



# Making a desired name: identity narratives in young university students who have committed transgressive offences

Hacerse a un nombre deseado:  
narrativas identitarias en jóvenes  
universitarios que han cometido actos  
transgresores delictivos

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## Abstract

In Colombia, juvenile crimes constitute one of the most significant groups in penitentiary institutions. This phenomenon tends to be justified by poverty, inequality, lack of access to education, domestic violence, among others. However, these acts are not only linked to these sociodemographic characteristics, but they also involve family, relational, and subjective issues.

The main purpose of this research was to identify how identity narratives are shaped in young people from private universities who have committed transgressive offences. To this end, research was carried out with a qualitative methodological approach, employing the narrative method through life stories. The narrative conversational interview was implemented with three young students from private universities who committed offences.

For the analysis, the narrative method was applied using transcriptions and encodings of meaning units of the stories. Among the most significant results, there is the adolescent's search for a desired status, not imposed, through transgression. Blunt events or acts as hinge moments in the identity generated by the transgression and a post-transgression identity permeated to the present by said event.

## Keywords

Juvenile crimes; Identity; Adolescence; Adolescent psychology; University student.

## Resumen

En Colombia, la comisión del delito por parte de adolescentes y jóvenes constituye porcentualmente uno de los grupos más significativos en las instituciones penitenciarias. Este fenómeno se tiende a justificar por la pobreza, la desigualdad, la falta de acceso a educación, violencia intrafamiliar, entre otros. Sin embargo, estos actos no están ligados únicamente a dichas características sociodemográficas, también se ven implicados asuntos de corte familiar, relacional y subjetivo.

Esta investigación tuvo como principal propósito identificar cómo se configuran las narrativas identitarias en jóvenes de universidades privadas que han cometido actos transgresores delictivos. Para ello, se realizó una investigación con un enfoque metodológico cualitativo, haciendo uso del método narrativo a través de las historias de vida. Se implementó la entrevista conversacional narrativa con tres jóvenes estudiantes de universidades privadas que cometieron actos delictivos.

Para el análisis, se utilizó el método de análisis narrativo a través de transcripciones y codificaciones de unidades de sentido de los relatos. Entre los resultados más significativos se encuentra la búsqueda mediante la transgresión adolescente de un nombre deseado, no acatado. Sucesos o actos contundentes como momentos bisagra en la identidad generada por la transgresión y una identidad postransgresión permeada hasta la actualidad por dicho evento.

## Palabras clave

Delincuencia juvenil; Identidad; Adolescencia; Psicología del adolescente; Estudiante universitario.

## Introduction

According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Youth Violence Newsletter of 11 October 2023, 200,000 homicides are committed globally each year by people between the ages of 10 and 29, accounting for 43% of the annual global total. In 2018, Colombia exceeded 25 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, being at the top of the list in South America along with Venezuela (37).

According to the databases of the National Penitentiary and Prison Institute (INPEC BY ITS SPANISH ACRONYM), between 2005 and 2015 the number of young people (18-28 years old) imprisoned in different institutions amounted to 45,718; that is, 37.8% of the total inmate's population in the country. Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar –ICBF (2004). However, not all transgressive acts or offences end in a prison sentence. The WHO (2020) cites the following repercussions of those acts: mental health problems, low school performance, harmful substance use, in addition to having a higher risk of being a victim of violent acts or committing them in adulthood, among others. Thus, violence and crime leave as consequences the increase of costs in health, social, and judicial services, which reduce the productivity and quality of life of those who commit the act and those who integrate their social and family sphere.

We consider *adolescence* and *youth* as moments of transition to adult life in which fundamental subjectivation processes of development are put into play, both chronologically and logically. These are relevant in the construction of the individual due to multiple psychic, biological, and social changes aimed at shaping or consolidating identity. The terms adolescence and youth correspond to social, historical, and cultural constructs located in a certain time and, especially, they refer to moments of passage from childhood to adulthood.

Usually, adolescence is used to describe the phenomena of change and physical, psychological, and relational transformation that occurred after the advent of puberty; it also refers to youth, to the late moments of adolescence, which usually imply a greater development in the social sphere, the deployment of autonomy, the consolidation of a life project, and a political and productive participation in the world (Le Breton, 2015). Currently, the WHO (2023) has defined the adolescent period as between 10 and 19 years old, and youth between 15 and 24 years old; thus, there is a period—between 15 and 19 years old—in which subjects can be considered young adolescents.

In this sense, it is noteworthy that, according to this age description, the interviewees participating in this study are young people in transition to adulthood and, in their stories, they account for the place the transgressor had during their late adolescence (between 17 and 21 years, according to WHO, 2023). Then, we refer to the place the transgressive act had in the process of subjectivation during a vital moment of transition.

In addition to the above definitions, different areas of knowledge have sought to define this moment of vital transition. In the context of psychology, there is a discrepancy between the different currents and fields of action. In general, the authors agree that adolescence and youth are transits from childhood to maturity that every person must inevitably face. Piaget (as cited in Adrian & Rangel, 2012), the father of evolutionary psychology, specifically describes adolescence as “a period in which there are important changes in cognitive abilities, and, therefore, in the thinking of young people, associated with processes of insertion into adult society” (p. 10).

The moment of logical passage from childhood to adulthood is defined by Nasio (2011) from three dimensions: biological, sociological, and subjective. From the biological standpoint, the term awarded is usually puberty, assigned by the health sciences to indicate this stage in development that begins at approximately 11 years of age and corresponds to purely physiological changes associated with the sexual maturation of the body.

Regarding the sociological aspect, the transition to adulthood can be considered as a feeling or a social image that transcends the biological data provided by puberty and refers to the consensuses established in each socio-historical context to define the logics of passage from childhood to adulthood and the possible places that the subjects who are assimilated in said category can occupy (Le Breton, 2014).

In this way, Morch (1996) argued that to define the concept of youth as a logic of passage, it should be read within a historical framework, since the emergence of capitalism opened up the symbolic space that made it possible to understand these people as consumers and, in addition, as an age group. Likewise, Sandoval (2002) considers youth as a moment of transition that implies subjective maturation, participation in subcultures beyond the family and school environment, and new possibilities for political participation and social transformation.

In relation to the subjective dimension, the passage from childhood to adulthood is understood as a logical moment of existence in which the subject is especially characterized by conflict (Nasio, 2011). The subjective elaboration of the changes produced in the body due to the advent of puberty and the new roles assigned to it by society produces a series of contradictions and instabilities that can cause subjects to develop an unstable feeling of themselves, which can vary between insecurity and excessive vanity. Due to this instability, subjects often deviate from the values and ideals transmitted by their parents and relatives and find in peers, communities, and idols the references that lead them to new orientations to conduct themselves in life (Le Breton, 2013; Nasio, 2011).

Classic authors such as Aberastury and Knobel (1971) and contemporary positions such as that of Blanquicett (2012) agree that the transition to adult life implies a significant challenge at the psychic level because during this process, subjects must abandon their childhood identity,

detach from their parents and find an identity of their own, this will allow them to enter the adult world and meet the cultural demands of their environment. In contrast, Espinosa (2010) names the characteristic processes of this stage as *psychic tasks*, which, in addition to allowing them to be read outside of their turbulent character, presents this passage with the same characteristics of all transition processes. In addition to emancipatory achievements, authors such as Blos (1971) propose the resolution of identity achievements as keys in the reconciliation of childhood narcissism and in the projection of an adult self, with which narcissism is transformed into an impulse towards perfection.

Faced with the disturbances and difficulties mentioned above, the dilemmas experienced in the vital transition from childhood to adulthood can produce a state of perplexity before the unavoidable *not knowing*, which leads subjects to develop different unique treatments that allow them to, somehow, understand those incomprehensible disagreements. Nasio (2013) mentions three: (a) a growth neurosis refers to the modifications in the body and personality made by the majority, something that does not imply a social or individual risk; (b) mental disturbances refer to the emergence of pathologies or complex subjective states that can put the physical and mental health of the subject at risk; and (c) *dangerous behaviors* refer to risky, compulsive, and repetitive acts that are usually transgressive. In this same way, Albornoz (2019) sees this stage as a period that can enhance or propitiate the onset of antisocial manifestations or criminal behaviors that respond to social needs, psychic conflicts or conflicts with society due to the rules and values imposed by it.

The Colombian legal framework states that the most common transgressive acts in adolescents are theft, manufacture of or carrying narcotics, and murder (ICBF, 2015). For authors such as Le Breton (2012), risk behaviors in this logical moment of existence are read as a provocation to the environment that aims to test the love of others and prove their existence before the eyes of significant figures.

Therefore, in view of the fact that there is a diversity of “possibilities that contribute to the subject changing the path of their drives and manifesting them through the choice of new destinations” (Albornoz, 2019, p. 61), transgression should not be reviewed from a general perspective nor ensure that there is a specific or definitive cause. There are different factors associated with transgressive offences in subjects who try to respond to the task of consolidating a position as future adults. We understand transgressive acts as “those acts that cross a limit to the established norms. Its result is to perform an act considered ‘abnormal’ that is sanctioned by society and considered an offence by the law that sets those rules” (Carpintero, 2012, para. 1).

Hernández et al. (2020) present a series of associated factors that make it possible for adolescents and young people to be involved in criminal dynamics, including poverty, inequality, lack of access to education, and domestic violence. For its part, the ICBF (2015) refers to the

role of territorial dynamics in the origin of the offence because those subjects live with people who commit illegal and/or violent acts, who reinforce these violent or conflictive behaviors, either by direct contact or through observation. Bringing up again the WHO newsletter(2020) on adolescent and youth violence, there are other risk factors such as the quality of a country's governance, specifically education and social protection regulations.

Based on this articulation among identity, transgressive acts and transition to adult life, the University of Buenos Aires presents a research work to analyze the relationship between transgressive behaviors and the Criminal Law, grounded on the hypothesis that they will be triggered by deficiencies in attachment bonds. To support this, Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory is used, which presents a correlation between an individual's experiences with their significant figures, usually parents, and their subsequent ability to establish affective bonds with their environment. Although in the work they emphasize the lack of bond formation, it leaves a void in the identity construction elaborated as a result of this lack.

The compilation *Desarrollo de los adolescentes III Identidad y relaciones sociales [Development of adolescents III: Identity and social relations]* (Pérez, 2006), shows a characterization of adolescence as an evolutionary moment of search and achievement of individual identity. Elaborating on this theory, it is possible to conclude that adolescence does not always culminate in the consolidation of an identity, at times, adolescents incur a "moratorium" state in which they are conceived trapped in the midst of an identity crisis, a cultural identity crisis, attributed to "the fragmentation of values and the rapid pace of social change" (p. 24).

According to the ICBF (2015), the consumption of psychoactive substances, which is a common activity in the adolescence stage, is considered one of the main risk factors in the commission of transgressive offences. Regarding the statistical indicators, Matalí and Pardo (2009) affirm that the consumption of illegal drugs was increasing, to the point of reaching an incidence rate of consumption of one in four young people per month. Considering the above, the *Estudio nacional de consumo de sustancias psicoactivas en adolescentes en conflicto con la ley en Colombia [National Study of consumption of new psychoactive substances in adolescents in conflict with the law in Colombia]* (National Government of the Republic of Colombia, 2009) reports that about 50% committed the transgressive act under the effect of some NPS and 23.8% did so to acquire them. Moreover, they state that only a quarter live with both parents, and 72% say that they only sometimes or never obey and accept rules, which allows the Institute to identify major deficiencies in family dynamics, including suboptimal dialogue and poor parental supervision-control. Finally, they highlight that 23% of the parents of these young people have a criminal record, which represents an important difference with the general population.

For their part, Fantin and Morales (2007) investigate possible differences in the consumption patterns of new psychoactive substances (NPS). When applying the battery of tests, the authors describe a greater trend towards consumption in those who attend schools of high socioeconomic status, thus supporting the approach of the existence of factors beyond the economic one. In contrast, Sedronar (2001), in Argentina, found no statistically significant correlation between substance use and socioeconomic status (as cited in Fantin & Morales, 2007). In both works, the most significant gap is the scarce approach to the subjective components of consumption.

Therefore, we understand the transition to adult life as a temporary period of construction and subjective elaboration that does not necessarily culminate in a specific time, but varies from subject to subject, according to their process, and that implies a satisfactory resolution of family separation, the construction of identity, and the consolidation of social roles in culture (Espinosa, 2010). Accordingly, one of the aspects that is most at stake in this passage is identity, which is understood as

*the characteristics that an individual possesses by which he/she is known. Without ignoring the biological aspects that make it up, a good part of our personal identity is formed from the social interactions that begin in the family, school, and with people we meet throughout life. The identity thus constructed will influence the way we act in the world. (Páramo, 2008, p. 541)*

An investigation by Chala and Matoma (2013), which deepens the construction of identity and the step of becoming a self-critical subject, states that participants describe the search for identity as

*a process of exploration in which they want to find those reference points that are the basis that represents their personality, approaching the answer of what they want to know about themselves; this exploration allows them to see the transition away from the childhood stage. (p. 53)*

Hence, within the search for identity, the identity/socialization relationship is implicitly evident to the extent that it is in the other and with the other where you can identify what you want to be and/or show yourself. In this regard, Valencia (2010) affirms that the human being is discovered and consolidated as a subject through interaction with others, especially in the passage from childhood to adulthood, identity conquests are shaped and tested from what they want the other to see or through what they interpret that the other wants from them.

This identity is made consistent from the stories that are established with others in relation to what one is, believes oneself to be or wants to become. Narrating in the encounter with others enables analyses and reflections on identity that become consistent and consolidate a more or less stable and lasting image with which one can show up in the world and relate to others (Santos, 2018). In this sense, we understand the configuration of identity as a narrative process.

From the above compilation, it can be concluded that identity is a malleable, manipulable and subjective construct that unfolds narratively through language, forms of relationship, actions and self-concept. The study from which this article is derived established as a general objective to identify how the identity narratives of young university students who committed transgressive offences are configured. To do this, we sought to know the experiences of transgressive offences committed by the interviewed university students. We inquired about the transformations that occurred in their lives based on the experiences of transgressive offences to know the meanings attributed by them to it within the configuration of their identity.

## Methodology

Considering the objectives of the research from which this article is derived, it was pertinent to use a qualitative approach. According to Salgado (2007):

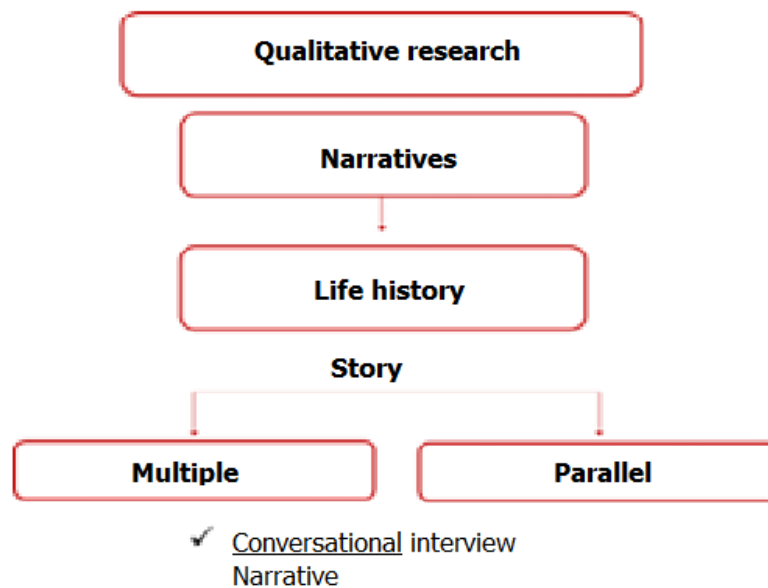
*qualitative methods start from the basic assumption that the social world is made up of meanings and symbols. Hence, intersubjectivity is a key piece of qualitative research and a starting point for reflectively capturing social meanings. Social reality is therefore made of intersubjectively shared meanings. (p. 71)*

The methodological design in narrative research is derived from the qualitative approach, which is oriented based on dialogue and the told stories represent lived realities (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Therefore, the approach to “objects” is not given directly but mediated by the involved “subjects.” In this sense, the gaze is placed on what subjects think, consciously or unconsciously; they feel, whether they express it directly or not, and do or, perhaps, omit (Arias & Alvarado, 2015).

It should be noted that this implies a direct relationship between researcher and subject so that the former can understand their experience as humans, put themselves in the place of the subject and feel in order to explain what they have revealed. A relational scenario framed in the possibilities of language is thus structured, in which there is no talk of information collection, but rather of data construction. This process requires constant feedback between interviewer and participant to approximate the understanding of the signifiers, therefore, it is not linear. Figure 1 establishes the representative scheme of the methodological approach used in this research.

**Figure 1.**

*Representative scheme of the methodological approach used in this research*



*Note:* own elaboration

Considering that a qualitative approach allows us to understand these narratives, the subjects who are part of the population sample are important due to both their discourse and its characteristics to meet the proposed objectives. The following inclusion criteria were established: (a) being students at private higher education institutions; (b) being within an age range between 16 and 25 years old; and (c) having committed transgressive offences while at university.

A non-probabilistic snowball sampling was used, which allowed us to reach people who met these criteria. Snowball sampling is a non-probabilistic technique in which individuals selected for study recruit new participants from their acquaintances (Ochoa, 2015).

In the sample collection process, prior contact was made with the three participants who were invited. The first one participated after a call and the other two were referenced by the first, in accordance with the sampling method indicated above. After presenting the project, its objectives, and the possible topics to be addressed in the interview, the questions emerging from the presentation were answered to establish conditions of trust that would enable the proper development of the interview. The meetings with participants and the narrative interviews that allowed us to know their stories were held between January and August 2021.

As mentioned, the sample was composed of three participants, two men and one woman, who in this research will be named with pseudonyms: “Ríos”, “Colin” and “Montes”, in favor of order and the protection of personal data. They were involved in the commission of transgressive offences at the age of 18, 19 and 16, respectively.

The analysis of the data obtained in this research was guided by the proposal of Quintero (2011). We started by collecting information, transcribing and assigning codes that can highlight relevant elements in it. Subsequently, the preconception of the narrative plot was carried out, i.e., the facts, temporalities, and spatialities took on importance, since, as Piedrahita (2014) points out, they provide information about events, actions, and experiences. It enables significance processes about the way in which the narration of events reflects the creation of realities.

Ríos, a resident in socioeconomic stratum 61, narrates having been immersed in cybertheft of credit cards through public internet networks. Colin, referred by Ríos, from socioeconomic stratum 5, was part of a group dedicated to the sale of narcotics inside a private university in the city of Medellín, Colombia. Montes, meanwhile, belonged to a criminal gang dedicated to the sale of narcotics, theft, and other crimes. All three were students at private universities during the transgressor-criminal period.

The research was prepared from the basic principle of respect for the individual, complied with the legal aspects that regulate research with human beings, from the ethical point of view, and with the four universal principles of bioethics; namely, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. All three participants signed and obtained informed consent, and their identity was protected through the use of pseudonyms when presenting the results.

## Results

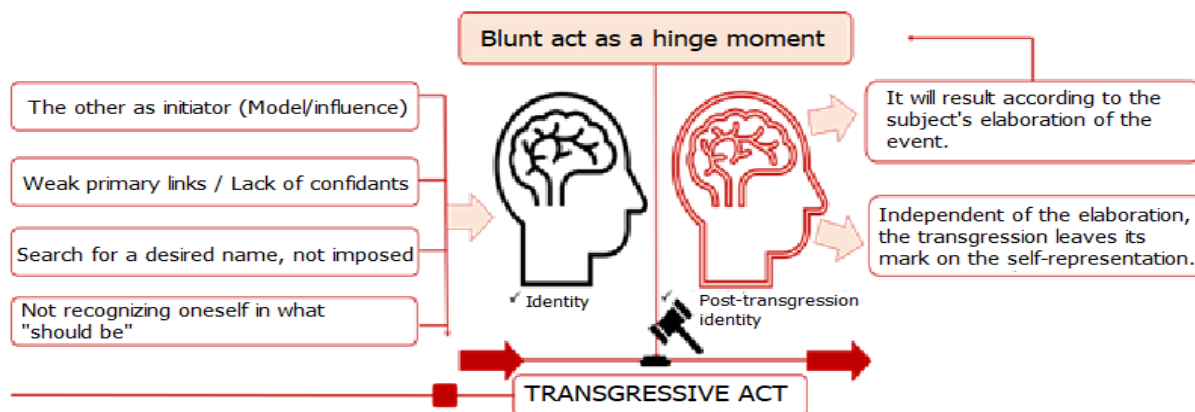
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To present the results, the key concepts emerging from coding the conducted interviews were used as a common thread. In this way, common sense units become protagonists to elaborate on the findings, since they show links or coincidences in the discourses that allow narrative series to be found in the stories of the three participants.

Figure 2 presents an illustration of the results and articulates the concepts of the analysis.

<sup>1</sup> The socioeconomic stratification in Colombia is a classification into strata of residential properties that must have utilities. Stratum 1 means low-bottom; stratum 2, low; stratum 3, medium-low; stratum 4, medium; stratum 5, medium-high, and stratum 6, high.

Figure 2. Illustration of the results



Note: Own elaboration.

At the left of the image, there are four dimensions corresponding to significant categories of the answers obtained in the interviews; they are related to each other because they are constant in the three discourses. On the time axis, transgression is at the center, and, during this period, there is a moment of rupture, a forceful act, also called a *hinge moment*, which marks a before and after in the identity of the subjects and gives rise to the concept of *post-transgression identity*. These dimensions will be developed below.

## The other as initiator

Most people tend to acquire knowledge according to concepts, elements, emotions or references that are directly involved in their environment. It implies the need for the other as a model that, in the case of transgression, takes the place of the *other as initiator*. In the stories of the participants, the presence of the other was found as a common element, different from the figures in the environments they inhabited until now, which became for them an unprecedented reference through which they oriented their subsequent actions and that helped them locate new coordinates to inhabit the world. In their narratives, the other initiator of the offence appears as expressed by Ríos:

I started transgressive acts, specifically that of the cards, when I was in high school. I used to hang out with "X" and, once, we bought like airsoft guns online, well, we bought it with my mom's card, on Amazon. It was many years ago when people had no idea about online shopping. And then, after months, my mom scolded me because someone had used the card to buy some games, so my first thought was "well, it wasn't me. Because it wasn't me: it must have been 'X'", so I asked, "X, did you do something weird? He told me: 'Well, man, I did do it...'" and showed me how' ... At that time, we did it in a very beginner way, but since everyone was very new to technology, online theft was easier if you were an acquainted.

In this same way, Colin tells the following:

Well, we [emphasis added], it was in XXXX university, we ... I was more or less 19 years old, we were into the third semester or so at the university, a friend of mine had like the contact, something really quiet, just someone who grew (marijuana) in the mountains, we bought it very cheap, and we then resold it at the university, more expensive.

That other initiator appears in both cases as a pair that presents a different image, alien to what has been known so far. This image also contains practices and ways of naming themselves, which those young people begin to assume as their own and it becomes part of their identity. Through a transitive movement, they go from talking about oneself to talking about us. Although the questions of the conversational interview were aimed directly at the subject, as the owner of their experience and knowledge, the answers of the three participants resulted in plural pronouns such as *we*, *we felt*, *we were*, *we liked* or third person expressions.

Thus, the other constitutes an initiator reference that, due to its remoteness from what has been known so far, grants badges and semblances of which young people use to feel *similar to* or *part of* and take the steps of initiation in the commission of a transgressive act. Here, we use the word demeanor to refer to the treatments or symbolic resources that subjects establish to make an image of themselves that they can use to present themselves to the world and being before others (Indiana & Rossi, 2021).

This experience of being part of is narrated by young people as an arrangement that produces an emotional relief not experienced until then. They use those gregarious behaviors to respond to the requirements of contemporaneity in which, in the midst of an affective situation, they find belonging as a solution, not to anything, but to a reference that raises them above the law, the rule, the paternalisms that until now have generated conflicts and contradictions that they had not been able to solve by themselves.

Understanding the “I” from the “you” that configures a “we” is expressed in the use of the language of those subjects as evidence in their reflection of social identity. In this regard, Montes relates the following: “but to me, the simple fact that I was related to those people, for some reason made me feel empowered, I felt like safer, in theory.”

Hence, the other initiator is perceived by these subjects as that identity mirror in which they find, in addition to criminal referents, roles through which they are reflected or represented before their significant others. The other initiator provides them with a semblance that gives replies and solutions to the disagreements experienced so far and allows them to outline answers to the question about who they are.

Some of the recurring elements in the stories of the three interviewees were associated with problems with their family bonds, expressions such as “not getting along with my family at all”, “a lot of problems in my house”, “poor family communication”, etc., appeared constantly in their narratives, before and during the transgressive era. Montes puts it this way:

*In my house, communication was not easy, the priorities were other than that existential crisis I had at the time I broke up, because I was grieving, I was really grieving my best friend, I did not talk about that with anyone.*

As a reaction to this suffering, particularly common in the time of transition to adult life, we have a subject who, faced with an emotional and relational conflict, finds a way out in the transgression, which is consistently presented by the other, who brings a known semblance and seems to provide solutions. Therefore, following them is a test of love, an attitude that, as Le Breton (2012) said, manages to capture everyone’s attention by trying to test the appreciation of their environment.

Now, how do the stories of these young people show how to avoid an emotional situation through disruptive behavior? Let’s see what the story of the participant “Ríos” indicates:

*Everything was very murky, I mean, seriously, I did not get along with my parents and everything was wrong, so if I think about it, something that I was not willing to do, I already knew how to do this, and I was doing something that, because of the type of activity, made me feel so much adrenaline when I did it. It was a very good distraction because I had to distract myself from something very strong.*

“Ríos” tells us that “he had to distract himself from something very strong”; thus, we can infer that the coordinates that oriented his social environment were not the friendliest. In his life, everything was murky, and he did not get along with his parents, so we understand that, in the face of the vicissitudes of life, which are not always kind, and are accentuated in adolescence and youth, this young man did not find outlets in his home for what was presented to him as unbearable, difficult to avoid.

Phrases such as “I already knew how to do this”, “feeling the adrenaline” and “a very good distraction in the face of a strong problem” show how “Ríos” chooses the trajectory of the transgressive act as a treatment that, although disruptive, is creative and transformative, since the overwhelming sensation decreases through it, he recognizes himself as the author of what was committed and gives himself a differentiated place in the world: a recognition of his own knowledge, an emotion that serves as a distraction and a purely overwhelming context.

## Making a Name: How to Become Someone

In the theoretical structuring of this study, positions such as that of Chala and Matoma (2013) that provided clear indications about the adolescent identity constructions were brought up. They present individuals who, in order to *make a name* that solves the contradictions of this stage, try to look for identity reference points in their closest environment.

That identity association could be evident in a transgressive context in which different references and risk factors such as those already described were present. However, this is not the case, then, the following question arises: How do these young people, who according to theory are not in contexts of psychosocial risk, end up recognizing themselves in transgression? “Colin”, “Ríos” and “Montes”, in this order, tell us about their experiences as follows:

Like, obviously, at our age all that produced like a certain feeling of, I don't know, empowerment, like we felt good about doing it, we felt like we were *cool* for doing it, and to a certain extent like we were dangerous ... because it's like something implicit that you have with your dealer, “I seem to need marijuana, this person is the one who is selling it to me and the one who is bringing it to me to the university and they don't mind going through what they have to go through to be able to sell it to me, so: Damn, *this person has to be someone* [emphasis added].

But I liked what I did. I mean, doing this gave me something that I could show to my friends, then it was a very good and efficient way, I did it more than anything because of the status it gave me... It made me feel at the forefront, because whenever I did this, I said to myself: “okay, there is something different here, this person did not want to know something new, I did”.

I also liked how that was projected on others, I mean, those who did not belong as part of the group, but I felt that I was part of something and that empowered me in front of others, because I was not alone, I was not an individual wandering around.

We find, then, that the other initiator appears contingently in the lives of these young people in a context of fragile family relationships and with various social problems. Transitivity, they take from this a semblance that, at first, they live in a plural way (us) and in the configuration of their identity they begin to make it their own. Making this countenance their own allows them to *give themselves a desired name*, which we understand allows them to say, “I am someone”. We know that the question of being is human, it is essential in the transition to adult life, a logical moment in which identifications falter and a nomination that generates contours to being and allows them to present themselves as someone for the rest and among the rest is sought.

With the transgressive act, we find that those subjects build a name they use to position themselves before others who value them and respect them for what they do. They have found in their transgression and in the names that emerge from this act an evaluation of their own, the way to capture the looks of their environment. The stories highlight the feeling of grandeur evoked by transgression, an experience in which they find that long-awaited identity. The above is inferred from certain elements of the discourse, such as “getting away with it”, “they owe us something”,

“they respect us” or “I liked how that was projected on others”, which accounts for a particular position, which they assume in front of the world, derived from the new names that arise to name their being.

These names have a relationship with the way in which they were linked in their family environments and the previous experiences they had had in social interaction in other contexts. About this, Montes and Colin tell us:

I no longer felt such a lonely person, well, I had many not worthiness ideas before, like rejection and that part kind of changed ... I began to feel like a valid person for others, I felt a lot of approval.

We were always in trouble, I had to leave my house up to three times, if we analyze it on the family side, let's say that I was quite unstable; on the university side, let's say that I liked the program, but I did not feel one hundred percent happy, I did not see myself exercising when I saw what the industry could be.

In seeking refuge from a lack of understanding, transgression and their names are positioned as an alternative. Although in these cases we do not find socioeconomic difficulties as risk factors, this lack of understanding constitutes the entry point to transgression through the other initiator. This initial feeling of misunderstanding is manifested in an intense unconscious suffering that, from the theory of Nasio (2011), corroborated in this study, is expressed through dangerous behaviors; an emotional barter that appears as an opportunity to flee from the identity imposed on these young people at home and positions them in a new reality. This is responded to in the words of Ríos, as a *distraction* to avoid something that, from his narratives, was already *very strong*, thus becoming a desired name and not an imposed name given by others.

## Colliding as a precautionary method

As of this point, we have seen the trajectory of an identity construction that, in the case of these three young people, raises similar coordinates, expressed in unique ways for each case: (a) a social context with satisfied economic needs, but fragile family ties; (b) social difficulties and contradictions, subjectivities experienced with urgency and gravity; (c) the contingent appearance of another initiator, who presents a consistent semblance by transgression; (d) the transitive assimilation of said semblance, experiencing themselves in the plural; (e) the conquest of a proper name that is found through transgression and gives them a place in the world.

Now, to what extent are these names and semblances taken by these young people? In principle, according to their stories, to infinity, since the acts described in the three narratives correspond to facts that they recognized as inappropriate, even before committing them, but they were not questioned nor caused a subjective division in them; the effects obtained (recognition, identification, belonging) supplemented the contradiction that could be generated by committing an offence.

However, in all three cases the transgressive act does not reach its final consequences and stops. What makes this happen? Let's get to know it through the stories of the three participants ("Montes", "Ríos" and "Colin", respectively):

I was simply ashamed to admit that I participated in that, I feel that it marked my life a lot... not belonging to that, but to be captured. I feel that this is one of the darkest times in my life, that I have been farther away from my family, that I have less identified with myself, that I have been more lost, that I felt more afraid of losing everything, so I think from there I became the extreme opposite of what I was before.

My perception about the acts has not changed (it is not negative), even when I stopped doing it and all that, I said to myself: "I am going to quit because I want to try other ways to get this" and I had already gotten into trouble, because when I received that notification I said ok, I think this marks the end ... it was a notification of the service I had used, of the application and the District Attorney, and there was something involving me.

I think that would be the meaning I give to that moment of my life, crashing as a method of precaution, let's just say I did it because being warned before did not help, I crashed so I could take that crash as a method of precaution and say to myself: "hey wait a minute, if I am going to do this ... what am I doing this for?, what is the purpose of doing it?"

In all three cases, the other appears, a third person that acts and introduces a limit function in their subjectivity, which is manifested in quitting the transgressive act, reflecting on what they have been doing, and creating other possible solutions to the question of identity. The third person, it is evident, is not and cannot be anyone: in two cases it is an official authority that embodies the law and, in the other, a criminal group that is neither official nor institutional, but that embodies another system, a law that is perhaps more savage and brutal, but in the end, law.

The meeting with a representative of the authority introduces these young people to the dimension of the law, its effects and consequences. Until now, parents, teachers, and other members of the family and community have not operated as agents to redirect the assumption of their new identity conquest. The act carried out by the actors mentioned by the young people is forceful, makes them collide—as mentioned by one of them—and makes the veils that had stretched the splendor of the chosen faces fall. The blunt act operates as an event, as it acts as a barrier of arrest, establishes a structure of limits and marks a before and after in the trajectory of identity construction.

A variety of narratives are projected here, "Montes" is recognized in repentance and shame for what happened; "Ríos" explains his interpretation of the norm, stating that if it does not benefit him, he is not willing to follow it; and "Colin" looks at the past from the understanding of his acts and his being, naming his need to prove something. From the singularity, each one makes a different reading and interpretation of his past, according to the way in which they have been able to elaborate it, but structurally similar in terms of the effect generated by that shock barrier that stops the transgression.

## Identity after transgression

When colliding with a representative of the law, who acts forcefully in each of these young people, a post-transgression identity begins to be configured. It is forged through elaborations made by the subject. These acquire, according to Albornoz (2019), a particular character in accordance with experience, since each one creates unique solutions, the results of a transformative experience. When asked how this experience marked their identity, “Ríos”, “Montes” and “Colin” responded as follows:

It made me understand ... and this is bad, because it was something that got into my head a lot for a long time, that I could get away with anything, and of course, it happened when I was little, nothing happened. I started doing it when I was older and nothing big happened, so in my mind what I thought was: getting away with it is viable, and that affected many other areas, such as couple's life. I became someone who could get away with it, also in academic things, because I did some things with academic technology as well.

The biggest mark it left on me is the talent of manipulation, I went from being that person who always let herself be manipulated by everyone to taking those things and taking control, I am very afraid of being manipulated and I am very cautious, or I am very defensive when I see manipulative traits in others.

It has meant like “demonstrating”, transgression is proving something, it is demonstrating that I can, then demonstrating how far I can go, demonstrating what can happen to you if you mess with me, demonstrating what happens to you if you ignore me, like... I feel that this has been the place of transgression in my life, like sometimes I keep seeing it a little like that.

Although when analyzing narratives, it is a matter of evading deterministic terms, such as the notion of *trauma* to explain a change as a result of an event, we can infer the association they make between the transgressive act and the subsequent traces to their identity, perpetuating attitudes that, on certain occasions, are disruptive in their links and have spread to different areas of their lives.

Transgressive offences are stopped due to the intervention of a representative of the law who acts forcefully; however, when faced with the question, *who am I?* answers continue to be outlined and contemplate transgressive traits that, although they manage to gain a place in social norms, retain a remnant of opposition, manipulation or demonstration that continues to elevate them in one way or another over the order that establishes rules and logics for all.

Young people stop committing crimes because of the effect of this act, but identity still retains a semblance of transgression that places them in a place of social externality and gives them a specific image through which they assume an exceptional position with respect to others.

It is worth highlighting the way in which they perceive the relationship between the transgression of the barrier and the emotion produced, by making them feel a potentiation of their identity attributes. Thus, transgression is resignified in these subjects as a method of social uprising despite at present it does not exceed the legal limit.

## Discussion

Offering the idea of an event that determines the transgressive action through a causal understanding could be compared with burying your head in the sand, something that cannot be done.

By contrasting the information, in line with the classic theory of Erikson (1957), these subjects could be going through identity crises typical of this evolutionary period, whose resolution could be hindered by the lack of elaboration of their internal conflicts and were stuck in moratorium stages. These gave rise to dangerous behaviors through which they managed to elaborate that unconscious suffering, revolted before their parents and found their own identity far from the family environment.

The difficulties in establishing ties with their significant figures is noteworthy here; therefore, in accordance with Bowlby and his attachment theory, there are coincidences between the transgressive behavior and the unsatisfied affective needs with their primary bonds. According to Sarmiento et al. (2009) and Amariles (2016), it could reinforce the idea that the weakness of the family nucleus constitutes a key element in the origin of the transgression, without ignoring the possibility that it is the young person who voluntarily excludes her/himself from her/his protective environment.

One of the most controversial points, based on theory, lies in some official State publications (ICBF, 2015), in which they make a direct association between transgression with unfavorable socioeconomic conditions. Thus, they give a starting point to this research, with the intention of proposing another perspective, focused on the particular elaboration of the young person in the face of their need for identity and the significance of the transgressive act.

Through the development of this research work, the addressed problems are considered solved, such as the identification of the types of transgressive acts committed by university students: cyber theft, sale of narcotics, and being a member of criminal gangs. Also, it is possible to clarify the relationship dynamics established by young people with some of their peers, acts and authority figures that make up their experience, presenting us with narratives that allowed us to analyze

these links and their relationship with the transgressive act: search for status, empowerment or mitigation strategy in the face of a feeling of loneliness, to rebel against their environment and the place that had been attributed to them, and find a personal meaning, a desired name, not imposed.

Finally, the place of transgressive experience in the post-transgression identity narrative is recognized, which marks a before and after in their stories, permeates their current self-perception, fosters new attitudes, and reinforces old ones.

In “*El Trabajo Penitenciario en el ordenamiento jurídico colombiano: una realidad maquillada y oculta [Prison Work in the Colombian legal system: a made-up and hidden reality]*” (2016), the relationships between the transgressive act and adult identity in people who go through re-education, rehabilitation, and resocialization processes are established. In this study, we show that, although the young people who participated in the study were not exposed to these intervention logics, subjective consequences of said act are established in the construction of their identity in the same way. In this case, it is rather a change of narrative in the configuration of oneself subsequent to what we call a transformative act. It is even expressed that the subjectivation of said act can have effects similar to those of a therapeutic or educational experience.

However, the methodology of this study presents some limitations given by the selected sample, due both to its small size and to its homogeneous baseline characteristics. This limits the possibility of performing a population contrast that determines the distinctive narrative elements between heterogeneous populations, in addition to the possibility of extrapolating the results to the general population. However, it opens the way in this field to possible future research that can, through narrative or statistical comparisons, specify distinctive elements in the identity constructions of young people from various contexts.

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## Conclusions

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This study aimed to identify how identity narratives are shaped in young people from private universities who have committed transgressive offences. From the results obtained, we can conclude the following:

- To determine a subject by its context is to deny its capacity and responsibility as a human being, the action is determined by an elaboration and not by a circumstance. Although a context opens up conditions of possibility, it is that elaboration, ultimately, that affects the decision.

- A young person who perceives their primary ties as weak (disruptive family relationships, lack of trust in their parents, lack of empathy and solidarity) can have a more direct entry to transgression, since they do not find a trusting environment as a protective barrier in the internal conflicts characteristic of this stage, so they move this trusting environment to the transgressor environment and, sometimes, to their other initiator. However, it should be emphasized that this binding condition of possibility in the three participants is fractured by themselves and not by their family nucleus.

- Transgressive behavior can be read in adolescence as a desired name, in response to an imposed name and the impossibility of building an identity based on it. It is worth noting the satisfaction that young people find when they are read or seen according to their own signifier, in which they adjust their particular margins above *the law* (where parents or significant figures of power also act) and establish a structure that is not acquired in search of that desired individuality.

- The transgression is established, at this stage, as a hinge moment (important changes occur in this situation) that marks a before and after, until leaving marks that are perpetuated until today in the behavior of the subjects. There is evidence in each of the narratives of feelings of uprising, manipulative behaviors or wanting to *show themselves* to the other constantly. There are three experiences that, although they collided with a barrier that stopped transgressive action, also allowed some of those ideals to permeate the current beliefs of these people.

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## Authorship note

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Santiago Bahamonde Olaya participated as principal investigator. Wilson Andrés Amariles Villegas participated as a co-investigator.

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## Conflicts of interest

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The authors declare no conflict of interest with any commercial institution or association of any kind.

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