

## Graffiti and Gender: A Sociolinguistic Study of Wall Writings in Selected Pakistani Higher Learning Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

*As the most widespread and strongly prohibited activity in Pakistani educational institutions, graffiti writings are the subject of this paper. The article explores graffiti as a gendered activity. The study investigates gender variations in the frequency, types and themes used in the writings. This is done to obtain a comprehensive understanding of gender roles and stereotypes in Pakistan in light of Lakoff's (1975) framework on gender variations in language. Using a qualitative approach, the paper analyses graffiti texts collected from two same-sex colleges in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan. To substantiate the findings from the graffiti texts, semi-structured interviews with students from the same institutions are also conducted. The findings indicate significant variations in how men and women write graffiti. Women outnumber men as graffiti writers, and they tend to use more expletives than men. The primary subjects of male graffiti are politics and sex, whereas female graffiti centres on poetry, romance, songs and slurs. The analysis reveals that while some long-held gender stereotypes proposed by Lakoff (1975) are still widely accepted, there is also some defiance of these norms on the part of men and women alike, indicating a subtle but significant shift in gender roles in Pakistan.*

*Keywords: Educational Institutions; Graffiti Writings; Gender Variations; Gender Roles and Stereotypes; Gender Role Shift*

### INTRODUCTION

The world has always been intrigued by gender differences in terms of how men and women communicate and relate to one another. It is widely accepted that men and women speak in various ways and have different behavioral patterns depending on their social roles. Analysis of male and female communication shows different word choices and communication strategies (Lopez-Rocha, 2005). According to Lakoff (1975), who laid the foundation for the study of language, both the language used by women and the language used to describe women suppress women's identity. She argued that men's and women's language differences reflect their social status and roles. She claimed male speech patterns convey confidence, authority, and directness, whereas feminine ones show respect, reluctance, and uncertainty. Therefore, in a community where men predominate, traits like dominance and forcefulness are viewed as masculine and are supposed to be avoided by women. Other linguists (Carli, 1990; Mulac et al., 2000; Holmes, 2008; Cameron, 2009; Wardhaugh, 2010; Eckert & McConnell-Ginnet, 2013; Sardabi & Afgari, 2015; Rasekh & Saeb, 2015; Sone, 2016; Oktapiani et al., 2017; Namaziandost & Shafiee, 2018; Mahmud & Nur, 2018) also agreed with Lakoff's perspective on women's inferior status and usage of standard language. However, her analyses of how language reflects the power dynamics between men and women

were criticised by several scholars. They contended that her observations were anecdotal and unsubstantiated by empirical study. Coates (2008), Tannen (1999), Bradley (1981), Latić and Celjo (2018) and Genc and Armagan (2018) were prominent among those who disputed that factors other than gender play a significant influence in linguistic differences. While some researchers (Kasmiran & Ena, 2019; Bhatti et al., 2020) partially agreed with Lakoff regarding gender differences in language use.

However, the majority of research on language and gender (Lakoff, 1975; Cameron et al., 1988; Holmes, 1995; Coates, 1996; Kunsmann, 2000; Eckert & McConnell-Ginnet, 2013; Al-Harashsheh, 2014) concentrate on face-to-face conversations rather than written text, which, according to Tannen (1992) and Coates (2008), differs significantly from the oral style of discourse. One-on-one interactions draw immediate responses from both the interlocutors and the listeners, which makes the participants more careful with their words. Moreover, there are times when replies are based on factors other than just gender preferences, such as age, education and social position. As a result, there's a possibility that one-on-one conversations will not accurately reflect the participants' personalities. In contrast, graffiti inscriptions are made without inhibition due to their anonymity; hence, they are unfiltered, and natural, enabling a deeper insight into the graffiti writers' individuality. Additionally, it more accurately captures ideas and identities than spoken speech (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001), making it essential to investigate.

Graffiti, like any other form of communication, has gendered connotations too. Men and women write in distinct styles. It reveals a lot about their preferences, prejudices, and attitudes, necessitating a close examination. Graffiti's ubiquity and cultural relevance have attracted historians and researchers for decades (Rawlinson & Farrell, 2010; Trahan, 2011). The origin of the word *graffiti* can be traced to Latin, where the verb *graphuim* means *to write*. Basthomi (2007) claimed graffiti originally meant mural painting but now includes any drawing, scribble, symbol, or remark, which Young (2009) said is unlawful, unknown, and contemporary. The practice's pervasiveness in contemporary culture, even though social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook provide freedom of expression and anonymity to a certain level, needs additional research (Matthews et al., 2012).

Graffiti is considered a major cultural phenomenon as these inscriptions reflect the nuances of a community (Ferrell, 1993; Rawlinson & Farrell, 2010; Al Karazoun & Hamdan, 2021). In different communities, it has prompted a range of reactions. While some may view it as art (Robinson as cited in Hanauer, 2004; Brighenti, 2010), others may see it as a form of vandalism (Wolff, 2011; Stewart, 2008; Abaza, 2013), as it is done without permission and damages both public and private property (Lombard, 2013; Tracy, 2005; Pietrosanti, 2010). However, it allows individuals lacking self-confidence to talk publicly without fear, and as a result, develop vast linguistic reserves free of pretension and ostentation.

Graffiti, like any other language, is shaped by history, politics, and culture. Since graffitiists express themselves in diverse contexts, milieus, and civilizations, it is crucial to understand them. In a similar vein, how both genders act across time and community merits research. According to Wodak (cited in Wardhaugh, 2010), gender is fluid and expectations for what it means to be a man or a woman alter through time and across cultures. Given this, it is important to examine how language, specifically graffiti, depicts gender roles and disparities over time and space.

Previous studies have shown that both genders employ language in graffiti fairly differently (Arluke et al., 1987; McMenemy & Cornish, 1993; Teixeira et al., 2003; Green, 2003; Matthews et al., 2012; Haslam, 2012; Moghaddam & Murray, 2022). Leong (2016) argued that there is a clear gender divide in the graffiti found in anonymous and private spaces like bathrooms. There

are differences between how men and women create graffiti. It often reflects opinions, idiosyncrasies, social standing, and psychological, sociological, and cultural features of a community. These variables must be thoroughly investigated if the community's well-being is the goal. This is especially true for marginalized groups that use graffiti to express their feelings (Farnia, 2014; El-Nashar & Nayef, 2016; Nealon, 2018). Hence, these writings must be analysed to comprehend the thought patterns of underrepresented groups.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

A culture of graffiti writing exists in Quetta the capital of Balochistan, Pakistan, and is especially widespread at the city's various educational institutions. Despite the common prevalence of graffiti in Pakistan's educational settings, these areas have not previously been investigated.

When it comes to Pakistan, it is a male-dominated society where gender roles are established according to social norms and expectations rooted in religion, culture, and traditions. Soomro et al. (2019) reported that women in Balochistan lack decision-making authority and are socialised to remain at home and accept the preferences of their male relatives. According to Salam (2021), Pakistani society overlooks men's propensity for sexuality, while women's is reprimanded. However, Balochistan's social structure is evolving in terms of female empowerment, equality, and education, which warrants research on both genders. Since graffiti is context-specific, its data reflects the social structure and sociocultural impacts. Accordingly, the linguistic choices made in these texts would demonstrate if gender roles/stereotypes are the same in Balochistan and Pakistan or if there is a shift. Furthermore, the anonymity, rawness, and spontaneity of the graffiti writings would aid in portraying the writers' genuine selves, allowing greater insights into their personalities. Although there has been thorough research on graffiti throughout the world, there has not been any specifically conducted in Pakistan on graffiti in educational settings. To address this gap, this article investigates wall inscriptions in two selected Pakistani institutions of higher learning in terms of gender preferences, social position, and adherence to cultural norms and stereotypes.

Keeping the aforementioned argument in mind, the paper seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent and types of graffiti writings in the educational institutions of Pakistan
2. To explore gender differences in the graffiti written by male and female students of Pakistan
3. To investigate how graffiti writings reflect gender stereotypes and roles in the Pakistani society

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of language and gender is of paramount importance because it not only reveals how men and women speak but also explains language as a social activity that affects how people think and view themselves and others. Gender differences in written language have also been studied, albeit less extensively. Similar to oral speech, the findings across research on writing have been mostly consistent. Other than a few exceptions, there is no significant difference in how men and women use language (Bradley, 1981; Weatherall, 2002; Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003).

#### LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN PAKISTAN

In the context of Pakistan, gender studies have primarily focused on student essays (Khan & Ali, 2016), articles (Khan & Ali, 2016; Latif & Rasheed, 2020), mobile texting (Ali & Aslam, 2012; Ahmed et al., 2015; Rafi, 2012), love letters (Baig & Ahmed, 2019), and social media applications like Facebook (Nazir, 2012; Salam, 2021). Motivation in learning a second language, and gender bias in textbooks studies (Hussain & Afsar, 2010; Shah, 2012), blogs (Amjad & Rasul, 2017), and cultural songs (Khan et al., 2011) are also areas Pakistani researchers have studied. Most research on language and gender in Pakistan has a common theme of emphasizing the continuation and strengthening of gender stereotypes in diverse contexts. Salam (2021) and Nazir (2012) discovered that women employed poetry and discussed fashion and weather, whilst males discussed business, politics, and sports on social media. Khan and Ali (2016) concluded that females produced longer paragraphs and made fewer grammatical errors in essays than males who wrote short phrases. According to Baig and Ahmed (2019), males used first-person pronouns to exhibit authority, whereas females used third-person pronouns to indicate objectivity. The majority of research found that men are portrayed as strong and powerful in text, while women are portrayed as docile and passive (Amjad & Rasul, 2017; Hussain & Afsar, 2010).

The study of the literature on various genres of written language in the Pakistani setting reveals a considerable influence of cultural norms and social structure on language use. Also evident in the writings are the stereotypes connected with both genders. However, the nuanced connection between gender roles and stereotypes, cultural values, and language choices in communicative writing such as graffiti, remains an unexplored topic that calls for additional study.

#### LANGUAGE, GENDER AND GRAFFITI.

As with spoken languages, men and women also respond differently to wall inscriptions, leading to gender variations in graffiti. Given the aforementioned, several researchers have examined graffiti from a gender viewpoint over the years (Teixeira et al., 2003; Green, 2003; Matthews et al., 2012; Haslam, 2012). Female graffiti, according to Ahangar and Shirvani (2016), interacts with previously inscribed messages on the walls. Interactions are carried out through guidance and affection (Green, 2003). Some researchers (Koster & Randall 2005; Zukin & Braslow 2011; McAuliffe, 2012) rarely found men to respond, instead discovered insults and displays of sexual prowess. Bartholome and Snyder (2004) investigated graffiti at a New York restaurant. Compared to men, women generated more poetry, reacted to communications, and wrote song lyrics. Green (2003) found women debate philosophy, sexual assault, and religion while men discuss politics and money. He thought men were arrogant, prejudiced, and rude, but women needed guidance. Men also liked humour, homosexuality, and sexual descriptions. According to Al Rousa and Al Harahsheh (2019), women use graffiti less frequently than men do. They postulated that Jordanian women view graffiti as damaging and worthless and a sign of poor parenting and education. Rosewarne (2004) claimed graffiti characterizes masculinity and promotes violence, destruction, and crime. Phua (2020) investigated gender representation in pictorial graffiti in Brazil and discovered stereotypically sexualized depictions of women, whilst men's representations were less sexualized. He observed that graffiti images depict and perpetuate gender roles and relational prejudices in Brazil.

Contrarily, certain studies showed contradictory findings about the themes of graffiti by both genders. For instance, according to Bates and Martin (1980) and Green (2003), women's

graffiti is not always empathetic and men's is not always sexual. Additionally, they demonstrated that women's graffiti was more sexual than men's. The disparity in findings is due to graffiti's constant evolution. The literature reveals that the majority of gender studies have been undertaken in restrooms since bathroom graffiti is private and anonymous (Green, 2003; Hanauer, 2004; Haslam, 2012; Leong, 2016). Most studies indicate that sexual innuendo and politics are the main gender differences in restroom writing (Green, 2003; Haslam, 2012; Leong, 2016). Men are typically more erotic, with discussions of homosexuality dominating, and women are more romantic (Schreer & Strichartz, 1997; Green, 2003). However, some research found that men write angrier sentences than women, who write about love and hope (Yogan & Johnson, 2006). Otta (1993) studied bathroom graffiti at 10 Brazilian universities. She noticed sexual and political graffiti in men's toilets. Female writing emphasized morals, personal themes, and romance. Women were optimistic and compassionate, but men were aggressive. Obeng (2000a) examined graffiti in university men's toilets. He claimed graffiti was a gendered form of expression in Ghana. National politics and university politics were the two main themes of male graffiti. No graffiti was discovered in the female bathrooms, which, in his opinion, calls for additional inquiry. Additionally, according to Madero (2012), sexual graffiti is only a masculine domain that is only used by men. Other research (Loewenstine et al., 1982; Leong, 2016) found that women use walls to communicate romance, love, marriage, and pleasant moments, while men are abusive and derogatory to women. In addition, female writing is more conservative and follows social, ethical, and moral norms than male writing (Green, 2003). The majority of the differences can be seen in the number, content, style, and causes. The previous literature on restroom graffiti shows that gender differences are widespread. However, Green (2003) claimed gender differences are now at a minimum level and declining. This finding calls for further investigation.

#### GRAFFITI IN THE EDUCATIONAL MILIEU

Graffiti in educational institutions is important to the current study because the study's context includes male and female tertiary educational institutions in Balochistan, a province in Pakistan. Despite the widespread presence of inscriptions in Pakistani educational institutions, no research on their prevalence in Pakistan has been conducted. Some research undertaken in educational settings around the world includes Iran (Farnia, 2014; Ahangar & Shirvani, 2016), Jordan (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2017; Abu Jaber et al., 2012), Kenya (Yieke, as cited in El-Nashar & Nayef, 2016), Ghana (Obeng, 2000a), Nigeria (Nwoye, 1993), USA (Dombrowski, 2011; Mc Cormick, 2003), Turkey (Şad & Kutlu, 2009), Israel (Klingman et al., 2000), and Ethiopia (Zenebe, 2018). The inscriptions' topics were largely student deprivation, hostility, lack of expression, national politics, and vandalism. Besides, Sechrest and Olsen (1971) examined the male toilets at four institutions for differences in graffiti inscriptions. The institutions were chosen based on their socioeconomic standing. The findings revealed that institutions from lower socioeconomic groups had more heterosexual content than institutions from higher social groups, which had a greater number of homosexual inscriptions. The outcome of the study mirrored the priorities of the groups involved. However, Mangeya (2019) and Sehgal (2013) concentrated on the psychoanalytical and educational aspects of graffiti as a way to educate students and provide insights into their psyches. Moreover, Ta'amneh (2021) and Cassar (2017) both highlighted graffiti's ability to teach taboo topics outside the curriculum.

The review of the literature shows that males are competitive and females are emotional and relationship-oriented in graffiti. Nevertheless, socio-cultural and economic issues affect how



men and women speak and write. Also, graffiti is unstructured, informal, and context-specific, so it is a better source for analysing gender differences in natural settings. Additionally, the language used in graffiti helps to analyse gendered stereotypes, which are largely based on social traditions and "resistant to change" (Amjad & Rasul, 2017, p. 163), especially in Pakistan, where the patriarchal structure of the society still reinforces stereotypes about male and female roles, behaviors, and speech (Hadi, 2017; Habiba et al., 2016; Tarar & Pulla, 2014). However, there are few academic studies on language and gender in Pakistani society; those that have looked at gendered language have only analysed educational texts, which are not impromptu, direct, and organic like graffiti, showing a gap in the literature.

The review of the literature also reveals that previous studies (Madero, 2012; Haslam, 2012; Hanauer, 2004; Wang et al., 2019) focused largely on toilet wall graffiti, not graffiti in open locations. The current study fills this gap by including toilets and other surfaces. Additionally, the same-sex research environment in the current investigation helps find graffiti done by both genders and expands the study beyond restrooms. The current study is significant because it not only highlights the presence of graffiti at educational facilities but also sheds light on gender roles/statuses and stereotypes through graffiti writings in Pakistan's patriarchal province of Balochistan—a hitherto uncharted area.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The investigation of graffiti is undertaken using Lakoff's (1975) language and gender framework. Lakoff (1975) was chosen due to two reasons, firstly because of its relevance to social norms and stereotypes and how they affect female and male use of language and their role and social status, which is the premise of the present study. Second, a review of the relevant literature reveals that earlier research on language and gender in Pakistan did not use the framework, thus underscoring the need for the current study. The framework would assist in determining the social standing of both genders in the current context and any potential shifts in that standing.

Lakoff outlined a set of presumptions regarding the characteristics that are evident in women's language but absent in men's. The present study investigates graffiti writings by both sexes using the selective features of Lakoff's framework (1975). The features are adapted considering written language (Lakoff's framework was only for speech) and graffiti themes and content. The features include the *Choice of Topic*, *Use of Expletives and Taboos*, *Super Polite Forms* and *Less Number of Words*.

### CHOICE OF TOPIC

Females like to discuss food, fashion, family, clothing, and housework, argued Lakoff. Men debate politics, business, sports, stocks, and current affairs.

### USE OF (SUPER) POLITE FORMS

Lakoff (1975) maintained that women use more polite and courteous language than men, commonly employing *thank you*, *sorry*, *please*, and *excuse me* in speech. In addition, indirect sentence types are used by females to soften requests and make a declaration or give a command in a pleasant way.

### LESS NUMBER OF WORDS

Lakoff (1975) believed that men use fewer words because their speech is more direct than that of women.

### USE OF EXPLETIVES AND TABOOS

Lakoff (1975) asserted that women do not use strong expletives such as *shit*, *damn*, and *fuck*. Women use weaker curse words like *shoot*, *fudge*, *oh dear* (p.10). According to her, men prefer swearing and are more open to homosexuality.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the way graffiti writing functions in Pakistani educational contexts. The collection of data was conducted through graffiti texts and one-on-one in-depth interviews. Graffiti inscriptions helped answer the first and second research questions, while semi-structured interviews provided additional insight into gender roles and stereotypes. The one-on-one interview sessions lasted for 15 to 20 minutes for each participant. For the interviews, 10 male and 10 female students from the same institutions (chosen through convenience sampling) were selected. The respondents (male and female) were aged between 18 to 22 years.

### SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study covered institutions of higher learning. It was carried out in an all-female and all-male college in Quetta, Balochistan. The colleges are Quetta's only largest gender-segregated higher institutions of learning and serve students from varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The research was limited to same-sex institutions to ensure gender exclusivity.

Graffiti was collected from the open and closed surfaces of both institutions. Graffiti from open locations covered walls, desks, corridors, school boards, and notice boards. The closed areas were each institution's restrooms. The inscriptions were limited to individual words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues. Images, sketches, signatures, names and telephone numbers were not included in the study. Male and female college students from each institution assisted in photographing the graffiti. Tables 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the graffiti profiles of male and female participants before and after coding and categorization.

TABLE 1. Initial data

Gender	Open Areas	Toilets	Total Graffiti
Male	380	220	600
Female	600	200	800
Total	980	420	1400

TABLE 2. Final data

Gender	Open Areas	Toilets			Total Graffiti
		Sexual	Non-sexual	Total	
Male	358	86	126	212	570
Female	388	100	82	182	570
Total	746	186	208	394	1,140

TABLE 3. Types of graffiti

Themes	Male	Female
Choice of Topic		
Politics	83	1
Poetry	1	47
Songs	0	20
Love and Friendship	33	69
Use of Expletives and Taboos		
Sexual content	35	30
Swear words	53	70
Super Polite Forms	26	29
Less number of Words		
Communicative patterns	55	72

## ANALYSIS

Graffiti from both campuses was photographed, transcribed, translated, and coded. In the first round of data collection, a total of 1400 writings were extracted: 800 from the girls' college and 600 from the boys' college. The initial collection of writings included inscriptions, photos, sketches, phone digits, names and signatures. Drawings, photographs, phone numbers, and illegible inscriptions were excluded from the final data set in the second stage because the study focused primarily on texts. Inscriptions about course material were also omitted from the data due to illegibility. Following the elimination process, a total of 1140 inscriptions were utilised for data analysis (570 each for males and females). Table 1 exhibits raw data from the initial phase of data collection, whereas Table 2 represents the final count following classification and coding, and Table 3 displays the types.

Table 1 demonstrates that the female college had more graffiti than the male college. Both Tables 1, and 2 show that the total number of graffiti found in open spaces was more than those in restrooms. Both male and female colleges had significantly more graffiti in open areas. Furthermore, there were more non-sexual than sexual themes in toilet graffiti, with more sexual themes in female restrooms than in male restrooms.

The third step of data coding was grouping the data under the features provided by the framework (Lakoff, 1975) of the study. Key categories include *Choice of Topic*, *Use of Expletives and Taboos*, *Super Polite Forms* and *Less number of Words*.

*Politics, poetry, songs, love, and friendship* were among the subjects used under *Choice of Topic*. Male graffiti dominated in *politics*, while females led in *poetry, songs* and *love and friendship*. For the use of *Expletives and Taboos*, men dominated the taboo content, which was



predominantly sexual, whilst women excelled at writing *Swear Words*. The category of *Super Polite Forms* was dominated by women, but the difference between both genders was minimal. The feature *Less Number of Words* included conversation patterns employed in graffiti, with male graffiti predominating since their use of dialogues was substantially lower than that of females.

Men significantly dominated *political graffiti*, whereas women dominated *poetry and song*. In terms of *sexual content* and *polite forms*, there was no substantial gender difference observed. Urdu, English, and indigenous languages were employed for writing. Graffiti in Urdu was written using Arabic script and Roman Urdu (Latin script for writing Urdu).

#### PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS ON GRAFFITI WRITINGS

Interviews were conducted to corroborate the findings from graffiti writings. The participants were questioned on the frequency, gender variations, and reasons for writing graffiti. The identity of the interviewees is kept confidential, and the excerpts are referenced in the discussion by participant (p), number (1-10) and gender (male or female).

Discussing graffiti at educational institutions, a female said she can only talk about women due to lack of access to male institutions, she claimed that female students write more because they have always studied in colleges for girls (P7F). However, a male participant stated that graffiti is a male trait because women do not scribble on walls. He highlighted that:

[...] *females don't do this ...in my opinion very little because in my school and college, I've ever seen girls writing ...they don't write, boys write (P8M).*

When asked about the reasons for graffiti writings in Pakistani institutions of higher learning, one female participant viewed that they were written for fun (PIF), while another female believed that they may reflect the anger towards their teachers (PI0F). The participants shared a variety of motives, with the main ones being amusement, passing the time and expressing emotions. A female respondent opined that it is usually done by those individuals who lack the courage to say things directly, hence they resort to the walls (PIF).

In discussing the types of graffiti, a female student shared that there is a variety of inscriptions in the wall writings, ranging from drawing images to names and signatures (P5F). However, a male student elaborated that the types of content found on the wall writings may include those related to politics, advertisements, and business (P7M). In an interview with another female student, it is reported that there were also instances of graffiti writings that contain positive content such as maintaining cleanliness (P8F). A participant also mentioned that there were discourse patterns observed in the graffiti writings, particularly the ones involving replies to random comments (P6M).

The findings from the interviews also show that the wall writings can revolve around the use of swear words. According to a male student, the graffiti in toilets are mostly replete with all sorts of curse words (PI0M). Another male participant stated that the use of expletives or insults in some wall writings usually involves politicians or political figures of opposing parties (P5M). However, a female student denied the presence of swear words in her college as the ones that she came across were mainly on names, phone numbers and cheating (PI0F). In her response to the use of swear words in the wall writings of these institutions of higher learning, another female student argued that gender equality can also be observed in some of them.

[...] *it is because both genders have been given equality, the female feels she should also do it in order to show their dominance and that they are equal, if men can swear so why cannot they (P2F).*

The participants were also questioned about sexual content in educational institutions, both male and female participants said that women do not write about sex. A female affirmed that men write sexual content while women use curse words (P4F). A male also confessed that boys use sexual content (P6M). Another female thought that it used to be only boys who did it, but now girls do it as well (P3F).

When asked about politics and poetry, the participants indicated that men are more political and declare allegiances, whereas women are more romantic and produce poetry. A male respondent believed men take interest in politics because of peer pressure (P1M). A female confirmed that females discuss different political parties but do not write about them (P1F). Regarding poetry, a female assumed that men do not like poetry because they lack aesthetic sensitivity (P2F). A male respondent concurred, saying,

[...] *Well, I have not seen males writing poems on the walls (P3M).*

In a discussion about why students write on various surfaces, some thought graffiti was a great way to preserve memories. A female participant pointed out that if the wall writings were not rubbed off, they will remain there for some time. Thus, if the students were to go back to their colleges, the wall writings could revive their memories of that day (P9F). Some participants also claimed that students' scribbling on walls has become a trend. For example, one male student believed that wall writings may be preferred due to their anonymity (P7M).

All participants agreed that graffiti damages institutions' infrastructure and reputation. A male student remarked that politics should not exist in universities and that there should be nothing political in colleges (P7M). Another student brought up the institution's unpainted walls. He thought that they should not write on them because institutions only get painted once in every several years (P8M). However, some argued that sharing poetry, quotes, and paintings is harmless. A female maintained that it is fine if they are writing good things, like poetry, but it is wrong if they are writing negative things (P7F).

In response to a question concerning graffiti management, a male respondent stated that because graffiti is anonymous, perpetrators are never identified. He remarked:

[...] *like in one class in a college there are more than 60 students, how many can you control (P8M).*

Another male argued that they may do whatever they want and no one will be able to stop them because they will claim that:

[...] *you have nothing to do with it, I'll do whatever I want to (P9M).*

In sum, both female and male students accepted the existence of graffiti but opposed the use of walls for expression.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals the prevalence of all types of graffiti writing in Pakistani educational contexts. Both institutions of higher learning were replete with diverse sorts of texts, including politics, poetry, love, friendship, polite forms, sexual references, profanity, and communicative writings. The writing surfaces comprised open places (walls, corridors, tables, writing boards, and trees) and restrooms. According to findings, graffiti writing is a frequent and popular practice in educational institutions. Open places saw more graffiti than bathrooms for both genders, contradicting research that said bathrooms were a source of graffiti production (Madero, 2012; Haslam, 2012; Hanauer, 2004). The writings revealed that females favoured composing poetry with love themes while males picked political and sexual topics, corroborating earlier research on male and female topic preferences (Lakoff, 1975; Loewenstine et al., 1982; Otta, 1993; Green, 2003; Madero, 2012; Nazir, 2012; Haslam, 2012; Leong, 2016; Salam, 2021). Additionally, the study disputed previous findings that males do not utilise polite forms (Lakoff, 1975), as both genders used them. In terms of numbers, females were discovered to write more graffiti than men. Furthermore, the majority of inscriptions in women's restrooms dealt with profanity and sexual themes, contradicting conclusions that women do not write graffiti or discuss sexuality (Rosewarne, 2004; Al Rousa & Al Harahsheh, 2019). The results showed that females' vocabulary included expletives and taboo terms, hence disputing the belief that they follow moral standards, use polite language, and avoid profanity (Lakoff, 1975; Otta, 1993; Schreer & Strichartz, 1997; Obeng, 2000a; Green, 2003; Madero, 2012).

In the case of male institutions, plenty of political content supporting and denouncing various political parties was observed. The findings concluded that the majority of insults were directed at political individuals and organisations, showing students' affiliation with major political parties. The findings brought to fore the overuse of communicative discourse patterns by females that prominently featured humour, guidance, and satire. The practice demonstrated their propensity for offering advice and engaging in gossip, supporting earlier writing on graffiti (Ahangar & Shirvani, 2016) and claims made by Lakoff (1975) that females are more talkative and engage in gossip. The study also showed how males employed communicative graffiti with humour, instructions, and sex as the main topics, debunking preconceptions that men speak less and do not gossip (Koster & Randall 2005; Zukin & Braslow 2011; McAuliffe, 2012).

With a few exceptions, the results from the interviews supported most of the findings from the graffiti. The participants affirmed the presence of all sorts of writings in the vicinity of their respective institutions. Nevertheless, due to gender segregation at institutions, males and females were oblivious to each other's graffiti. However, both genders dismissed the existence of sexual content in female colleges, believing it to be an exclusively male trait. Thus, affirming the perpetuation of gender stereotypes that women use language more politely—despite the fact that profanity-laced graffiti by women provided contrary evidence. Regarding topic selection, both genders agreed that men are more interested in politics and that women have a strong aesthetic sense, as shown by the writings. This confirmed the stereotype that men are impersonal and objective while women are more emotional and relationship-focused.

Both male and female participants opposed graffiti on the institution's surface but encouraged constructive graffiti. Participants cited fun and enjoyment, killing time, releasing emotions, and keeping memories and habit as the primary reasons for writing graffiti. Most respondents agreed that students often engage in this behaviour and that despite social media, many still choose to express themselves freely and anonymously on classroom boards. Participants felt

it is an excellent platform for those who lack expression or want to save memories because the walls have not been painted in years, enticing students to write on them. The respondents also emphasised that it is challenging for the authorities to stop the practice due to the large number of students involved.

The interviews revealed the deeply ingrained nature of gender stereotypes, such as the belief that women are politer than men and that men are more interested in politics and sex. While females used polite language, their use of expletives, taboos, and insults was higher, suggesting that females frequently violate social and linguistic rules to be on equal footing with men. In addition, male conversational patterns demonstrated a penchant for gossip and advice-giving, as well as their use of polite forms, thus disproving long-held assumptions about male behaviour. The findings also confirmed the stereotype that men lack emotions while women love poetry and music. Although the scope of this study was limited to only two institutions, a more comprehensive examination of graffiti on various institutions of both higher and secondary levels from the public and private sectors with varying surfaces could shed light on the dynamics of graffiti, the impact of stereotypes on language and change in gender roles, if any.

## CONCLUSION

The present study looked into the practice of graffiti writings in selected higher educational institutions of Quetta, Balochistan. The objectives of the study were to determine the extent and types of graffiti writings in institutions of Pakistan, explore gender variations in graffiti, and investigate the impact of gender roles and stereotypes on the writings. In the context of Pakistan, the study revealed that graffiti writing, despite being prohibited, is widespread in educational institutions. It was also determined that graffiti is a habit among today's youth and is utilised for communication, implying that they lack platforms for expression and desire the freedom to express their thoughts (Nwoye, 1993; Obeng, 2000a; Klingman et al., 2000). Thus, the presence of graffiti in open locations on both campuses was evidence that students disregarded the rules of the institutions. Secondly, the study highlighted some major gender differences in graffiti writings and also emphasized adherence to specific gender stereotypes proposed by linguists (Lakoff, 1975; Mulac et al., 2000; Holmes, 2008; Wardhaugh, 2010; Eckert & McConnell-Ginnet, 2013) and graffiti researchers (Otta, 1993; Green, 2003; Madero, 2012). Men's interest in politics and women's passion for music, poetry, and romance stand out among them. The idea that women are empathic, emotional, and rapport-focused while men are logical, objective, and competitive persists. In addition, the amount of political content in the male college reflected the country's political climate and students' participation in it (Nwoye, 1993). McCormick (2003) claimed that this is an example of students making an effort to rebel against the rigidity, uniformity, and formality of their surroundings. Thus, as stated before by Bem (1974) and Lakoff (1975), it exemplifies how the masculine gender creates masculinity (Rosewarne, 2004) and maintains violence, forcefulness, and rivalry.

Moreover, both genders thought that talking about sex and politics was a characteristic of men and that women had an aesthetic sensibility that men lacked. In addition, the fact that both men and women denied that women used sexual content indicated how deeply embedded certain standards and expectations about both genders are in contemporary culture. The results, on the contrary, exhibited female use of profanity and sex-related language demonstrating their disregard for both the social and linguistic norms of decency and dignity attached to them. It suggested that women who are typically portrayed as being more sophisticated, refined and docile in Pakistani

literature (Khan et al., 2011; Hussain & Afsar, 2010; Baig & Ahmed, 2019) attempted to defy social norms and dispel gender stereotypes. Thus, also validating studies (Romaine, 1984; de Klerk, 1992; Parmach, 2010) that hypothesised women who use expletives do so out of a desire to be treated equally with men and to copy their defiance and dominance. Furthermore, the use of taboo content by both sexes demonstrated that the definition of taboos depends on context and age, as Pervaiz et al. (2021) established in the context of Pakistan, younger generations are more accepting of taboos and curse words than the older generations. At the same time, men's usage of dialogic structures demonstrated their love for talking and gossiping, which is considered a feminine quality (Lakoff, 1975), displaying yet another instance of gender fluidity. Consequently, reinterpreting taboos, women's use of insults and sexuality, and men's gossiping all point to a weakening of sociocultural parameters for both genders. Besides, the aforementioned findings also highlight gender as a performance and fluid reality rather than a fixed concept, as proposed by Judith Butler (1990).

In sum, graffiti writing, the language utilised, and the subjects covered in the writings reflected the status of both genders, adherence to some long-held stereotypes, and rule-breaking in the community under investigation. Both genders' clandestine wall writing, use of foul language, and discussion of sex and other taboo themes showed a disregard for societal standards, a desire for control, and a craving for power. Additionally, the usage of all taboo subjects by women revealed their desire to be on an equal footing with men, demonstrating a modest shift in female standing in what appears to be a culture that is dominated by men.

The study makes a significant contribution by utilising and highlighting a language resource that is widely available but illegal and underutilised. It is a method that allows individuals to express themselves whose inner voices might not otherwise be heard. The study is distinctive in that it captures the sociocultural makeup of society, current political events, and graffitiists' preferences. Moreover, the study is unique as it highlights the presence of a male-dominated practice (Obeng, 2000a) in an all-female context, indicating a weakening of prescribed female roles. Thus, it serves to reflect back to society the reality of gender stereotypes and, by extension, gender roles. It identifies that gender is not a universal constant and that contemporary ideas of masculinity and femininity may overlap, are context-specific, and are evolving. Additionally, it demonstrates that both men and women seem to struggle to fit into society's gender categories, pointing to a shifting perspective on gender norms and a gradual acceptance of the impending transition. In a gender-segregated culture, the writings generally aim to create awareness, understanding and recognition of gender roles as they currently exist.

Even though this study was conducted in two educational institutions, more research is needed across Pakistan to understand graffiti themes. Given its prevalence in Pakistan, graffiti can be utilised to understand people's psyches, uncover hidden problems, and grasp gender roles and attitudes in the modern world. The present study was conducted in same-sex institutions; to analyse gender behaviour in the presence of the opposite gender, the researchers recommend conducting the study in mixed-gender institutions.



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