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# A Study of the Origin of Gopnik, a Stereotyped Subculture in Russia

## Russian Gang: “Gopniks”

The 90's in Russia were very tough, both economically and socially. That period of time was tough for the nation as USSR has just collapsed, uncertainty and lack of vision for the future in the society has coined a new term “Gopnik”.

In my research I am going to focus on etymology of the name of the gang, specific physical attributes, their distinct jargon as well analysis as their agenda and social perception of the gang. I am not going to be touching the data of the people affected by these gangs as there isn't information on that as these kind of crimes tend to be categorized as a street pickpocketing with no mention of the Gopniks involvement.

Gopniks are considered to be the legacy of the 90's, not formally affiliated with anyone but they share same attributes of clothing, behavioral patterns and preferences amongst each other. Gopniks are often perceived and described as “Skin-Heads of Russia (WierdRussia.com). Gopniks do not have a specific set of agenda, and target whomever they choose to attack.(RBTH.com) However, peaceful civilians tend to be the most vulnerable groups and they have equal chance of getting attacked either day or night by the Gopniks in tracksuits(RBTH.com)

It is a challenging to find enough scientific data on Gopnik as they value their privacy and not so keen to communicate with the scholars. In my research I am going to focus on etymology of the name of the gang, specific physical attributes, their distinct jargon as well as their agenda and social perception of the gang. I am not going to be touching the data of the people affected by these gangs as there isn't information on that as these kind of crimes tend to be categorized as a street pickpocketing with no mention of the Gopniks involvement.

Social disorganization theory, strain theory and cultural deviance theory are the most relevant theories out there regarding Gopniks(Hesse, M). These theories lead to an explanation of why people choose to become Gopniks. Circumstances of the social stability, economy and educational bringing as well as lack of social control, however, are the main ones.

The evidence of Gopniks presence in the society are the people. Poorer neighborhoods where there is more crime tends to be the place where Gopniks are found. It is often written in foreign websites that the tourists should avoid Gopniks should they accidentally see them. They are portrayed close to neo-nazi's and even the locals fear them. Police chooses not to engage with the Gopniks as they aren't able to change their behavior and deter from engaging in criminal acts. (RUSSIAN 101 - TALKING TO GOPNIKS)

The word Gopnik has derived from the former Soviet republics, referring to a young men or woman often from the lower-income gap with little or no educational background. The origins of the word derive from the acronym GOP, or Gorodskoe Obshestvo Prizreniye (Russian for: "City Public Charity") organization. (Russiapedia.rt.com). Back in the pre-revolutionary time of USSR

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these individuals were in charge of public housing for the lowest income gap of the nation(Russipedia.rt.com). This term was later reshaped and became affiliated with those that are living in assigned public housing , as they often were very under-maintained, poorly constructed and located in the bad areas with high criminal rates. There is another controversy in the linguists circles that the term “Gop” has originated and evolved from the Russian word “theft”(RussiaPedia.Rt.com) . Since most of the street-crimes of that time were sudden attacks, it required the thief to jump on the victim the least expected way.( (RUSSIAN 101 - TALKING TO GOPNIKS). This sudden kind of attack was known to be called “Gop-Stop” ie: random attacks on by passers with the purpose to pickpocket. Shaved head, intent to do harm, asocial behavior, passion for criminal activities, racism, smoking and alcohol consumption are only some of the common attributes of those described as Gopniks. This term is similar to a “redneck” derogatory term used in America, yet those who engage in typical-Gopnik behavior don’t mind utilizing it themselves. (Yegorov, O). My reasoning why it was important for people to form such gangs in the past is that this in a way was forming a net system for caring about one another at the times when the government was weak and the country was fled with the problems of different kinds.

Gopniks typically can be found in rural areas. In the modern times the Gopniks are known for their racist, almost nationalistic and harmful behavior towards the public. The classic appearance of a Gopnik will include Adidas truck suits (mostly counterfeit Chinese track suit), shaved head, beer/vodka bottle being chugged straight from the bottle, cigarette pack whilst sitting in a squatting position. (Gopniks favorite snack tend to be sunflower seeds which are chewed and spit anywhere they happen to be at (TheMoscowTimes.com) The reason why particular brand as Adidas was chosen to be the attire of entire nation of Gopniks was due to the fact that back in the days foreign brands were not allowed to be imported to USSR thus was illegally sneaked as a contraband if it was original. However, since most of the Gopniks did not have access to such expensive garment, they figured to take a shortcut by buying fake ones. (WierdRussia.com). Adidas seemed like a sign of luxury in a sport clothing world and Gopniks chose to wear it ever since. Cheap stores are fled with counterfeit garment items, making it easy to find one in every city.

The squatting seating position may seem like a random move, yet it has its specific purpose. In fact, this particular posture is able to distinguish a real Gopnik from fake one. It is essential to keep the right posture whilst doing the “Gopnik’s squat” which requires the real Gopnik to not keep their entire feet on the ground but rather remain on the tips of their feet. (WierdRussia.com). This position is the most comfortable way to get up like a spring and attack a bystander or run away from the coming Policiya (Police in Russia).

Gopniks are known for their specific slang. Their particular posture of squatting is known as “in court” (Russian: na kartah) or “doing the crab” (Russian: na krabe). Their most known phrases and perhaps most feared ones are “got a cellular?” or “got change?” These two phrases tend to be the only phrases Gopniks tell people before they rob them as a result making Gopniks being known for those phrases.

He Gopniks are known for excessive usage of vulgar language, derogatory terms and sexist remarks towards both of the genders. Gopniks are very negative towards minorities. In today's life, when Gopnik spot someone of LGBTQ community that person will get physically and verbally assaulted with a likelihood of 99.9%. There really isn't much what someone can do to protect themselves from Gopniks, but rather avoid walking alone at nights in rural areas, and by

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no means engage in any verbal or nonverbal communication with Gopniks.

After the rough 90's and the breakdown of the USSR the perception of the Gopnik became less influential. Although the youth had once been in are of the Gopniks, they no longer glorified their destructive ways, refusing to partake in it and nurture the Gopnik community These days it becomes harder and harder to spot Gopniks in comparison to what it was 15 years ago. There has been a noticeable decline in Gopniks presence on the streets of entire post-USSR region. This hate gang without an agenda is a bad image of the country and distorted image of the past. I believe the reason why people wanted to become Gopniks because the post-USSR region was at peak of chaos and people were simply looking out for each other in an informal way. It is important that the Gopnik behavior is not supported by anyone and deterrence theory is applied to outweigh any thoughts of joining the Gopnik gang.. Most people choose to join gangs in the first place because they want to feel like they belong somewhere. Russia should focus on engaging youth to do more sport and other activities, and perhaps that will contribute to Gopniks gang declining interest to join.

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