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And Road Traffic Injuries Among Young Motorcyclists (SPEED, VIOLENCE AND SEX: MARGINALITY, IDENTITY AND ROAD TRAFFIC INJURIES AMONG YOUNG MOTORCYCLISTS)
SPEED, VIOLENCE AND SEX: MARGINALITY, IDENTITY AND ROAD TRAFFIC INJURIES AMONG YOUNG MOTORCYCLISTS

PANATDA CHUMNANSOOK 4537435 SHMS/D

Ph.D. ( MEDICAL AND HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCES )

THESIS ADVISORS: SUREE KANJANAWONG, Ph.D., LUECHAI SRINGERNYUANG, Ph.D. ( MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY ), PAIBUL SURIYAWONGPAISAL, M.D., M.N.Sc.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the world of young motorcyclists and their severe road traffic injuries. The methods for data collection were interviews and entering into the world of young motorcyclists by ethnographic techniques for three years. This study attempts to understand motorcycle fetishism among teenagers in a provincial town of eastern Thailand. The study suggests that a motorcycle as a commodity is endowed with values, meanings, and utilities far more than its transportation function. Social meanings of motorcycles change in relation to the changing ages and phases in a teenager’s life. As a vehicle for everyday errands and helping out parents, or for traveling to school in a district town, motorcycles assume a new meaning as teenagers become owners. Attitudes to motorcycles change from a human to object relationship to an ownership between two beings in which care, commitment, and deep emotional ties connect the teenager to his or her “vehicle”. A motorcycle in the teenager’s world is more than just a commodity, it is an object of fetishism. This obsessive affection could be viewed as the highest form of consumption, a consumption that needs to be taken care of, not unlike a living thing.

The severe road traffic injuries are a reflection of Thai society. It is not a problem of skill but a problem related with teenagers’ lifestyle today and how they express their identities, which is a result of consumerism in society. The motorcycle has led them into another world, where they meet new people and make more friends. The bike was the key to this world and thus became a status symbol to be cherished. They are good at nothing; nothing they could be proud of. The motorcycle allows them to have social space. The vehicle is the gateway to many problems such as discontinued study, drugs, street violence and crime as well as free unprotected sex. The motorcycle is the cause that leads the kids to other problems. It is a large issue that people overlook. It links with social violence and crime. Actually, there is a chain of problems. If policy makers understand the whole problem clearly, they may see a new way to solve it. Otherwise it will just continue to loop. This study sheds light on the fact that road traffic accidents and related-injuries among young motorcyclists are complex social problems that require a paradigm shift in understanding and solving.

KEY WORDS: MOTORCYCLE / THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS / TEENAGERS / MATERIAL FETISHISM / ROAD TRAFFIC INJURY / IDENTITY / SOCIAL VIOLENCE / SPEED / MARGINALITY

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