

# ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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### TOPICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH OF THE PAST: P. ROSSI'S CONCEPT OF THE CROWD

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*The purpose of the study is to identify the main idea of the spontaneous associations concept proposed by Pasquale Rossi, an Italian researcher of the late 19th – early 20th centuries.*

*Methods or methodology of the work.* To study the P. Rossi's concept, the following research methods of the theoretical analysis were applied, i.e. the historical and functional method that focused on studying the ideas of the Italian scientist, taking into account the logic of scientific development of that time; historical and genetic, involving consideration of the scientist's scientific heritage, taking into account the social and historical conditions of the late 19th – early 20th centuries; as well as comparative and historical method aimed at comparing P. Rossi's views with the views of some of his contemporaries, as well as particular provisions of modern psychological science.

*Results.* The study contains a description of certain methodological errors found by P. Rossi in the concepts proposed by S. Sighele, G. Tarde, G. Le Bon. P. Rossi's contribution to the development of collective psychology is characterized. The study shows the set of reasons that made collective psychology lose its status of an independent science that looks into social associations, specifies certain characteristics of the

*street crowd, proposed by Rossi, as well as provides his understanding of demopaedia as a new science of educating the masses. The aspects of P. Rossi's research are noted, their further development being, according to modern scientists, quite promising for tackling topical social and psychological issues.*

**Practical implications of the results.** *The conducted research seems relevant in the context of expanding the subject field of modern psychology of spontaneous social associations, as well as in developing the conceptual foundations of a systematic approach to this phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** *crowd; crowd concept; P. Rossi's crowd concept; collective psychology; psycho-collective rhythm; leaders of the crowd; demopaedia.*

## АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ ПРОШЛОГО: КОНЦЕПЦИЯ ТОЛПЫ П. РОССИ

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**Целью исследования** являлось выявление основного содержания концепции стихийных объединений итальянского исследователя конца XIX – начала XX веков Паскуале Росси.

**Методы или методология проведения работы.** *Изучение концепции П. Росси предусматривало применение следующих методов исследования: теоретического анализа; историко-функционального метода, ориентированного на изучение идей итальянского ученого с учетом логики научного развития того времени; историко-генетического, предполагающего рассмотрение его научного наследия с учетом социально-исторических условий конца XIX – начала XX вв.; сравнительно-исторического, направленного на сопоставление взглядов П. Росси с воззрениями некоторых современников, а также с отдельными положениями современной психологической науки.*

**Результаты.** *Описываются методологические ошибки, отмеченные П. Росси в концепциях С. Сигеле, Г. Тарда, Г. Лебона. Характеризуется его вклад в развитие коллективной психологии.*

*Указывается совокупность причин, по которой коллективная психология утратила статус самостоятельной науки о социальных объединениях. Уточняются некоторые характеристики уличной толпы, предложенные Росси. Излагается его понимание демопедии как новой науки об образовании масс. Отмечаются те аспекты исследований П. Росси, развитие которых современные ученые считают перспективным для решения актуальных социально-психологических проблем.*

**Область применения результатов.** *Проведенное исследование представляется целесообразным в контексте расширения предметного поля современной психологии стихийных социальных объединений, а также при разработке концептуальных основ системного подхода к данному феномену.*

**Ключевые слова:** *толпа; концепции толпы; концепция толпы П. Росси; коллективная психология; психокolleктивный ритм; вожаки толпы; демопедия.*

The crowd as a specific subject of social conflicts has a complex of cognitive, emotive and behavioral characteristics. The study of such characteristics should be recognized as one of the topical tasks of social psychology. The researchers of the crowd of the initial period proposed a number of quite original and well-grounded ideas that corresponded to the needs of the time, which later turned out to be beyond consideration and were almost forgotten. Their explanatory potential, upon being analyzed taking into account the social, cultural and intellectual context of both that time and current period, can be used to tackle the issue of relevant description and forecasting of processes occurring in the crowd.

Descriptions of spontaneous associations that appeared in Western European science at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were traditionally accompanied by extremely negative connotations. Thus, S. Sighele described the crowd as “a substratum in which the microbe of evil develops very easily, whereas the microbe of good is highly likely to die without finding suitable living conditions” [4, p. 42]. G. Tarde compared it to a wild animal, “moreover, to a rabid, unrestrained beast, a blind toy

of its instincts and routine habits, [that] sometimes resembles an invertebrate of the lowest order, a monstrous worm ... wriggling in disorderly movements even after the separation of the head" [5, p. 10]. G. Le Bon wrote, "The strength of the crowd is directed only to destruction. The rule of the crowd always indicates the phase of barbarism" [3, p. 157]. "The principle of the beast", "collective madness", "wild savagery", "female character", "propensity to crime," "irrationality of thinking," "obedience to suggestion," "herd instinct" - these are just some of the characteristics attributed at that time to spontaneous associations [1].

From the point of view of modern researchers ([6], [13], [15], etc.), such attitude became an expression of fears of representatives of the ruling classes in response to a drastic change of social and economic realities. The processes of industrialization, accompanied by an increase in the number and activity of the proletarian masses, growth of peasant unrest in central Europe, intensification of the influence of left-wing political parties, activation of the suffragist movement, surge of anarchist terror – all this made it necessary to try and comprehend the issue of mass crimes prosecution and search for efficient ways to control the crowd.

Pasquale Rossi (1867–1905), an Italian researcher, doctor, journalist, socialist and philanthropist, took a fundamentally different position to the psychological nature of the spontaneous associations. Rossi refused to demonize the crowd, to perceive it exclusively in terms of psychopathology, irrationality and delinquency [8], [15]. In his opinion, the crowd knows how to perceive external influences, act and feel, as well as think, being purposefully active. Just like individuals, it needs education in order to replace intelligibility with meaning, shallowness of thought with depth, antisocial orientation with thoughtful prosocial actions [9].

### **Critique of P. Rossi by first crowd researchers**

The idea that the crowd is likely to commit crimes as presented by Sighele, G. Tarde and their numerous followers was thought by P. Rossi to be nothing but a "sophistry of false generalization", expressed in an unjustified transfer of a property inherent only in some kinds of spontaneous associations to all of them. According to P. Rossi [9], [10], the

crowd becomes a criminal one for several reasons. Firstly, it can differ in its specific composition, including a significant number of “inborn” and professional criminals at the time being; second, it can obey the malicious leaders’ suggestion; third, it can imitate the norms imposed by the indiscriminate elite; fourth, it can experience moments of emotional disturbance and moral crisis that make it prone to violating the law. Thus, the criminal principle was in his understanding not an immanent, but a sporadic property of the crowd. Rossi wrote, “The usual actions of the crowd, as a rule, are anticriminal, peaceful or useful. ... The building caught fire, and before the fire fighters and soldiers arrive, an anonymous crowd begins working on extinguishing; there is a misfortune that deeply affects the soul, and the first rescuers stand out of the crowd, ... therefore we can say that it is an exception in regard to the actions of the crowd that it may become a criminal one” [9, p. 18].

A convinced socialist as he was, having been sentenced during his studies at the University of Naples to a six-month prison sentence for participation in mass disorders, the one who later organized a committee to protect victims of government repression, P. Rossi regarded “crime” as the label that the establishment was likely to assign to its political opponents. Rossi perceived the crowd as a subject of social development, capable of defending its interests in the struggle or removing social institutions interfering with progress [9].

“Twelve sane and healthy people are capable of giving a verdict that is completely stupid and meaningless,” S. Siegel wrote about the jurors, “a similar phenomenon occurs at the meetings of numerous commissions – artistic, scientific and industrial ones” [4, p. 10]. “All that is ingenious is individual, even in the case of committing a crime ... social groups are unlikely to have a high mental development ... a well-created mind stands above a whole parliament ...,” G. Tard postulated [16, pp. 350–351]. “In the crowd, people are always levelled, and ... the casting of the votes of forty academicians will not be any better than casting the votes of forty water-carriers,” G. Le Bon echoed to them [3, p. 307].

It is quite obvious for P. Rossi that emotional experiences, upon being expressed, make it difficult to understand issues in complex, but this does

not mean that the ability to think, weigh up decisions and be creative is inherent only in isolated individuals. As he believed, the emergence of such judgments is associated with the “infantile” age of the new science, i.e., collective psychology that it does not always distinguish between the random and the typical due to a lack of empirical data.

Another “teething trouble” of the new branch of psychology was, in his opinion, an underestimation of social factors of the crowd’s activity. Excessive exploitation, poverty and deprivation lead to mass nervous illnesses, weakening of mental abilities and development of pathological suggestibility [11]. He considered a cardinal improving the life of the oppressed masses as a necessary but not exhaustive measure for establishing a relationship of social harmony.

### **P. Rossi and collective psychology**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new approach was formed in West European (mostly Italian and French) science that was subsequently called collective psychology. However, its time turned out to be quite short, which is largely due to the specifics of the selection of the research subject. According to the views of adepts of the new science, the subject field of collective psychology should be located between psychology that studies the psyche of individuals and sociology as focused on the structure and functioning of organizations. According to S. Sighele [4], it was assumed that collective psychology is to study temporary, random and dissimilar associations. According to P. Rossi [10], the object of its research is any social association in which a “spiritual unity”, “cumulative soul” was formed, which motivates formerly independent individuals to think, act and feel in the same way.

While developing the key provisions of this approach, Rossi proposed the concept of “psycho-collective fact”, a mechanism for the formation of a community, designated by him as “collective synesthesia” (Italian “sinestesia collettiva”, derived from Greek “co-feeling”). He postulated that the distribution of emotional experience across all the gathered has an outward side, as expressed in exclamations, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as well as an internal one manifested in the unity of per-

ceptions and relationships. At the same time, “collective synaesthesia” is dynamic, its intensity and duration vary depending on the strength of one or another incentive and effects from previous influences, producing a special psycho-collective rhythm [10].

The product of synaesthesia, i.e., the “collective soul”, was not considered by Rossi as a metaphor, but as a real phenomenon, similar to an organism consisting of many coordinated cells.

Having summarized the views of his predecessors, Rossi formulated the basic principles of collective psychology as follows:

- 1) “mental product”: when individuals unite, mental characteristics of the original units do not add to one another (E. Ferri);
- 2) “changes in properties”: the unification of individuals always reduces initial intellect and enhances feelings (S. Sighele);
- 3) “hyperorganic law”: when people are united in a crowd, the atavistic aspect of their psychology is enhanced.

Rossi limited the action of the last principle to the actual crowd as an unorganized and unstructured association, while other principles were recognized to be characteristic of “crowds” of any type [10].

It should be noted that in order to emphasize the similarities of various social communities capable of levelling individual differences, instill the same ideas and push for the same actions, the followers of collective psychology excessively widely used the concept of crowd. They applied it not only to loafers, demonstrators or pogromists, but also to political parties, theatrical public, jury colleges, scientific congresses, military units, religious sects, social classes and even whole nations, if they could, at any time, be attributed as having “spiritual unity”.

The actual ignoring of the differences between social associations of such different types, when they were designated by a term with a fundamentally different content in everyday life, introduced confusion and later was believed to be inappropriate [1].

Distinguishing such “crowds” as research subjects, i.e., associations in the phase of their greatest influence on individuals, deliberately narrowed the scope of collective psychology, depriving it of the opportunity to compete with social psychology. A peculiar subjective derivative of the subject

of this science also played its role. This refers to the involuntary inclination of the supporters of collective psychology to expand the field of research, exaggerating the strength of the group's influence on its members and the extent to which personal changes take place. Thus, G. Le Bon wrote, "The predominance of the unconscious, the same direction of feelings and ideas, determined by suggestion, as well as the desire to immediately turn inspired ideas into action – these are the main features that characterize the individual in the crowd. He already ceases to be himself and becomes an automation, which does not have his own will" [3, p. 170]. It is significant that neither he, nor Rossi, nor any other adherents of this science specified variables that prevent the influence of the crowd on a person.

Limitations in the methods of research became another obstacle in the way of recognition for collective psychology as an independent science. According to P. Rossi [10], the processes of formation of the "collective soul" due to their complexity and the number of subjects are hardly subject to experimental study. Commenting on the observation and analysis of secondary sources, he argued that experiment is possible only with "crowds" of small numbers (a school class, spiritual circle, etc.) and primitive incentives. As for social psychology, it had acquired a distinctly experimental character since the days of F. Allport.

### **The nature of the street crowd**

Arguing about the peculiarities of primitive social associations, P. Rossi paid special attention to leaders who emit "psycho-collective waves" of suggestion and infection. He devoted a separate work to the means of their influence [11], having considered the corresponding arsenal of tragedians, singers and musicians, orators, criminals and soldiers, leaders of informal children's associations, etc. Using in many ways the same methods, leaders are likely to be people with a disturbed psyche, characterized as disharmonious, impulsive and purposeful, who exert a decisive influence on excitable people of weak will who begin to affect others as "multipliers of emotional vibrations" [10, p. 222]. Thus, a "spiritual community" is formed, erasing personal and social differences into emotional experiences and actions.



According to Rossi, the influence of the leader and the crowd is mutual and volatile in terms of the intensity of manifestations. They are connected by a lot of psycho-collective waves and vibrations superimposed on each other. Some of them die out, while others are amplified to such an extent that they cause autosuggestion even in the least hypnotic individuals [9], [11]. The Italian researcher did not quite successfully attempt to describe the results of these processes in the form of the “law of collective psychometry” [11, p. 135], according to which the time for the appearance of a crowd-specific psycho-collective rhythm is due to the time of reaction of each of its members and the density of the association in space and time.

Just like the individual, each crowd, in his opinion, has its own character, age, periods of crisis. Summing up particular feelings, it is capable of formulating and spreading thoughts. Making certain actions the crowd can develop an attitude towards other subjects of social life.

The crowd, as being unstable in its manifestations and undifferentiated in composition, according to his views, is capable of a positive transformation. So, the two aspects in its existence should be distinguished, i.e., the static aspect, corresponding to the current state, and the dynamic one, reflecting the potential of the subsequent development. While the former is characterized by the dominance of emotional and impulsive passion, the latter is distinguished by the collective work of thought, conscious morality, and the stability of relations. Transition to this aspect means that the crowd has become a people [12].

### **Demopaedia as science on educating masses**

While outlining the prospects for the social reforms that were imminent, P. Rossi wrote, “The more well-formed the crowd is, the more culture will penetrate the lower social strata, the more thinking people will participate in the development of ideas, and if the genius ... pinpoints a new field of research, it is the crowd that will give this idea its universality and integration” [9, p. 43]. From his point of view, the main task is not to learn how to successfully manipulate spontaneous associations, but to raise their level of development to the level that is necessary for public welfare [7]. This task was to be handled by a special branch of

science, located between psychology and pedagogy, i.e., demopaedia, that focuses not on the individual, but on the masses.

The impact should be comprehensive, including the adoption of laws that in a fair way regulates the labor of the proletariat, as well as provision of the necessary political freedoms, development of academic training programs for talented people, opening numerous public libraries, theaters and concert halls [12]. Rossi called upon the national elite to rely on a more thoughtful policy on this issue of Belgium, Britain, Germany and other advanced countries. In addition, much depends on those patterns of social morality that can be adopted by the proletariat and the peasantry as examples to follow. The process of further educating the crowd is believed to be impossible without the self-education of the elite.

Contemporaries criticized Rossi for the redundancy of the analogies of the “collective soul” with the individual psyche, as well as emphasized his inconsistency in distinguishing the phenomena of the mass and the crowd, manifestations of psychopathology and irrationality, nature of the spontaneous and social associations [14], nor did they see the fundamental differences between demopaedia and social pedagogy [12].

It should be noted that P. Rossi’s works were not particularly popular. It is significant that only one comprehensive review of his views on the psychology of the leaders of the crowd was ever published in Russian [2], while bibliographic lists of the works of other researchers of this issue of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., G. Le Bon, N.K. Mikhailovsky, G. Tarde include numerous items. However, at present, scientists have taken interest in the principles of P. Rossi’s concept. They have pointed at the potential of P. Rossi’s ideas for solving topical issues of interaction with “crowds back at home”, being characteristic of modern times [15], analysis of the regularities of influence in groups of considerable numbers [6], study of the phenomenon of judgments polarization after discussion [8], defining specifics of political parties and sects [7], identification of social prerequisites in the matter of educating the masses [13]. It should be added that his studies on leadership and charisma, interference of incentives in the crowd, as well as irrational aspects of the behavior of spontaneous associations seem promising for further study.

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