The Social Representation of the Moped Among Teenage Boys: Between Transgressive Behavior and Social Integration

Mathieu Bessin[a],*; Sandrine Gaymard[b]

[a]Department of Psychologie, Université d'Angers; Laboratoire de Psychologie des Pays de la Loire (LPPL, EA4638), Angers, France.
[b]Professeur, Department of Psychologie, Université d'Angers Laboratoire de Psychologie des Pays de la Loire (LPPL, EA4638), Angers, France.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

A moped user's risk of being killed on the road is much higher than that of a motorist. If numerous studies have been performed for bikers, much rarer are works dealing with moped users, who however represent a population of vulnerable users. Compared with bikers and other types of road users, this population of low cylinder users has the particularity of being made up of a majority of teenagers, that is, riders with little experience, little training and the particular problems linked with this age group. This qualitative study proposes to investigate the social representation of the moped among French teenage boys with the method of little stories. It deals with group influence on driving and taking risks.

Key words: Risk behavior; Moped; Teenagers; Social norms; Substance use

1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 Accident Data

French accident data indicate that teenage moped riders are particularly exposed to risk on the road. According to the National Interministerial Observatory for road safety (ONISR, 2016) there are 20 times as many fatal accident risks on a moped as in a car; being less protected in the case of a shock the moped user belongs to the category of "vulnerable users". Again, according to the ONISR, in 2015, the risk of an accident on a moped is particularly high between the ages of 15 and 17. It is also at this age that it is most used and it can be seen that moped riders represent 70% of the 14-17 year-olds killed on the roads (mostly boys). If the number of moped accidents is decreasing, this trend is progressing less favorably compared to other means of transport (except for motorbikes) since out of the total casualties on the road the percentage of moped riders has gone from 5.6% in 2000 to 6.8% in 2011 evening out to 5% in 2015. The death rate among moped riders fell by 46% between 2000 and 2010 while road fatalities dropped by 51.1% over the same period for the totality of road users. In addition to the significant death rate noted in accident data, it is necessary to stress the severity of the injuries specific to this means of transport since for 10 moped riders killed, 180 are in hospital for more than 24 hours of whom 13 will bear serious after-effects (ONISR, 2012).

The decrease in the number of moped accidents noted in the last years, in particular among the youngest, can be explained by the loss of interest in this mode of transportation according to the ONISR. Young people would seem effectively to be turning to cycling, which is enjoying a boom, and using school transport widely and public transport both of which have developed.

1.2 Research on Teenage Moped Riders

Gaymard & Bessin (2017) showed that teenagers were influenced by the transgressive peer model rather than the parental model which is closer to respect of the rules (Gaymard & Bessin, 2012). The parental model only has a significant weight on themes concerning non-négociable

questions of safety such as wearing a helmet (Gaymard & Bessin, 2017).

This dominating influence of the normative model of peers compared with the model of the parents as well as the emphasis on numerous transgressions by the former seems linked to aspects of identity. Studying exchanges on social networks between young moped riders (Gaymard, Bessin, Bordarie, & Leguen, 2012) it could be seen hat they are in conflict with other users through aggressive discourse toward car drivers as well as a strong tendency to attribute the causes and responsibilities to external factors. Moreover, Gaymard and Andrés (2013) showed that teenagers do not know the rules they are supposed to have learnt in the frame of the road safety diploma (Brevet de Sécurité Routière) such as the legal maximum speed for a moped.

2. THE LITTLE STORIES TECHNIQUE

We used the technique of little stories to be completed proposed by Gaymard, 2003 (see also Gaymard, 2012;

Gaymard, Andrés, & Nzobounsana, 2011). This technique consists of a series of thematic lead-ins in the form of sentences to be completed. According to Gaymard (2003) these lead-ins allow the respondents' discourse to be channeled while leading them to project themselves beyond spontaneous discourse. Moreover, the tool of the little stories brings out the emotional component of social representations in specific interactive situations. In the study of interactions between drivers and pedestrians (Gaymard, 2012) this method brought to light the place of emotions felt by drivers when interacting with pedestrians. Starting from these works, we adapted this tool to the question of teenage moped riders with the aim of putting into context better the representation that these young people may have of their two-wheelers and how to ride them.

We prepared scenarios to be completed around several themes (Table 1) encountered during previous works on teenage moped riders (Gaymard, Bessin, Bordarie, & Leguen, 2012; Gaymard & Bessin, 2017). The instruction given was to complete the stories proposed with fictional first names.

Table 1
Thematic Scenarios to Be Completed

Theme	Lead-in
Uses of the moped	1- When Alex takes his moped it is often to …
Image of the moped	2-Kevin has an ugly moped, his friends...
Boosting the moped	3- Leo changed his exhaust pipe and he put in a 14 carburetor in order to go faster...
Moped, alcohol and cannabis	4- Benjamin rides a moped, he smokes joints but on the other hand…
	5- Thomas rides a moped, drinks a little but on the other hand…
Moped and respect/ disrespect of the rules	6- When he is on his moped, Alex thinks that the police …

2.1 Population

To carry out this study, we submitted the test to a group of 64 teenage moped riders from 5 different schools on two bordering départements (administrative division). We selected only boys because of their clear over-representation in the accident data. The average age of our sample is 15.6 years, which are representative of the teenage moped rider population. The average age of teenagers is 16 years according to the ONISR (2016).

2.2 Analysis Strategy: Thematic Analysis of Content

Content analysis is a technique well known to psychologists and social psychology researchers in particular. There are, however, several types of discourse analysis, such as structural semantic analysis or logical aesthetic analysis (Mucchielli, 1991). For this work, like Gaymard (2003), we have chosen a discussion of logical-semantic type, which sticks to the manifest content, considering only the immediately accessible signified (Mucchielli, 1991). In this work, we will consider two dimensions: The thematic dimension, which will allow us to determine the themes developed in the discourse and

the frequency dimension, which will allow us to compare the frequency of themes.
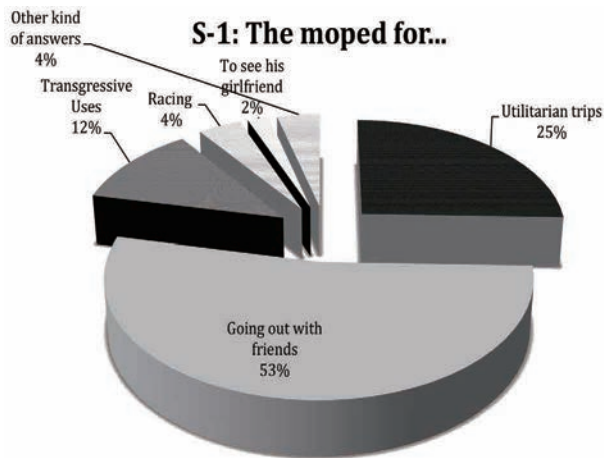
3. RESULTS

In this part, we will present a description and interpretation of the results we have collected through the tool of short stories to complete. For each scenario, we present the thematic groupings that we carried out by means of a thematic analysis of the content. For some scenarios, we have created a category called "other" that combines unexplainable answers (drawings for example) or absences of answers.

3.1 Uses of the Moped

The sentence to be completed was: "When Alex takes his scooter it is often for...." We hope to learn more about the practices of young people but also about what motivates them in the use of two-wheeled vehicles.

Among the productions of our subjects, presented in Figure 1, going out with friends clearly emerges as the most frequent response. In this category are included answers such as, "going to town with his friends" or "going

S-1: The moped for...

Other kind of answers 4%

Transgressive Uses 12%

Racing 4%

To see his girlfriend 2%

Utilitarian trips 25%

Going out with friends 53%

Figure 1
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story 1: Uses of the Moped

to see a friend" (53% of the answers). It is about seeing friends and very often "dating" but no specific activity is disclosed.
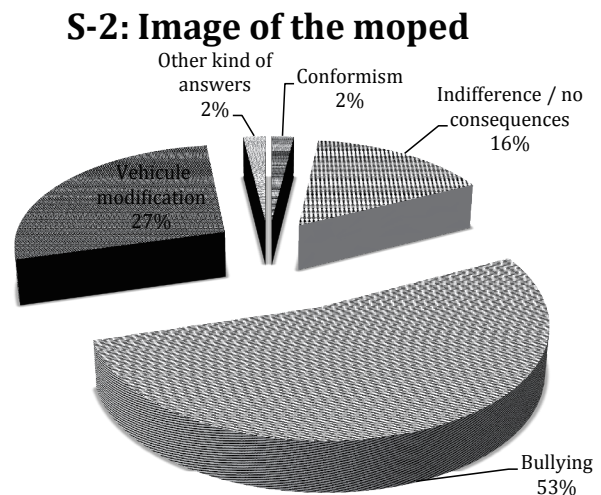
The second most frequent category (Figure 1) concerns the uses that we will call useful (utility of the moped). These uses, such as "going to high school", going on a training course" or "avoiding his parents taking him in the morning" represent 25% of the answers. This figure is somewhat surprising because of the results of Gaymard, Bessin and Bordarie (2012). Utilitarian uses, especially for school, are frequently cited by teens for convincing parents to accede to their wish for a two-wheeler.

If "…representations are determined by the norms and by all the behaviors, past or present, of the social actors…" (Our translation, Abric, 1994, p.238), then it seems that the representation of the moped in adolescents is much more than the simple representation of a vehicle to go from one place to another. It is also marked by an identity dimension and the desire to be freed from the parental bosom to spend more time with peers or friends. Having a scooter is therefore above all a way for young people to see their friends and thereby integrate into a group. If this is not necessarily a way to make friends because we can assume that they are instead met by other socialization ways like school, it would be a way to live these relationships, maintained by leisure activities or by the simple fact of seeing each other freely, outside the formal or more strict frameworks that are the high school or the family home. The other categories of answers that we were able to form seem to go in this direction since it is about playful uses. In the first place among these are the answers that we grouped under the category "Transgressive Uses" (Figure 1). We have grouped together in this theme which represents 12% of the answers to relatively generic productions like "to fool about". There are, however, more precise answers such as "to drive fast on the roads" or "to go smoking with his friends". We recorded answers such as "racing with

buddies" or "to go for a spin with friends" in the "race" thematic category (4% of respondents) thinking they were typical of the youth's interest for speed and competition with peers. It seems to us, however, that these answers are in the thematic line of the categories "Transgressive Uses" and "Going out with friends". All of these elements confirm, according to us, the social dimension of driving two-wheelers in adolescents. Indeed, if the moped is the way to see friends and to integrate into a group, it seems that to show a positive image in the eyes of the peers one must be transgressive. We note however that 2% of the answers (Figure 1) concern the love life of the young people. We grouped answers such as "to go see his girlfriend" in the category "see his girlfriend". Although this theme represents few answers in terms of volume, it seems to give weight to the representation of the moped as an emancipation vector. In the same way that this vehicle is used to free oneself from the supervision of parents or educational institutions to see one's friends and to engage in certain activities, it also allows a new emotional intimacy. If this is not about speed or transgressions valued by the group this question reveals rather a desire to develop, thanks to the freedom induced by mobility, a sphere in which the young people do not want to have to make accounts to their parents.

3.2 Image of the Moped

Here, the situation deals with a young man with an unsightly or outdated scooter: "Kevin has a lousy scooter, his friends ....." It is then for our participants to discuss the reaction of friends of the young man in question.

S-2: Image of the moped

Other kind of answers 2%

Conformism 2%

Indifference / no consequences 16%

Vehicule modification 27%

Bullying 53%

Figure 2
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story 2: Image of the Moped

As presented in Figure 2, we find that 53% of the collected answers involve bullying or mockery by peers. In this category we find productions such as "his friends laugh at him", "his friends take him for a fool" or "his friends are ashamed to hang out with him". The two-

wheeler seems here to be seen as an extension of self, at least in terms of image. Like the dressing style, the appearance of moped says a lot about its owner. It must be consistent with the group and its codes, its values in terms of style, color or aspects more or less sporty. The clothes of a young person may enable him to identify with a tribe or a group, often in connection with a passion shared by friends (i.e. a style of music or a sport). It is also true for a vehicle; these are customizable by stickers, paints and other accessories. There are many examples on the social networks or on specialized sites of young people who are exposing the changes made to their vehicle. If one attributes an identity dimension to the scooter driving, it is actually disturbing that its appearance is inadequate with the values of a group into which we want to integrate. The thematic categories *Bullying* and *vehicle modifications*, account together for 80% of answers and are diagnosis and treatment of the same problem. An unsightly vehicle is an unacceptable barrier to peer assent and integration.

While a clear majority of participants seemed to consider the aesthetics of the two-wheeled vehicle to be important, we noted that 16% (Figure 2) reported some peer indifference on this point. Answers such as "his friends do not care" or "his friends have nothing to say as

long as it works" testify to a less identical representation of two-wheeled vehicles. Presumably for these young people, the scooter is not really an integration issue and they might be involved in other practices and other group values. The scooter is then perceived rather as a means of locomotion or a tool.

3.3 Boosting the Moped

The technical changes to improve performance in terms of top speed, represent a major topic among teenagers scooter riders. Although increasing the speed of a scooter is illegal and although it is a defect for insurance companies, it still seems to be a common practice.

The participants to whom we submitted the story of a young man who changes his exhaustion and the carburetor of his vehicle showed a positive assessment of 41% (Figure 3). We noted comments such as "He's too right, he'll be able to race", "serious he'll be able to distance his buddies" or "cool he'll gain at least 40 km / h". Improving speed is actually perceived as a way to be competitive compared to friends. The pleasure of speed "for oneself" is certainly mentioned a few times but the motivations described by young people are very much related to the group and a comparison with the performances of other members.
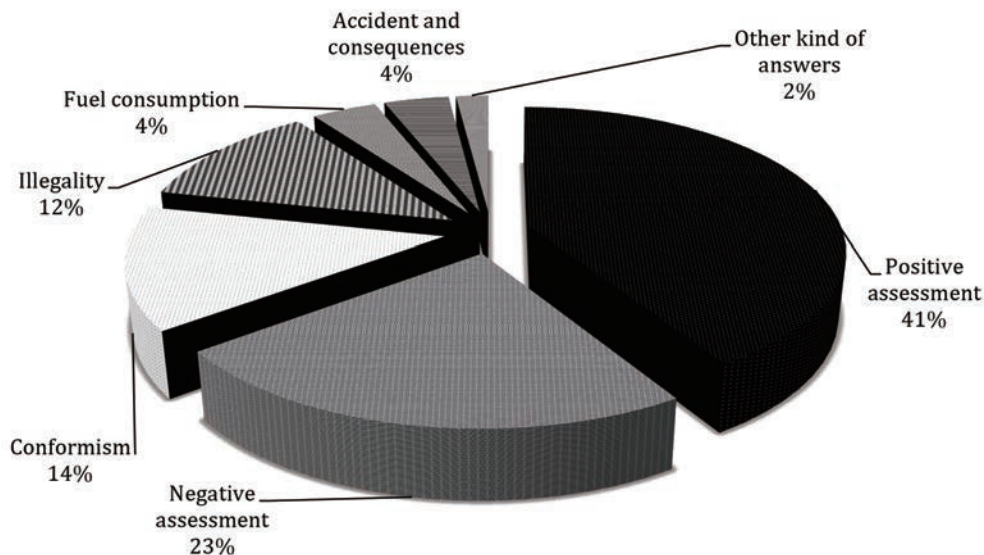
Figure 3
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story 3: Boosting the Moped

A smaller share of the sample (23%) gives a negative assessment of the technical change (Figure 3). It is interesting to note that these negative evaluations do not concern the risks of being punished by the police, the risks of accidents or the risk of not being covered by an insurance company. Other means to improve the

machine may be more widely shared or better evaluated. We have identified a category that includes productions that explain the motivations or reasons why the character of the story improves the speed of his scooter. These productions do not include any position or evaluation, they are simply explanations. The reasons described

in our sample reflect conformism, that is to say, social motivations linked to the group and the place we intend to occupy. Speed, which is the major condition, would be means of being well seen by his peers and thus of being integrated into the group. This is an important dimension of identity and it seems to have far more weight than the simple search for sensations through the speed which is of an individual order. We also note that, in Figure 3, the illegality of some modifications and tinkering of the vehicle is only mentioned in 12% of responses, through productions like "it will improve its speed but if he gets caught, it will not be cool for him". This is not to say that only 12% of the subjects are aware of the illegality of speed improvements or of the risk of being arrested for this offense, but it seems to us rather that it is interpreted as a legitimate transgression. In the same way that speed seems to be conditional for young road users (Gaymard, 2009), speed improvements, if one does not get caught or does not involve a too heavy work on the engine is considered legitimate although illegal because it serves a key value: speed. This legitimization of speed is however tempered by an overconsumption of fuel which is expressed by 4% of the subjects.

Finally, what is striking in the treatment of this scenario is that only 4% (Figure 3) of the participants mentioned or described an increase in the risk of an accident or a danger associated with the increase in the top speed of the scooter. Examples of productions collected such as "results: He is in hospital" or "he falls because he can not yet manage his new speed" shows a certain awareness of the risk in a minority of subjects but the overwhelming majority of the population does not associate speed with accident risk. The risk of being fined for an improper configuration of the vehicle is little taken into account even if it is evoked three times more frequently (12%) than the risk of fall or aggravation of the falls induced by the speed (4%). The speed referred to above as the main motivation for technical improvements is thus perceived as a vector of strong integration and not as a factor of risk or danger.

This goes against the discourse of adults or what is formalized in training and in the Highway Code; for young people, speed is an asset and a goal that must be pursued and not a danger that should be regulated or limited.

3.4 Moped, Alcohol and Cannabis

The themes of alcohol and cannabis, regarding the place of these products among the most accidental elements for this age group, seemed to us inevitable.

We shall first deal with the question of cannabis which is widely mentioned by young people. We have thus proposed to our participants to complete the following story: "Benjamin drives a scooter, he smokes joints but on the other hand ...".

Among the results that we present for this question of driving a two-wheeled vehicle under the influence of cannabis, we note in Figure 4 that a clear majority of the answers denote an assent or approval.

This approval takes several forms. First, 27% of positive evaluations were answered through responses such as "he is right" or "so what?" "I do not see where the problem is". These answers indicate that for teenagers, driving a scooter while smoking cannabis is simply not
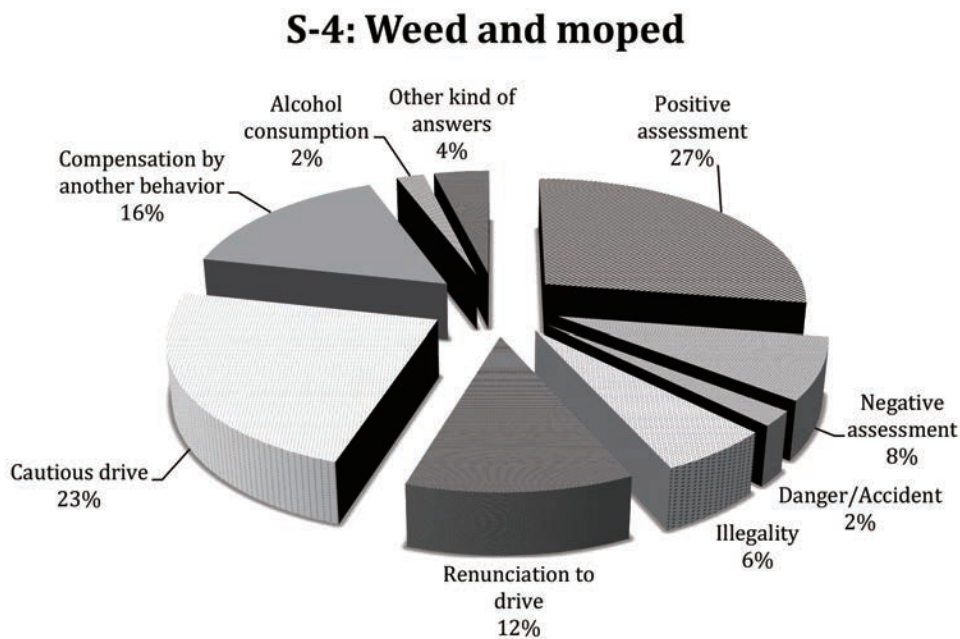
Figure 4
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story 3: Weed and Moped

a problem in itself. The young people do not see any harm, they even find it quite commonplace or normal. This cannabis trivialization in adolescents is not strictly speaking the subject of our work but it is interesting in the sense that it implies that the consumption of cannabis is not even perceived as a risk taking when driving a moped. The evocation of a potential hazard or a risk of accident concerns only 2% of the answers, which are relatively negligible (Figure 4).

If the consumption of cannabis with a moped is not considered as a risk-taking, its criminal dimension does not seem really taken into account by our participants since only 6% of them mention its illegality (Figure 4). However, it is difficult to conceive that young people ignore this illegality or that they do not consider the consumption of hashish as a transgression. They seem rather to estimate the risk of getting caught as pretty low. The responses in the other two forms of approvals we have identified are consistent with this.

The second form of approval in terms of frequency (23% of responses) concerns cautious driving in the case of driving under cannabis. Although it may seem contradictory to "drive cautiously" while having consumed a psychotropic drug, we have found answers such as "yes, but he pays attention" or "he advances cautiously".

The third and last form of approval we have noted is quite similar to the second insofar as it also refers to counterparts or conditions to drive under cannabis. We have grouped under the term "compensation by another behavior" answers such as "yes but he does not drink" or "ok but he does not deal". Driving under the influence of cannabis is presented here as a legitimate transgression, provided that no other transgressions are associated with it such as alcohol consumption in particular. Alcohol consumption appears to be less conditional than cannabis use, which is perceived as more acceptable; only 12% (Figure 4) of the subjects concern declining to drive.

Regarding the question of alcohol, we proposed the following story to our subjects: *Thomas drives a moped, he drinks a little but on the other hand..."*
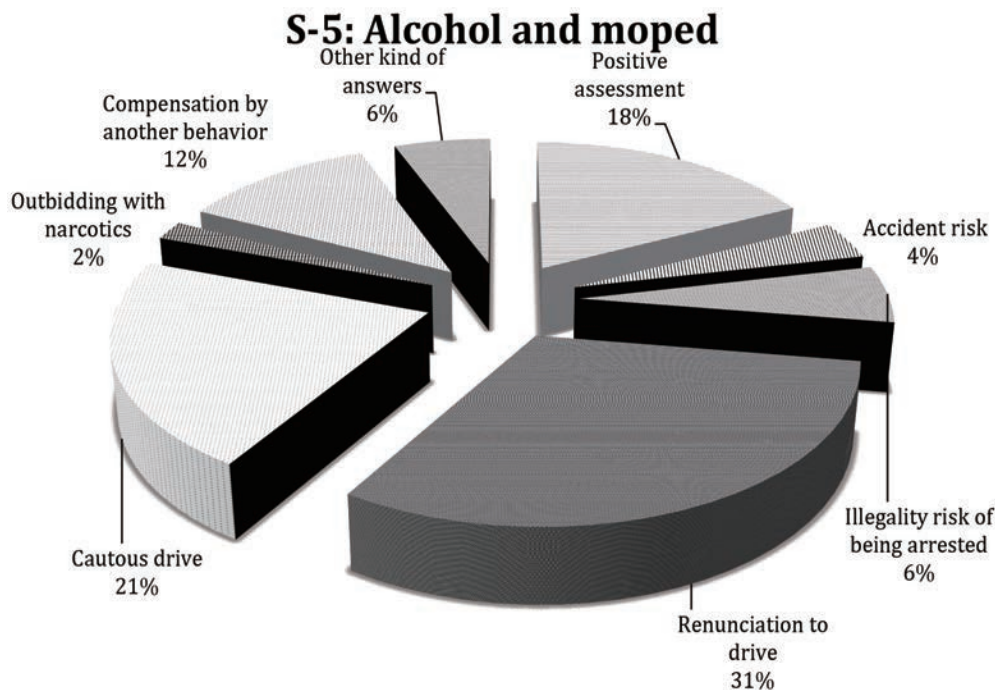
Figure 5
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story-5: Alcohol and Moped

Driving a moped under the influence of alcohol shows close results in thematic terms to those observed on the question of cannabis but the frequencies and weights of these subjects fluctuate significantly.

We note in Figure 5 that 31% of responses mention declining to drive. Here we find answers such as "he sleeps on the spot after his party" or "he does not drive if he is drunk". This figure is significantly higher than

the one we observed for the same theme of responses concerning cannabis driving. This confirms that drinking alcohol and driving a moped is considered less acceptable than cannabis use. It should also be noted that young people give up driving and not drinking or smoking. It can therefore be deduced that if transgressions in the driving of two-wheeled vehicles are rites of passage for adolescents, they are less important than the consumption

of alcohol or cannabis which seems to be more valued by young people.

Other answers indicate an awareness of the danger or risks. Thus 6% (Figure 5) of the productions of our subjects evoke the risks of being stopped by the police. This figure seems to us very low if we consider the media coverage of alcohol testing. It seems again that young people consider the risks to be controlled quite low. We note by the way that the fear of being repressed by the police relates to technical or typical aspects of the moped but not for behaviors related to alcohol or cannabis. These technical offences would be typical of the moped drivers while the "target heart" of the authorities concerning alcohol would be rather the car-drivers or the adults.

Young people show a very low awareness of danger through responses to potential accidents. These responses only appear with surprisingly low frequency, since they represent only 4% of the total. Again, it is conceivable that the risk of accidents is underestimated because of the particularities of driving two-wheelers. Gaymard, Bessin and Bordarie (2012) found that the scooterists considered themselves as special users of the road. They described themselves as less responsible than car-drivers (adults). This probably explains these results: they consider themselves less dangerous so they think it is not so serious to drive being drunk. Young moped drivers may not consider their speed sufficient or their journey long enough to consider drunk driving as dangerous on a moped as in a car for example.

We note that 18% (Figure 5) of respondents mention a positive assessment with productions such as "it's not a problem". These responses, similar to those on the positive assessment of cannabis driving, indicate that a non-negligible part of young people believes that driving while drinking is not so serious and ultimately constitutes an acceptable transgression.

We also find responses updating the conditionality of driving under alcohol through two categories of responses.

The first in terms of frequency (21% of responses) concerns "cautious" behavior, with responses such as "he is careful" or "cautious". This antinomy between safe driving and alcohol consumption shows that young people are not well aware of the risks involved in such practices although we can not really doubt the knowledge of the rules. In other words, if young people know that they are strictly prohibited from drunk driving, they consider the risks too low to make this rule absolute.

The second category, which refers to the conditionality of alcohol consumption, accounts for 12% of responses (Figure 5). These are answers such as "yes but he only drank beer" or "he goes back via the small roads", which mention compensation behaviors. Young people consider that it is acceptable to drive under the influence of alcohol provided, for example, they have not consumed strong alcohol or they do not drive on too busy roads. This conditionality of the rule (Gaymard, 2014) about alcohol surprises us by its extent since it concerns a large part of the answers.

However, driving under the influence of alcohol is clearly less conditional than driving under cannabis and seems to be considered by young moped drivers as a less acceptable transgression. These results nevertheless reveal the scale of the task still to be carried out in terms of prevention and road education to achieve a more massive awareness of the risks inherent to alcohol on the road.

3.5 Moped and Respect / Disrespect of the Rule

Our last theme concerns the respect or the transgression of the rules. If this question has crossed all the other themes, we wanted at the beginning of our study to devote a specific theme. Transgressions about driving moped and lifestyle of adolescents can be of several types and are mentioned above in particular through the use of alcohol, cannabis or speeding. We have, however, confronted our participants with other types of transgressive behavior, including non-compliance with the rules of the road.

The following story to be completed outlines the relationship or perception that youth may have of law enforcement. The proposed lead in was: "When he's on his moped, Alex thinks the police...."

This question, within the framework of the theme of the transgression of the rules, seems interesting to us insofar as the police materialize or personify the rules.

It is noteworthy, in Figure 6, that nearly half of the responses (49%) indicate distrust or fear of law enforcement. Answers like "he is suspicious of them" or "he is afraid that they stop him because his moped is tinkered" translate a certain "fear of the policeman". While this fear is not necessarily sufficient to deter young people from transgressing the Highway Code, it can be inferred that young people are aware of the risks of being punished. This fear of punishment has, moreover, evolved in the light of the themes mentioned above concerning, for example, speed, modification of the vehicle or consumption of alcohol. The risk of being arrested also sometimes seems to be better taken into account or more dissuasive than the risk of accidents or injuries.

If we find this fear of the police in most of the answers, we still note that certain answers mention a certain indifference or a lack of confidence in the police. The answers highlight the indifference to the presence of police officers represent 17% of the whole (Figure 6).

More surprisingly, we find some answers indicating a certain animosity towards the police. They are in fact insults such as "they are swine". These productions still represent 18% of the responses of our participants. This verbal aggression seems to be the product of a posture of transgression or provocation. Because the police represent the order and because the transgression or opposition to this order is valued by young people, policemen are the object of jeers or certain mistrust.
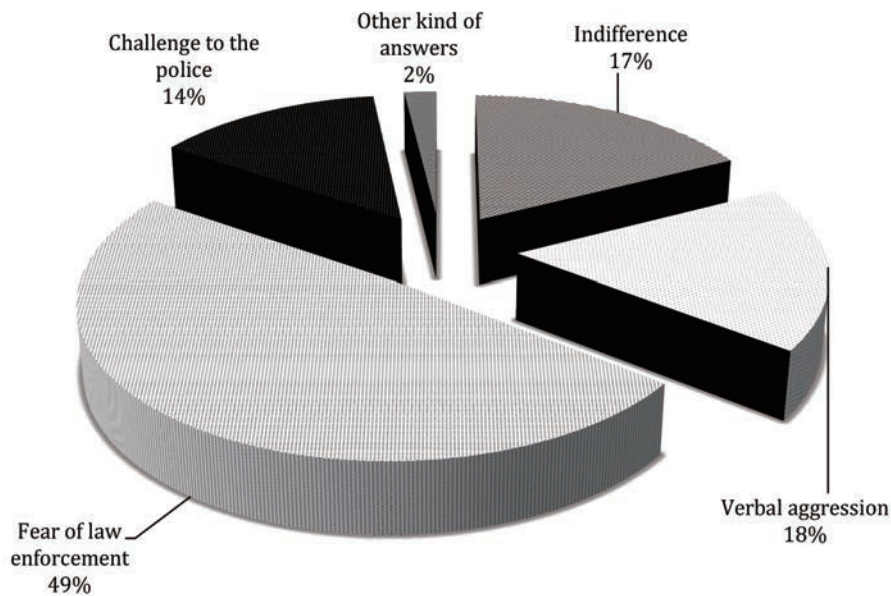
Figure 6
Thematic Analysis of the Content of Story 6: Transgression of the Rules

More surprisingly, we find some answers indicating a certain animosity towards the police. They are in fact insults such as "they are scums". These productions still represent 18% of the responses of our participants. This verbal aggression seems to be the product of a posture of transgression or provocation. Because the police represent the order and because the transgression or opposition to this order is valued by young people, policemen are the object of jeers or certain mistrust.

We also find this mistrust in the answers evoking the impossibility for the police to catch up the moped drivers. We find 14% of the responses a form of challenge to the police (Figure 6) through responses such as "he thinks they will never catch him" or "he's too fast to get caught". One can think that this is a game reminiscent of" cops and robbers" largely fantasized by teenagers.

4. DISCUSSION: AN INSTRUMENT OF TRANSGRESSION AND INTEGRATION

The importance of transgressing or transgressive behavior and risk-taking in the social representation of mopeds in adolescents was discussed above. We also talked about the importance given by young people to group values. Young people perceive the scooter as something that makes integration easy within the framework of what sociologists have called secondary socialization (Bolliet & Schmitt, 2002). If the primary group of the individual assures primary socialization, i.e. his family, secondary socialization is a socialization of adulthood, where the individual will internalize norms and values from other instances. We believe that driving a two-wheeled vehicle as a teenager is part of the transition between these two stages of socialization.

Young people, partially emancipated from the control of their parents thanks to the new autonomy of transport that the moped gives them are confronted with group experiences such as outings or parties in a different setting from school and freer. These new group experiences lead them to integrate new social norms and to adapt to a different group functioning. The young moped driver may not belong to a different group from the one he attends in school time but the framework and thus the functioning of this group is not the same. One can think for example that in a school, more rigid even formal, coexist legal norms (Gaymard, 2007, 2014) and social norms. The freedom to move at will allow the emergence of a new framework, governed this time mainly by social norms. Legal norms have not disappeared, they remain in particular by the Highway Code, but they are for young people experienced as less restrictive than those applied to high school or home. This seems to be an explanation for the feeling of freedom and independence described by young moped users during our study of the little stories to be completed.

Our study of the short stories to be completed allowed us to contextualize the representation that the teenagers have the scooter. We were able to realize on this occasion that the motivations of young people for driving a two-

wheeled vehicle are very much social in nature, the latter wanting to be able to frequent their friends in a freer and more independent way of supervising adults.

Youth practices are also impacted by these group considerations. Indeed, how to use its moped, its appearance, or compliance with the road code depends on how these practices are going to be received by peers. Adolescent scooterists pay particular attention to the image they refer to themselves through their practices, but also through the "falls". They also cultivate a man-making image, where transgression and competition hold an important place. These trends are for us the result of a typical socialization of adolescent boys of this age. It is above all to ensure their place and their integration within the group of peers by showing a certain mastery of its standards and an adherence to its values.

It appears through the elements of discourse we have received among young people that risky behavior and transgressions find their justifications in a valorization by the group rather than in the search for strong sensations. In other words, what motivates transgression is its supposed valorization by friends. It is the prestige of transgression in the eyes of peers that makes it legitimate for its author.

It is therefore understandable that if the social representations have the function of maintaining the group identity (Flament & Rouquette, 2003), it is quite logical, considering its valorization by the group, that the transgression of the rules occupies an important part in the social representation of moped among young people.

If we know the propensity of adolescent moped drivers to transgress rules (Gaymard & Bessin, 2017), the use of a qualitative tool such as the little stories to be completed allows us to better understand the modalities of these transgressions according to the different contexts of the use of two-wheeled vehicles.

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