caregivers, and in women become vulnerable to risk by losing their decision-making capacity.

Let's say the first time I got drunk there was a man who, after being drunk a bit, was telling me something like let's go to the house, to accompany him to the house, but I obviously told him no. Ent 23/09/2021)

Finally, in the face of the dimension of being under control, it is pointed out that once excessive consumption occurs, people can excuse their behavior, common in women, or justify it, common in men. The difference between excusing and justifying refers to the fact that in the former, an excuse is invoked to avoid an obligation, in this case an unexpected behavior in women, or to apologize for such a fault. Justification, on the other hand, tells us that man's behavior under the consumption of alcohol converts or transforms what does not conform to the norms into just or true.

In relation to justification, one participant puts it this way:

That justification that is sometimes given for violence against women: "Oh, it couldn't be controlled", because I was drunk and I didn't know what I was doing. (SM. Ent,20/10/2021)

Discussion

Understanding the dialectics of control in alcohol consumption, we can turn to several studies that report that sex as a variable has implications on behavior patterns about alcohol consumption, that is, what, where and how much is consumed; (Pilco et al.2021; Mora and Hernán 2019, 225) but there are few current studies that address the complexity of the gender perspective from the discourses of young Latino university students, (Zegada 2022; Marin 2021) and those that are published are from Spain. (Álvarez, Romo, & López 2022, 191; Romo 2021, 17) The need to recover discourses and the complexity involved in recognizing alcohol consumption from a gender perspective is recognized by (Ferreira et al. 2013; Elipe et al. 2021, 117; Gonzalez et al. 2022, 167; Rodríguez et al., 2022), among others, who point out that research must be strengthened to understand the complexity of this phenomenon, given that its determinants are diverse and contextual.

The views that have been given from the qualitative approach allow us to see that the main difference that gender establishes is related to the possibility that men have to drink, as it is an attitude according to their gender, (Álvarez, Romo and López 2022, 191) while this generates a negative evaluation for women for being unfeminine, This result is evidenced in this paper and is described as a subject who is or is not fit for alcohol consumption. Hence, this study reinforces the differentiating view between men and women and delves into the sociocultural and symbolic approach to the phenomenon of alcohol consumption, especially from the understanding of the concept of control and its different meanings, due to its repetitive appearance in the participants' discourses.

Control as a device over bodies has traditionally been studied, especially from the perspective of Foucault, who refers to how "human corporeality becomes a system of control and a tool of subordination to others, where the objectification and instrumentalization of the body allows us to conceive it as a place that has to be molded to external considerations." (Foucault, 1977, 5)

In this regard, in the present study, the role played by the gender roles assigned to each sex when it comes to alcohol consumption in the Cundiboyacense region seems to continue to be an initial identification element, without this generating differences in the patterns (how much, where and what) of consumption, since, on the contrary, men and women drink the same. and for women, this consumption is not related as a strategy of sexual equality, as referred to by Romo et al (2015, 13), but focuses on the motivations of: the breaking of stereotypes that are properly feminine, especially sexual initiative, the display of sensuality in public and bodily freedom.

1203 Speeches by Young University Students on Alcohol Consumption: A Reading from a Gender Perspective

In addition, the gender differences identified are in the risks of a social and sexual nature (robberies, fights and accidents for men and embarrassment, accusations and sexual abuse for women), and do not reveal biological risks in health despite the fact that they are students in the area, risks that the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2022) does point out, especially on alert for women.

Finally, in agreement with Fernández in his synthesis of literature and other authors, from an intersectional analysis it can be said that gender boundaries are broken in excessive consumption, for both men and women, affirming that changes in normative patterns of consumption reveal important gender ruptures in adolescence (Fernández and Corral 2018, p.262; Romo et al 2015; Fernández, Dema and Fontanil 2019, 267)

On the other hand, in women there is a tendency to the need for moderate consumption to exert greater control over their bodies, this is also seen in what is reported by Cundiboyacenses women, in the need for self-control due to guilt is presented in the face of the breaking of stereotypes.

Likewise, in the participating men, the acceptance of the masculine role is usually reaffirmed by its natural relationship to consumption, by their cultural learning of being a man, to avoid questioning their masculinity, this is also found in the study by Romo et al. 2015, 15 in which it is stated that the main reason for abusive alcohol consumption is the strong pressure exerted by the peer group and the It is also necessary to review how the audiovisual, a very important learning space in today's society, can be a source of activation of consumption, beyond peers. (Borras and Camps 2022; Quintana et al.2022, 78).

In the face of risks, research indicates that men manifest a relationship between aggressiveness and masculinity (Fernández & Dema, 2018; Fernández and Corral 2018; Pilco et al.2021; Ministry of Health of Spain 2021), risks also identified by the participants of this research, however, in this study there appears a risk little identified by the men themselves, and that is the possibility that when exploring their role as seducer and conqueror during consumption, this role may manifest itself aggressively or as several authors point out in an excuse to pressure or sexually abuse someone (Redondo et al. 2021; Prego et al. 2021, 287; Álvarez, Romo & López 2022,) This last element is worth exploring in more depth, especially from the discourses of men themselves, who do not recognize themselves from this point of view, which may be due to a justification and invisibilization of these aggressions. (Romo, García and Pavón 2020, 157; Ruiz, López and Sánchez 2020, Spain, Fundación Atenea, 2016)

In short, the social and sexual risks are more evident for the participants in this study, leaving little visible health risks from biological damage. In addition, it is necessary to recognize how justification, based on the naturalization of men's own consumption and the excuse that arises from guilt in women, have differentiating roles in the reasons for excessive consumption or not, and how to allow bodies to express themselves in freedom and autonomy. detached from traditional gender stereotypes, and favoring nonconsumption or conscious consumption (Galindo et al. 2022, 96) determined by the expectations or life purposes of men and women in the world.

Authorship Contribution

Mayra Solanye Galindo Huertas: Conceptualization, data analysis, manuscript elaboration, writing, discussion of results.

Milena Alexandra Galvis López: Conceptualization Data analysis, manuscript elaboration, writing, discussion of results.

Surisadday Rodríguez Sierra: Datacollection and partial data analysis.

Geidy Carolina Martin Barrera: Data collection and partial data analysis.

Thanks to Nurse Adriana Mendoza for her collaboration in the process of developing two (2) focus groups and organizing data in the city of Tunja

Funding: This product is part of the project Social perception of risk and risk reduction strategies against collective alcohol consumption in university students, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia MINCIENCIAS, through call 844-2019 for Science, Technology and Innovation in Health 2019 projects, contract number 912/2019 –SGI 2794

Image Use Consent: "Not applicable."

Approval of a research ethics committee: According to minutes No. 4 of May 20, 2019 of the research ethics committee of the UPTC, the project that originated this product entitled: Social perception of risk and risk reduction strategies against collective alcohol consumption in university students is endorsed in the category of minimum risk according to Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Ministry of Health. funded by the Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia (Colciencias), through call 844-2019 for Science, Technology and Innovation in Health 2019 projects, contract number 912/2019-SGI 2794.

Recognitions.

We would like to thank Nurse Adriana María Mendoza Pulido for her contribution in the process of data collection in some focus groups and partial data analysis.

Funding: This product is part of the project Social perception of risk and risk reduction strategies against collective alcohol consumption in university students, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia MINCIENCIAS, through call 844-2019 for Science, Technology and Innovation in Health 2019 projects, contract number 912/2019.

Conflict of interest.

The authors state that they have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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