

Master Thesis

Navigating Urban Realities: A Case Study on Gender Dynamics in Medellín's Public Spaces

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Abstract

This thesis delves into the gender dynamics within the public spaces of Medellín, Colombia, and their implications on the prevalence of street harassment. Situated at the intersection of Gender Studies, urban research, and Peace and Conflict Studies, this investigation addresses the challenges faced by women in urban environments. It particularly examines the role of language in perpetuating gender stereotypes and framing street harassment as a form of violence. Through in-depth analysis of interviews with Medellín residents and a comprehensive literature review, the study explores the individual experiences of women, factors influencing street harassment, and potential interventions to combat it. The research question guiding this inquiry is: "How does the urban environment, specifically public spaces in Medellín, influence and intersect with gender dynamics, particularly regarding experiences of street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender, among women living in the city?"

The theoretical framework draws from feminist theories, urban sociology, and conflict studies, providing a multidimensional lens to analyse the complexities of gender relations within urban contexts. The qualitative research design employs semi-structured interviews with women in Medellín, allowing for a nuanced exploration of their lived experiences and perceptions of street harassment. Medellín serves as a compelling case study due to its history of violence, ongoing urban revitalization efforts, and complex gender dynamics. Key findings reveal that the urban environment significantly shapes women's experiences of street harassment, with factors such as spatial segregation, socio-economic disparities, and cultural norms influencing the prevalence and nature of harassment incidents. Language emerges as a powerful tool in reinforcing gender stereotypes and legitimizing acts of harassment, highlighting the potential of linguistic empowerment and gender-sensitive language policies to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality in urban environments. Additionally, the study identifies potential interventions, including gender-inclusive urban planning, awareness campaigns, and legal reforms, to create safer and more equitable urban spaces for all residents.

Keywords: gender-based violence, language, women, Peace and Conflict Studies, Medellín, public spaces, urban environments, prevention, urban planning

Resumen

Esta tesis profundiza en las dinámicas de género dentro de los espacios públicos de Medellín, Colombia, y sus implicaciones en la prevalencia del acoso callejero. Situada en la intersección de los estudios de género, la investigación urbana y los estudios de paz y conflicto, esta investigación aborda los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres en entornos urbanos. Examina particularmente el papel del lenguaje en la perpetuación de los estereotipos de género y en enmarcar el acoso callejero como una forma de violencia. A través del análisis en profundidad de entrevistas con residentes de Medellín y una revisión exhaustiva de la literatura, el estudio explora las experiencias individuales de las mujeres, los factores que influyen en el acoso callejero y las posibles intervenciones para combatirlo. La pregunta de investigación que guía esta investigación es: "¿Cómo influye y se entrelaza el entorno urbano, específicamente los espacios públicos en Medellín, con las dinámicas de género, especialmente en lo que respecta a las experiencias de acoso callejero y las expresiones lingüísticas de género, entre las mujeres que viven en la ciudad?"

El marco teórico se basa en teorías feministas, sociología urbana y estudios de conflicto, proporcionando una perspectiva multidimensional para analizar las complejidades de las relaciones de género dentro de los contextos urbanos. El diseño de investigación cualitativa emplea entrevistas semiestructuradas con mujeres en Medellín, lo que permite una exploración matizada de sus experiencias vividas y percepciones del acoso callejero. Medellín sirve como un estudio de caso convincente debido a su historia de violencia, los continuos esfuerzos de revitalización urbana y las complejas dinámicas de género. Los hallazgos clave revelan que el entorno urbano moldea significativamente las experiencias de las mujeres con el acoso callejero, con factores como la segregación espacial, las disparidades socioeconómicas y las normas culturales que influyen en la prevalencia y la naturaleza de los incidentes de acoso. El lenguaje emerge como una herramienta poderosa para reforzar los estereotipos de género y legitimar los actos de acoso, destacando el potencial del empoderamiento lingüístico y las políticas lingüísticas sensibles al género para abordar la violencia de género y promover la igualdad de género en entornos urbanos. Además, el estudio identifica posibles intervenciones, incluida la planificación urbana inclusiva de género, campañas de sensibilización y reformas legales, para crear espacios urbanos más seguros y equitativos para todos los residentes.

Palabras clave: violencia de género, lenguaje, mujeres, estudios de paz y conflictos, Medellín, espacios públicos, entornos urbanos, prevención, planificación urbana

Content

Abstract	II
Content	IV
Preface	VI
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background and Context.....	1
1.2 Research Question.....	2
1.3 Justification.....	3
1.4 Objectives and Significance of the Study.....	5
1.5 Research Methodology.....	6
1.6 Structure of this Thesis	7
2 Theoretical Framework	9
2.1 Urban Theory: Navigating the Labyrinth of City Dynamics.....	9
2.1.1 Critical Urban Theory	10
2.2 Medellín's Urban Narrative	11
3 Literature Review	13
3.1 Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies	13
3.2 Gender Dynamics in Urban Studies	15
3.3 Language, Discourse, and Gender in Urban Contexts.....	17
3.3.1 The Basics: Linguistic Relativity	18
3.3.2 Language as a Tool for constructing Social Norms.....	19
3.3.3 Gender and Language in Public Space.....	21
3.4 Medellín's Post-Agreement Urban Transformation	24
3.5 Contribution to the Field	26
4 Research Methodology.....	28
4.1 Qualitative Research Design.....	28
4.2 Data Collection	30
4.3 Sampling Methods.....	31
4.4 Ethical Considerations	32
4.5 Data Analysis Techniques	33
5 Medellín: A City in Transition	34
5.1 Historical Context.....	34
5.2 The "Post-Agreement" Era.....	36
5.3 Urban Development and Transformation Initiatives	38
5.4 Challenges in Building Safer Public Spaces for Women.....	41
5.4.1 Unpacking Patriarchal Dynamics in Public Spaces.....	41
5.4.2 Navigating Urban Transformation Challenges for Women's Safety	43

6	Case Studies and Interviews.....	46
6.1	Selection of Participants.....	46
6.2	Data Collection and Transcription.....	47
7	Data Analysis and Findings.....	49
7.1	Demographic Data of the Participants	49
7.2	Perceptions of public spaces in Medellín	50
7.2.1	Gender socialization and its impact on freedom and safety	52
7.3	Personal Experiences of Street Harassment	55
7.3.1	Nature and frequency of street harassment incidents	56
7.3.2	Coping mechanisms and responses to street harassment	58
7.4	Factors influencing Street Harassment.....	59
7.4.1	Participants' Proposals for Combatting Street Harassment	61
7.5	Perception of street harassment as a form of violence.....	62
7.5.1	Language's Role in Reproducing Gender Stereotypes.....	65
7.5.2	Observations on shifts in street language regarding gender roles	66
7.6	Reflections on how language affects self-perception and societal opportunities for women.....	67
7.6.1	Evaluation of language as a tool for empowering women	69
8	Conclusion	73
8.1	Summary of Key Findings.....	73
8.2	Potential Policy and Intervention Strategies.....	75
8.3	Personal Learning Curve and Contribution to the Field	77
8.4	Limitations and Future Research.....	79
8.5	Final Remarks	80
	Publication Bibliography.....	LXXXII
	Plagiarism Declaration.....	XC

Preface

In the journey of completing this master thesis, there have been numerous individuals and organizations whose support, guidance, and contributions have been invaluable. I would like to take this moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to them.

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Finally, I extend an invitation to those intrigued by the intricate layers of this research. For those seeking more detailed information, access to consent forms, or the original audio recordings, I encourage you to reach out to me personally via email: marleen.lorenz@gmx.de

1 Introduction

My academic journey, rooted in Cultural Anthropology and Peace and Conflict Studies, led me to various global landscapes, concluding with a pivotal second-degree year in Colombia. Amidst these studies, my focus consistently gravitated towards the intricate intersections of peace, conflict, and social justice. Venturing to the vibrant city of Medellín for an internship during my second-degree year allowed me to immerse myself in its multifaceted dynamics and ongoing transformation. This urban environment, shaped by a tumultuous history and a commitment to a more peaceful future, provided a unique platform to explore my passion for Peace and Conflict Studies. This study, centred on gender dynamics in Medellín's public spaces, reflects the culmination of academic experiences and personal interests, aiming to contribute to the understanding of how urban development intersects with peace, security, and the promotion of gender equality. The subsequent sections will outline the research question, justify this study, and delineate its objectives, providing a robust foundation for the ensuing investigation.

1.1 Background and Context

Medellín, the city of eternal spring, nestled within the picturesque Aburra Valley of Colombia, is an urban centre that has undergone a remarkable transformation. Historically renowned for its association with drug-related violence and conflict, Medellín has transitioned into a city eager to redefine itself, both locally and internationally, as a place of innovation, resilience, and urban development. This transformation is undeniably complex, influenced by historical factors such as the ongoing process of post-agreement reconciliation, constant social and economic disparities, and the need for gender inclusion and urban safety. Medellín's path towards urban revitalization has not only been marked by infrastructural development but also by its commitment to fostering a more inclusive environment, where all residents, regardless of gender, can participate in public life without fear. While the revitalization of public spaces has aimed to break the cycle of violence and exclusion that plagued the city's past, it has also inadvertently exposed the underlying gender dynamics and inequalities that persist in urban environments. Medellín's public spaces have been vital sites for social interaction and community building, but they have also been arenas where gender-based violence, particularly in the form of street harassment, takes place. The experience of moving through the city as a woman, from walking down the streets to spending time in parks, can be drastically different from that of men. Street harassment, which includes unwanted comments, gestures, and behaviours of a sexual nature, often targets women, affecting their sense of safety and freedom in public spaces.

At the heart of this study lies an exploration of how the urban environment, specifically public spaces in Medellín, influences and intersects with gender dynamics. I aim to understand the experiences of women living in the city, particularly regarding street harassment and the linguistic expressions of gender. This research strives to delve into the intricate relationship between urban development, safety, and the perpetuation of gender norms and inequalities. As Medellín positions itself as a city of transformation and innovation, it is imperative to address how these changes affect its female residents and the broader implications for peace, security, and social justice in the post-agreement era. The trajectory of Medellín's urban revitalization offers an opportunity to understand the intersection of gender and urban studies and contributes to the ongoing discourse on building inclusive cities. This study is guided by the recognition that gender dynamics in public spaces are not just personal experiences but are deeply embedded in the social, cultural, and linguistic fabric of the city. By scrutinizing these dynamics, this research seeks to uncover pathways towards safer, more inclusive urban environments for women and promote peace-building efforts in the context of urban development.

1.2 Research Question

Within the complex landscape of urban development and gender dynamics, this study seeks to address the following central research question:

"How does the urban environment, specifically public spaces in Medellín, influence and intersect with gender dynamics, particularly regarding experiences of street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender, among women living in the city?"

This research question emerges from a confluence of personal experiences, academic background, and the broader context of Medellín's post-agreement transformation. As a student of Peace and Conflict Studies, my academic journey led me to Colombia, a nation grappling with the legacy of conflict and striving for peace and development. The understanding of how urban spaces intersect with Peace and Conflict became pivotal during my tenure as an intern at a feminist NGO in Medellín. This experience provided first-hand insight into the complexities of the city's urban landscape and its relevance to peace dynamics. Additionally, the significance of gender dynamics and women's experiences of public spaces is heightened by the prevalence of street harassment in Medellín, which I came to understand through personal interviews and observations. The research question encapsulates the core objective of this study: to explore the intricate relationship between the urban environment, the experiences of women in public spaces, and the linguistic expressions that shape their interactions. By scrutinizing this question, the study endeavours to provide essential insights into the lived experiences of women in Medellín, as well as the broader implications for urban development and Peace and Conflict Studies.

To address the central research question comprehensively, several sub-questions will be explored (see “Interview sheet” in the Appendix) during interviews which are designed to methodically explore the multifaceted dimensions of the central research question. They provide the necessary granularity to disentangle the complex web of gender dynamics and urban spaces in Medellín. Ultimately, they lay the groundwork for answering the central research question, culminating in a robust and nuanced conclusion that advances our comprehension of the intricate relationship between the urban environment, gender, and Peace and Conflict in Medellín.

1.3 Justification

This research occupies a unique academic space, situated at the crossroads of Gender Studies, Urban Studies, and Peace and Conflict Studies. Delving into the interplay between gender dynamics, urban landscapes, and women's individual experiences is firmly grounded in the realm of Peace and Conflict Studies, particularly within the context of Colombia's complex history of violence and peacebuilding efforts. The intricate connections between urban spaces, gender dynamics, and conflict-related factors offer a rich terrain for examination. Within Peace and Conflict Studies, a comprehensive understanding of peace requires insight into how urban environments shape gender dynamics and vice versa. Justified by its contemporary relevance, potential to address conflict root causes, interdisciplinary nature, empirical gaps, and alignment with human rights and social justice principles, this research holds significant policy implications and community impact. It contributes meaningfully to the broader mission of advancing peace and resolving conflicts in our increasingly complex and urbanized world, making it essential for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in this field.

Divergent perspectives on the term “gender” often centre on the debate between nature versus nurture concerning the formation of gender identity. In biological determinist frameworks, gender identity is posited as originating from prenatal brain development influenced by hormonal exposure (Swaab and Fliers 1985), and largely dictates the development of gender roles. Conversely, sociocultural models propose that gender identity results from a complex internalization of cultural meaning systems, subject to variability across different cultures and historical epochs (Butler 1990). These contrasting models yield distinct interpretations of gender dysphoria and conflicting viewpoints regarding appropriate interventions. In contemporary Western paradigms, “sex” denotes an individual's biological status as male or female based on anatomical characteristics, while “gender” refers to socially constructed roles and cultural representations. Additionally, “gender role” signifies the socially assigned attributes and expectations—attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and values - associated with being male or female within a specific cultural context (Newman 2002, p. 353).

In my research, “gender” refers specifically to socially constructed roles, distinguishing it from “sex”, with a commitment to honouring inclusivity and respect for diverse identities. A good starting point to underline the importance of the gender aspect in Peace and Conflict Studies is the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. One of the most significant outcomes was the agreement of the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming, meaning the process of evaluating the consequences for women and men of any planned action (legislation, policies, research etc.) in all areas and at all levels. Furthermore, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) provided a more comprehensive perspective, emphasizing that the gender lens should be seamlessly integrated into the formulation, execution, assessment, and appraisal of policies and programs at both national and international levels. This integration aims to ensure equal benefits for women and men. It also implied that the persistent incorporation of women's perspectives and experiences into all policies would naturally lead to modifications in their substance and priorities, aligning them more effectively with contemporary realities and the needs of all members of society.

Applying a gender perspective to conflict resolution within world politics acknowledged that women and men had distinct involvements in armed conflicts. However, it was recognized that existing policies and research often adopted a gender-blind approach, presuming that men and male norms represented the standard for all human beings. Therefore, embracing a genuine gender perspective in conflict resolution entails cultivating a deeper understanding of women's roles and the potential transformations that may arise from increased female participation in conflict resolution, including decision-making processes (Skjelsboek and Smith 2001). Nowadays, the inclusion of gender perspectives in Peace and Conflict Studies is no longer merely an option; it's essential (Olaitan 2023, p. 197). Peace, in its very essence, is a gendered process. Gender roles, identities, and power structures play a pivotal role in the dynamics of Peace and Conflict. Consciously including women's experiences in the post-agreement phase is essential to grasp the intricacies of peacebuilding. Over the past decades, significant advancements have been made to understand the role of women in conflict and peace processes. Integrating a gender lens uncovers nuanced narratives of women's experiences in the post-agreement phase. As Medellín is transforming from a conflict-ridden past, exploring how women navigate the urban space provides critical insights into peace dynamics. The exploration of street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender is, therefore, an inquiry into how women negotiate their roles in the post-agreement urban milieu.

Understanding the geographical context where Peace and Conflict unfold is of paramount importance. Spatial analysis offers a fresh and significant perspective on the dynamics of conflict and the processes of peace as they manifest within and help shape diverse spaces and actors.

Physical structures such as borders, war zones or bridges, and peaceful areas like gardens or parks play a pivotal role in dictating how different actors navigate these spaces and interact with one another.

Simultaneously, these spatial features are a product of these interactions, with social exchanges leading to tangible expressions that reshape and modify spaces. Consequently, this transformation influences the freedom of movement for individuals and groups within these spaces. This interplay between space and agency demonstrates a mutual and interconnected relationship. Space is not static; it is shaped and moulded by the actions of individuals and groups, and, in turn, it influences their behaviour. This intrinsic connection between the relational aspects and the spatial dimensions forms the foundation of our comprehension of the sites where Peace and Conflict manifest (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, p. 1). Cities play a crucial role in the peace-building process as they serve as the arenas where abstract concepts like democracy, fairness, and tolerance are negotiated and clarified. Debates on urban projects and discussions about physical spaces offer opportunities to ground and reconcile conflicting interpretations within post-agreement societies. Peacebuilding within cities doesn't hinge on the high-profile handshakes of national political leaders but, rather, on the everyday interactions and relationships among ethnically diverse urban residents. These interactions are the ones that hold more significance in the long run. Cities, as microcosms of broader societal divisions and tensions, provide a testing ground for progressive intergroup strategies that can be developed and assessed (Bollens 2006, p. 67).

1.4 Objectives and Significance of the Study

This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the research question with the following interconnected key objectives: The first objective is to understand the urban environment in Medellín, particularly focusing on its public spaces. The aim is to uncover how these spaces are structured and the role they play in the daily lives of women residing in the city. The second objective concentrates on investigating women's encounters with street harassment in Medellín, aimed to understand the nature and prevalence of such experiences and how they shape women's interactions with public spaces. The third objective on language dynamics delves into the impact of linguistic expressions in Medellín's public spaces on gender dynamics, scrutinizing their role in reinforcing or challenging traditional norms. It uniquely explores the intersection between street harassment experiences and linguistic expressions of gender, unravelling their joint influence on women's lives. Additionally, the study investigates the potential of linguistic expressions to either contribute to conflicts or serve as a tool for fostering peace and reconciliation within the community.

Providing tangible recommendations for policymakers, urban planners, and community stakeholders, the final objective aims to guide the development of policies and initiatives that prioritize gender equality and peaceful coexistence in Medellín's urban environments.

This research holds crucial significance on multiple fronts. First and foremost, it addresses a critical issue that profoundly affects the lives of women in urban environments, specifically within the context of Medellín. Street harassment is an issue of global concern, but it takes on particular significance in this city due to its historical context of violence and conflict. By delving into women's experiences, the study contributes to a broader comprehension of how urban settings influence women's well-being and safety, intricately tied to Peace and Conflict dynamics. Secondly, the research enriches the literature on gender dynamics in urban contexts, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by women in a city marked by historical complexities and rapid urban transformation. It extends its impact on the field of Peace and Conflict Studies by emphasizing the often-overlooked role of gender dynamics and linguistic expressions in shaping community landscapes. Furthermore, the study offers practical value, providing policymakers and urban planners with actionable recommendations. These insights aim to guide the development of policies fostering safer, inclusive, and harmonious urban environments in Medellín, emphasizing gender equality and peaceful coexistence. In summary, this study's significance lies in its contribution to the well-being of women in urban settings, expanding the understanding of urban gender dynamics, and offering practical guidance for policy and urban planning.

1.5 Research Methodology

In this section, I will shortly outline the research methodology that underpins this study, providing insight into the strategies and techniques employed to explore the intricate interplay between urban environments, gender dynamics, and linguistic expressions in Medellín. The methodological approach I adopt in this research is primarily qualitative, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of women's lived experiences in the urban environment. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for comprehending the nuances and contextual factors that shape the phenomena under investigation, which in this case are street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender. The primary data collection technique will involve semi-structured interviews conducted with women residing in Medellín. These interviews will offer participants the opportunity to express their experiences, perceptions, and feelings regarding the urban environment and the phenomena of interest. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility, ensuring that unanticipated insights and perspectives can be explored. In addition, I conducted three in-depth and longer expert interviews with women from feminist NGOs in Medellín, who shared their specific knowledge in this thematic area.

Moreover, participant observations in public spaces will complement the interview data. These observations will provide a real-time understanding of how women navigate and interact with the urban environment, offering valuable contextual information that enriches the findings.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations will be paramount. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality will be rigorously maintained. Furthermore, ethical guidelines regarding respectful and empathetic research conduct will be upheld, with particular sensitivity to the potentially sensitive nature of the topics under investigation. As this research is focused on understanding the experiences of women in the urban environment, a feminist perspective will guide the methodological approach. Feminist research principles underscore the importance of giving voice to marginalized groups, challenging gender norms, and fostering social change. This approach aligns with the overarching goals of Peace and Conflict Studies, which aim to address structural inequalities and power imbalances that may lead to conflict. In summary, this research methodology is thoughtfully designed to provide a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of how the urban environment influences and intersects with gender dynamics, with a specific focus on linguistic expressions and their implications. It is rooted in qualitative research principles, emphasizing the voices and experiences of women in Medellín and aligning with a feminist perspective to contribute to the broader field of Peace and Conflict Studies.

1.6 Structure of this Thesis

In conclusion, this introductory chapter has provided the background and context for this research. I have introduced the central research question, focusing on the influence of urban environments, particularly public spaces in Medellín, on gender dynamics and linguistic expressions. The significance of this study has been justified, connecting it to gender and urban studies within the broader context of Peace and Conflict Studies. The elucidated objectives serve as guideposts, directing the research toward a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between the thematic areas. The research approach and methodology, including qualitative interviews and participant observations, have been outlined, providing insight into the strategies I will employ to investigate this intricate interplay.

Following initial insights into the research subject in the section on the theoretical framework, the forthcoming chapter will embark on an exploration of the existing body of literature, providing insights into the current state of knowledge concerning the interrelation of the chosen topics. Subsequently, the methodology chapter will illuminate the research process, encompassing data collection and analysis.

A dedicated chapter, "Medellín: A City in Transition," will provide the historical background and a general overview of gendered experiences in public spaces and language in urban environments. The case study outline will precede the findings chapter, which will present empirical results, emphasizing women's experiences related to street harassment in the urban context.

Through detailed analysis and interpretation, this research will unveil the intricate connections between these phenomena and the urban environment. The discussion section will then analyse and contextualize the findings within the existing literature, shedding light on the implications of this research for Peace and Conflict dynamics within urban environments. Policy and planning implications will be put forward, offering practical recommendations for improving the safety and equality of urban spaces. The conclusion chapter will summarize the findings, underscore their significance, acknowledge limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I establish a theoretical foundation to explore the intricate interplay between urban environments, gender dynamics, and linguistic expressions. By integrating insights from urban theory, gender theory, and linguistic theory, I aim to elucidate the multifaceted relationships shaping women's experiences in urban spaces, particularly in the context of Medellín.

2.1 Urban Theory: Navigating the Labyrinth of City Dynamics

Urban theory, which describes the economic, political, and social processes which affect the formation and development of cities, serves as a crucial lens through which researchers can decipher the intricate tapestry of city life. It seeks to understand the processes, patterns, and dynamics of urbanization, as well as the impact of cities on society and vice versa. In the context of my thesis, I utilize urban theory to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of urban environments. Urban theory helps me analyse how urban spaces are structured, how they influence social interactions and power dynamics, and how they shape individuals' experiences, including experiences of gender-based harassment and discrimination. By drawing on urban theory, I can contextualize my research within broader discussions on urbanization, social inequality, and urban development. This allows me to explore the intersections between urban environments, gender dynamics, and linguistic expressions, ultimately enriching my analysis and enabling me to generate valuable insights into the complexities of urban life and its implications for gender equality and social justice. Therefore, this subchapter navigates the labyrinth of urban theory, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions that characterize urban environments.

At its core, urban theory aims to provide insights into the complexities of urban life, including issues such as urban development, inequality, segregation, gentrification, social movements, sustainability, and governance. By analysing the structure and functioning of cities, urban theory helps us comprehend the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanization in different contexts around the world. Urban theory is important because cities play a central role in contemporary society. With the majority of the global population living in urban areas, understanding urban dynamics is crucial for addressing pressing societal issues, promoting social justice, enhancing quality of life, and achieving sustainable development. Moreover, urban theory provides valuable frameworks and tools for policymakers, planners, activists, and scholars to navigate the complexities of urban environments and work towards creating more inclusive, equitable, and resilient cities (Allu 2023). In terms of places, urban theory considers various types of urban spaces, including neighbourhoods, streets, public squares, parks, transport systems and buildings. Architecture is also a significant component of urban theory.

It explores the design principles, styles, and functions of buildings within urban contexts, as well as their impact on the urban landscape and social dynamics. Urban theory examines how these spaces are designed, used, and experienced by different groups of people. The term "place" is intricate, carrying various meanings. It can signify a space where people coexist or denote a position in a list, temporal sequence, or social hierarchy. In contemporary social science, the geographical interpretation has been overshadowed by other definitions. State census categories, in particular, have supplanted geographical places as the primary operational unit in social theory. Classes and status groups have taken precedence over places and geographical settings. In essence, sociology has moved beyond the realm of human geography (Agnew and Duncan 2014).

Approaches to defining the geographical concept of "place" have typically emphasized one of three elements rather than recognizing their complementarity. Economists and economic geographers have highlighted "location" or unique space, focusing on the spatial distribution of social and economic activities influenced by differences in factor costs and market prices between places. Microsociologists and humanistic geographers have explored "locale," which refers to the settings where everyday social interactions occur. Anthropologists and cultural geographers have been interested in the "sense of place," which involves the identification and attachment individuals feel toward a particular place due to their experiences living there. These three aspects have often been viewed as conflicting definitions of place rather than complementary dimensions. However, they are inherently related; if locale is the central element of place sociologically, it must be grounded geographically. The local social world (locale) cannot be fully understood without considering the broader context of location and the territorial identity associated with the sense of place (Agnew 1987).

2.1.1 Critical Urban Theory

Critical urban theory, often associated with leftist or radical urban scholars post-1968, diverges from mainstream urban theory inherited from the Chicago School of urban sociology or neoliberal policy science. It rejects traditional disciplinary divisions and market-oriented urban knowledge. Instead, critical urban theory, influenced by figures like Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Manuel Castells, emphasizes the socially contested nature of urban space. It challenges the notion of cities as static expressions of universal laws, advocating for a more democratic and socially just urbanization process. This perspective critiques existing power structures and calls for the reimagining of urban spaces as sites of political and social transformation (Brenner 2009, p. 198). The concept of critique, particularly within critical theory, is not merely descriptive but holds significant theoretical content rooted in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment social philosophy, notably Hegel, Marx, and the Western Marxian tradition.

Critical social theory has evolved over the past two centuries, responding to changing conditions of capitalist development. The Frankfurt School, although not extensively addressing urban questions, provided a crucial reference point for contemporary critical urbanists. However, as we witness a global urbanization phenomenon, the projects of critical social theory and critical urban theory have become increasingly intertwined (Brenner 2009, p. 199). Marx's notion of critique, particularly the critique of political economy, involved unmasking bourgeois forms of knowledge and ideologies, while also critiquing capitalism itself and aiming to transcend it. This dialectical approach emphasizes revealing contradictions within the social totality formed by capitalism. As capitalism evolves into a globalized, neoliberal, and financialized system, critical theory faces new challenges in understanding and critiquing the contemporary urban condition. The urban revolution anticipated by Henri Lefebvre underscores the centrality of urban questions within the broader project of critical social theory in the 21st century. The concept of critique, particularly within critical theory, serves several important functions. It exposes the forms of power, exclusion, injustice, and inequality inherent in capitalist social formations. Moreover, it illuminates ongoing sociopolitical struggles by connecting ideological discourses to underlying class antagonisms and social forces. Critique also explores the possibility of forging alternatives to capitalism, revealing how its contradictions simultaneously undermine the system while pointing toward other ways of organizing society (Brenner 2009, pp. 200–201).

2.2 Medellín's Urban Narrative

Following the exploration of critical urban theory, it is pertinent to contextualize its application within the unique urban landscape of Medellín. Known for its rich history and tumultuous past marked by violence and social inequalities, the city provides a compelling backdrop for examining the tenets of critical urban theory in action. The spatial segregation evident in Medellín's topography, with its stark divides between affluent neighbourhoods and marginalized *comunas* (districts), reflects broader socio-economic disparities entrenched within the urban landscape. Understanding these spatial dynamics is essential for comprehending the lived realities of Medellín's residents and the challenges they face in navigating the city. Furthermore, Medellín's transformation over recent decades, from a notorious hub of drug violence to a beacon of urban innovation, underscores the dynamic nature of cities and the potential for positive change. Urban theorists offer frameworks for analysing such transformations, examining processes of gentrification, urban regeneration, and the role of governance in reshaping urban landscapes.

The relevance of critical urban theory to Medellín lies in its emphasis on understanding urban spaces as socially constructed and contested environments. As noted by Brenner (2009), critical urban theory rejects deterministic views of urban development and instead recognizes the agency of various social actors in shaping urban landscapes.

In Medellín, where historical legacies of conflict and marginalization continue to shape the city's fabric, this perspective offers valuable insights into the underlying power dynamics and social struggles at play. Moreover, critical urban theory's focus on social justice and emancipatory alternatives resonates deeply with Medellín's ongoing efforts towards peacebuilding and inclusive development. By interrogating dominant narratives and power structures within the city, critical urban theory provides a framework for challenging entrenched inequalities and envisioning more equitable urban futures.

In the broader context of critical urban theory, the case of Medellín serves as a compelling illustration of the complex interplay between urban violence, political economy, and territorial control. Eduardo Moncada's study on urban violence offers valuable insights into the unique urban narrative of Medellín, where historical, socioeconomic, and geopolitical factors converge to shape the city's spatial and social dynamics. By examining the intricate relationships between urban violence, political power structures, and territorial governance, Moncada illuminates the multifaceted and historically rooted nature of Medellín's urban landscape. This narrative underscores the importance of understanding local contexts within the framework of critical urban theory, as it allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying forces that drive urban development and shape the lived experiences of its residents (Moncada 2016). As we delve into Medellín's urban narrative, we gain a nuanced understanding of how broader theoretical perspectives intersect with localized realities, offering valuable insights into the complexities of urban life in the Global South. This focus on local contexts, personal experiences, and social injustices, such as gender issues, or economic disparities, will enrich our exploration of Medellín's urban dynamics and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the city's intricate tapestry. By grounding my exploration of Medellín within the framework of urban theory, I gain a deeper understanding of the city's complexities and contradictions. From the bustling streets of its vibrant downtown to the sprawling hillsides of its marginalized communities, Medellín embodies the tensions inherent in urban life, where narratives of progress and prosperity intersect with legacies of inequality and exclusion.

3 Literature Review

In the realm of Peace and Conflict Studies, the intersection of gender dynamics and urban environments has emerged as crucial. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in post-agreement urban landscapes. This literature review navigates through this intersection, focusing on Medellín, to explore the multifaceted interactions between gender, violence, language, and urban transformation. By analysing previous studies and contemporary discourse, the review aims to uncover underlying social norms, power structures, and linguistic expressions influencing gender experiences and safety in urban settings. However, it is noteworthy to critically engage with these works, recognizing their contributions and limitations in promoting gender equality and social justice, especially in public life.

3.1 Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies

Peace and Conflict Studies is a dynamic interdisciplinary field dedicated to understanding, managing, and resolving conflicts while fostering sustainable peace. Emerging after World War II, this academic discipline has expanded to encompass diverse theoretical and practical approaches aimed at addressing violence and promoting reconciliation globally. "Peace and Conflict Studies," authored by David P. Barash and Charles P. Webel (2021), stands as a cornerstone text in the field, offering a thorough exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of Peace and Conflict dynamics. This foundational text delves into key theories, methodologies, and practices essential for understanding and addressing global conflicts. Emerging as an academic discipline in the mid-20th century, Peace and Conflict Studies gained prominence during the Cold War era due to heightened awareness of war's devastating impacts and the need for alternative conflict resolution approaches. Since then, the field has expanded significantly to address contemporary global challenges related to conflict, violence, and peacebuilding. Peace and Conflict Studies aim to analyse the causes, dynamics, and resolution of conflicts at various levels, with the overarching goal of promoting peace and preventing violence. Drawing from disciplines such as sociology, political science, psychology, anthropology, and international relations, this interdisciplinary field examines conflict complexity and explores constructive approaches to conflict resolution. Barash and Webel's book covers topics from conflict origins to peacebuilding strategies and reconciliation, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners. With its nuanced analysis and insightful case studies, it is an indispensable resource for navigating the complexities of contemporary Peace and Conflict issues (Barash and Webel 2021).

"Peace is surprisingly difficult to define. Like happiness, harmony, justice, and freedom, it is something we often recognize by its absence." (Barash and Webel 2021, p. 2)

Johan Galtung, a pioneering figure in Peace and Conflict Studies, introduced the concepts of positive and negative peace. Negative peace denotes the absence of overt violence or conflict, such as the absence of war or direct physical aggression. Conversely, positive peace extends beyond the mere absence of violence to include social justice, equality, and harmony. Galtung emphasized addressing structural violence and underlying root causes of conflict to achieve positive peace, advocating for proactive efforts to promote social, economic, and political justice. His groundbreaking work redefined peace as more than just the absence of war but as a holistic state of well-being and harmony within societies (Galtung 1985). In Colombia's post-agreement pursuit of peace and reconciliation, John Paul Lederach's work stands as a beacon. Renowned for his contributions to conflict transformation and peacebuilding, Lederach's book, "Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies," offers valuable insights for addressing conflicts in deeply divided communities. Colombia's prolonged internal conflict, involving guerrilla groups, paramilitary forces, and government entities, has inflicted deep scars on society, leading to displacement, human rights abuses, and social fragmentation. Lederach emphasizes inclusive dialogue, community engagement, and transformative processes for achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation. His understanding of social relationships, cultural dynamics, and identity-based conflicts guides practitioners and policymakers alike. Lederach's approach, focusing on local actors and participatory methods, aligns with Colombia's efforts to empower communities and promote bottom-up reconciliation. By prioritizing relationship-building, trust, and understanding among diverse stakeholders, Lederach's work offers a roadmap for addressing post-agreement challenges and fostering social cohesion in Colombia (Hampson and Lederach 1998).

A more recent scholar, Oliver P. Richmond (2012), is renowned for his innovative perspectives on peacebuilding, particularly his exploration of post-liberal peace frameworks. These frameworks challenge conventional liberal notions of peace by prioritizing local agency, cultural context, and social justice. Richmond's work sheds light on alternative approaches to peacebuilding that prioritize inclusivity, participatory decision-making, and acknowledgment of historical injustices, offering a more holistic approach to fostering sustainable peace (Richmond 2012).

Additionally, Cynthia Enloe (2014), an influential feminist scholar, offers invaluable insights into the gendered dimensions of conflict. Her landmark work underscores the significance of integrating feminist perspectives into the study of Peace and Conflict. By highlighting the marginalized experiences of women within conflict zones, Enloe's scholarship challenges traditional notions of security and power dynamics, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and other social identities in shaping experiences of violence and peace. Her work serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of understanding gendered dynamics within urban contexts, where issues of safety, accessibility, and social inclusion intersect with broader peacebuilding efforts (Enloe 2014).

3.2 Gender Dynamics in Urban Studies

Urban spaces are recognized as dynamic arenas where Peace and Conflict dynamics converge. Peace and Conflict Studies increasingly emphasize the need for gender-responsive approaches. In urban contexts, violence disproportionately impacts women, and the urban milieu is often a breeding ground for gender-based violence (UN Women 2019). Scholars have highlighted the importance of safe and inclusive urban spaces in peacebuilding. Urban planning and design play pivotal roles in fostering gender-sensitive environments (UN Women 2019). Street harassment, as a manifestation of urban violence, disrupts the potential for women's full participation in city life (Bhan 2009). Cities like Medellín, which have experienced significant conflict-related issues, offer rich ground for exploring how post-agreement societies navigate their way to sustainable peace (Villegas Serna 2018). In the wake of conflict, urban areas are often at the forefront of peace transformation, influenced by factors such as migration, urbanization, and shifts in social dynamics. Research on the urban environment's role in Peace and Conflict brings forth insights that can help in crafting more effective peacebuilding strategies. Exploring women's experiences in the city is a direct endeavour in aligning urban peacebuilding initiatives with gender-responsive practices.

Building upon these foundational insights, Iris Young's essay "Throwing Like a Girl" (1990) delves into the embodied experiences of gender within urban environments, emphasizing the influence of societal norms and expectations. Young highlights how gendered embodiment extends beyond the physical realm to encompass societal dynamics, norms, and power structures. Women's interactions with urban spaces are shaped by cultural understandings of femininity, which dictate their bodily movements, gestures, and behaviours. Traditional gender norms impose restrictive expectations on women, constraining their ability to fully engage with urban environments and express themselves authentically. Young's analysis sheds light on how these norms lead to feelings of vulnerability, self-consciousness, and exclusion among women in urban settings. Through the lens of embodiment, Young advocates for a reimagining of cities that embraces diverse bodily experiences and challenges restrictive gender norms (Young 1990).

Gillian Rose's "Feminism and Geography" (1996) intertwines feminist theory with geographical analysis to emphasize the pivotal role of gender in shaping urban environments. Rose critiques traditional geographic approaches for overlooking gender's influence on spatiality, arguing that mainstream scholarship has historically ignored how gender intersects with other social categories to produce spatial inequalities. She challenges the notion of space as neutral, highlighting its construction and gendered meanings. Gender, Rose contends, is a fundamental organizing principle in spatial arrangements, affecting urban design, resource access, and opportunities.

Furthermore, Rose explores feminist geography's alternative perspectives, advocating for diverse voices, including those of marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of colour, in geographic research. By centring these perspectives, feminist geography seeks to uncover and challenge underlying power structures that perpetuate spatial injustices. Rose's work contributes to critiquing and transforming social and spatial relations, emphasizing the importance of gender in shaping geographical landscapes and advocating for more inclusive approaches to understanding space (Rose 1996).

Among the more recent scholars in the field, Susan Fainstein's "The Just City" (2014) delves into the concept of justice within urban planning emphasizing the importance of equitable access to resources, opportunities, and amenities for all residents. Fainstein argues that achieving justice in cities requires addressing social, economic, and political inequalities, which often intersect with gender dynamics. She highlights the need for inclusive urban policies and planning processes that prioritize the needs and voices of marginalized groups, including women. Fainstein's work underscores the significance of gender equity in creating cities that are truly just and equitable for all inhabitants (Fainstein 2014).

Leslie Kern's "Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World" (2021) critically examines urban environments from a feminist perspective, advocating for inclusive and equitable urban planning practices. Kern argues that cities have historically been structured based on masculine norms, prioritizing the experiences of men while sidelining women and other marginalized groups. She critiques traditional urban planning for perpetuating gender inequalities by reinforcing social norms that privilege masculinity. Kern highlights how urban landscapes, transportation systems, and public amenities are designed with male experiences in mind, disregarding women's needs. She also explores how gendered notions of safety and risk shape women's movements in public spaces. Kern calls for a feminist reimagining of the city, advocating for participatory planning processes that centre the voices of diverse communities, particularly women and marginalized groups. Her work aims to empower individuals to challenge entrenched power dynamics and create more equitable urban environments (Kern 2021).

The intersection of gender dynamics in urban spaces with feminism and peacebuilding underscores the importance of inclusivity, equity, and empowerment in urban planning and peace efforts. Scholars like Cynthia Cockburn (2010) and Laura Sjoberg (2014) provide valuable insights into these intersections. Cockburn's work focuses on gender, conflict, and peacebuilding, highlighting the role of masculinity in perpetuating violence and advocating for gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding. Similarly, Sjoberg's analysis in "Gender, War, and Conflict" challenges traditional views of war by emphasizing gender as a crucial factor in shaping violence and peace dynamics.

Both scholars advocate for inclusive and transformative strategies that prioritize gender equality and social justice in urban planning and conflict resolution (Cockburn 2010; Sjoberg 2014).

Two authors who have conducted related research specifically in Medellín are Beatriz Eugenia Sánchez Mojica (2020) and Catalina Gómez Toro (2016, 2019). Sánchez Mojica's work focuses on urban violence, gender dynamics, and peacebuilding initiatives, while Gómez Toro explores urban planning, gender equity, and safety in public spaces. In her publication "State of the Art of the Literature on Internal Displacement in Latin America," Sánchez-Mojica provides an overview of existing literature on internal displacement, with a focus on the gendered dimensions of displacement and case studies from Medellín. She highlights the intersection of gender with displacement experiences, particularly the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized groups (Sánchez-Mojica 2020). Catalina Gómez Toro provides valuable insights into crime statistics and safety dynamics in Medellín. "Seguridad Ciudadana, Violencia y Criminalidad" offers a comprehensive criminological analysis of 2018 crime statistics, informing discussions on public safety and potential implications for gender-based violence. Similarly, her work "Efecto de los Ingresos Permanentes sobre el Delito" explores the spatial dynamics of crime and socioeconomic factors, aiding policymakers in developing targeted interventions. Additionally, Toro's research on "Happiness and Victimization in Latin America" investigates the relationship between subjective well-being and experiences of victimization, emphasizing the intersection of gender dynamics with crime and safety perceptions. Understanding these intersections is crucial for addressing gender-based violence and promoting public safety in urban environments (Gómez Toro et al. 2019a; Gómez Toro et al. 2016; Gómez Toro et al. 2019b).

3.3 Language, Discourse, and Gender in Urban Contexts

Urban environments are not neutral; they are gendered. Women's experiences in cities are unique and impacted by gender norms and biases. Street harassment exposes the vulnerabilities of urban spaces for women and their potential as sites of conflict (Bhan 2009). The linguistic expressions of gender on the streets embody power dynamics and social norms. Examining linguistic expressions in urban settings provides a holistic understanding of how women experience not only physical spaces but also social and psychological dimensions. Language in public spaces can perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to experiences of street harassment and gender-based violence. Understanding how language shapes these interactions is crucial for developing strategies to create safer and more inclusive urban spaces. This chapter offers insights into the complex relationship between language, gender, and urban space, exploring theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and contemporary perspectives.

3.3.1 The Basics: Linguistic Relativity

Linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, is a fundamental theory relevant to the analysis of language in urban gender dynamics.

The hypothesis suggests that the structure and vocabulary of a language shape the perceptions and cognitive processes of its speakers (Whorf et al. 2012). In the context of urban gender dynamics, linguistic relativity implies that the language used to describe and interact within urban spaces can influence individuals' understanding and construction of gender roles, identities, and power dynamics. For example, the use of gender-specific language or gender-neutral language in urban discourse can reflect and reinforce societal attitudes towards gender. Additionally, linguistic relativity highlights how language may influence individuals' interpretations of their experiences in urban environments, including their sense of safety, belonging, and agency. By considering linguistic relativity alongside other theoretical frameworks such as social constructionism, sociolinguistics, gender performativity, and critical discourse analysis, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how language shapes and is shaped by urban gender dynamics. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced analysis of the complex interactions between language, gender, and urban spaces, contributing to both theoretical insights and practical interventions aimed at promoting gender equity and social justice in cities.

The theory of linguistic relativity has been explored and discussed in various academic fields, including linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and urban studies. Initially proposed by Benjamin Lee Whorf in the mid-20th century, the concept of linguistic relativity suggests that language impacts thought and perception and therefore influences the way its speakers perceive and conceptualize the world. He argued that different languages encode different cultural and cognitive systems, leading speakers of those languages to think differently. Whorf's theory gained attention for its radical proposition that language shapes thought, challenging the prevailing view that thought exists independently of language. However, Whorf's ideas were often misunderstood and oversimplified, leading to misconceptions about linguistic determinism, the idea that language determines thought completely (Whorf et al. 2012).

Subsequent scholars, such as John A. Lucy (1992), offered a reformulation of Whorf's ideas, emphasizing a more nuanced view of linguistic relativity. In his book "Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis" Lucy argued against the strong form of linguistic determinism proposed by Whorf, emphasizing instead a weaker version that suggests language influences thought to varying degrees. His reformulation aimed to clarify misconceptions about linguistic relativity and provide a more nuanced understanding of how language interacts with cognition.

He highlighted the importance of empirical research to test hypotheses about language and thought (Lucy 1992). Furthermore, the contributions of scholars like John J. Gumperz and Steven C. Levinson (1996) highlight the importance of context and social factors in shaping language use and interpretation.

Gumperz focused on the concept of contextualization cues, which are linguistic and non-linguistic signals that help speakers interpret meaning in conversation. He demonstrated how cultural and social norms influence the interpretation of language, highlighting the importance of studying language in context (Gumperz and Levinson 1996). Levinson extended the discussion of linguistic relativity to include spatial cognition and communication. He explored how language influences spatial reasoning and how cultural variations in spatial concepts manifest in language (Levinson 2003). Both approaches underscore the complex interplay between language, culture, and cognition.

Contemporary research on linguistic relativity continues to explore the complex relationship between language, thought, and culture. Scholars draw on interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and cognitive science. Recent studies, such as those by Lera Boroditsky (2011), have shed new light on the ways language influences cognition and perception, providing valuable contributions to the field. Current perspectives acknowledge the influence of language on cognition but also recognize the bidirectional nature of this relationship. While language shapes thought, cognitive processes also influence language use and development. Boroditsky's work highlights how language can shape spatial perception and reasoning, demonstrating the intricate interplay between linguistic structures and cognitive processes (Boroditsky 2011). Critiques of linguistic relativity focus on the limitations of empirical evidence and the challenges of disentangling linguistic influences from other cultural and cognitive factors. Some argue for a more nuanced understanding that accounts for individual differences and the dynamic nature of language use. Overall, the evolution of Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity has led to a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and culture, with contemporary perspectives emphasizing contextuality, variability, and the bidirectional nature of linguistic influence.

3.3.2 Language as a Tool for constructing Social Norms

The analysis of urban gender dynamics through language is rooted in the understanding that language constructs and perpetuates social norms, including those related to gender. This perspective draws from social constructionism, a theoretical framework that examines how social phenomena are constructed through language and interactions. Social constructionists emphasize that language not only communicates but also shapes social reality, establishing norms and identities.

Language is not neutral but rather reflects and reinforces power dynamics within society, with certain discourses becoming dominant and perpetuating existing power structures while marginalizing alternative perspectives. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" lays the groundwork for this perspective, arguing that reality is socially constructed through language and communication (Berger and Luckmann 2023).

Another prominent scholar in this field is Harold Garfinkel, known for his development of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel's work focuses on how individuals actively construct meaning in social interactions through everyday practices. He emphasizes the importance of examining the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices that underlie social order. His ideas indirectly touch upon the role of language in social construction. While he does not delve deeply into linguistic analysis, he does acknowledge the importance of language in shaping social order and meaning-making processes. In ethnomethodology, language is seen as a tool through which individuals negotiate social reality and produce meaningful interactions (Harold Garfinkel 2023).

In sociolinguistics, scholars investigate how language varies and evolves based on social factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender. Within urban environments, linguistic variations can both reflect and perpetuate social hierarchies and power dynamics, including gender inequalities. Some key authors and works in sociolinguistics include William Labov's research on linguistic variation in urban settings. Labov's work demonstrates how linguistic features can be associated with social identity and social stratification (Labov 2019).

Another influential figure in sociolinguistics is Deborah Tannen, renowned for her research on how gender influences communication patterns, particularly in urban contexts. Her work, "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" (1990) explores the differences in communication styles between genders, attributing them to socialization rather than inherent biological factors. Tannen identifies various conversational strategies employed by men and women and explains how these differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. She suggests that women prioritize rapport talk, focusing on building connections, while men often engage in report talk, emphasizing conveying information and asserting dominance. Through detailed examples, Tannen illustrates how these communication styles can create barriers and contribute to gendered power dynamics in society, offering insights for improving inter-gender relationships (Tannen 1990). Similarly, Penelope Eckert's research on language and social identity has contributed to our understanding of how language reflects and constructs social meaning.

Her studies, such as "Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School" shed light on how language use contributes to the negotiation of social identities, including those related to gender, within urban settings (Eckert 1989). Overall, sociolinguistic theories provide valuable insights into how language functions as a social tool, shaping and reflecting social dynamics within urban environments.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scrutinizes language's role in upholding or challenging power structures and ideologies in society. In urban contexts, CDA examines discourse practices to uncover how they perpetuate or contest gendered power dynamics, revealing how language influences access to resources and public spaces.

Interdisciplinary methods from linguistics, sociology, and critical theory dissect texts and interactions, exposing power imbalances and inequalities. By analysing language use, researchers reveal subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion based on gender, shedding light on how language reinforces or subverts dominant gender norms in urban spaces. CDA also examines how linguistic representations shape perceptions of gender roles and identities. Foucault's "Power/Knowledge" offers insights into the relationship between power and discourse, showing how knowledge systems perpetuate social structures (Foucault 1980). Ruth Wodak is another prominent figure in Critical Discourse Analysis, whose work deepens our understanding of language's role in constructing social identities and power relations, particularly in politics. In her seminal work, "The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual" (2009), Wodak employs a rigorous analytical framework to dissect the discursive strategies employed by political actors, revealing how language serves as a medium through which ideologies are disseminated, contested, and legitimized. By integrating these frameworks, the analysis of language in urban gender dynamics uncovers how linguistic practices shape perceptions and inequalities, offering insights into social change (Wodak 2009).

3.3.3 Gender and Language in Public Space

Early in the 1970s, Robin Lakoff offered a fundamental work "Language and Woman's Place" on the study of language and gender. In this book, Lakoff explores how language reflects and perpetuates gender inequalities, particularly regarding women's linguistic behaviour and social status. Her analysis delves into linguistic features such as tag questions, hedges, and intensifiers, which she argues contribute to women's perceived powerlessness and subordinate status in society. Lakoff's work is significant for highlighting how the ways in which language both reflects and reinforces gendered power dynamics, shape interactions and perceptions in various social contexts (Lakoff 1973).

Judith Butler's theories on performativity and gender, as outlined in "Gender Trouble" (1990), challenge fixed notions of gender by asserting that it is a social construct enacted through language and behaviour.

Butler argues that gender is continuously performed rather than inherent, shaping cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity. This perspective emphasizes the role of language in shaping and reproducing gender identities, particularly in urban environments where social interactions are frequent and diverse. Butler's work has profound implications for urban contexts, where linguistic performances contribute to the negotiation of gender norms, challenging traditional notions of identity and highlighting the role of language in reinforcing social norms and power dynamics (Butler 1990).

In "Language, Gender, and Sexuality" (2017), Susan Ehrlich and Mary Bucholtz explore how language constructs social identities, particularly regarding gender, in public discourse. Ehrlich's analysis reveals how linguistic choices influence perceptions of gender and identity, emphasizing language's dual role as both a site of power and resistance. Within urban contexts, where diverse voices intersect, Ehrlich's work offers nuanced insights into the complex dynamics of language in shaping understandings of gender and identity in public spaces. Bucholtz's research further explores gendered language practices, considering their intersections with broader social structures and identities. Her work illuminates contemporary issues such as the fluidity of gender identities and the role of language in challenging hegemonic norms, particularly within urban settings characterized by diverse linguistic practices (Ehrlich et al. 2017).

Additionally, Deborah Cameron's work, "Gender, Language, and Discourse" (1998), explores how language reinforces gender norms, particularly within urban spaces where linguistic expressions often reflect existing gender hierarchies. Her analysis challenges essentialist beliefs about gendered communication styles, as seen in "The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?" (2008). Here, Cameron questions claims of inherent differences in communication between genders, highlighting the socially constructed nature of linguistic practices. Through empirical evidence, Cameron dismantles the myth of gendered language, emphasizing the influence of societal expectations on language use and offering valuable insights into how language perpetuates gender inequalities, especially within urban contexts (Cameron 2008, 1998).

Street harassment, often overlooked or normalized, constitutes a pervasive form of gender-based violence that occurs in public spaces worldwide. It encompasses a range of behaviours, including catcalling (the act of making a whistle, shout, or comment of a sexual nature towards someone, typically a woman), unwanted comments, stalking, groping, and more, all targeted at individuals based on their perceived gender. Such harassment not only violates individuals' rights to safety and dignity but also contributes to a hostile environment that limits women's freedom of movement and participation in public life. These acts of harassment are often fuelled by power dynamics, with perpetrators seeking to assert dominance and control over their targets.

They occur in various settings, from streets and public transportation to parks and workplaces, impacting individuals' sense of security and well-being (Bowman 1993, pp. 519–520). Understanding its prevalence and impact is crucial for developing strategies to combat it and create safer spaces. In exploring the role of language in gender dynamics, the following authors examine its dual nature as both a tool for harassment and empowerment. Holly Kearn's "Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women" (2010) offers a comprehensive examination of street harassment, revealing its prevalence, forms, and impact on individuals' well-being and freedom in public spaces. Kearn's research sheds light on the various manifestations of street harassment, from verbal comments to physical intimidation, and its role in perpetuating gender inequality and normalizing violence against women (Kearn 2010).

On the legal and social front, Laura Beth Nielsen's work "License to Harass: Law, Hierarchy, and Offensive Public Speech" (2009) delves into the complexities surrounding offensive speech regulation, including street harassment, within legal frameworks. Nielsen's analysis exposes the underlying power structures perpetuating offensive public speech, particularly concerning gender-based harassment. She underscores the need for comprehensive strategies challenging societal norms and power dynamics to address street harassment effectively (Nielsen 2009).

In "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center" (2000), bell hooks emphasizes language's transformative potential within feminist discourse, advocating for its use as a tool for empowerment and social change. Hooks highlights language's role in articulating feminist ideas, challenging patriarchal norms, and mobilizing collective action toward equality and justice. She calls for a feminist language that is inclusive, intersectional, and accessible, capable of fostering solidarity across diverse audiences (Hooks 2000). Additionally, in "We Should All Be Feminists" (2015), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores language's nuanced role in reinforcing or challenging gender norms. She discusses how linguistic choices, like gendered pronouns and stereotypes, can subtly perpetuate societal inequalities, limiting opportunities for women. Adichie draws from personal experiences to illustrate how language shapes perceptions of gender and social interactions, highlighting terms like "bossy" or "aggressive," often used to undermine assertive women's authority. She advocates for inclusive language that celebrates diversity, empowering individuals to challenge oppressive norms and advance gender equality (Adichie 2015).

These scholars offer key insights into the complex interplay between language, discourse, and gender within urban environments, highlighting how the ways in which language both reflects and reinforces social inequalities. By examining linguistic expressions in public spaces and the impact of street harassment on self-perception, their works contribute to a deeper understanding of how language shapes gender dynamics and explore strategies for challenging gender-based discrimination and inequality in urban contexts.

3.4 Medellín's Post-Agreement Urban Transformation

In Daniel Pécaut's "Configurations of Space, Time, and Subjectivity in a Context of Terror: The Colombian Example" (2000) key insights shed light on Medellín's historical context. Firstly, the spatial configuration of Medellín has been significantly impacted by the city's history of violence and conflict, particularly in the marginalized hillsides, reflecting broader patterns of inequality and exclusion in Colombia that have evolved over the latter half of the 20th century due to migration and economic factors. Secondly, Pécaut's consideration of temporal dynamics resonates with Medellín's history, marked by distinct eras from the Medellín Cartel violence to post-agreement efforts, revealing a complex narrative that underscores the city's journey through various phases of conflict and recovery. Finally, Pécaut highlights subjective experiences, revealing how violence has shaped perceptions and behaviours in Medellín, intertwined with social injustice and traditional gender norms, particularly the pervasive influence of *machismo* on the city's construction of masculinity. Incorporating Pécaut's insights, Medellín's historical trajectory emerges as a complex interplay of spatial configurations, temporal dynamics, and subjective experiences (Pécaut 2000).

Forrest Hylton's "Medellín: The Peace of the Pacifiers" (2008) offers a comprehensive exploration of Medellín's post-agreement period following the downfall of Pablo Escobar. Through meticulous analysis, Hylton delves into pivotal aspects such as the landmark 2016 peace agreement, which signalled a significant shift in Colombia's approach to conflict resolution. Additionally, he examines the impact of devastating military operations in areas like the *Comuna 13* and the emergence of promising urban renewal initiatives aimed at transforming marginalized neighbourhoods. Despite the demise of Escobar, Medellín continued to grapple with the enduring legacy of violence, profoundly shaping the city's socio-cultural landscape. While urban renewal projects introduced innovative initiatives like cable cars and escalators, traditional gender norms persisted, significantly influencing women's experiences in public spaces. The cultural imprint of *narco*-trafficking further complicated post-agreement dynamics, perpetuating gender stereotypes and influencing power dynamics. Particularly noteworthy is Hylton's exploration of the cultural legacy of *narco*-trafficking, which continues to influence perceptions of power, wealth, and social status in Medellín. This cultural backdrop significantly shapes the dynamics of public spaces, impacting how individuals navigate and engage with their surroundings. Understanding these nuanced gender dynamics is essential for comprehending the multifaceted challenges and transformations that occurred during Medellín's post-agreement era (Hylton 2008).

Standing as a seminal work in urban theory, John Peponis's research delves into the intersection of space, culture, and urban design, particularly in the late modernist era and beyond. He examines how cultural influences shape urban spaces and vice versa, shedding light on the intricate relationship between space, culture, and design (Peponis 1989). Following this, Simon Parker's "Encountering the City" (2015) further explores this dynamic by focusing on how individuals interact with and experience urban environments. Parker emphasizes the structural dimensions of cities, such as spatial segregation and power dynamics, in shaping people's daily lives and identities within urban landscapes (Parker 2015). To address safety concerns for women in public spaces, M. Nagaraj Naik provides a comprehensive examination of strategies for ensuring women's safety in urban environments. Naik advocates for holistic approaches encompassing physical design, community engagement, policy formulation, education, and collaborative partnerships to effectively create safer public spaces for women (Nagaraj Naik 2020).

In the specific context of Medellín, Patrick Naef's "Touring the 'comuna': Memory and Transformation in Medellín, Colombia" (2018) explores the significance of memory and transformation in the city through tours of *comuna* neighbourhoods. Naef highlights how these tours acknowledge historical memory and influence urban development dynamics (Naef 2018). Some observers may raise concerns about the implications of slum tourism or tours that specifically focus on poor and marginalized areas. While these tours may raise awareness about the city's history and ongoing challenges, critics argue that they can perpetuate voyeurism and objectification of poverty, potentially overshadowing the deeper structural issues contributing to urban inequalities and violence in the city.

Furthering the discussion on urban development in Medellín, Luisa Sotomayor's studies, including "Equitable planning through territories of exception: the contours of Medellín's urban development projects" (2015) and "Social Urbanism to Build Human Security" (2018), delve into Medellín's approach to equitable planning and initiatives aimed at enhancing human security. Sotomayor's research provides insights into addressing socio-cultural challenges and promoting inclusivity in urban development (Sotomayor 2018, 2015). Both Sotomayor and Naef's works are relevant as they likely provide insights into the urban development and transformation initiatives in Medellín, with a particular focus on the role of memory, social engagement, and human security. Transitioning to the exploration of urban violence and political economy in Medellín, Moncada's study "Urban Violence, Political Economy, and Territorial Control: Insights from Medellín" analyses the spatial distribution of violence and strategies employed by different actors to assert control over urban territories (Moncada 2016). These insights complement critical urban theory, emphasizing the importance of understanding power dynamics in shaping the city's social and spatial realities.

In Tobias Franz's examination of urban governance and economic development in Medellín, the concept of an "Urban Miracle" is scrutinized, raising questions about the validity of such a characterization. While the paper delves into the strategies and policies that have contributed to Medellín's transformation, critics may argue against labelling it as a miraculous phenomenon. Instead, one may point to deeper structural issues, such as persistent inequalities and historical legacies of violence, which continue to shape the city's trajectory. By focusing solely on surface-level successes, there is a risk of overlooking systemic challenges that undermine the sustainability and inclusivity of Medellín's development trajectory (Franz 2017). Contrastingly, the paper authored by Jason Corburn, Marisa Ruiz Asari, Jorge Pérez Jamarillo, and Aníbal Gaviria explores Medellín's transition into a "City for Life" with a focus on promoting health and well-being. While highlighting the city's strides in improving public health and creating a more sustainable urban environment, critics argue that the narrative of a transformed Medellín glosses over persisting issues of inequality and exclusion.

Despite the commendable efforts in urban planning and community engagement, there is a need to address the root causes of health disparities and ensure that the benefits of urban development are equitably distributed across all segments of society. This critique underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to urban transformation that addresses social, economic, and environmental dimensions of well-being (Corburn et al. 2020).

3.5 Contribution to the Field

The landscape of literature within Peace and Conflict Studies has seen significant growth, with recent works embracing feminist perspectives and adopting more holistic, transdisciplinary approaches. However, despite this progress, there remains a notable gap when it comes to specific geographic focuses, for example cities like Medellín. Furthermore, while some studies touch upon public spaces, there is a lack of in-depth analysis, particularly concerning the role of language as a tool for sexual harassment and its impact on perpetuating traditional gender and social norms. This gap presents a unique opportunity for research to delve deeper into these under-researched aspects, offering valuable insights into addressing gender-based violence and safety in urban environments, with Medellín as a focal point.

This research contributes to the exploration of a less explored domain by examining the intersection of Peace and Conflict Studies with gender dynamics within urban environments, particularly focusing on Medellín.

While more recent literature already acknowledges the importance of gender in conflict and urban settings, this study offers a deeper exploration into the holistic understanding of how gender influences experiences of safety, violence, and public space in a post-conflict urban context. Furthermore, by focusing on Medellín, a city with a complex history of violence and crime, displacement, and urban transformation, this research offers insights that are particularly relevant for understanding the challenges and opportunities of peacebuilding and urban development in similar contexts. Through empirical investigation and contextual analysis, my study uncovers the intricate dynamics of gender-based violence, perceptions of public spaces, safety concerns, and interactions in Medellín, shedding light on the complexities of post-agreement recovery and urban resilience. Furthermore, my research contributes to methodological innovation by employing a thorough qualitative approach that integrates in-depth interviews and spatial analysis. By delving deeply into the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted issues at the intersection of gender, urban space, and peacebuilding, providing valuable insights for future research and policy development. Additionally, this study emphasizes the significance of language in shaping gender dynamics within urban spaces, particularly in post-agreement contexts like Medellín.

Through qualitative analysis of linguistic expressions and discourse, it explores how language influences perceptions of safety, interactions, and power dynamics, enriching our understanding of the complex relationship between language, gender, and urban environments. Overall, this study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender, urban dynamics, and peacebuilding processes in Medellín, contributing to theoretical advancements, empirical knowledge, and practical interventions aimed at promoting gender equity, urban safety, and sustainable peace in post-conflict settings. Through its interdisciplinary approach and contextual specificity, this research advances scholarship in Peace and Conflict Studies, Gender Studies, urban planning, and related fields, while also providing actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society actors engaged in peacebuilding efforts.

4 Research Methodology

In the context of this study, the research methodology serves as the roadmap for the investigation. It outlines the strategies and techniques I will employ to delve into the complex interplay of urban environments, gender dynamics, street harassment, and linguistic expressions of gender in Medellín. My choice of research methodology is driven by the need to comprehensively explore these intricate relationships and the experiences of women in the urban environment. This section will provide a concise overview of the qualitative research design, data collection methods, sampling approach, and data analysis techniques tailored specifically to my research objectives, ensuring a clear understanding of how my study was conducted and how insights were derived.

4.1 Qualitative Research Design

“Qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans’ lives and social worlds.” (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 717)

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach to generate and analyse data, a choice rooted in the fusion of personal experiences and observations in Latin American public spaces. During extended stays in various Latin American countries for internships and volunteer service, I have repeatedly encountered a phenomenon that piqued my interest. In the public sphere, my name often became inconsequential as I was reduced to a nameless, endearing, or aesthetically pleasing object through the medium of language. I often found myself addressed with uninvited pet names or adjectives that focused on physical appearance or presumed female charm. This recurring experience was not exclusive to me; I observed similar instances involving other women in public spaces, prompting several questions, which will be addressed in this study in a more academic, less personal form: Is this phenomenon noticed only by “cultural” outsiders like myself, or is it more pervasive? If I represent a minority bothered by it, does it qualify as a problem? Is it embedded in the local culture? Is it evolving, or is it an unchallenged facet of everyday life? Most importantly, does this linguistic peculiarity possess the potential to perpetuate gender stereotypes?

This study aligns with the ongoing gender discourse, which underscores the transformative power of language in shaping gender roles. It delves into the exploration of whether active changes in language or the manner of interpersonal communication within a specific cultural context warrant examination. The central assumption posits that in Colombia, public spaces serve as arenas where men assert dominance over women. This perpetuates hierarchical and patriarchal relationships, not solely through explicit language, but also through subtle, non-verbal cues and behaviours. The outcome of these interactions contributes to the persistence of deeply rooted gender stereotypes.

The primary aim is to shed light on these intricacies of communication and their potential impact on fostering gender equality, if it is indeed desired within the cultural context under scrutiny. The study seeks to raise awareness of a predicament observed—the everyday propagation of gender stereotypes through interpersonal dynamics. Particularly in Colombia, where traditional gender relations persist, addressing and challenging such processes may serve as a catalyst for change. In the specific context of this research, qualitative methodology provides a lens through which we can explore the nuances of (non-) verbal communication and the subtle dynamics of gender relations. Qualitative research encompasses a diverse range of research methodologies aimed at providing detailed descriptions and explanations of individuals' experiences, behaviours, interactions, and the social contexts they inhabit. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative approaches do not rely on statistical procedures or quantification, emphasizing instead the exploration and interpretation of rich, context-specific data (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 717). By delving into the lived experiences of women in Medellín's urban spaces, qualitative research allows for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of interpersonal interactions on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. It offers the flexibility to capture the subtleties of street harassment, which often extend beyond explicit language and can manifest through gestures, behaviour, and tone. Moreover, this approach is well-suited to navigate the complex cultural and contextual factors that shape these interactions, enabling a rich exploration of the urban environment's influence on gender dynamics in Medellín. Qualitative research empowers us to hear the voices of those directly affected, shedding light on their experiences and perspectives, which may remain concealed within quantitative data alone. It is the ideal method for unveiling the hidden dimensions of gender dynamics within the specific cultural and urban setting of Medellín.

At the heart of my study lies an interpretative approach. It is a method that invites to unravel the intricacies of women's experiences, behaviours, and interactions within the urban landscape of Medellín. It is particularly suitable for my research, given its focus on uncovering the underlying meanings and interpretations that individuals attribute to their lived experiences. The methods I employ, such as in-depth interviews, participant observations, and expert interviews, align seamlessly with the interpretative framework. They provide a window into the subjective perspectives and experiences of the participants (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 720). In addition to the interpretative core, my research incorporates elements of critical research. This involves an exploration of power structures and inequalities within the context I am investigating, intending to challenge them. I examine the ways in which language and behaviour in the public sphere contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Through this inquiry, I implicitly engage with power dynamics and gender-related inequalities. Furthermore, by examining the potential for change and actively raising awareness about these issues, my research aligns with the central objectives of critical research (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 720).

In summary, the qualitative approach is chosen for several reasons. First, it enables an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and perspectives of women living in Medellín, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face in urban spaces. This approach allows to uncover the multifaceted nature of street harassment, the impact of linguistic expressions on self-perception, and how urban environments influence these phenomena. Second, qualitative research is well-suited for capturing the voices of those directly affected by these issues. By conducting interviews and surveys, one can provide a platform for the participants to share their lived experiences, which is essential for a context as nuanced as urban spaces.

4.2 Data Collection

In my research, data collection encompasses a multifaceted approach involving research literature, interviews, expert interviews, and participant observation. Each of these methods is strategically chosen to gather a rich and comprehensive dataset that will enable a thorough exploration of the research question. The analysis of existing research literature related to urban development, gender issues, and public policies in Medellín serves as the initial step. These documents provide essential context and background information, which is fundamental for understanding the broader framework of gender dynamics in the city. As I immerse myself in the field, participant observation, a method finding its roots in the anthropological tradition, becomes an essential method (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 727). By spending time in specific public spaces in Medellín, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. This method enables the collection of data on non-verbal communication, behavioural patterns, and the overall atmosphere of these spaces.

Since interviews are among the most recurring strategies for collecting qualitative data (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 314), in-depth interviews with women living in Medellín are at the heart of the data collection process. Through these interviews, I aim to tap into the lived experiences of participants. The conversational nature of interviews allows for the exploration of perceptions, experiences, and emotions related to street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender within the city. A few additional expert interviews form another pivotal element. These interviews offer a broader perspective by engaging scholars, activists, and professionals with expertise in gender issues, urban development, or linguistics within the context of Medellín. Their insights provide valuable contextualization and complement the experiences of the participants. Semi-structured interviews, as employed in my research, are harnessed to delve more deeply into specific topics. These interviews are led by an interview guide, typically comprising a well-considered set of questions. The intention behind these guides is to lead the interview in a manner that is both focused and adaptive, fostering a conversational atmosphere while ensuring a systematic exploration of the subject matter (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 727).

4.3 Sampling Methods

Qualitative sampling, deeply rooted in the quest for information richness, hinges on two vital principles: appropriateness and adequacy. In essence, it is the identification of participants who are most capable of offering valuable insights that steer the qualitative sampling process. Qualitative sampling takes on the characterization of being "purposive" or "purposeful", differentiated from "theoretical" when its focus is on the deliberate selection of information sources that can shed light on underlying meanings. While qualitative research may involve relatively small numbers of participants, the volume of data amassed can be substantial, often accumulating through extensive participant interviews. It's noteworthy that there is no fixed minimum number of participants required to conduct sound qualitative research. Rather, the emphasis is on achieving a depth of information that permits a thorough portrayal of the phenomenon being investigated (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 726).

In the realm of sampling methods, my research adopts a purposive or non-probability sampling approach, specifically employing a technique known as "snowball sampling." This method is particularly suited to the nature of the study, which explores sensitive topics such as street harassment. The selection of participants in this study is deliberate and based on the principle of relevance to the research question. Snowball sampling begins with the identification of an initial participant who possesses specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This individual, often known as the "seed" participant, is chosen due to their firsthand experiences and insights into the phenomena under investigation. By widening the social network of the researcher, subsequent participants are then selected based on their connection to the initial participant. These connections can be established through referrals, recommendations, or shared experiences. The snowball effect continues, with each participant referring to others who are likely to provide valuable insights. This method allows for the inclusion of participants who may not be easily accessible through traditional sampling methods, given the sensitive nature of the research topic (Parker et al. 2019). Snowball sampling enhances the richness of the data by ensuring that participants have a direct stake in the issues being explored. It facilitates the collection of in-depth and contextually relevant information, contributing to a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of women in Medellín's urban spaces. The use of snowball sampling aligns with the qualitative and interpretative nature of the research, enabling the inclusion of participants who can offer nuanced insights into the dynamics of street harassment, and gender-related experiences in the city.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

As with any research involving human participants, the ethical dimensions of this study are of paramount importance. Ensuring the well-being, dignity, and rights of all those involved is a fundamental commitment. The research adheres to established ethical guidelines and principles to maintain the highest ethical standards throughout the study. Therefore, the very essence of good scientific practice is to work systematically during the data-gathering process, to be clear and transparent about how the information was obtained and to report on the procedures (Bangura 2007, pp. 808–809). These first steps make their contribution to ensure a certain degree of protection against subjectivity. Even if research may never be fully free from bias, with explicitness in terms of choices made and the procedures used, problems can be reduced (Höglund and Öberg 2011). Informed consent forms the cornerstone of ethical research practices, where participants are provided with thorough information about the research objectives, procedures, and potential risks. This is followed by voluntary consent, with participants fully aware of their right to withdraw at any stage. The consent form, integral to this process, can be referenced in the appendix. Subsequently, confidentiality and anonymity are upheld to safeguard participants' identities, with data securely stored and access restricted. Strong passwords and institutional drives further ensure data security. Prioritizing participants' well-being, support resources are readily available should distress occur, including contact information for psychological assistance and support for cases of domestic violence. Respect for autonomy is fundamental, granting participants the freedom to express their views without influence or judgment. The study aims to contribute positively to understanding gender dynamics in urban environments, potentially informing policy changes for the betterment of society. Participation is entirely voluntary, without any form of remuneration, and the study has obtained clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Rosario University in Bogotá, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and protection of participants' rights. Acknowledging additional ethical considerations, such as avoiding power imbalances and ensuring unbiased data collection, is important in maintaining the integrity of the research process. These ethical considerations underscore the commitment to conducting this research with the utmost integrity, respect, and responsibility toward the participants and the broader community. Ethical oversight ensures that the study's objectives are achieved without compromising the rights and well-being of those who contribute to its findings. A final point concerns the possible outcomes and the evaluation of the data. In this case, care must always be taken not to steer respondents in a particular direction with their answers and to deliberately omit other questions just to be able to confirm a hypothesis. Although there are several ethical dilemmas one may encounter while researching in the field, in this specific case the researcher is not likely to be in a direct danger zone or face violence, which probably obviates the need for psychological support or additional safety precautions beyond data security.

4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis serves as the crucible where the rich and diverse dataset is meticulously examined, unveiling the intricacies of women's experiences in Medellín's urban spaces. The analysis process is guided by the study's interpretative and critical approach, aiming to reveal the depth and nuances of gender dynamics within the city. With participant observation as the foundational point of entry, I embark on a journey to decode the subtle interactions, unspoken communication, and behavioural patterns, subsequently extending the exploration to in-depth and expert interviews. This multifaceted approach aims to uncover the layers of meaning and context surrounding the research question, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are the primary data source. The semi-structured interviews are conducted in a conversational manner, allowing participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and responses to the dynamics observed in public spaces.

Thematic analysis is applied to these interview transcripts, systematically identifying recurring themes and patterns, ultimately deepening the understanding of women's experiences in Medellín's urban spaces. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves systematically identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within a dataset. Commonly used in various fields, such as social sciences and psychology, thematic analysis aims to uncover underlying meanings and patterns in qualitative data. The process involves several key steps. Researchers begin by immersing themselves in the data to gain a deep understanding of its content. They extract meaningful segments and assign descriptive labels, known as codes, to these segments. Codes are then grouped based on similarities or shared concepts to create broader themes, representing recurring patterns, ideas, or topics in the data. Themes are meticulously reviewed and defined to accurately capture the data's essence. Each theme is given a clear name and accompanied by a detailed description for clarity. The themes and interpretations are validated through cross-referencing with the original data. Finally, a comprehensive report is generated, presenting the identified themes supported by relevant quotations and examples (Castleberry and Nolen 2018, pp. 808–809). Thematic analysis is a flexible and adaptable method that can be applied to a wide range of research questions and qualitative data types, making it a valuable tool for researchers exploring complex and nuanced topics. Expert interviews complement the insights gathered from participant observation and participant interviews. The data from these interviews with activists and professionals are also subjected to thematic analysis. Expert perspectives enrich the overall understanding of the research topic and provide valuable contextual insights, contributing to a holistic view of gender dynamics within the urban environment.

5 Medellín: A City in Transition

Medellín, once notorious as the most dangerous city globally, has undergone profound transformations shaped by its complex history of conflict, healing, and urban revitalization. In exploring this section, we embark on understanding the city's multifaceted dimensions as it transitions from violence to a nexus of urban development and peace-building initiatives. Within its vibrant urban landscape, we seek to uncover the intricate relationship between public spaces, gender dynamics, and language in residents' lives. Understanding Medellín's historical context, marked by violence and *narco*-trafficking, is crucial for comprehending its trajectory and the forces shaping its social fabric.

5.1 Historical Context

In the tumultuous landscape of 20th-century Colombia, the early 1960s marked the onset of a profound and enduring state of violence. The bitter civil conflict between the liberal and conservative political parties, coupled with the emergence of leftist guerrilla groups and paramilitary organizations, set the stage for a protracted struggle. However, Medellín experienced an alarming escalation of violence in the 1980s, notably linked to the rise of Pablo Escobar and his infamous Medellín Cartel. The city's backdrop of high inequality, insecurity, and social exclusion provided fertile ground for the cartel, urban militias, and paramilitary groups to consolidate power by promising employment, social mobility, and security. Yet, to fully comprehend Medellín's historical violence, one must also consider direct military intervention by the Colombian State in certain civilian areas, the prevalence of political populism, and the blurred lines between formal and informal politics, as well as legitimate and illegitimate sources of authority. These factors collectively underpin the intricate tapestry of Medellín's historical violence (Maclean 2015, p. 29). Medellín's narrative is intricately woven with pronounced inequalities and rapid growth during the latter half of the 20th century. The prevailing narrative suggests that these structural disparities have created voids in the provision of security, encompassing protection from violence and broader social rights. Non-state armed actors have capitalized on the perceived reluctance and inability of formal political authorities to meet these needs, thus gaining power. This discourse has found resonance with leftist militias, paramilitary groups, and the cartel, attracting support from residents in the marginalized *comunas* (districts) of Medellín by seemingly filling the void left by the State. However, it's essential to dispel the notion of a power vacuum. Formal political influence permeates these areas in multifaceted and concerning ways, particularly due to the vertical exercise of political power and the close coexistence of formal and informal armed actors in the Colombian case.

Political leaders' actions have contributed to the prominence of violence within the political process, rather than it has occurred in the State's "absence". The persistent violence in Medellín necessitates a holistic consideration of the city's historical, social, and political context.

Vulnerability to violence is spatially segregated, with the informal settlements on the hillsides in the northeast and northwest developing as focal points for violence. The affluent south achieved a higher degree of security, shaping Medellín's "multiple theatres of violence" (Pécaut 2000). As we navigate the historical labyrinth of Medellín, the focus shifts to a pivotal era - 1984 to 1993 - an epoch marked by the ominous shadow of *narco*-trafficking violence. This period saw the emergence of the Medellín Cartel on the national political stage, initiating a turbulent war against the state (Polit Dueñas 2013, p. 34). Delving into this historical chapter unveils not only the intricate dynamics of a violent past but also the enduring legacy that continues to shape Medellín's public spaces today. The ascent of drug trafficking in Medellín unfolded in the aftermath of a profound economic downturn. The crises affecting various sectors - cotton on the Atlantic Coast, coffee and sugar in the central region, emeralds in Boyacá, and the industrial sector in Antioquia - converged, creating a fertile ground for the sudden surge in *narco*-trafficking activities (Polit Dueñas 2013, pp. 36–37). The involvement of guerrilla groups and the backdrop of political instability provided an additional layer of facilitation. These groups assumed roles as protectors, imposing taxes, generating income for themselves, and allocating funds to reinforce their arsenals. In the early stages of the drug trade expansion, guerrilla groups, with their antagonism toward the state, played a pivotal role. In the urban milieu, drug lords orchestrated the formation of their armies by enlisting local gangs already embroiled in warfare during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Recruiting destitute and aimless young men proved effortless, with subsequent training processes. This conflict among the *comunas*, reshaped the city's landscape dramatically. The prospect of amassing wealth overnight became a tangible reality, evident in displays of opulence such as cars, jewelry, and women (Polit Dueñas 2013, p. 38).

The turning point in local *narco*-trafficking history occurred with the killing of then minister of justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in April 1984, thrusting *narco*-traffickers into the public eye. This marked the initiation of the war between drug dealers and the Colombian state. The demise of Pablo Escobar in 1993 signalled the conclusion of this tumultuous period. Despite a decline in drug-related violence, Medellín continues to be emblematic of cocaine production, and the legacy of *narco*-trafficking (consumption, distribution, prostitution etc.) persists in public spaces such as parks and playgrounds. While violence associated with *narco*-trafficking has diminished, Colombia maintains its status as the world's leading cocaine producer and exporter (Polit Dueñas 2013, p. 34). Medellín's association with the illicit trade endures in the collective memory, shaping public spaces into hubs for distribution and consumption.

The ongoing discourse surrounding *narco*-trafficking and Pablo Escobar's legacy underscores its integral role in people's lives. Explaining Colombia's pre-eminence in cocaine production, some could attribute it to the nation's ideal geographic position. However, a more comprehensive understanding points to the country's historical context, highlighting the fundamental role of the Colombian state's weakness in controlling its peripheries as well as combating drug-related activities. The assertion that nation formation never fully materialized in Colombia, leaving it as a collection of regions with divergent identities, reflects the absence of a true nation-state. This lack of national unity and hegemonic state presence is evident in Colombia's recent history of violence, particularly the prolonged period of armed conflict since the era of "La Violencia", which began in 1948 with the assassination of presidential candidate Jorge E. Gaitan (Polit Dueñas 2013, p. 36).

5.2 The "Post-Agreement" Era

Medellín played a pivotal role in spearheading modernization throughout the 20th century. It served as the original hub for mid-sized industry, boasting an entrepreneurial elite and an identifiable working class. The city developed a model of social control rooted in early industrial sites and factories, characterized by a discipline-oriented content influenced by the work ethic. This ethos, coupled with a set of values aligned with conservative Catholic morality, permeated the city, reflecting a tradition deeply ingrained in the region of Antioquia. Despite the wave of modernization, traditional conservative party influence endures in Medellín and other Colombian centres of modernization until today (Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001, p. 113). As Medellín transitioned from the tumultuous era of *narco*-trafficking, particularly after the death of Pablo Escobar in 1993, the city found itself at a critical juncture in its history. The post-agreement period unfolded against the backdrop of a city deeply scarred by decades of violence and the pervasive influence of the Medellín Cartel. The absence of Escobar did not mark the disappearance of Colombian *narco*-traffickers; rather, their presence became less conspicuous. Between 1989 and 1996, several prominent cocaine kingpins were incarcerated or killed. Paradoxically, in the following six years, cocaine production surged by 143 percent. The new structure of the narcotics trade evolved into a network with horizontal hierarchies, granting each operational node greater autonomy. This transformation involved the establishment of new transportation routes, smaller shipments, and the hiring of professionals for specialized services, such as financial investment strategies. These adaptations enhanced their efficiency and reduced vulnerability to detection by DEA agents. The dynamics of the *narco* trade, coupled with a lack of will among local actors - guerrillas, army officials, local political elites, and paramilitary forces - to cease conflict, have proven profitable. All these actors benefit from the illegal production and shipment of cocaine. The termination of armed conflict would entail restricting access to these profits, making the conflict financially lucrative for armed groups but detrimental to civilians.

Consequently, many individuals left violent or conflict-ridden areas, migrating to Medellín. However, upon arrival, they encountered a city with insufficient job opportunities and an inadequate public transport system, preventing their integration into society. As a result, some individuals turned to activities such as becoming hitmen or joining paramilitary groups, perpetuating the very violence that led them to the city (Polit Dueñas 2013, pp. 44–45).

The demise of Pablo Escobar in 1993 sparked optimism that the era of gangs had reached its conclusion. However, these groups were not mere mercenaries operating on behalf of drug kingpins. Instead, drug trafficking had integrated into the socialization of the youth, reshaping the evolution of gangs and altering their fundamental essence (Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001, pp. 118–119). The rise of militia groups in Medellín in the late 1980s is linked to the escalating criminal violence fuelled by the drug trade, particularly in the working-class neighbourhoods of the city's northern region. These militia groups gained widespread recognition at the beginning of the 1990s, as armed and hooded youths declared themselves the armed authority of the “barrios” (neighbourhoods). The militia groups marked their presence in new territories through graffiti, blacklists, and threats. They conducted night patrols and occasionally engaged in armed clashes with rival gangs or the police. In essence, these militia groups evolved as a result of the dynamics among armed gangs involved in criminal activities and territorial control, the influence of dissidents from guerrilla cells and leftist armed commandos, and the communal pressure in marginal barrios to unite and arm themselves for self-defence against criminal threats (Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001, pp. 122–123). Ramiro Melguizo argues that the persistence of social disintegration and the traumatic impact stemming from the presence of these armed micro powers in the city mirror the broader process of destabilization at the national level. Regrettably, the actions implemented by the local government, when they extend beyond mere repression, often overlook the connection between these urban conflicts and the nationwide war (Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001, p. 127).

In the late 1990s, a social cleansing process gained momentum, primarily supported by paramilitary groups with state backing, particularly during the two terms of President Álvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010. While the primary objective was to drive guerrillas out of the city, the *limpieza social* (social cleaning) also targeted various individuals, including prostitutes, union leaders, and minor criminals. *Comuna 13*, a criminal hotspot in those days, became a notorious symbol of this process, marked by military and paramilitary operations. The so-called Mariscal and Orion operations in 2002 were the most infamous and traumatic for the local population due to the brutal state violence and arbitrariness with many civilian victims. After guerrilla groups left *Comuna 13*, paramilitary structures assumed control until there the demobilization process began in 2003.

Presently, under different labels like *bandas*, *desmovilizados*, or *BACRIM*, violence and the threat of forced displacement persist as means of political and social control (Naef 2018, p. 4).

In the past decade, Colombia has undergone significant transformations in its internal conflict, driven by intense negotiations with armed actors and increased military control over extensive territories. Currently, the country is closer than ever to achieving peace, marked by unprecedented agreements with paramilitary groups and the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), the largest guerrilla group. These developments are steering the nation toward the "post-conflict" era (Sierra et al. 2017, p. 41). Despite significant changes, reaching a clear post-conflict era in Colombia proves elusive, as ongoing conflicts continue to influence cultural and societal perspectives. This intricacy lays the foundation for comprehending Medellín's urban development and transformation initiatives following its tumultuous history. The imperative to reconstruct Medellín's environment and societal fabric becomes apparent, seeking to confront entrenched problems and chart a new trajectory amid enduring obstacles.

5.3 Urban Development and Transformation Initiatives

Unlike the years when it held the title for the world's highest homicide rate and was synonymous with Pablo Escobar, Medellín now maintains a notably reduced homicide rate. The city has become a magnet for tourism, the culture industry, business conventions, and significant capital investments. In the realm of Urban Development and Transformation Initiatives in Medellín, several noteworthy projects have sought to address historical challenges and reshape the city's cultural landscape.

Since the 1990s, Medellín has been implementing programs and projects aimed at improving informal settlements, both physically and socially integrating them into the urban fabric. Informal settlements constitute a pervasive feature of urban landscapes across Latin America. These settlements largely reflect the efforts of residents who have constructed and developed them through self-building and self-help initiatives. Over time, these areas undergo a process of legalization, consolidation, and full integration into the city fabric. Eventually, after two or three decades, their informal origins become increasingly difficult to trace. Among the earliest and most influential initiatives regarding these informal settlements, was the introduction of an above-ground metro system in 1995 (Hernandez-Garcia 2013, p. 43). However, it was not until 2004 that the city introduced the world's first modern urban aerial cable-car public transport system, specifically designed to reach hillside informal settlements (Brand and Dávila 2011, p. 648). These efforts have led to upgrades in public spaces and the establishment of community services such as schools and libraries, designed by renowned architects, which have significantly enhanced the atmosphere and quality of life in these economically disadvantaged areas.

Consequently, Medellín's "barrios" have become popular destinations not only for local Colombians but also for international visitors, particularly from Latin America, eager to witness firsthand the transformation brought about by these projects. This initiative, termed "social urbanism" by the municipality, is increasingly becoming a defining brand for the city (Echeverry and Francesco 2010). Medellín has unexpectedly found informal settlements playing a crucial role in branding the city and attracting tourism to these areas.

Luisa Sotomayor, expert in environmental and urban development studies, investigates the role of large-scale Urban Development Projects (UDPs) as tools for promoting socio-spatial justice in Latin American cities, focusing particularly on Medellín, Colombia. She examines how UDPs, traditionally used to catalyse market-driven transformations in neglected urban areas, can also be harnessed to redirect social investment towards informal neighbourhoods previously overlooked by formal planning systems. By analysing the strategic features of UDPs and their potential to address socio-spatial inequalities, Sotomayor sheds light on the benefits and contradictions of employing this approach in cities like Medellín. While UDPs offer promise for integrating marginalized districts into the urban fabric, they also raise concerns about their reliance on exceptional practices outside the legal planning framework. Sotomayor argues that in highly unequal cities, transformative urban planning must not only aim to integrate marginalized areas but also challenge the regulatory and land rights systems perpetuating socio-spatial injustices. Her research contributes valuable insights into the complexities of urban development strategies in Latin American cities, emphasizing the need for planning approaches that prioritize social equity and systemic change (Sotomayor 2015, p. 373). Sotomayor concludes that Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects (IUPs) represent a unique experiment in contemporary urban policy, aimed at improving the quality of life for the urban poor by addressing historical injustices in urban space production. Led by mayors Fajardo and Salazar, along with progressive planners and policymakers, the IUPs demonstrate a commitment to rectifying decades of state neglect in marginalized areas of Medellín. By providing new services and infrastructure tailored to the needs of self-help communities, IUPs navigate bureaucratic barriers and foster a sense of social inclusion and transformation locally. This approach holds promise for more equitable urban development, offering valuable lessons for cities in the Global South.

However, IUPs are not without contradictions. Like other Urban Development Projects, they prioritize efficiency and functionality characteristic of neoliberal urbanism. Neoliberal urbanism refers to an approach to urban development and governance that prioritizes market-oriented policies, deregulation, privatization, and individual responsibility over collective welfare. It is characterized by an emphasis on free-market principles and the reduction of state intervention in urban affairs.

Neoliberal urbanism often leads to the commodification of urban space, gentrification, social inequality, and the prioritization of profit over social needs. This hybridity is evident in Medellín's IUPs, which simultaneously aim to reduce urban divides locally while projecting the city as a market-enhancing destination globally. This dual-purpose risks undermining locally defined welfare and development goals and raises questions about democratic urban transformation. Moreover, the concentration of power in special-purpose bodies like the Urban Development Company highlights limitations in broader planning frameworks. While IUPs propose an integrated approach, their project-based format and narrow geographic focus underscore deficiencies in current planning norms and bureaucratic procedures. Addressing critical urban challenges such as poverty and inequality requires a deeper restructuring of power relations and more equitable planning frameworks that accommodate diverse needs and interests across the cityscape (Sotomayor 2015, p. 394).

In recent years, Medellín has undertaken significant efforts to reshape its image, aiming to attract foreign investments and tourists. Embracing the concept of resilience, the city has positioned itself as a "resilient city," particularly after joining the "100 Resilient Cities" network in 2016. This strategic branding initiative, led by both municipal and private sectors, seeks to highlight Medellín's ability to overcome its turbulent past and thrive in the face of adversity. However, this branding strategy has not been without its complexities. While municipal authorities and promotional platforms champion resilience as a core value of the city and its residents, there are divergent perspectives within the community itself. Many residents, particularly those in marginalized communities, view resilience not merely as an adaptation to adversity but as a call for structural changes that address underlying socio-economic inequalities (Naef 2020, p. 1). The integration of resilience into Medellín's branding narrative has been a collaborative effort, involving various stakeholders from local to international levels. Yet, this process has also raised concerns about depoliticization and the erasure of diverse community representations. As the city continues to navigate its branding as a resilient urban centre, it is crucial to recognize the active role of communities in shaping resilience and to ensure that initiatives go beyond superficial branding exercises to foster meaningful transformations. Looking ahead, as the city reflects on its governance and development strategies in the post-pandemic era, it must prioritize a comprehensive understanding of resilience that acknowledges its multifaceted nature and actively involves communities in the process of urban transformation (Naef 2020, p. 18). While some experts praise Medellín's transformation as an "urban miracle," emphasizing rapid progress from violence to innovative urban development, this term overlooks deeper socio-economic challenges. Despite infrastructure revitalization and urban renewal projects, Medellín faces persistent issues like high unemployment, inequalities, and limited opportunities, especially in informal settlements. The city's economic landscape, dominated by low-productivity sectors, hinders sustainable employment.

The narrative of an “urban miracle” neglects underlying power dynamics and neoliberal policies, reinforcing hierarchies of power. State initiatives like “good governance” and urban renewal risk exacerbating inequalities, diverting attention from addressing social and economic disparities. The notion of Medellín as an “urban miracle” appears illusory, masking persistent challenges and inequalities. A critical examination of urban policies is crucial to understanding the city's development impact on marginalized and disadvantaged residents (Franz 2017, pp. 65–66). Despite facing criticism, social urbanism has significantly enhanced the quality of life for residents in Medellín's informal settlements. Moreover, it has inadvertently played a role in shaping Medellín's image, rendering it more authentic and distinguishable from other cities in Colombia and Latin America. Surprisingly, it has also attracted tourism to these neighbourhoods, a phenomenon previously unimaginable. Medellín has pioneered a model of urban and social development that is garnering attention and emulation in other contexts. In the realm of city branding, which involves improving a location's image, creating perceived value, and enhancing competitiveness through tourism and investment while fostering community development and reinforcing local identity, social urbanism and informal settlements are proving pivotal in shaping Medellín's brand.

5.4 Challenges in Building Safer Public Spaces for Women

As cities undergo rapid development and transformation, there is a need to critically assess how these changes impact women's access to and experience of public spaces. By examining the intersection of urban development and gender dynamics, one can identify key areas for improvement and advocate for more inclusive urban planning and design practices.

5.4.1 Unpacking Patriarchal Dynamics in Public Spaces

Feminist scholars have long emphasized the role of patriarchal structures in perpetuating sexual violence against women, both in conflict settings and beyond. This violence is viewed as a manifestation and reinforcement of masculine power over women, reflecting entrenched gendered power dynamics magnified in times of war (Kreft 2019). However, less attention has been given to how patriarchal norms and structures influence social and institutional responses to this violence, and the socio-political implications thereof. Patriarchy is understood as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby 1989, p. 214). This does not imply that all men individually dominate or oppress women, or that all women are uniformly oppressed. Rather, patriarchal norms are embedded in social relations, institutions, and practices that reinforce gendered hierarchies, disadvantaging women relative to men collectively.

Patriarchy operates across various levels, from the household to the macro-level, and across different spheres such as politics, media, and religious institutions. The concept of patriarchy transcending different spheres aligns with the feminist notion of the continuum of violence, where sexual and gender-based violence inflicted upon women in war or peace, in public or private spheres, shares a common foundation in patriarchal social norms that devalue women (Kreft 2019). In Latin America, patriarchal violence is a prevalent issue, with the region ranking high in both intimate partner violence and non-partner violence against women. In Colombia's conflict, sexual violence has been perpetrated by all armed actors against civilians, predominantly targeting women and girls. This violence occurs in various contexts, including during incursions, in detention, and within armed groups, driven by motives such as territorial control, intimidation, punishment, and asserting male dominance.

In her article “This Patriarchal, Machista and Unequal Culture of Ours”: Obstacles to Confronting Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, Anne-Kathrin Kreft sheds light on the intricate relationship between patriarchal norms, power dynamics, and the challenges associated with confronting conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) within urban contexts. She emphasizes how patriarchal structures permeate individual behaviours, interpersonal relationships, and institutional responses, blurring the boundaries between public and private spheres. In Colombia the role of patriarchy in perpetuating and responding to sexual violence becomes increasingly evident. Despite being a middle-income democracy, Colombia has faced widespread sexual violence perpetrated by state actors, paramilitaries, and rebel groups. The peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) exemplifies the complexities of addressing gender-based violence within urban settings. While the peace accords have been praised for their gender sensitivity, the actual implementation has been slow, reflecting the entrenched nature of patriarchal structures within urban landscapes (Kreft 2023, p. 658). This intersectionality between patriarchy, conflict, and urban spaces underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to addressing gender-based violence within cities. In Latin America, where intimate partner violence and non-partner violence against women remain prevalent, urban environments serve as arenas where patriarchal norms manifest and perpetuate violence. From the normalization of everyday sexual violence to the systemic failures in responding to survivors, urban spaces reflect and reinforce gendered power dynamics. However, amidst these challenges, there is hope found in the resilience and activism of women's organizations and victims' associations within urban areas. Through grassroots mobilization, advocacy efforts, and community engagement, these groups play a pivotal role in challenging patriarchal structures, amplifying the voices of survivors, and demanding accountability from urban institutions. Their work transcends the confines of the public and private spheres, creating spaces for dialogue, empowerment, and collective action within cities (Kreft 2023, p. 672).

5.4.2 Navigating Urban Transformation Challenges for Women's Safety

In the quest to create safer public spaces, Medellín has embarked on a series of transformative initiatives. From the revitalization of neighbourhoods like *Comuna 13* to innovative public transport infrastructure, the city has garnered acclaim for its forward-thinking approach. Notable projects include the introduction of cable cars, recognized for their ingenuity and impact on accessibility. Additionally, artistic initiatives, such as graffiti murals, have not only added vibrancy to urban landscapes but also served as poignant reminders of the city's journey. However, amidst these advancements, challenges persist in ensuring the safety and inclusivity of public spaces for women.

A public place refers to a communal area accessible to individuals, encompassing streets, parks, government buildings, and other spaces open to the public, albeit with certain restrictions. Safety within these spaces significantly influences feelings of comfort, belonging, and commitment (Fenster 2005). Women's safety initiatives encompass preventative measures aimed at deterring violence or abuse before it occurs. This involves fostering awareness, promoting attitudes aligned with societal norms, advocating for non-violence, and challenging male sexual privilege. Global evidence suggests that jurisdictions with laws against domestic violence experience lower prevalence rates, indicating the importance of legal frameworks in shaping behaviour (Nagaraj Naik 2020, p. 734). Consequently, there is a need for additional legislation to address attitudes and behaviours concerning women's safety in public spaces. The treatment of women in these environments, particularly regarding sexual harassment, has garnered increased attention due to media coverage and heightened global awareness of women's mistreatment and exploitation (Manjoo and McRaith 2011).

Various forms of harassment can afflict victims differently, with impacts varying based on factors such as duration, severity, and specific actions involved. Individuals often respond to harassment with psychological, behavioural, emotional, and mood-related symptoms. The pervasive nature of harassment can demoralize those affected and detrimentally affect both personal and organizational productivity. Ignoring harassment and discrimination does not make it disappear; instead, perpetrators may interpret silence as tacit acceptance of their behaviour, potentially emboldening them to continue or escalate their actions. Thus, addressing harassment in public spaces requires a multidisciplinary community approach. Consequently, several strategies have been developed to combat harassment, spanning preventive, prohibition, and redressal stages (Nagaraj Naik 2020, 741).

The preventive approach aims to stop harassment before it happens through measures such as gender-inclusive urban planning, awareness campaigns, and anti-harassment policies. By addressing societal attitudes and behaviours, this approach seeks to create environments where harassment is less likely to occur.

In contrast, the prohibition method involves establishing and enforcing laws and policies that explicitly forbid sexual harassment, aiming to deter offenders and establish clear boundaries and consequences. Once harassment occurs, the redressal method provides support to victims through legal mechanisms and disciplinary actions against perpetrators, ensuring avenues for seeking justice and fostering accountability in addressing harassment instances in public spaces (Nagaraj Naik 2020, pp. 742–743). Preventing violence against women and girls necessitates fostering their cooperation and strengthening associations between neighbourhoods, network organizations, local authorities, and governments, ensuring their involvement in decision-making processes. Community participation and diverse leadership forms should be promoted to facilitate collaborative efforts. Preventive measures should encompass planned, long-term initiatives that address both risk and protective factors associated with perpetration, harassment, and bystander behaviour (Curtis 2014).

Sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in both public and private spaces stem from deep-rooted issues of gender inequality, discrimination, and harmful social norms. Addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) requires a comprehensive gender equality framework that tackles these underlying social norms, stereotypes, and unequal gender relations. This action area focuses on transforming social norms, attitudes, and behaviours to ensure women's and girls' rights to safe public spaces, free from sexual harassment and violence. Initiatives under this approach engage various stakeholders, including girls, boys, influential champions, and leaders, in transformative activities aimed at promoting respectful gender relationships, gender equality, and safety in both urban and rural settings. Municipal governments, as entities closest to residents, often play a crucial role in supporting community-led prevention efforts.

In Medellín initiatives led by the Safe City Initiative with Women and Girls, in collaboration with UN Women and other community partners, aim to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces. These efforts include engaging teachers to form networks in schools, developing curricula to integrate human rights and gender equality, conducting sessions with students to raise awareness about sexual harassment and its effects, and involving parents in workshops to support program objectives. Additionally, communication strategies challenge negative gender stereotypes through conversations on public buses, theatrical performances in non-traditional settings, and participatory methodologies like the "emotions game" to explore the psychological impact of sexual harassment. Training frontline workers in bars and nightclubs as active bystanders further enhances efforts to prevent sexual harassment and promote the safe enjoyment of nightlife (UN Women 2019).

To sum it up, in grappling with urban transformation challenges for women's safety, Medellín faces deeply ingrained social norms rooted in *machismo* culture and patriarchal structures.

Despite strides in infrastructure and community engagement, these enduring cultural barriers persist, shaping attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate harassment and inequality. Overcoming these challenges demands a multifaceted approach, including legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and efforts to challenge entrenched gender stereotypes. By addressing the underlying social norms and cultural attitudes, cities can pave the way for safer and more inclusive public spaces where women are empowered and respected.

6 Case Studies and Interviews

The following extensive section stands as the cornerstone of my thesis, encapsulating the essence of my research journey as I present, reflect on, and analyse the interviews conducted during my time in Medellín. To ensure transparency and provide a detailed picture of the interview context, as well as to reflect on the power and hierarchical structures inherent in such interactions, it's essential to introduce myself. As a white, female German master's student, I arrived in Medellín, Colombia, financially supported by a scholarship, to fulfil my mandatory internship requirement. My placement led me to the feminist NGO *Proyecto Florecer*, spearheaded by two female founders from the United States. Over the ensuing three months, I resided in Belén, neighbouring Barrio Antioquia, a neighbourhood marked by low income and significant social challenges, where the NGO's community kitchen was situated. Through this experience, I gained firsthand insight into the urban dynamics of Medellín, and the critical role played by grassroots organizations in addressing gender issues within the community.

6.1 Selection of Participants

For participant demographics, the study focused on individuals aged 18 and above, ensuring legal adulthood and maturity for participation. Gender selection prioritized individuals who self-identified as women, reflecting their perspectives on gender dynamics in public spaces, with one participant identifying as a transgender woman. Considerations for diversity in ethnicity were taken into account, with participants primarily Colombian and Venezuelan. This reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds present in urban Medellín and prompts reflection on power hierarchies in this context, particularly considering the researcher's position as a white Western researcher. Additionally, some participants had experiences of flight, seeking refuge in Medellín. Geographically, participants were required to have spent significant time residing in urban areas of Medellín, excluding villages or suburbs, to ensure experiences relevant to urban dynamics, though not necessarily born in the city. Furthermore, income and education were not restrictive criteria for participation, encompassing a diverse socioeconomic range. The majority of participants hailed from low-income backgrounds, residing in marginalized hillside communities within Medellín. Additionally, participants' educational backgrounds varied, with some having limited literacy skills, while a few with university degrees held management positions in NGOs. The overarching criterion remained women living in urban Medellín for a substantial duration, aged 18 and above, to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and insights into gender dynamics within the city.

I employed snowball sampling to initiate my participant selection process, beginning with women associated with the NGO where I completed my internship.

Leveraging the connections of the NGO's founders, I expanded my network to include other initiatives and NGOs. Expert interviews were conducted with two women from the NGO *Vamos Mujer*, while individuals like Andrea from *Amarte Global* and Alexandra from *Mujeres Sonoras de Llanaditas* acted as gatekeepers, facilitating introductions to their respective groups and organizations, coordinating interview logistics, and suggesting suitable locations for conducting interviews. Additionally, I created a flyer that friends, gatekeepers, and interview participants could share to amplify my reach.

The detailed consent process has already been discussed in the research methodology section and can also be reviewed in the appendix. Additionally, consent was obtained from the ethics commission of the Universidad del Rosario, and their feedback was incorporated. For instance, interviews were conducted only in public places like schools or community centres, not in private settings. Most interviews took place in group settings, primarily during workshops or shared activities. However, it's important to note that only individual interviews were conducted within these group settings, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Typically, I scheduled interview days with up to five or six interviews per day, maximizing efficiency while maintaining the integrity of each individual interview. The interviews were conducted between March and May 2023, followed by the transcription phase from June to August 2023. In total, 28 interviews were conducted, with all but two transcribed due to very poor audio quality. The duration of interviews varied, ranging from as short as 5 minutes to as long as 35 minutes, reflecting the depth and diversity of the conversations held.

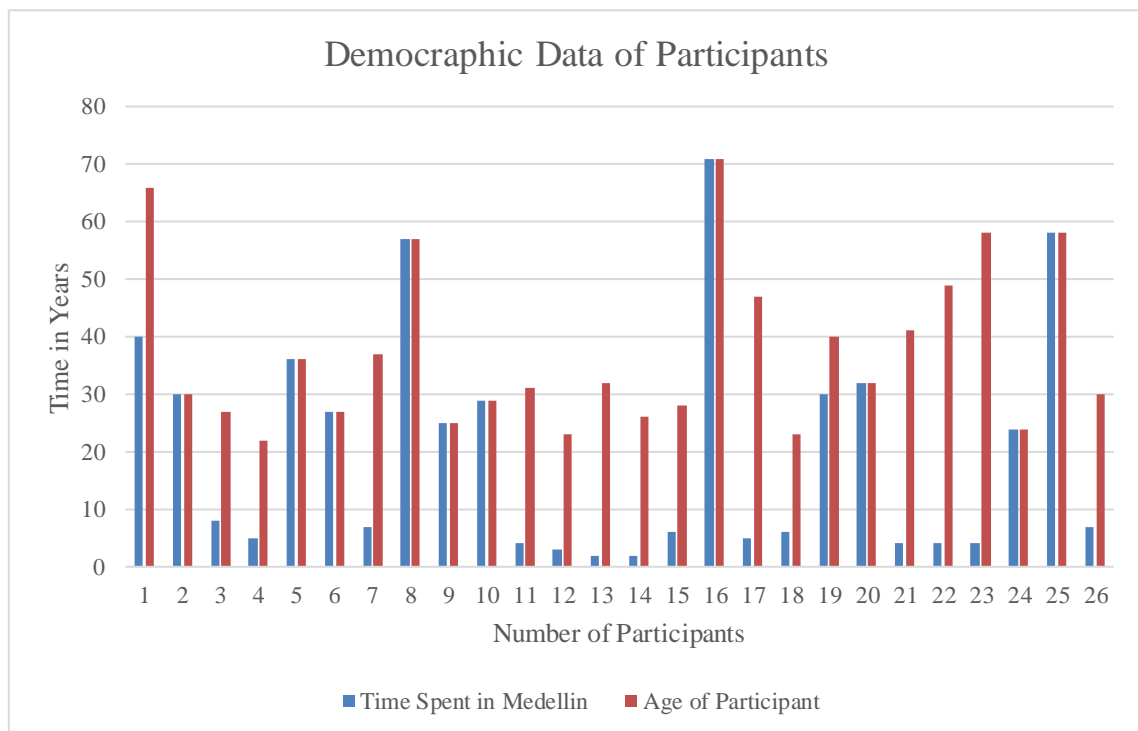
6.2 Data Collection and Transcription

In the data collection and transcription phase, participant observation served as the primary motion, driven by my personal and subjective experiences in public urban spaces in Colombia, specifically in Medellín. These observations encompassed my own interactions in these spaces, as well as observations of others and stories shared by individuals regarding their experiences in public settings such as metro stations, parks, playgrounds, and rideshares like Uber. Drawing from these initial observations, the decision was made to conduct semi-structured interviews, providing a framework for comparison of responses while also allowing for exploration of additional topics as they arose. Notably, interviews were conducted individually, even within group settings, ensuring each participant had a private and separate interview session. To optimize efficiency, "interview days" were organized, during which multiple interviews were conducted per day. After explaining the purpose and procedure of the interview and providing background information on myself, participants were asked to sign a consent form or verbally consent if they were illiterate. Each participant received a copy of the signed consent form for their records. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had.

Interviews were recorded solely in audio format, using both my personal mobile phone and the software “Audacity”. The files were transferred to the laptop after each interview and immediately deleted from the original source. No video recordings were made, including for the three online interviews conducted via Zoom, which were also recorded solely as audio files. In the data collection process, aside from the essential elements of a consent form, recording devices, and interview questionnaire, no additional materials were utilized. All recordings were saved securely on my laptop in a password-protected folder and backed up on the KU Cloud-Service "Filtr" for flexible and mobile file storage. Contact information and real names of participants were stored in a separate file on my laptop, also secured with a password. All data was anonymized and cannot be traced back to individual participants. The transcription process entailed creating verbatim transcripts with timestamps using the transcription software “Happy Scribe”. The data centre for this software is located in the European Union. Prior to transcription, the uploaded audio files were anonymized and deleted after transcription. Each transcription was then reviewed and corrected by me while listening to the original audio files. After completion, transcripts were sent to the respective participants who opted to review them prior to analysis. Until October 2023, all participants approved the transcripts without requesting any changes or making remarks. Following the transcription process, the next step involved analysing the data extracted from the transcriptions. In addition to transcriptions, Google Sheets was utilized to organize, analyse, and partly visualize the data through the creation of graphics and charts. The prior anonymization of the data uploaded to the software, which involved not using any names or contact details, ensured that no individual could be identified. The data analysis was completed in February 2024, and the anonymized data will be made available to both universities responsible for evaluating the thesis. After evaluation and the granting of the master's degree, the data stored on my laptop and the KU cloud will be deleted.

7 Data Analysis and Findings

The following data analysis and discussion delve into various aspects related to street harassment and gender dynamics in Medellín. It begins by examining the demographic data of the interviewed participants, followed by their perceptions of public spaces and the impact of gender socialization on freedom and safety. Personal experiences of street harassment are then explored, including the nature and frequency of incidents, as well as coping mechanisms employed by victims. Factors influencing street harassment are discussed alongside participants' proposals for combatting it. The role of language in perpetuating gender stereotypes and its perception as a form of violence is scrutinized, along with reflections on how language shapes self-perception and societal opportunities for women.



7.1 Demographic Data of the Participants

In this section, I briefly explore the demographic composition of the participants engaged in my study, presenting a comprehensive snapshot of their diverse backgrounds and experiences. The study encompassed 26 individuals who self-identified as females, representing a varied spectrum of ages ranging from 22 to 71 years old. The average age of the participants was approximately 37 years. These individuals hailed primarily from Colombia and Venezuela, with one participant originating from the USA. Their collective residency in Medellín ranged widely, spanning from 2 to 71 years, with an average duration of approximately 20 years. This wide-ranging residency duration underscores the depth and breadth of their experiences within the city.

Furthermore, the length of interviews varied, with durations ranging from 5 to 35 minutes, and an average interview duration of approximately 14 minutes.

The interviews were exclusively conducted in Spanish, reflecting the primary language spoken by the participants and ensuring effective communication. The participants resided in various neighbourhoods across Medellín, each with its own distinct characteristics and socioeconomic dynamics. For instance, the neighbourhood of Llanaditas is situated in the northeastern part of the city, characterized by its hilly terrain and lower-income population. Manrique, located in the northwest, has historically been marked by socioeconomic challenges and has undergone revitalization efforts in recent years. Bello Horizonte, situated in the eastern part of the city, is known for its vibrant community and cultural diversity. Belén, located in the southwest, is a mix of residential and industrial areas, with pockets of informal settlements. Popular, located in the central-eastern area, has historically faced issues related to poverty and violence but has seen improvements in recent years. The *barrio* of Antioquia, situated in the west, has historically been one of the toughest neighbourhoods in Medellín, particularly noted for its establishment as the drug market hub of the city in the 1960s, coinciding with the rise in marijuana consumption. Additionally, it was formerly selected as a *zona de tolerancia*, a designated area where prostitutes were required to operate according to specific regulations enforced by a city ordinance. This mandated the relocation of prostitutes from other areas to Antioquia, so "respectable ladies" and their families could rent or sell their homes in other neighbourhoods of the city. Envigado, while technically a separate municipality, is located adjacent to Medellín and is known for its higher-income neighbourhoods and lower crime rates. These neighbourhoods provide a rich tapestry of urban experiences and perspectives, reflecting the diverse social, economic, and historical contexts within Medellín.

7.2 Perceptions of public spaces in Medellín

La calle está llena de peligro. (Transcript M04)

Based on the data provided from the interviews the perception of public spaces in the city appears to be varied and complex. While some participants expressed relatively positive views about public spaces, describing them as normal or acceptable ("bien", "normal"), their perspectives were not dominant. The majority of participants tended to have negative feelings, citing concerns such as fear, discomfort, and insecurity making them unable to relax and constantly being alert and attentive, anticipating potential threats and trying to prevent them.

La verdad, yo me siento insegura por lo mismo que estábamos hablando...del tanta inseguridad. Y tantas cosas que pasan todos los días y todos contra las mujeres. Uno sale, pero uno no sabe si va a volver, uno sale sin seguro. (Transcript M05)

Me siento incomoda, insegura. Cuando salgo, pienso ¿Será que me van a matar?, ¿Debería cambiar mi ropa?, cuando me pongo algo corto. Algunos momentos son tan incómodos e inseguros que pienso ¿Puede ser que no vuelva a casa? (Transcript H05)

These sentiments were often attributed to factors such as drug use, the presence of homeless individuals and inebriates, traffic, air pollution, and the overall crowdedness of urban areas which were often described as “contaminated”. Some stated they leave the house as seldom as possible.

Uno lo puede criar, uno puede tener una buena crianza en casa. Pero, ¿qué pasa que si tú lo sacas a un parque? Se supone que los parques son para recreatividad de un niño. Pero si tú lo sacas a un parque te da miedo, porque tú no sabes cómo lo van a mirar, si le van a hacer un daño, la persona que está drogada, está borracha, la persona que está fuera de sí. (Transcript A02)

This variation in perceptions could be attributed to the open-ended nature of the initial question, which allowed participants to express a range of experiences and interpretations. Even among those who initially expressed positivity, later parts of the interviews revealed underlying discomfort and intimidation in certain situations or related to the presence of certain individuals or activities in public spaces. Therefore, while a third of participants expressed positive attitudes initially, their subsequent responses highlighted the subtle and varied nature of their experiences with public spaces, suggesting a nuanced understanding of urban environments among participants.

The feelings of fear and insecurity described by participants align with the perceptions of researchers and international organizations. Violence, insecurity, and the fear of crime pose significant threats to the social sustainability of cities, impacting life and impeding the realization of fundamental rights (UNDP 2013). Moreover, responses to violence often worsen socio-spatial exclusion and lead to unequal access to security and justice (Muggah 2014). Social urbanism acknowledges violence, socio-spatial exclusion, and institutional fragility as interconnected issues. Understanding that conventional policy tools alone cannot address chronic violence (Moser 2004), Medellín's policymakers adopted a coordinated strategy involving social investments, area-based planning, civic engagement, violence prevention programs, and strategic policing. This approach resulted in a remarkable 90% reduction in violence rates between 1991 and 2015 (Doyle 2019). However, recent security policies have shifted focus from social development to increased spending on policing and security technologies. A critical challenge for the city's social sustainability is to continue fostering equity, especially for the socio-economically marginalized segments of the population. Cities like Medellín, marked by chronic violence, are not only shaped by fear and violent incidents but also by the responses adopted by various stakeholders. Fear-management strategies often lead to the creation of divisive urban environments that prioritize private interests over the public good (Muggah 2014).

The proliferation of fortified enclaves, such as gated communities and office parks, exemplifies hyper-securitized urbanism, perpetuating urban segregation and reinforcing unequal power dynamics (Rodgers 2012). Additionally, the privatization of security in response to perceived state incapacity further exacerbates social divisions. Perceptions of neighbourhood security impact various dimensions of community development and social sustainability, influencing social interaction, community participation, and collective action. Fear of violence may deter community involvement, while feeling safe fosters trust, social cohesion, and neighbourhood pride (Dempsey et al. 2011). As such, safety perceptions play a crucial role in shaping individuals' relationships with their urban environment and mediating community dynamics.

7.2.1 Gender socialization and its impact on freedom and safety

After delving into the perceptions of public spaces, the discussion naturally leads to an exploration of gender socialization and its profound impact on freedom and safety in these spaces. The interviews shed light on how societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles shape individuals' experiences and interactions in public. By examining the ways in which gender socialization influences perceptions of safety, autonomy, and agency in urban environments, we gain valuable insights into the underlying factors contributing to gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities. The majority of participants indicated significant differences in how boys and girls are raised. It seems that there is a consensus among most participants that girls are more likely to be taught to fear and protect themselves in public spaces compared to boys. Girls are often subject to excessive protection measures, which can instil fear and anxiety, as they are constantly reminded to be vigilant, avoid certain places, conform to specific behaviours such as sitting a certain way or pulling down skirts and dresses, and refrain from activities that may be perceived as risky or daring, such as climbing or engaging in physical play.

[...] yo tengo una niña y un niño, y obviamente a las niñas en un parque se les enseña cómo se sientan, si tienen de pronto falda, cómo se tiran, en qué se puede montar. A un niño, no. Un niño simplemente va tranquilo. (Transcript M05)

Some participants expressed concerns about addiction or substance abuse, suggesting that it heightens feelings of insecurity and fear in public spaces. While three participants indicated that parenting approaches are becoming more equal between genders, the prevailing sentiment was that distinct gender-based differences persist in child-rearing practices. Specifically, participants highlighted instances where girls are kept separate from boys to shield them from potentially harmful influences. This segregation is perceived as a means to protect girls, but it also reinforces gendered norms and restricts their freedom in public spaces.

I will now delve into the invaluable insights provided by three experts, shedding light on the complex interplay of societal norms, cultural influences, and individual experiences surrounding gender-based violence and inequalities.

Expert H10 highlights the stark differences in how girls and boys are raised concerning their freedom in public spaces. Girls are often taught to be cautious and avoid being alone in public, especially during certain hours, while boys are afforded more liberties. This gendered approach to upbringing contributes to a sense of insecurity among girls and women when navigating public spaces. Furthermore, participant H10 underscores how societal norms, influenced by historical contexts such as the *narco* culture, shape perceptions of gender roles. Girls are simultaneously taught to be cautious and modest but also encouraged to seek financial security through relationships with older men, reflecting conflicting messages about femininity and success. The influence of *narco* culture and *machismo* continues to shape perceptions of gender roles and behaviours, particularly in regions where these phenomena have deep historical roots. The *narco* culture glorifies power, wealth, and dominance, often at the expense of women who are objectified and commodified. Women are taught to aspire to find financial security through relationships with men who possess wealth and status, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing gender inequalities. This mindset, ingrained from a young age, can manifest in women seeking validation through their physical appearance and dependence on men for financial stability, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and inequality. Addressing these entrenched attitudes requires a multifaceted approach that challenges traditional gender norms, promotes equality, and empowers women to assert their agency and autonomy. Expert E01 further delves into the lifelong impact of gendered upbringing on girls and women who from a young age are more restricted in their movements compared to boys. This early conditioning perpetuates a sense of fear and insecurity in public spaces for women, impacting their ability to navigate the world independently. E01 also discusses how public spaces are inherently gendered, with men dominating and women confined to smaller, marginalized areas. This segregation reinforces power dynamics and perpetuates feelings of vulnerability among women. Expert E02 highlights the psychological and emotional toll of growing up in an environment where fear and insecurity in public spaces are normalized. Children raised with these beliefs may develop a sense of distrust towards others and experience heightened stress and anxiety. This, in turn, can lead to difficulties in forming healthy relationships and contribute to mental health issues in adulthood. The pervasive sense of insecurity instilled in children can have profound and long-lasting effects on their well-being and social interactions. Overall, these insights shed light on the complex interplay between gender, upbringing, and perceptions of public spaces. They underscore the need for societal change to create safer and more inclusive environments where all individuals, regardless of gender, can feel empowered to navigate public spaces without fear or restriction.

Understanding gender dynamics in Latin American culture requires a comprehensive view of its societal fabric. Historically rooted in conquest marked by slavery and serfdom, the social structure reflects the Spanish conquistador's dominance over indigenous societies, symbolizing masculine authority. This legacy influences contemporary expressions of *machismo*, notably among European and mestizo males, albeit less so in indigenous cultures. Additionally, Western, particularly Spanish, culture exhibits a strong bias towards masculinity, with limited impact from advancements in women's rights during periods like the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Cultural norms shape distinct gender roles and behaviours, while dualistic views perpetuate the notion of separate realms for each gender. In Latin America, relationships between men and women primarily revolve around sexuality, with marriage fulfilling societal needs. Romantic love, a late Western development, had limited prevalence in Latin America (Williamson 2006, p. 112). This historically evolved and entrenched *machismo* is therefore a cultural concept rooted in Latin American societies that emphasizes traditional masculine traits, often leading to the perpetuation of gender inequalities and the subordination of women. *Machismo* shapes societal beliefs and expectations surrounding gender roles. Men are traditionally expected to embody characteristics of masculinity, such as being self-reliant and dominant, while women are often idealized as epitomizing purity and morality, mirroring the archetype of the Virgin Mary. This gendered dichotomy not only perpetuates power imbalances but also contributes to the victimization of women. However, it's essential to acknowledge that gender-related beliefs also (negatively) affect men, influencing their behaviour and attitudes towards women. *Machismo* manifests behaviourally through various forms of discouragement, exclusion, teasing, and sexual harassment. Viewing this cultural phenomenon as a systemic issue reveals its resilience and its role in perpetuating inequality. Just as racism or capitalism functions as systems, *machismo* operates within a framework of power relations, structuring inequality while also being perpetuated over time (Kabelka 2019, pp. 23–24). As mentioned before, this culture of *machismo* was further fuelled during *narco* times, as *narco*-traffickers embraced and amplified traditional gender norms to exert control and dominance, adding another layer of complexity to the already pervasive issue of street harassment and gender-based violence. This gender socialization, which, according to the participants, is reflected in the differences between raising boys and girls, is reinforced by *machismo* culture and *narco* glorification. It contributes to women's feelings of fear and insecurity in public spaces, as it perpetuates power imbalances and norms of dominance that increase the risk of harassment and violence directed towards women.

7.3 Personal Experiences of Street Harassment

The definition and perception of street harassment vary among participants, with 19 individuals able to define or explain it. The majority described it as the experience of receiving derogatory or offensive comments, often of a sexual nature, from strangers in public spaces. This behaviour includes verbal remarks, suggestive looks, gestures, and catcalling, with occasional instances of unwanted physical contact or violence, such as groping breasts, buttocks, or the pubic area.

El acoso callejero...pues, hablamos de gente en la calle mirándote, de la cabeza a los pies, con algún tipo de intención. Personas que te hacen gestos, algo vulgar. Que dicen cosas feas u obscenas. Empieza en la mente de estas personas, con la intención. Esto pasa toda mi vida, a diario. (Transcript L05)

However, it is noted that not all comments are necessarily negative, as some participants mentioned receiving what they perceived as compliments alongside the more derogatory remarks. Despite this, the predominant perception is one of negativity, with street harassment often connected to feelings of insecurity and discomfort. Interestingly, three participants viewed street harassment as a form of admiration, highlighting differing interpretations of the behaviour. Conversely, seven participants either could not provide a clear definition or associated street harassment solely with physical violence, suggesting a lack of awareness or understanding among some individuals. It appears that there are geographical differences and affiliations with various NGOs that influence the definition and perception of street harassment. The experts and my group from Barrio Antioquia, who have been engaging with such issues for years and regularly participate in women's groups, provide a clear definition of street harassment, and recognize it as a problem that is culturally normalized, however not normal per se. Other groups that have formed more recently and lack a clear conceptual framework had difficulty providing a unified definition. For 7 participants, street harassment is not perceived as a problem and therefore considered a normal occurrence of everyday life. Opposite to this, 19 participants view it as problematic, recognizing its roots in socialization and upbringing.

No es que sea normal, sino normalizado. No se puede gastar tanta energía cada vez que esto sucede para estar enojado o molesto. Después de un tiempo, se vuelve tedioso. (Transcript H05)

Overall, the understanding and acceptance of street harassment appear to vary, with some participants unaware of the term but familiar with the behaviour, reflecting a continuum from normal to normalized to naturalized conceptualisation towards this issue. At this point, the distinction between "normal" and "normalized" is crucial in understanding the pervasive nature of gender-based inequalities and violence. While something may be deemed "normal" within a given societal context, it does not necessarily mean it is acceptable or just.

In contrast, when a harmful behaviour or attitude becomes "normalized," it suggests that it has been ingrained into the fabric of society to the extent that it is no longer questioned or challenged. This distinction highlights the insidious nature of gender-based violence, which, despite being widely acknowledged as problematic, continues to persist due to societal conditioning and acceptance. One participant highlighted a progression from describing street harassment as "normal" to "normalized" and finally to "naturalized." This transition reflects a deep-seated societal acceptance and normalization of gender-based violence ingrained within Latin American *machismo* culture. In this context, street harassment is perceived as an inherent aspect of gender roles, where men hold dominance and privilege, while women are relegated to subordinate positions. The term "naturalized" suggests that such behaviour has become so deeply entrenched in cultural norms that it is considered an inherent and inevitable part of societal dynamics, further reinforcing the power imbalances between genders.

Nosotros le decimos que está naturalizado, porque hace parte de esa cultura machista latina de que el hombre es el hombre y es el dueño de todo y tiene sus privilegios, y nosotras estamos en esa condición de subordinación. (Transcript E01)

All participants except for two affirmed that they would feel better or safer without street harassment, especially concerning the future well-being of their children. This sentiment highlights the widespread recognition of street harassment as a pervasive issue that undermines feelings of safety and security in public spaces. For many, the normalization of street harassment reflects a troubling societal acceptance of behaviour that should be deemed unacceptable. Despite this normalization, there is a clear desire among participants for a society where street harassment is not tolerated, particularly to ensure a safer environment for future generations. This suggests a collective aspiration for change and underscores the importance of addressing street harassment as a significant social problem.

7.3.1 Nature and frequency of street harassment incidents

[...] una vez me dijeron ballena. Que me pareció una falta de respeto. [...] a ninguna nos gusta que nos traten mal. Sea la condición que tengamos, gorda o nada. Todas merecimos respeto. (Transcript M04)

Out of the participants, 21 reported personal experiences with street harassment. For 5 women, the acknowledgment of these experiences came later in the interview, as they provided examples of the words, situations, and gestures they encountered. This disparity suggests that while some may initially deny experiencing street harassment, a further exploration often reveals instances of such behaviour. In exploring the nature and frequency of street harassment incidents, participants conveyed a clear distinction in the choice of words used for younger versus older women.

Older women are often subjected to insults or derogatory remarks (e.g., "gallina" [chicken], "ballena" [whale]), while younger women face more sexually charged and vulgar language.



Siempre hay ataques y comentarios. Seas viejo o joven, sólo cambian las palabras. Si eres guapa, gorda, vieja... son muy creativos ahí fuera. (Transcript L02)

This differentiation in the types of harassment experienced highlights the varied forms and levels of objectification and disrespect faced by women in public spaces.

A word cloud generated from participant responses visually illustrates the prevalent terms associated with street harassment, providing insight into the language and attitudes perpetuated in such incidents.

Pero ¿cómo así? Pues los hombres. Sí, por supuesto, los hombres. (Transcript H01)

One notable consensus among all 26 women participants was their unanimous agreement regarding the main perpetrators of street harassment. 26 participants identified men as the primary perpetrators. Additionally, there was a shared acknowledgment that older adult men, particularly those aged 40 and upwards, were frequently cited as the main culprits. Interestingly, a smaller subset of participants, comprising three individuals, also included younger men in their responses. However, they noted that younger men tended to be more hesitant or shy when engaging in street harassment, particularly when confronting older women with such behaviour. Conversely, only two participants referenced women as perpetrators, although their remarks were not directed at women in general but rather at specific groups, namely gays and lesbians. Both individuals had suffered physical violence, including rape in one case, committed by women who were therefore considered lesbians by the interviewees. Therefore, according to the interviewee, the violence was specifically committed by "lesbians", not simply women.

However, the collective agreement sheds light on the gendered dynamics inherent in street harassment incidents, underscoring the prevalence of male perpetrators and the age demographic most commonly associated with such behaviour. Likewise, there was also complete agreement when asked whether they believed that other women had had similar experiences and had been victims of street harassment. The consensus here was that all women have this experience in common - regardless of whether it was specifically in their circle of female acquaintances or more abstractly in relation to "all/other" women.

The expert insights shed light on the main perpetrators of street harassment, primarily identifying men as the primary offenders. Participant E01 highlights that these men often hold positions of power and authority, such as police officers, teachers, fathers of the family, or shopkeepers, which exacerbates the vulnerability of the victims. This aligns with the broader societal dynamics where power imbalances between genders perpetuate harassment, with nearly 70% of harassers identified as men in a study conducted in Medellín (see Transcript E01).

7.3.2 Coping mechanisms and responses to street harassment

Participants employ various coping mechanisms and responses to street harassment, with the most common being to simply ignore the harasser (mentioned by 16 participants) and respond with kindness rather than aggression (noted by 2 individuals). Many also use non-verbal cues such as facial expressions to convey their discomfort. In terms of physical responses, participants often resort to flight, such as walking faster or running, changing sidewalks, altering their direction, or even taking a taxi to escape the situation. Others described continuing upon their path but remaining highly vigilant and seeking safety in the presence of other people.

Me protejo buscando otras personas. Porque defenderme, eso no se puede. Tú te vas a defender y no sabes qué consecuencia te trae. Yo prefiero alejarme, buscar protección de otras personas, estar con otras personas, no sentirme sola. (Transcript H02)

When seeking help or support, participants predominantly turn to female figures such as psychologists, group discussions in community centres or initiatives where other women are present, friends and family members (including mothers, neighbours, daughters, and sisters). However, two participants mentioned that they refrain from discussing their experiences because they believe they are not considered important and one individual expressed frustration that she could not always talk to someone about her experiences due to fear of blame or judgment.

Street harassment, a pervasive form of gendered violence experienced by women globally, frequently faces dismissal or trivialization when women recount their encounters with it.

Often portrayed as mere compliments, such behaviour places an undue burden on recipients, compelling them to either ignore or respond to these breaches of civil inattention. Research indicates that street harassment contributes to heightened levels of anxiety and depression, fosters self-objectification, and perpetuates victim-blaming attitudes (Fairchild 2023).

7.4 Factors influencing Street Harassment

Transitioning from the varied perceptions of public spaces, it becomes evident that the experiences of street harassment are contingent on several factors such as location and time. Two participants spontaneously raised this point during the interviews, underscoring the importance of delving into the contextual nuances of street harassment.

Generalmente, eso depende de varios factores. Por ejemplo, de la hora, de la zona, del acompañamiento porque esa ciudad en los espacios es muy diversa. Entonces, hay lugares que a cualquier hora tú los percibes como peligrosos. Algunas zonas del centro, por ejemplo. Algunos barrios a todas horas se perciben como peligrosos. Hay otros barrios que todo el tiempo tú los percibes como tranquilos. Allá no pasa nada. Laureles y ese tipo de barrios. Y hay otros que dependen de la hora. Tú puedes ir a un lugar como El Poblado en el día y es genial, no pasa nada, todo es tranquilo. Pero si vas después de cierta hora, se vuelve un lugar que es una percepción más pesada. Entonces acá todo depende de eso, de la hora, del espacio en general. (Transcript P01)

The time and location significantly influence individuals' experiences of street harassment, as reported by the majority of participants. 20 interviewees noted that incidents are more frequent at night, attributing this to factors such as alcohol and drug consumption, lack of adequate lighting, and the rise of illegal activities in urban areas. Conversely, some participants mentioned that during the daytime, it is easier to either ignore or anticipate potential harassment. Additionally, several participants acknowledged that the prevalence of street harassment depends on the specific location, with Medellín's crowded city centre being highlighted as a particularly problematic area by 10 individuals. Participants identified hidden places, corners, and certain neighbourhoods as areas where they were more likely to experience harassment. Interestingly, a third of the participants mentioned that they feel safer in their own neighbourhoods, not necessarily because they are inherently safer, but rather because they are more familiar with the surroundings, including the layout of the streets, local businesses, and the presence of familiar faces.

Expert insights extend the discussion beyond street harassment to encompass other forms of sexual harassment within institutional settings, particularly educational institutions. Participant E01 underscores the prevalence of harassment in schools and universities, where daily reports of harassment are common. Of particular concern is the harassment of girls in school bathrooms, which is treated as a joke or game by perpetrators but inflicts significant emotional and psychological harm on the victims.

Additionally, Participant H10 draws attention to public transportation, particularly the metro and buses, as significant problem areas due to their crowded nature and close proximity to others. This underscores how harassment permeates various public spaces and highlights the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address and prevent such behaviour. Furthermore, the expert insights corroborate the participants' perspectives on the frequency and timing of street harassment. Nighttime and the early morning hours are identified as the period of higher risk for women on the streets. The location also plays a crucial role, with harassment occurring more frequently in areas with higher foot traffic, such as parks or public spaces with various activities.

Strikingly, also experts (see Transcript H10) emphasize feeling safer in her own neighbourhoods, highlighting the influence of familiar surroundings on perceived safety, and demonstrating that fear intensifies in unfamiliar or central areas, even during daytime.

A fascinating study on conflicts in Medellín, though not only related to street harassment but also encompassing broader issues, unveils intriguing insights. Notably, the analysis reveals that Friday and Saturday, accounting for 23% and 21% of incidents respectively, coincide with heightened social activities, likely linked to leisure, parties, and alcohol or drug use, as already indicated by my interview participants. Moreover, the temporal distribution showcases that 35% of disputes occur during nighttime hours, between 7:00 p.m. and midnight, with another 23% happening in the morning hours, from 1 a.m. to midday. The overwhelming majority of incidents (89%) transpire in public places like streets, parks, vacant lots, and sports fields (Duque and Montoya 2013, pp. 171–172), further reinforcing the significance of public spaces in the occurrence of conflicts, as highlighted by interviewee's accounts.

Participants noted that street harassment is at its worst when they are alone, with 16 individuals expressing this sentiment. Even when in groups of girls, although there may be a feeling of protection, comments still occur frequently. Furthermore, the experience can be negative when with children, as women are often objectified as either "the pretty mom" or seen as capable of bearing more children. Interestingly, nearly all participants mentioned feeling safer when accompanied by men, as their presence tends to command more respect.

Si [mujeres] están acompañados de una pareja ya es algo diferente. Entonces nadie te diría nada en las calles. Pueden mirar, claro. Pero cuando un hombre está de tu lado, se callan. Entonces respetan a los hombres, no a ti. Hay tantas cosas que considerar y evitar, pero a veces nada sirve. No importa la hora del día, cómo te vistes... (Transcript M01)

However, it is worth noting that this is not always the case, as exemplified by one participant's experience of harassment even when accompanied by the father of her children.

O que, por ejemplo, yo una vez iba con el papá de mis niños, de mis hijos, cuando un hombre dijo "déjalo, mi amor, déjalo, ir sola y ven conmigo". O hagan cosas, gestos...rítmicas. (Transcript L02)

Overall, while the form or intensity of harassment may change depending on the circumstances, the fundamental experience remains consistent for many: it is perceived as worst when individuals are alone and best when accompanied by a male figure.

7.4.1 Participants' Proposals for Combatting Street Harassment

[...] siempre tiene que estar uno como...pendiente. Mirar siempre para todos lados. [...] Los espacios públicos, las cosas peatonales, deben de ser libres, libres de humo, libres de contaminación, libres de acoso, libres de todo restrictivo, pero no son, lamentablemente. (Transcript A02)

In response to the pressing issue of street harassment, participants not only express a desire for change but also offer insightful ideas and suggestions for improving safety in public spaces. They emphasize the importance of fostering maturity and education, particularly targeting boys both at home and in schools. Verbal communication within families is deemed crucial and participants stress the role of values taught at home, particularly to men and sons, highlighting the lack of positive examples and role models in society. Moreover, there is a call for a shift in public consciousness towards respecting women and addressing the pervasive culture of *machismo*. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of practical measures such as increased lighting in public spaces, heightened vigilance from law enforcement, and the implementation of workshops within community initiatives. These initiatives aim to empower individuals with knowledge and skills to recognize and respond to street harassment effectively. Many participants advocate for the increased involvement of female police officers and law enforcement agencies equipped with knowledge and training about this form of violence and how to support victims. Additionally, participants advocate for collaborative efforts between community initiatives, local government, and global organizations to tackle the issue comprehensively. Importantly, the discussion extends to the alarming phenomenon of femicides, with participants linking it to ingrained cultural norms and attitudes towards women, further emphasizing the urgent need for societal change.

Los hombres, la verdad es que ya no tienen un límite para respetar a las mujeres porque ven tanta violencia. Son tan inseguros que tienen que matar a la persona cuando dice "te dejo, no quiero estar más con usted". Porque ha habido mucho de eso, se mata a muchas mujeres, porque dejan a su pareja o porque la pareja decide no estar más con ellos y ¿qué hacen? - vuelven, pero a matarlas. (Transcript B01)

Prominently, the focus of change is seen less in the private sphere and more as a societal shift that necessitates support from government bodies and local authorities.

The expert insights provide a comprehensive perspective on the pervasive issue of street harassment, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to address its complex underlying causes. Beyond surface-level solutions such as improved lighting and accessible assistance points, there is a pressing need for comprehensive education initiatives targeting both individuals and institutions. These initiatives should aim to challenge deeply ingrained societal norms and attitudes towards gender, power dynamics, and the ownership of public spaces (Transcript E01). Moreover, the normalization of harassment underscores the deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers that perpetuate this behaviour.

This normalization not only diminishes the severity of the issue but also exacerbates its prevalence, making it crucial to address it through ongoing sensitization efforts and policy interventions. By engaging in open dialogue, raising awareness, and implementing targeted interventions, society can work towards dismantling the systemic inequalities that contribute to street harassment. Furthermore, the insights highlight the importance of understanding street harassment as a symptom of broader issues related to gender-based violence and inequality. It is essential to recognize the intersectionality of factors such as race, class, and sexuality that compound the experiences of harassment for marginalized individuals. Therefore, any efforts to combat street harassment must be intersectional in nature, acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by different groups within society (Transcript H10). Ultimately, ensuring respect for all individuals in public spaces requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including policymakers, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations (Transcript E02). By collaboratively working towards cultural and systemic shifts, society can foster an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected in public settings.

7.5 Perception of street harassment as a form of violence

In the following, we delve into the participants' perceptions of street harassment as a form of violence, particularly focusing on its linguistic aspects. 19 participants acknowledged street harassment as a form of violence, emphasizing the profound impact of verbal aggression. They described how verbal harassment could inflict emotional harm, leading to lasting psychological effects. Participants highlighted the importance of tone, intention, and specific words used in street harassment encounters, indicating that these factors contribute to the perceived violence.

Por eso, porque afecta a las personas, la falta de respeto. Especialmente a las mujeres. Hace daño a las personas de forma permanente y cotidiana con palabras, gestos y miradas, y permanece en sus pensamientos. Es violencia porque duele, deja cicatrices y huellas, aunque sean casi siempre invisibles.
(Transcript L02)

However, four participants viewed street harassment as something normal, while three others did not consider it violence because it lacked physicality, relegating it to the category of mere harassment ("acoso").

The expert opinions shed light on the insidious nature of language as a form of violence, particularly evident in street harassment and the use of derogatory remarks. Language carries significant weight due to its underlying meanings and representations, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others. The symbolic nature of language in harassment situations, such as catcalling or lewd comments, underscores its power to demean and objectify individuals, especially women (Transcript E01). Moreover, the normalization of certain language and expressions contributes to the perpetuation of violence.

Such language not only offends but also reinforces harmful stereotypes and power dynamics, further marginalizing individuals and perpetuating gender-based violence. The reluctance to acknowledge language as a form of violence stems from the unequal power dynamics between genders, with men often exploiting their perceived superiority to assert dominance and control. This abuse of power disregards the feelings and autonomy of others, reflecting a broader societal issue of prioritizing male desires over respect and comfort for all individuals (Transcript E02). Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in giving a name to problems or concepts, making them visible and understandable. It serves as a tool for communication and comprehension, allowing individuals to articulate their experiences and navigate social interactions. In the context of street harassment, language not only communicates explicit messages but also conveys underlying power dynamics and societal norms. A very compelling example provided by one of the experts sheds light on the intricate dynamics of language and its role in verbal harassment or objectification. It exemplifies the importance of recognizing that before individuals can even feel offended or insulted by language, they must possess a certain degree of linguistic proficiency in the culture where such expressions are rooted.

A ver si hoy me acuerdo de un piropo. Ah, bueno, uno que le escuché en estos días, dice que, si tú fueras una galleta, yo te compraría como una cúquita. Aquí la cúca en la vagina. Y hay unas galletas que se llaman las cucas. (Transcript E01)

This statement exemplifies how language, particularly slang and culturally specific expressions, can carry hidden meanings and perpetuate harmful stereotypes or objectification. In this instance, the seemingly innocuous remark about buying someone like a "cúquita" (a type of cookie) takes on a more derogatory connotation when one understands the slang term "cúca" referring to the vagina (vulva). The discomfort or offense caused by such language extends beyond mere tone or facial expression; it stems from an understanding of the underlying meaning encoded in the words and slang used.

This underscores the importance of linguistic awareness in recognizing and addressing instances of verbal harassment or objectification, as it is through understanding the language used that individuals can fully comprehend the harmful intent behind certain remarks. Ultimately, recognizing language as a form of violence is essential for addressing and combating street harassment effectively. It requires challenging ingrained attitudes and norms, promoting respect and empathy, and holding perpetrators accountable for their words and actions. By fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding, society can work towards creating safer and more inclusive public spaces for everyone.

In theorizing the relationship between language and violence, Paul Ricoeur delves into the intricate dynamics that underpin human interaction and expression. He explores how language can both serve as a vehicle for violence and as a means to oppose it, shedding light on the complexities inherent in this connection. Through his analysis, Ricoeur offers insights into how language can be harnessed as a tool for confronting and mitigating violence, ultimately contributing to the pursuit of peace and understanding in society. The discourse explores the intricate relationship between violence and language, highlighting the significance of this connection in understanding human existence. Rather than viewing violence solely through extreme manifestations like murder, Ricoeur's discourse suggests that violence permeates various aspects of human interaction and expression, encompassing desires, fears, dominance, and oppression. He argues against oversimplifying violence and emphasizes the need to consider its multifaceted nature, spanning from external forces to internal conflicts within individuals. The discussion extends to the role of language as both a medium for expressing violence and a tool for rationality and discourse. Language, it suggests, stands in opposition to violence, representing a means to mitigate and confront it. However, he acknowledges the complexities of this opposition, as violence often finds expression within the discourse itself. Ricoeur concludes with practical guidelines for using language in the face of violence emphasizing the importance of recognizing violence where it exists and upholding non-violent principles in discourse. Additionally, he advocates for respecting the diversity of languages and modes of expression as a means to work towards rational meaning and understanding (Ricoeur 1998). Following on from this, Slavoj Žižek's exploration of language, violence, and non-violence delves into the intricate ways in which language can perpetuate or resist violence within society. Žižek argues that language is not inherently peaceful, as it can be manipulated to propagate ideologies of oppression and domination. However, he also posits that language holds the potential for subversion and resistance, serving as a tool for challenging oppressive structures and advocating for non-violent alternatives. Through his analysis, Žižek underscores the critical importance of language in shaping social relations and contends that harnessing its transformative power is essential in the struggle against violence and injustice (Žižek 2016).

7.5.1 Language's Role in Reproducing Gender Stereotypes

When asked about their perspectives on the role of language in perpetuating gender stereotypes, 10 participants recognized the influence of language in reinforcing a culture of *machismo*, where men traditionally hold more power and authority. They expressed concerns about how men are often allowed to behave and speak inappropriately without consequence, while women are expected to remain silent. One participant highlighted the pervasive nature of *machismo* culture, which normalizes and even tolerates men's misconduct in public spaces. Another participant emphasized the unequal power dynamics between men and women, questioning who would challenge or deter men's behaviour when it goes unchecked.

Pues yo creo influye demasiado. Es diferente cuando un hombre o una mujer se comportan mal. Los hombres son físicamente más fuertes y también tenemos la cultura machista... a nadie le importa cuando los hombres se comportan mal. Es aceptado en las calles, digan lo que digan y es respetado o tolerado por otros hombres. Siguen haciendo públicamente lo que les da la gana. Sin consecuencias. ¿Quién detendría ese comportamiento? (Transcript M01)

However, it is important to note that this was a complex question, with some participants unable to provide a clear answer and others expressing uncertainty about the issue.

The experts highlight the transformative power of language in reshaping societal norms and addressing social inequalities. Through processes of subversion, narratives, word structures, and meanings can be altered, as exemplified by efforts to reinterpret songs or children's stories that perpetuate gender subordination (Transcript E01). This underscores the importance of redefining cultural constructs like catcalling, wherein offensive remarks objectify women, necessitating the creation of alternative expressions that reshape perceptions and challenge power dynamics (Transcript H10). Such linguistic interventions are crucial in dismantling entrenched systems of oppression and redefining gender identities beyond traditional roles of dominance and submission, as evident in societal attitudes towards prostitution and the objectification of female bodies.

Research suggests that language plays a significant role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, with linguistic structures and discourse patterns often reflecting and reinforcing societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity. In Mary Crawford's work, "Talking Difference: On Gender and Language," the author highlights how linguistic structures, expressions, and social norms contribute to the perpetuation of gendered expectations and inequalities. She examines how language can encode and reinforce stereotypes about gender roles, behaviours, and identities, thereby influencing individuals' perceptions and interactions within society.

According to her research, language plays a pivotal role in reproducing gender stereotypes through the use of linguistic markers such as pronouns, adjectives, and verb forms that reinforce traditional gender roles and hierarchies. Additionally, societal norms and linguistic conventions often dictate specific linguistic styles and speech patterns associated with masculinity and femininity, further solidifying and perpetuating gendered expectations and inequalities (Crawford 1997). Furthermore, Mary Talbot's examination of "Language and Gender" extends to how linguistic structures, discourse patterns, and communicative strategies contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms and stereotypes. This involves exploring how language subtly reflects and perpetuates societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity, including the use of gendered pronouns, lexical choices, and speech styles. Moreover, Talbot investigates how language is utilized to construct and maintain gender hierarchies, emphasizing its role in shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviours within social contexts (Talbot 2019).

7.5.2 Observations on shifts in street language regarding gender roles

The majority of participants (14) expressed the view that street language concerning gender roles has always been negative and has not shown any significant improvement or change over time. Additionally, six participants noted that the language has become worse in recent years. However, one participant highlighted a unique perspective, suggesting that there may be a shift in language among younger individuals, particularly with the emergence of slang and the influence of the internet. This participant emphasized the importance of paying attention to online platforms and social media, as they can play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours, especially among the youth. This observation underscores the dynamic nature of language and its evolution in the context of changing societal norms and technological advancements.

Así que, a los niños que estoy criando ahora, los voy a criar como hombres con respeto. Pero uno tiene que prestar mucha atención con el Internet, los redes sociales porque eso les enseña en otra dirección. (Transcript M01)

The experts emphasize the dynamic nature of language in Colombia, noting its continuous evolution with the emergence of new words and expressions, particularly among young people (Transcript E01). This linguistic evolution extends beyond physical spaces to the virtual sphere, including social media platforms and online communities. However, despite these shifts, there remains a concern that much of this language still perpetuates aggression and disrespect, often originating in environments characterized by drug use and bullying. While there is some indication of increased awareness of street harassment, with adults with higher educational backgrounds being more mindful of their behaviour, there still is a need for greater efforts to foster a language of respect and solidarity, especially among younger generations.

The linguistic changes observed underscore broader shifts in social consciousness, both off- and online, and ongoing efforts to resist and transform harmful cultural norms (Transcript H10).

Although research about observations on shifts in street language regarding gender roles remains limited, a study conducted in Medellín sheds some light on the subject, particularly concerning the youth population and influences from the English language showing linguistic dynamism and flexibility. In "Reflecting on Second Language Literacies in Medellín: An Exploration of English in Physical Spaces" by Raúl Alberto Mora et al., the study observes shifts in street language regarding gender roles. Specifically, the researchers note how the adoption of English phrases and expressions in physical spaces in Medellín has influenced street language dynamics, including the portrayal of gender roles. They highlight that the incorporation of English elements into the street language often reflects broader societal trends and may contribute to the reinforcement or challenging of traditional gender norms and stereotypes within urban environments. The research conducted in Medellín unveiled a fascinating trend where language usage extends beyond mere fashion or passing trends.

Contrary to the perception of Medellín as a monolingual city, the findings uncovered a rich tapestry of linguistic diversity. Observations made in various urban settings, including restaurants, malls, bookshops, and libraries, provided compelling evidence of people's adeptness at manipulating language to convey meaning. This urban literacy is a reflection of the fluid dynamics of language and how individuals navigate communication using words from multiple languages without deep knowledge of them. Additionally, the study unearthed a plethora of linguistic nuances in the city's physical spaces, including irony, humour, and even profanity. Quotations, song lyrics, and motivational phrases adorn storefronts, serving as strategies to engage customers and reflect their interests, thereby diversifying approaches to customer engagement. The emergence of informal language learning spaces beyond traditional academic institutions highlights how individuals engage with languages through various literacy practices, whether consciously or incidentally (Mora et al. 2016).

7.6 Reflections on how language affects self-perception and societal opportunities for women

Pues, [el lenguaje] influye en cómo te sientes, cómo vistes, cuándo sales y con quién. (Transcript L06)

The majority of participants (19) acknowledged that language does indeed affect self-perception and societal opportunities for women. They described feeling differently about themselves depending on the context: at home, they may feel pretty, but in the streets, they often feel objectified or even ugly when talked to.

This dichotomy in perception can lead to feelings of sadness or anger and may result in avoidance of certain places or reluctance to go out at night. Moreover, participants noted that while being admired or receiving compliments can boost self-esteem, experiencing derogatory or offensive language can undermine one's sense of dignity. Notably, two participants highlighted the issue of victim blaming, where women are unfairly held responsible for street harassment based on their appearance or attire, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. On the other hand, some participants (4) perceive certain forms of street harassment as admiration, although it is not expressed respectfully. Despite the disrespectful nature of these actions, some girls and women interpret them as signs of admiration, seeking validation and recognition for their worth and beauty in society.

Sí, admiración, porque le sube más el ego a una. Cuando los hombres hacen milagros, adulan o gritan, a las mujeres les gusta que las adulen. A las mujeres les gusta. Algunas incluso lo necesitan. Si nadie dice nada... puede hacerle dudar de tu valía o belleza. (Transcript M03)

Additionally, participants emphasized the unequal treatment of men and women in public spaces, with men often enjoying more freedom and autonomy while women feel the need to be cautious and vigilant, especially regarding their appearance and behaviour.

Limita salir más tarde o más temprano o vestirse de cierta manera, sí, eso sí limita. Claro, no se previene del acoso, pero se limita a sí mismo. (Transcript H01)

However, a few participants (3) expressed that their self-concept remains unchanged despite societal language norms, indicating a strong sense of self-awareness and resilience. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that language can still impose limitations on their choices and behaviours, such as dressing differently, hoping to reduce the risk of harassment. These reflections underscore the complex interplay between language, self-perception, and societal norms in shaping women's experiences in public spaces.

The study "Language and Identity: Exploring the Link Between Language Use and Self-Perception" by S. Abdullayev delves into the intricate connection between language use and self-perception. Abdullayev investigates how individuals' language choices impact their sense of self and identity, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between language and self-concept. His research emphasizes how language serves as a potent emblem of cultural identity, embodying traditions, values, and shared experiences within communities. It further examines the influence of language on self-perception, highlighting its role in shaping self-image, self-understanding, and worldview. The language individuals use to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences molds their self-image and understanding. Furthermore, language provides a cognitive framework that shapes individuals' worldviews and interpretations. The nuances, expressions, and vocabulary available in a language influence individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and self-perception.

Language, deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts, reflects and reinforces broader cultural values and social expectations, thereby influencing self-perception within those contexts (Abdullayev and Kholbekova 2023). Here we have a very different angle, shifting the focus from solely examining the self-perception of participants who experience street harassment—feeling emotions like shame, sadness, or anger—to considering the perspective of the harasser. This perspective delves into the linguistic and cultural background of the harasser, exploring their worldview and self-perception within the context of harassment. This perspective delves into the linguistic and cultural background of the harasser, revealing crucial insights into their worldview and self-perception amid acts of harassment. It exposes the severe power imbalances inherent in such interactions, where men assert words of harassment while women endure them silently. This glaring hierarchy not only underscores the linguistic dynamics but also serves as a poignant reminder of the pervasive societal structures that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality. It speaks volumes about the unequal distribution of power and privilege, where the voices of harassers overpower the silenced voices of their victims, perpetuating a cycle of oppression and marginalization.

7.6.1 Evaluation of language as a tool for empowering women

El lenguaje no es algo solamente personal, es algo público, algo de la política. (Transcript M04)

Exploration of language as a tool for empowering women and addressing social inequalities, reveals various perspectives among participants. While 7 participants cannot either answer the question, or do not consider language as an empowering tool, the majority (19) acknowledge the power of language in fostering mutual respect and creating a sense of security, emphasizing the importance of speaking, and treating each other with dignity and respect. They note that respectful communication can contribute to a safer and more inclusive environment, allowing individuals to feel empowered and capable of pursuing their aspirations.

Porque el lenguaje es muy importante, porque esa es la forma de expresarse y de que uno sepa qué le pasa a la otra persona, viceversa. Entonces, el lenguaje es muy importante. Sí. (Transcript L06)

However, within this acknowledgment lies a deeper recognition of the challenges and complexities associated with language use. Several participants highlight instances where language perpetuates social inequalities and reinforces gender stereotypes. For example, some note that certain words or expressions, particularly those used to address women, can carry connotations of disrespect or objectification, contributing to a culture of harassment and discrimination. Additionally, participants point to the impact of language in shaping perceptions and interactions, both in virtual spaces and the workplace.

Es importante cómo se habla. Especialmente como mujer. Más aún en el ámbito laboral. El tono de voz, las palabras que utilizas... (Transcript M01)

They emphasize the need for respectful and appropriate language to facilitate understanding and empathy, particularly in online interactions where anonymity may lead to a lack of civility.

Porque en cuanto a lo virtual [...] muchas veces no vemos a la persona que está al otro lado. Es más fácil perder el respeto y ser maleducado. Es importante ver al otro como una persona completa. Un ser humano. Hemos perdido mucho respeto y empatía. La gente se ha vuelto muy egoísta y creemos que podemos tratar a cualquiera como nos apetezca. Y un lenguaje respetuoso y apropiado puede ser de gran ayuda. Es muy importante hablar correctamente. Es el primer paso hacia un mayor entendimiento e intercambio y menos acoso e insulto. (Transcript M01)

Moreover, participants draw attention to the role of language in perpetuating societal norms and values, including traditional notions of gender roles and power dynamics. They note that language can serve as a tool for resistance against oppressive structures, yet also recognize its potential to reproduce and reinforce existing inequalities.

One participant highlights the limitations imposed by language barriers, particularly for women, which can restrict access to education, employment, and social opportunities. Another underscores the importance of language in political discourse, where rhetoric and messaging can shape public opinion and influence policy decisions. Additionally, participants discuss the impact of language on self-perception and societal opportunities for women, noting how derogatory language and gendered stereotypes can undermine confidence and limit agency.

Despite these challenges, participants express optimism about the transformative potential of language when used responsibly and inclusively. They advocate for the adoption of language practices that promote gender equality, challenge harmful stereotypes, and foster empathy and understanding. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of education and awareness-raising efforts to promote linguistic diversity and combat linguistic discrimination. Overall, participants highlight the multifaceted role of language in shaping social dynamics and advocate for its respectful and empowering use to promote gender equality and combat violence.

Pues si a uno... tratan bien, uno va tranquilo, se siente seguro. Y cuando te sientes tranquila y segura y puedes ir donde quieras sin importar tu aspecto ni tu forma de vestir. Puedes ocuparte de otras cosas, quizás sentirte menos dependiente y pequeña, darte cuenta de más posibilidades y de tus propias capacidades. (Transcript L02)

According to experts, the power of language to transform situations and address social inequalities depends greatly on how it is utilized. It serves as our initial point of interaction with others and the world around us.

[...] creo que [el lenguaje] es la primera manera que nosotros nos enfrentamos con el otro y con el mundo. Y entonces, es nuestro primer punto de encuentro con otra persona. (Transcript E02)

Language can either be a tool for violence or a means of resistance. For instance, the ongoing debate surrounding the use of inclusive language, such as the adoption of the "E" in Spanish to represent gender neutrality, illustrates how language can challenge traditional norms and highlight the existence of individuals outside the binary gender spectrum. Similarly, discussions within feminism regarding the recognition of pregnant individuals beyond the confines of traditional gender labels exemplify how language can provoke critical reflections on societal constructs. In the context of street harassment, a simple greeting can morph into an act of violence when infused with malicious intent, underscoring the dual nature of language as both a tool for resistance and a vehicle for oppression. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the significance of language in scrutinizing and addressing issues of violence against women.

Language serves as both an agent of social change and a tool for identity formation, reflecting and contributing to the dynamic nature of social identities. Social movements, cultural shifts, and globalization influence language practices, giving rise to new varieties, codes, or registers tied to specific social identities. In recent years, there has been a notable surge in feminist discourse surrounding language, epitomized by works such as "Wordslut: A Feminist Guide to Taking Back the English Language" by Amanda Montell, alongside gendering approaches observed across various languages and influential movements like #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo. "Wordslut: A Feminist Guide to Taking Back the English Language" by Amanda Montell serves as a compelling call to action, shedding light on the often-overlooked connection between language and power dynamics. Montell argues that many speakers of a language are unaware of the direct correlation between language and control, urging readers to recognize the transformative potential of linguistic empowerment. By fostering a language that is more inclusive and representative of a diverse world, individuals can challenge existing systems of oppression and advocate for social justice (Montell 2019). This broader conversation about gendering language extends beyond English and encompasses efforts around the world to promote linguistic inclusivity. However, these efforts are often met with resistance, exemplified by initiatives such as the planned "gender star" ban in schools and administration in some German federal states.

Drawing on the transformative potential of language, various movements worldwide have leveraged its power to effect social change and champion gender equality. The #NiUnaMenos movement, originating in Argentina, utilized powerful slogans such as "Ni Una Menos" (Not One Less) to raise awareness about femicide and violence against women.

By employing emotionally charged language, this movement successfully mobilized individuals and communities to demand policy reforms and societal shifts to combat gender-based violence. Similarly, the #MeToo movement, sparked by activist Tarana Burke, gained momentum globally through the use of social media platforms. The hashtag #MeToo provided a platform for survivors of sexual harassment and assault to share their stories, breaking the silence surrounding these issues and holding perpetrators accountable. Language played a crucial role in amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging entrenched power structures, leading to widespread cultural reckoning and calls for institutional change. Moreover, slogans like "Girls Just Wanna Have Fundamental Rights" and "My Body, My Choice" have become rallying cries for reproductive rights and gender equality movements worldwide. By encapsulating complex social and political issues in succinct and memorable phrases, these movements effectively communicated their core messages and galvanized public support. However, despite their successes, these movements have also faced significant challenges and resistance. Criticism, backlash, and attempts to undermine their goals have highlighted the enduring struggle for gender equality and the need for continued advocacy and awareness-raising efforts. Nonetheless, their impact on public discourse and policy reform underscores the transformative potential of language in driving social change and advancing gender justice.

8 Conclusion

To address the research question regarding the influence of Medellín's urban environment on gender dynamics, particularly concerning street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender among women, this study mainly used semi-structured interviews, conducted with 26 women residing in Medellín to explore their experiences and perceptions of street harassment in public spaces, that were then complemented and discussed with additional literature on the topic. This concluding section encapsulates the summary of key findings regarding the influence of Medellín's urban environment on gender dynamics, offers policy recommendations for creating safer public spaces, acknowledges the limitations of the research, and suggests avenues for future inquiry.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study provides valuable insights into street harassment and gender dynamics in Medellín, shedding light on various key findings:

1. **Perceptions of Public Spaces:** Participants' perceptions of public spaces in Medellín were notably influenced by the city's historical legacies of conflict and prevailing gender socialization norms. The women interviewed expressed perceived vulnerability attributed to societal expectations and past experiences of violence, significantly impacting their sense of safety and freedom of movement within urban environments. This underscores the intricate interplay between gender dynamics and urban landscapes, emphasizing the necessity of contextual understanding in shaping perceptions of safety and accessibility to public spaces.
2. **Early Gender Socialization:** Gender socialization emerged as a key finding, highlighting the distinct upbringing of boys and girls in Medellín. Participants described how societal norms and cultural expectations reinforce traditional gender roles, perpetuating inequalities and contributing to the normalization of street harassment. Participants described how gender socialization begins in early childhood, with boys and girls being socialized differently based on societal expectations and norms. Boys are often encouraged to assert dominance and exhibit behaviours associated with strength and power, while girls are taught to be passive, nurturing, and compliant. This gendered upbringing stems from entrenched cultural beliefs and historical legacies, perpetuating traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.
3. **Frequency and Nature of Street Harassment:** Street harassment emerged as a pervasive issue in Medellín, spanning from looks and gestures to verbal catcalling to instances of physical assault, predominantly targeting women and gender-nonconforming individuals.

Participants detailed the lingering impacts of insecurity and gender-based violence in post-agreement Medellín, revealing a clear demand for community-driven initiatives and policy interventions aimed at creating safer and more inclusive public environments for all residents.

4. **Coping Mechanisms and Responses:** Women employed various coping mechanisms, such as avoiding eye contact, dressing differently, altering routes, or seeking preferably male companionship, to mitigate the risk of street harassment. Moreover, many participants turned to female figures for emotional support, discussing their experiences and seeking solidarity. Few respondents reported directly responding to harassers, opting instead to avoid confrontation and de-escalate situations. These responses reflect the resilience of individuals navigating urban spaces marked by persistent insecurity.
5. **Factors Influencing Street Harassment:** Structural factors, including inadequate urban infrastructure and entrenched gender inequalities, were identified as contributing to street harassment. Among the participants, prevalent topics included the pervasive influence of *machismo* culture, the ongoing glorification of *narco* culture, and the prevalence of substance abuse in public spaces. Additionally, the timing and location of incidents played a significant role, with evenings and nighttime associated with heightened risk, particularly in poorly lit areas. Interestingly, women reported feeling safer when accompanied by men, reflecting broader societal dynamics around gender and safety. Post-conflict Medellín's transition has highlighted the need to address underlying socio-economic disparities and promote inclusive urban development. Incorporating insights from Gender Studies and urban studies can inform policies that address systemic issues fuelling gender-based violence.
6. **Proposals for Combatting Street Harassment:** Participants proposed a multifaceted approach, including urban planning reforms, education campaigns, encompassing legal reforms, and enhanced access to support services, to combat street harassment effectively. These proposals underscore the importance of intersectional approaches that address both the symptoms and root causes of gender-based violence. Furthermore, these recommendations emphasize the need for immediate measures as well as long-term systemic changes, reinforcing the importance of integrating gender perspectives into legal frameworks and urban policy.
7. **Language's Role in Gender Dynamics:** Language was identified as a powerful tool that reflects and perpetuates gender stereotypes, contributing to the normalization of street harassment which emphasizes the need for linguistic empowerment and gender-sensitive language policies. Participants noted that language not only reflects societal attitudes but also shapes them, perpetuating harmful norms through everyday interactions.

Additionally, there were discussions about the potential for a language shift towards more inclusive and respectful communication, suggesting that efforts to challenge gender-based violence should encompass linguistic analyses and interventions.

8. **Perception of Street Harassment as a Form of Violence:** Participants almost unanimously viewed street harassment as a form of violence with profound psychological and emotional impacts on victims. Recognizing street harassment as a manifestation of broader gender-based violence highlights the interconnectedness of individual experiences with systemic inequalities. Integrating perspectives from Gender Studies and urban studies can inform holistic interventions that address the structural roots of gender-based violence in urban environments.

The key findings reveal that Medellín's urban environment significantly shapes women's experiences of street harassment. Factors such as spatial segregation, socio-economic disparities, and cultural norms were identified as influential in the prevalence and nature of harassment incidents. Linguistic expressions of gender were also found to contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the normalization of harassment. Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of *machismo* culture in reinforcing power imbalances and perpetuating gender-based violence in public spaces. Overall, the research underscores the complex interplay between the urban environment, gender dynamics, and experiences of street harassment among women in Medellín. By shedding light on these dynamics, the study emphasizes the need for comprehensive interventions to create safer and more inclusive urban spaces for all residents, regardless of gender.

8.2 Potential Policy and Intervention Strategies

In the following, I will explore potential policy and intervention strategies aimed at addressing gender-based violence and enhancing urban safety in Medellín, drawing upon insights gleaned from participant interviews regarding their expressed needs and desires for tangible solutions to the pervasive issue of street harassment and insecurity in public spaces. One approach involves establishing **community-led safety initiatives** in collaboration with local residents, NGOs, and governmental agencies. Community-led safety initiatives could encompass neighbourhood watch programs for patrolling streets and reporting suspicious activities, community forums to address safety concerns and propose solutions, self-defence classes, and graffiti or mural projects aimed at reclaiming public spaces through community art. These initiatives foster community engagement and ownership, tailor interventions to local needs and contexts, and promote social cohesion and solidarity. However, they may require time and resources to build trust and rapport within communities and may face challenges in sustaining participation and funding in the long term.

Another strategy entails **enhancing street lighting and urban design features** in areas identified as high-risk for gender-based violence. This includes installing bright LED lights, trimming vegetation to reduce hiding spots, and redesigning public spaces for increased visibility and surveillance. While this approach enhances physical safety and visibility, deters potential perpetrators, and creates a more welcoming environment, it may involve high initial implementation costs, ongoing maintenance requirements, and potential displacement of existing residents or businesses.

Public awareness campaigns and education programs represent another avenue for intervention. These initiatives target diverse audiences, including school children, public transportation users, and community members, to raise awareness about the impacts of street harassment and promote respectful behaviour and bystander intervention. While effective in shifting social norms and attitudes, empowering individuals to speak out against harassment, and fostering a culture of mutual respect, these campaigns require sustained funding and resources for development and implementation, with effectiveness varying based on audience engagement.

Police training and sensitization programs are also essential for improving responsiveness and sensitivity to gender-based violence cases. Specialized training for law enforcement officers on trauma-informed interviewing and de-escalation strategies can enhance trust and confidence among survivors to report incidents and strengthen collaboration between police and community-based organizations. However, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are necessary to ensure accountability and effectiveness, alongside potential resistance or scepticism from law enforcement agencies and challenges in changing entrenched organizational cultures.

Lastly, **safe public transportation initiatives** can significantly enhance safety and security for women during commutes. This includes designated women-only sections on buses and trains, increased surveillance and security personnel at transit hubs, and partnerships with ride-sharing companies to provide safe transport options during late hours. While these initiatives promote greater mobility and independence, they may encounter logistical challenges in implementation and enforcement, resistance from other passengers or transportation providers, and concerns about stigmatization or segregation.

While I consider the implementation of community-based safety initiatives or enhanced street lighting and urban design as relatively easy and more realistic strategies, others pose greater challenges due to their long-term nature, resource requirements, and complexities. For instance, establishing comprehensive legal frameworks to address street harassment may be challenging in the short term due to the intricacies involved in drafting and passing legislation, as well as the need for effective enforcement mechanisms.

Similarly, implementing comprehensive police training programs to address gender-based violence may face obstacles such as the need for extensive resources and efforts to change entrenched organizational cultures within law enforcement agencies. Additionally, language-focused interventions to challenge harmful gender stereotypes may require sustained efforts in education, media, and public discourse to effect long-term societal change. Regarding language interventions, one possible approach could involve developing educational campaigns aimed at promoting gender-inclusive language and challenging sexist or derogatory language in public discourse. This could include initiatives such as workshops, public service announcements, and school curriculum enhancements to raise awareness about the impact of language on gender equality and foster more respectful and inclusive communication practices. However, changing linguistic norms requires long-term efforts and may face resistance from those entrenched in traditional language usage. In conclusion, addressing street harassment comprehensively may require a multifaceted approach that considers both short-term interventions and long-term societal change initiatives.

8.3 Personal Learning Curve and Contribution to the Field

The interview process has been instrumental in enhancing my understanding of the research topic and refining my skills in qualitative data collection and analysis. Reflecting on the interview process, I have learned to be more proactive in searching for participants and to be straightforward in asking and connecting with them. It was also quite insightful to realize that ethics commission reviews can take a lot of time and that interview sessions can be quite draining, leaving me tired, contemplative, or even saddened by some of the stories shared. It was fascinating to observe how some participants deeply reflected on my questions, while others provided brief responses without much exchange of thoughts or stories. I also encountered challenges in connecting with certain participants, which highlighted the importance of rapport-building in qualitative research. Nonetheless, many participants seemed appreciative of having someone listen to their experiences and personal stories. I was surprised by the level of personal insight some participants shared without me prompting them directly. As a first-time interviewer, I navigated the process of organizing interviews and finding suitable locations, noting that schools, while initially chosen, were not always optimal due to noise, resulting in poor audio recording quality. I also found that some questions were more difficult for participants to answer, leading me to learn how to explain or rephrase questions to facilitate understanding or encourage deeper reflection. Furthermore, the invaluable insights provided by experts during the interviews offered more theoretical and detailed approaches, which, in combination with the very personal and subjective views shared by other interviewees, served as a rich starting point for nuanced discussions.

Additionally, I realized the significance of streamlining the interview process by removing certain questions and understanding the sheer volume of data to analyse from 26 interviews, which was more substantial than anticipated at the outset. Reflecting on power and hierarchy structures, it is crucial to acknowledge my positionality as a white German researcher engaging primarily with black women from low-income backgrounds with limited education. While I did not offer compensation for their participation, I recognize the inherent power dynamics at play, where I benefit from their contributions for my academic pursuits while they may not gain anything tangible in return. This raises important ethical considerations about reciprocity and giving back to the community. Moving forward, it is imperative to explore avenues for meaningful engagement and reciprocity, such as sharing research findings with participants or contributing to initiatives that address the issues they face in their communities. This underscores the need for researchers to critically reflect on their roles and responsibilities in conducting ethical and inclusive research.

My research has contributed to the field of Peace and Conflict Studies by delving into the intricacies of post-agreement Medellín, where gender dynamics intersect with urban spaces and violence. The urban environment, specifically in Medellín, served as a crucial backdrop for understanding the gender dynamics and challenges faced by women. The disparity between the gender-sensitive intentions of the 2016 FARC peace agreement and its actual implementation becomes especially pronounced within this urban context, where issues such as street harassment and unequal access to public spaces are prevalent. The exploration of women's very personal experiences has unearthed the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence, revealing its prevalence, manifestations, and underlying structural determinants within the city. By applying a Peace and Conflict Studies lens, the study has unveiled how historical conflict legacies, coupled with persistent socio-cultural norms, contribute to the perpetuation of insecurity and inequality in the urban landscape. Here, my findings underscore the role of structural factors, such as *machismo* culture and the glorification of *narco* ethos, in perpetuating insecurity and inequality in urban environments. Moreover, the research highlights the resilience and agency of women in navigating and coping with the challenges posed by street harassment and gender-based violence in public spaces. In advocating for gender-sensitive urban policies grounded in empirical evidence, the study aims to contribute to positive change and promote social justice, particularly in post-agreement Medellín. The focus on bridging academic research with practical interventions underscores the intent to inform policy-making processes and empower marginalized communities, fostering safer and more inclusive urban environments. Facing the challenge of the limited literature on language, linguistics, and street harassment in Medellín and Colombia, this research stands out in its commitment to addressing essential gaps in understanding the complexities of post-conflict societies.

By navigating these challenges, the study provides a unique perspective that enriches the broader discourse on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, emphasizing the intricate connections between gender, urbanization, and violence in post-conflict contexts.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

While my research provides valuable insights into the experiences of women in Medellín regarding street harassment and access to public spaces, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the absence of individuals with disabilities or a significant representation of queer individuals in the participant group limits the comprehensiveness of the study. While the research did not intentionally exclude these groups, their absence underscores a potential area for future investigation to provide a more inclusive understanding of gender dynamics and experiences of street harassment in urban environments like Medellín. Additionally, the lack of funding limited the scope of the study and its ability to reach a broader and more diverse sample population. As a sole researcher, the study may not fully represent the complexities and nuances of gender dynamics in Medellín. Moreover, while efforts were made to cover a range of topics, there may be additional questions left unexplored that could have provided further depth to the research findings. Also, the research was conducted within a specific urban context in Medellín and may not fully capture the diversity of experiences within the city or in other urban areas in Colombia. Finally, the time constraint of conducting the research within a few months in Medellín limited the depth of the study and the opportunity for longitudinal analysis or more extensive data collection.

As we peer into the future of research on gender dynamics and urban safety in Medellín, recent studies employing advanced algorithms to prevent street harassment provide a glimpse into potential solutions, while also highlighting the persistent need to address underlying cultural norms and structural inequalities. “Indicator of risk of gender-based violence in Medellín’s road network” by Vélez, Salazar Vásquez, and Velasco introduces a method using statistical techniques to identify areas with a high risk of gender-based violence in Medellín. This tool can help city planners and policymakers target interventions more effectively. However, it also raises questions about the reliance on algorithms to address complex social issues like sexual harassment. While it provides a practical solution for identifying risk areas, it does not address the underlying cultural and social factors contributing to gender-based violence (Maria Alejandra Vélez et al. 2023). Similarly, in “Prevention of Street Harassment through constrained Shortest Path Algorithms” Mora, Serna, and Toro propose an algorithm to prevent street harassment by prioritizing safety in route planning. This algorithm considers both distance and safety when suggesting routes to users. The advantage is that it can help individuals avoid potentially risky areas while navigating the city (Mora et al. 2022). However, relying solely on algorithms may not address the root causes of street harassment or create long-term solutions.

Future research could explore how to complement technological solutions with broader cultural and social changes to create safer public spaces for everyone. Future research in this field should therefore aim to address the gaps identified in this study and further deepen our understanding of gender dynamics in urban environments. Specifically, investigating the experiences of marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and ethnic minorities can provide valuable insights into intersectional forms of discrimination and violence. Longitudinal studies could explore changes in perceptions and experiences of street harassment over time, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of interventions and policy measures. Additionally, comparative studies across different urban contexts can help identify common trends and unique challenges, informing more tailored approaches to promoting gender equality and safety in diverse urban settings.

Furthermore, exploring the role of technology, social media, and online spaces in perpetuating or mitigating gender-based violence in urban environments warrants attention. Lastly, embracing participatory research methodologies that actively involve community members in the research process can foster more inclusive, ethical, and impactful studies, ensuring that the voices and experiences of all individuals are adequately represented and respected.

8.5 Final Remarks

In exploring the intricate nexus between gender dynamics, linguistic expressions, and the urban environment in Medellín, Colombia, this thesis delves deeper into the complex interplay shaping women's experiences in public spaces. Rooted in the research question, "How does the urban environment, specifically public spaces in Medellín, influence and intersect with gender dynamics, particularly regarding experiences of street harassment and linguistic expressions of gender, among women living in the city?" the analysis uncovers nuanced layers of influence and interaction. Within the urban fabric of Medellín, public spaces emerge as contested arenas where societal norms, power structures, and individual agency converge. Street harassment, a prevalent issue plaguing women's mobility and safety, reflects broader gendered dynamics entrenched in the urban landscape. From the bustling streets of downtown to the tranquil plazas of residential neighbourhoods, linguistic expressions serve as potent markers of gendered power relations, perpetuating violence, and discrimination. However, beyond the challenges lie opportunities for transformation and empowerment. By delving into the roots of linguistic expressions and societal norms, one can unravel the mechanisms perpetuating gender-based violence and discrimination in urban spaces. Through targeted interventions such as community-led initiatives, urban design reforms, and public awareness campaigns, it appears feasible to foster environments that prioritize respect, dignity, and inclusivity for all residents.

In contemplating the transformative potential of language, I would like to remind of Walter Benjamin's poignant inquiry: "Is any non-violent resolution of conflict possible?" Benjamin's assertion that language, as a medium of understanding and empathy, holds the key to peaceful coexistence resonates deeply in the context of Medellín's urban landscape (Žižek 2016, p. 1). By harnessing the power of language to foster dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect, we can envision a future where public spaces transcend their current limitations, becoming vibrant hubs of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In essence, this thesis serves as a call to action—a call to reimagine Medellín's urban environment as a catalyst for positive social change. Through collective effort and unwavering commitment to challenging entrenched norms, we can pave the way for a city where every individual—regardless of gender—can navigate public spaces with confidence, dignity, and security.

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