

## PHENOMENON OF GRAFFITI: PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Ramil R. Khayrutdinov<sup>1</sup>, Flyora G. Mukhametzyanova<sup>1</sup>, Anton I. Belkin<sup>2</sup> and Natalya A. Sigacheva<sup>1</sup>

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The relevance of the research problem is due to high social significance of youth cultures and deviant behavior of the authors of the graffiti and the lack of a comprehensive socio-psychological research of graffiti, as well as the insufficient development of theoretical and empirical aspects of the study of the relationship between culture and personality and deviant behavior of authors of graffiti. The purpose of this article is to determine the specifics and stages of development of scientific psychological knowledge about the phenomenon of graffiti, as well as the study of written mentality of graffiti and socio-psychological characteristics of authors of graffiti. A leading theoretical approach to socio-psychological phenomenon of graffiti is a cultural, historical, and leading empirical research methods: content analysis, method tests. Theoretical analysis showed that the scientific study of graffiti in a natural phase of transition from the classification-topographic stage to typological socio-psychological, empirical research has revealed a set of personal qualities of the authors of the graffiti. The obtained data allow us to identify a number of features of socio-psychological characteristics of the authors of graffiti, and also the specifics of writing graffiti mentality and their main functions.

**Keywords:** culture, graffiti, graffiti functions, mentality, socio-psychological characteristics of personality.

### INTRODUCTION

In modern society there are many intensive changes in all spheres of life: economic, political, sociocultural etc. The process of transition of the individuality from the psychology of stability to psychology of choice of behaviour, polyidentities and mobility. These processes primarily affect the youth group. However, in psychological science, forms of expression of youth groups still remain under-researched. One of the main ways of individual and group self-expression of a certain part of young people in modern world are graffiti which are illegal in nature, serving as means of constructing psychosocial identities and solutions of individual psychological problems (Belkin, 2008).

Graffiti represent ordinary, intermediate, interdisciplinary reality which is important to understanding the health of today's youth. The phenomenon of graffiti is not an object of art, as non-institutional graffiti are not art, literature – as this is not literature, and linguistics – as graffiti is a fragmented language, etc. From this point of view, the analysis of graffiti primarily lies in the field of studying the psychology of large social groups and mentality, that is, psychology on the

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

<sup>2</sup> Department of General and Social Psychology, Samara State Social and Pedagogical University, Samara, Russia, *E-mail: rotati@mail.ru*

intersection of cultural studies, semiotics, history, and social and cultural-historical psychology.

Graffiti is a significant social problem. In modern world graffiti cause significant financial and social harm to the urban environment in many countries. The annual cost of eliminating illegal graffiti in the United States, according to some estimates, exceeds \$ 4 billion. As graffiti we understand the inscriptions and drawings made by hand and of deinstitutionalized nature (Belkin, 2003).

We should note that the first interest in graffiti emerged in the framework of the archaeological and historical sciences. Archaeological study of graffiti were carried out on the territories of ancient civilizations and medieval states, such as: Ancient Egypt, ancient city of Greece, Italy and the Northern black sea, Russia of 10-12 century, and other (Great Soviet encyclopedia, 1972).

The most common bases of classification of graffiti were their topological and semantic characteristics, and on the basis of data researchers we can identify the types of social practices of using graffiti. First social practices have been associated with magic- pragmatic use of graffiti, that is, non-institutional graffiti was seen primarily as a means of influencing events and signs of the items included.

Analysis of a number of archaeological and historical research graffiti made it possible to identify their main historical function: identification, religious-magical, pragmatic, communicative and protest (Vysotsky, 1985). Studies of the later period are mainly aimed at the study of age, gender, status of authors of graffiti (Lachmann, 1988), as well as to identify the individual personal characteristics of the authors graffiti (Solomon & Yager, 1975). Due to the high prevalence of graffiti and their high importance for the youth subculture the significance of the socio-psychological characteristics of the authors of the graffiti and the psychological mechanism of creating graffiti increases.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

During research following methods were used: descriptive methods (psychological, qualitative interpretation), organizational methods (the method of control groups; method of stating experiment); empirical research methods (the method of fixing the empirical data; the method of qualitative and quantitative analysis of documents content analysis; survey method; the method of psychological testing); mathematical and statistical methods of data processing: (Fisher transformation  $\bar{\sigma}^*$ , W-Wilcoxon criterion and V criterion of van der Waerden). Processing of the results was carried out manually and with the help of the statistical program Stadia.

### **The experimental base of the research**

Empirical research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, we investigated non-institutional inscriptions and drawings on the material of the higher educational institutions in Samara (n=6185), the method of content analysis was used. The

sample consisted of the wall and the toilet graffiti of 14 higher educational institutions (the main sample) and 12 vocational schools (the control sample) in Samara.

The second stage there was a study of the psychological characteristics of the subjects themselves – the authors of the graffiti. The strategy of sampling – randomization was applied. Subjects were asked to fill out forms the traditional psychological methods. In the course of stating experiment, we used the following methods: test of interpersonal relationships T. Leary, the technique of diagnostics of level of subjective control by J. Rotter, 16 PF questionnaire by R. B. Cattell, the technique of diagnostics of motivation of success and avoiding failures of the So-Ehlers. The calculation is done manually and with the statistical program Stadia 6/3 by professor A.B. Kolaychev. For data processing we used the nonparametric tests of W-Wilcoxon criterion and V criterion of van der Waerden.

The sample consisted of the students of psychological faculty of the Samara state pedagogical University (n=248) and the students of Samara state Academy of architecture and construction (n=250). The experimental sample consisted of 80% girls and 20% of boys and in the control group 81% of girls and 19% boys. The age of the subjects in the experimental sample (M=19,6): 19 years – 48%, 20 years – 52%, in the control sample (M=19,5) – 19 years – 45%, 20 years – 55%. All subjects are not married. According to the criterion of  $\varphi^*$  experimental and control samples do not differ in size ( $p>0.05$ ).

### **The stages of the research**

The study of the problem was carried out in three stages.

During the first stage theoretical analysis of the psychological literature was carried out; the main categories of empirical research graffiti were defined.

During the second stage the features of requirement of the individual sphere of the authors of the graffiti on the graffiti material of higher educational institutions and vocational schools of the city of Samara, Russia were revealed.

During the third phase the stating experiment to determine the specificity of the personality and interpersonal relations of the authors of the graffiti was done, processing and analysis of experimental results, formulation of conclusions were carried out.

The theoretical hypothesis of the study is: the scientific study of graffiti is a natural phase of transition from the classification-topographic stage to typological socio-psychological stage that reflects the logic of development of scientific knowledge, which moves from description to explanation and prediction in the study of psychological phenomena of social reality. We also put forward the empirical hypothesis that non-institutional expressive activity is multi motivated activities, which main motivational trends are the pursuit to the construction of psychosocial identity and the sublimation of intrapersonal conflict.

## RESULTS

Content-analytical research has shown that basic needs which are met during non-institutional artistic activity are social needs (51.1 per cent in primary and 61.5% in control sample), particularly – needs for the identity (42,9% and 56.3%), and also the needs for self-actualization (27,5% and 18.1%). The results of the empirical research has shown that graffiti is created mainly to meet the needs of their authors ' identity ( $p<0.01$ ), acting as a means of constructing psychosocial identity.

The data of the third phase of the study show that all the relevant indicators are expressed in both groups in a moderate way. In the study of peculiarities of interpersonal relations it was revealed that all types of interpersonal relationships in the experimental group expressed at a moderate level. It indicates adaptive behavior of the authors of the graffiti in relation towards others. The exception is subordinated type of interpersonal relations, which is expressed at a low level. In the control group all types of interpersonal relationships are also expressed in a moderate way, with the exception of the dependent relationship type that has a low level. The authors of the graffiti are more aggressive ( $p<0.05$ ) and dependent in interpersonal relationships ( $p<0.05$ ).

Analysis of the level of subjective control showed that the authors of the graffiti have a higher total externality in comparison with respondents in the control group ( $p<0.05$ ). They are also subject to a large externality in the areas of production ( $p<0.05$ ) and interpersonal relationships ( $p<0.05$ ).

In the study of personality traits it was founded out that the authors of the graffiti are more closed and uncommunicative ( $p<0.05$ ), dominant, authoritative ( $p<0.05$ ) affected by feelings ( $p<0.05$ ), more diplomatic and prudent ( $p<0.05$ ), they have better developed self-control ( $p<0.05$ ).

The study of motivation has shown that the authors of the graffiti characteristic of a higher intensity of the motive to achieve success ( $p<0.01$ ) and lower – of the motive of failure avoidance ( $p<0.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

A review of the literature showed that currently there is no comprehensive study of graffiti and psychological characteristics of authors of graffiti. Theoretical analysis of the problem suggests that in the last time there was graffiti classification, according to topographic and thematic characteristics. There is a reflection of the psychological reasons for creating graffiti. The main of them are the assertion of the identity, a protest against social and cultural norms, the creative and entertainment motives, as well as aggression. Few cultural studies indicate that graffiti express the values, antagonistic to the dominant culture. The attitude towards graffiti and their authors depends mainly on the personal experience of the respondent in creating graffiti.

Analysis of a number of archaeological and historical researches of graffiti made it possible to identify their main historical function: identification, religious-magical, pragmatic, communicative and protest (Vysotsky, 1985). The first attempts to scientifically systematize and study the graffiti date back to the 18th century. In 1731 an Englishman, Trumbo has published an ontology of inscriptions collected on buildings and public places of London. The book contained statements about love, marriage, drunkenness, sobriety, scandal, politics, games, and sermons (Abel & Buckley, 1977).

The original explanatory approaches to graffiti was part of the structuralist approach, where the act of writing graffiti was seen primarily as a release of repressed impulses of the unconscious, archaic early phylogenetic human reactions, and other factors. The researchers wanted to explain all forms of this phenomenon, based on one explanatory approach.

Thus, some scientists believe that graffiti are analogues to archaic, phylogenetically early behavioral reactions typical to animals (for example, marking area) (Kokoreff, 1991). From the standpoint of psychodynamic theory graffiti are the product of repressed unconscious drives of the individual. So, A. Dandes (1966) believes that the psychological reason for the creation of graffiti in public restrooms is the infantile desire to play with their own feces that is regressive trends. There is also a point of view which underscore the determination of the graffiti from the cultural attitudes and cultural conflicts (Bocharova & Shchukin, 1997). O. Bocharova and Y. Shchukin (1997) believe that graffiti are the mechanism of removal of collective stress, means of dealing with the group fears: through them there is a representation of yourself or the object of fear.

A number of researchers stresses that graffiti reflect public values and attitudes, the nature of the society that produces them, and more individual emotional traits of the individual graffiti authors (Lucca & Pacheco, 1986).

Motivational sphere of the authors' graffiti is little studied. So, on the basis of theoretical analysis some researchers propose classification of the causes leading to the creation of a graffiti based on the study of subculture values of the authors of the graffiti and meaningful classifications of inscriptions and drawings: statement of personal or group identity; protest against social and cultural norms; aggressive reactions; motives for creation; sexual motives, entertainment motives (Abel & Buckley, 1977).

Studies have been conducted to identify personality traits that cause this kind of behavior. Study by H. Solomon and H. Yager (1975) showed that the authors of the graffiti has authoritarianism to a greater degree than other college students. According to M. D. Schwartz and D. F. Dovidio (1984) the authors of the graffiti are more creative and external, than those who reported that never did drawings and inscriptions.

Therefore, the emergence of the problem of graffiti in psychological science was due, on the one hand, with the need to explain and develop measures of

prevention of this type of social behavior, and on the other to study this kind of deviant behavior of the youth. If the study of materials in historical and archaeological sciences was the degree of prevalence of this phenomenon, its topographic characteristics, thematic content, the formation of the graffiti issues in psychological science in the first stage was connected with the search for explanatory hypotheses and subjective-pragmatic classifications. This approach can be called a structuralist-descriptive, as graffiti was seen primarily as a means of release, the implementation of certain phenomena of the human psyche, which did not change anything in reality, and personality. Then there are studies that speak about the social conditioning of non-institutional artistic activities and examining the issue of graffiti as issues mainly socio-psychological. Currently, it becomes clear that graffiti is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to any single explanatory approach. Graffiti can have independent significance, i.e., be one of the leading leisure activities of the youth, and may have situational value, and to perform many different functions. While non-institutional artistic activity is multi motivated, that is may be due to different motivational tendencies.

The study of the psychological characteristics of authors of graffiti led to the conclusion that their main difference lies in the specifics of interpersonal relations and the peculiarities of the reaction of negative emotions. Being more dominant ( $p < 0.01$ ), aggressive ( $p < 0.01$ ) and external ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the field of interpersonal relations, they are more affected by feelings ( $p < 0.01$ ), but the diplomacy ( $p < 0.01$ ), isolation ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the development of self-control ( $p < 0.01$ ) did not allow them adequately to respond and fight against negative emotions. The growth of reasons for conflicts causes an increase of aggressiveness.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the theoretical analysis suggests that the theoretical hypothesis of the study is confirmed: the scientific study of graffiti in a natural phase of transition from the classification-topographic stage to typological socio-psychological stage.

Graffiti is a complex social-psychological phenomenon, the study of which is currently a separate field of socio-psychological knowledge – a social psychology of graffiti. There is a transition from the classification of topographical schemes to create a typology of graffiti on the basis of the analysis and study of their socio-psychological characteristics.

The results of empirical research suggests that the main motivational trends creating graffiti are: the desire for the creation of psycho-social identity and the desire to resolve the conflict caused by the contradictory nature of individual psychological and socio-psychological characteristics of personality.

Consequently, it confirms the empirical hypothesis that non-institutional artistic activity is a multi motivated activity, which main motivational trends are the desire to construct psychosocial identity and the sublimation of intrapersonal conflict.

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