The Social Organization of the Hip Hop Graffiti Subculture

Victoria Arriola Wilson

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THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
OF THE HIP HOP GRAFFITI SUBCULTURE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Victoria Arriola Wilson
1995
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

[Signature]
Author

Approved, August 15

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Kathleen Slevin
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the qualitative characteristics and determinants of middle-class graffiti writers and their subculture. Detailed observations and interviews were conducted with thirty-five suburban graffiti writers over a period of nine months (November 1994 to August 1995). This study concentrates on types of Hip Hop graffiti, the social characteristics of writers, and the social organization of the graffiti subculture. The paper concludes with several observations on the effects of social policies designed to decrease the production of graffiti.
THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF
THE HIP HOP GRAFFITI SUBCULTURE
CHAPTER 1

HIP HOP GRAFFITI: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Over the past three decades, graffiti has become a growing problem for many cities in America (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987). In recent years, graffiti-writing has spread to neighborhoods in rural and suburban areas. Municipal governments, law enforcement officials, community agencies and private citizens have had limited success in their efforts to eradicate illegal street graffiti. Official paint-outs, legal walls, legislation curbing the sale of spray paint and community-based murals have been tried as control strategies in a number of cities throughout the nation. These programs are expensive both in money and human time. In 1994, $6 billion was spent cleaning up graffiti nation-wide (Beswick, 1995). The major reason that such programs have failed is that most anti-graffiti programs ignore the social and cultural aspects of graffiti production.

The present study is an in-depth ethnographic investigation of Hip Hop graffiti and the social characteristics that shape its form and persistence. Hip Hop writers are interested primarily in recognition. In contrast, gang members write graffiti to defend self-marked territories. Skinhead youth groups write hate messages to spread their believes. These types of graffiti are created, and must be understood, within distinct
social niches. Accordingly, a social organization perspective is useful for analysis. This study will focus on the Hip Hop youth subculture.

**The Difficulty Defining Graffiti**

What is graffiti? Is it artists painting murals on exterior walls? Is it adolescents spray painting their designs on buildings and other structures regardless of granted permission? Should it be considered vandalism? Or is it a service performed by some youth for the general beautification of a drab and lifeless city landscape?

The word graffiti originates from the Italian word, graffiare, meaning to scratch and has existed in various forms for centuries. In prehistoric times, cave dwellers used ashes and berry juice to paint on cave walls. The ancient Egyptians decorated monuments with hieroglyphics that described the history of their nation. During World War II, American soldiers scrawled messages, such as *Kilroy was here*, on their vehicles. In the 1950's, mustaches scribbled over model's faces and profanity were commonly found on public advertisements and billboards. However, the invention of spray paint and the recent developments of gangs, youth skinhead groups, and tagger crews underscore the need for an adequate definition.

Lachman (1988) provides a useful preliminary interpretation. He summarized the social action of graffiti-making as "an illegal social activity for production of fame through art." In a similar fashion, Ferrell (1993) described graffiti as "the collective process which produces new styles of visual communication." The FBI Uniform Crime
Reports (1975) take a different stance. They report graffiti to be "the willful or malicious
destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of property without the consent of the
owner or person having custody or control."

Is it really so difficult to define graffiti? Isn't graffiti simply words, pictures, or
phrases written in public places without permission of the owners? If it is, do we
include political flyers and brochures which prolifically decorate county and state
property during an election campaign? Do we include the unofficial paint-outs by
community residents and chalk drawings done by children on the sides of streets? All of
these involve a certain "lack of permission" that may or may not by characteristic of
graffiti. Many people who accept the "writing without permission" definition consider
legalized graffiti (such as murals and artistic slogans) to be a form of business
advertisement while unauthorized writing is assumed to be vandalism. Phase II, a
veteran writer from New York City, criticizes the word graffiti stating "... this word
graffiti needs to go...It means scribble-scrabble and does not enhance the value of this
cultural art. It was made up by the media and accepted by lack of knowledge of how
complicated, cultural, technical, spiritual, and on and on this art is."

By now it should be clear that graffiti is more complex than usually is assumed.

Devon Brewer (1989) attempts to classify graffiti on the basis of motivation.

"The nation-wide proliferation of graffiti damage is done by a new subculture of
wandering spray can artists who see themselves as itinerant self-
expressionist....Gang-related graffiti mark turf. But Hip Hop graffiti are
associated with break-dancing and rap music and just say "I was here."

Similarly, Katz (1988) distinguishes between various forms of deviance by grounding
their meaning in the lived experience of criminal events. Katz argues that homeboys, and other low income, minority street youth ritually celebrate their neighborhood ties by battling for symbolic rewards, following a "aesthetic leadership" and participating an understood street talk. When these youths encounter "mundane authority" they draw on the collective power of the group not only to oppose that authority, but to transcend it symbolically. Ferrell (1993) supports this notion contending that graffiti is "a collective process of aesthetic style."

Whatever criteria are used, people clearly have different and competing meanings about what graffiti really is. As Feiner and Klein (1982) state, "what is seen by one side as a law and order problem requiring responses appropriate to delinquents is seen by others as a generous outpouring of creative energies upon an ugly and demoralizing environment." Conflicts among artisans, law enforcement officials and subcultural members have shaped unfolding patterns of graffiti-making.

Many members of the art community feel some kinship with graffiti art. However, they seldom distinguish among graffiti types. Some view graffiti as an aesthetic form of self-expressionism and a colorful way to reclaim the urban landscape. Diego Cortez, a well-known art curator, argues that "graffiti should be looked at as a highly sophisticated art form which is the soul of the underground scene at the moment."

By failing to distinguish graffiti types and their respective social niches, the art community contributes to distorted and confused public perceptions.
Policy-makers and law enforcement officials view graffiti through decidedly sociopolitical lenses. Nathan Glazer (1979, pp. 7-9) draws an association between the occurrence of graffiti and a perception of diminished quality of services. He states, "Graffiti raise(s) the odd problem of a crime that is, compared to others, relatively trivial, but whose aggregate effects on the environment of millions of people are massive....It contributes to a prevailing sense of the incapacity of government, the controllability of youthful criminal behavior and (creates) a resultant uneasiness and fear."

This notion has been labeled "the broken window theory." Media agents, politicians, and anti-graffiti campaigners publicly apply this conceptualization and intentionally or unintentionally blur the boundaries between types of graffiti and graffiti writing. Unrelated and distinctly different forms of graffiti are collectively defined as vandalism and as "crimes signifying that we can no longer take orderly society and orderly change for granted" (Gablik, 1982). This is a distorted view that assumes that the presence of graffiti symbolically attacks and destroys the basic values and beliefs of society. The collective anxiety that supposedly results is described by Ferrell (1993; p. 143) to be comparable to a "Durkheimian nightmare--an anomic bomb exploding on middle-class America." These condemnations may reflect genuine concerns about the collective order. However, careful understanding will require clear and precise distinctions within and among subcultural arrangements.

Merton's (1957) theory of structural strain illuminates the dynamics of the emerging graffiti subculture. His theory contains two arguments. First, he argues that there are central societal goals that are held more or less pervasively throughout a society. Second, he contends that there are institutional and legitimate means for
achieving these goals. These legitimate means are not distributed equally in society. Various forms of deviance can result from the mal-integration of society's means and goals. Excessive emphasis on societal goals in the absence of access to legitimate means may produce deviant adaptations, including the following: conformity, retreatism, rebellion, innovation and ritualism. The Hip Hop subculture could reflect either rebellious or innovative adaptations—or a combination of both.

The Hip Hop movement began about twenty-five years ago and reflects Merton's innovative adaptation to societal strain. Hip Hop originated in the neighborhoods of New York City. Young urban blacks and Puerto Ricans held high aspirations of occupational success, yet they were relatively blocked off from conventional means necessary to realize these ambitions. Feeling pressure to take advantage of whatever means were available to obtain income and success, these youths embraced and transcended their environment through the Hip Hop subculture. Minority youths channeled their creativity through street language, the history and customs of their ethnicities and a capitalist value system emphasizing competition. It was from this creativity that new styles of dance, music and visual art evolved.

During the mid-1970's, neighborhood gatherings within the boroughs of New York City employed disk jockies such as Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Grand Wizard Theodore. Integrating their culture and environment to form a unique style of music and dance, these youths began what is now called "the Hip Hop Movement."
Beginning about twenty-five years ago, young musicians began to adapt music to their environment. Disk jockies and other young urban blacks and Puerto Ricans began to develop their own musical style, but they had limited material resources. This led many DJs to use old turntables to create new sounds. Cueing records on two turntables simultaneously, mixing the best "breaks" from each record, and manipulating the record back and forth to produce a scratching effect, were all techniques employed by young disk jockies. This new form of music was soon labeled rapping. As Max Roach states, "These kids were never exposed to poets or playwrights in school. They had all this talent, and they had no instruments. So they started rap music. They rhymed on their own. They made their own sounds and their own movements (Allen, 1989:117,119)."

Simultaneously, a new form of dance developed. "B-Boys" danced the breaks which the disk jockies spun together, and this fast and fluid movement came to be known as breakdancing. As the popularity of rap increased, break dancers began to organize themselves into crews and participate in dancing competitions.

The collective processes which produced new styles of music and dance also encouraged new forms of urban art and visual communication (Ferrell, 1993). Using spray paint, felt tip markers, shoe polish and various ink pens, early writers like Topcat, Kay 161, and Leo 204 wrote their nicknames and street numbers on neighborhood walls. One year later (1970), a Greek youth named Demetrius began writing Taki 183 on back walls, subway stations, and trains. Innumerable tags (term used by graffiti writers when they paint their moniker or nickname on a structure) began to appear, and a 1971 New York Times article on Taki 183 exposed many youth to the peer recognition and
fame associated street writing. Youth were impressed by the public notoriety of a name appearing all over the city. Writers soon realized that the pride associated with writing in one’s neighborhood could expand a hundredfold if geographical boundaries were expanded. Competition resulted, increasing both the size and scale of tagging. Entire sides of subway cars (also known as top-to-bottom), panel pieces (paintings below the windows and between the doors of a subway car), whole cars, and whole trains gave graffiti writers enhanced visibility and fame. The first "top-to-bottom" whole car was painted in 1975. One year later Caine I and the Fabulous Five painted whole trains (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987).

During this time period, regional styles with unique characteristics emerged from each borough of the city. Writers began to decorate their tags with cartoon figures and various forms of iconography. They began to experiment with fading techniques, depth perception and began to mixing various paint colors. By the mid 1970’s, "style became the most important aspect of graffiti writing (Hagar, 1984; 19), and the distinctive Hip Hop graffiti subculture began to take shape.

Bronx writers like Super Kool and Phase II began to write their tags in bubble letters and multiple colors, setting their work apart from those of other writers. Innovations such as these pushed Hip Hop graffiti writing from simple tagging toward the creation of larger and more complex pieces (short for masterpieces). As the emphasis on style grew, so did the number of style types. The "wildstyle" of the Bronx involved crunching bubble letters together so that one letter becomes part of another. Broadway style, characterized by tall and skinny lettering, was introduced in Philadelphia by a
writer named Top Cat. Computer or abstract style involves the placement of various geometric forms within a multi-colored tag. Arrows, crowns, stars, cartoon figures and three-dimensional effects enhanced various pieces. Similarly, fading and dripping techniques became measures of artistic skill. As status came to rely more heavily on aesthetic style, writers began organizing themselves into writer crews - groups of writers who collaboratively design and paint graffiti. The time-element and concentration on aesthetics produced the need for look-outs. More important, feedback and instruction on how to "burn the piece" (i.e. create graffiti that demonstrates significant style and skill) encouraged a collective effort.

With the development of spray can art came a new vocabulary and method of communication. Violent terminology such as tag (from dog-tag), throw-up, def (from death) and burn (to beat the competition) became commonplace and universally understood in the graffiti subculture. While selected vocabulary and a cultural argot helped to shape the Hip Hop movement, street imagery and visual style have acted as the primary means of communication amongst writers. Tag names and styles are distinctly different, guaranteeing identification and recognition within writer subculture. In addition, choice of colors, iconography, and paint techniques often reveal much about the writer's thoughts and attitudes at the time the piece is painted. Adjacent to a piece it is common to see comments from the writer that reveal difficulties in getting the piece "up". For example, writers complain of bad caps, cans blowing up, and cops showing-up. Written comments and compliments similarly found their place on exterior walls and surfaces.
This emerging movement did not go unnoticed by those outside the subculture. In 1972, Hugo Martinez, a City College sociology major organized a number of top New York City graffiti writers into United Graffiti Artists. He saw the emphasis on getting up (i.e. having tags and pieces seen all over an area) as a differentiating factor between Hip Hop graffiti and the creators of traditional forms of wall writings. Martinez stated that "the significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on getting around. Only a youth with a sense of vocation can put in the necessary amount of work (Castleman, 1982: 19)." In 1973, UGA held its first graffiti art show at the college. In 1974, Jack Pelsinger created NOGA (Nation of Graffiti Artists). Mainstream media coverage followed. This, in turn, led to art shows and exhibitions in a variety of New York City galleries. Embraced by the art world and gaining increasingly positive media attention, writers discovered other motives to produce their art. Retaining the spray can as a medium through which to paint, writers have joined the establishment art scene in response to dealers, collectors, and other artists. As Hagar (1984: p. 77) says graffiti "may have been started by a hodge-podge of impoverished art school dropouts and unschooled graffiti writers, but by 1982 they had turned it into the hottest art movement in America."

The greatest agent for the expansion of graffiti art was increasing exposure in video, film, and books. Pseudo-documentaries like Style Wars (1985), Wild Style (1983), and Beat Street (1984) spread the imagery and style of Hip Hop graffiti outside the boundaries of New York City and popularized the process of graffiti writing. Similarly, a variety of music videos, tape and album covers utilized graffiti murals as
part of their background and setting. Rap music, break-dancing, and graffiti "made heros of the young forerunners from the New York City Streets-Africa Bambaata, Rock Steady Crew, Blade and Dondi among others (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987: 8)." In addition, books such as Subway Art prompted writers in various geographical areas to adopt "wildstyle" techniques and the camouflage writing that Kase 2 invented called "computer rock."

By the mid 1980's, Hip Hop Graffiti had spread to cities throughout the United States. Hip Hop began to develop more topic-specific forms of expression. The appearance of Public Enemy and Boogie Down Production in 1986 led to afrocentric recordings like "By All Means Necessary" and "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back." Their success spawned a new form of rhyming called "gangsta" or "reality" rap. The first music groups to gain nation-wide notoriety were N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitude) and Geto Boys. These groups described the harsh problems of inner-city living in ways that some found offensive. Despite continuous criticism and several attempts by highly visible public figures to curtail this industry, it continues to thrive and influence the visual expressions of street writers.

Chalfant and Prigoff's (1987) book entitled Spraycan Art, documents sophisticated Hip Hop pieces in Pennsylvania, California, Illinois and other states. These "new enclaves of Hip Hop graffiti," in turn, began to form links through a national network of publications. These include Undercover Magazine (New York), Vapors Magazine (California), Graffiti Rock (Pennsylvania), and Ghetto Art (California), to name a few. By the early 1990's, VideoGraf (a highly circulated and
widely known video of the graffiti writing process) was developed to connect writers and provide technical instruction. With the advent of the computer, internet and prodigy lines now provide graffiti writers with a method of national and international communication.
CHAPTER 2

GRAFFITI: BASIC TERMS

Considering the variety of graffiti writers and their target locations, we can assume that graffiti is varied in form and content. Still certain patterns emerge. These common features allow an analytical description of the social realities surrounding the graffiti subculture. Prior to the 1970’s, graffiti writers used terminology such as getting over, getting the name out, and getting around (Castleman, 1982). Regardless of the terms used, writers acknowledge that acceptance and recognition within the graffiti subculture is dependent on visibility and proliferation.

Seven basic forms of graffiti writing have been identified in urban cities (Castleman, 1982). They are tags, throw-ups, pieces, top-to-bottoms, end-to-ends, whole cars and whole trains. These graffiti forms are distinguished by size, location, complexity of design and selected graffiti tools. Because this study focuses on a suburban area, tags, throw-ups and pieces are the most common graffiti forms.

Tags

Unlike latrinalia (bathroom graffiti), street graffiti emphasizes the pictorial connotations of one’s "tag." Brewer and Miller (1990) describe a tag as the most elemental form and most prevalent kind of Hip Hop graffiti. They describe a tag as stylized signatures written in marker, spray-paint, shoe polish, paint stick, or etched into
glass with an instrument called a scribe. Herbert Kohl (1972) describes a tag as a nickname given or a devised by the writer which becomes acknowledged, included and individualized. He argues that a tag is often reflective of one's physical appearance or personality, and changes as new values, beliefs, status, and responsibilities are acquired.

The taggers' surface varies. Tags are commonly found on outdoor walls, signs, freeway overpasses, bridges, and fences. However, because tags require a single graffiti tool, they are written quickly, involve one practiced movement, and can be found in semi-public and public places. Such places include school walls, student desk-tops, stairwells, and the interior walls of shopping malls. In contrast to other more time-consuming forms of graffiti, tagging can be accomplished during the daylight hours. The fluidity of the tag provides the writer with a quick and easy means to gain respect within the subculture.

Illustration #1: Example of a one-color tag
Illustration #2: Example of a one-color tag

Illustration #3: Example of a one-color tag
Throw-ups

Throw-ups are elaborated tags formed in bubble, block or script lettering. They are much larger than tags, requiring spray paint as the medium. They are often written on exterior walls. The reason for this is technical. Spray paint takes longer to dry and has a tendency to drip and run when used in closed quarters, spoiling the writers’ efforts to demonstrate a smooth style. In addition, the paint gives off powerful fumes that can attract unwanted attention (Beswick, 1994). Throw-ups take much longer to execute, and generally cannot be done during daylight hours. They often involve two or three colors of paint and consist of thick simplified letters, painted in one color and outlined in another.
Illustration #5: Example of a throw-up figure

Illustration #6: Example of a two-color throw-up
Illustration #7: Example of a two-color throw-up

Pieces

Pieces, derived from "masterpieces," are the most developed form of Hip Hop graffiti. Pieces are large, elaborate, multi-colored murals depicting a writer's tag and various backgrounds, designs, characters, messages, and comments. Pieces vary in size, with spray-painted pieces ranging between four square feet to several hundred square feet. Some are done with markers on plain white adhesive paper given freely at local post offices. Pieces are primarily painted in areas that are not highly visible to those outside the subculture. This is because pieces take a significant amount of time to complete, avoid arrest, concentrate on painting. Pieces depict the gamut of human expression; celebrating Hip Hop, protesting social inequalities, demonstrating personal hostilities, etc. Most piecer practice in piecebooks before executing their painting. When the piece is near completion, writers adorn their work with their crew name and the tags of individual crew members.
Illustration #8: Example of a multi-colored piece

Illustration #9: Example of a multi-colored piece
The graffiti subculture has experienced a number of changes since 1982 (Beswick, 1994). With the aid of ethnographic data, I hope to better describe Castleman's typology of graffiti forms. In addition, I hope to identify changes in graffiti form, motivations for these changes, and other forms of patterned behavior that develop through writer interaction.
Methodology

As consultant to a newly formed Graffiti Task Force in Long Island, I have been given access to suburban youth arrested for graffiti-making. Due to overcrowding in jails and shelters, judges were asked to consider monetary fines and mandated community service as effective forms of restitution. These youth will be sent to the American Red Cross to complete their sentences. I collected a sample of these and interviewed those graffiti offenders assigned to the agency. These youths were asked to agree to interviews lasting approximately two hours.

The sample was selected using a snowball sampling technique. Participants were asked at the end of the interviews to identify friends and other crew members actively involved in graffiti-making. Graffiti writers are anxious to talk about their "craft," and they referred me to others who had not been caught and referred to the courts. I also made excursions into New York City to interview three "kings of the subway line." The total sample includes thirty-five respondents. Because respondents were initially selected in a non-random fashion, the generalizability of the study is low.

I anticipated that many offenders would be apprehensive at first. However, the non-incriminating nature of the questions put them at ease. A formal interview schedule was used, with questions encompassing personal histories, racking and writing techniques, crew involvement, and effects of law enforcement. Cross-checks and probing questions were used throughout the interviews to ensure the truthfulness of responses. The interview was structured and used throughout the data collection process. Therefore, data reliability should be high and could be tested. All interviews were
transcribed, but respondent identities were kept confidential. I also arranged several "culturally sensitive" murals with the hopes of watching and observing the graffiti-making process and the hierarchy of structure involved. This was accomplished by asking several non-profit agencies interested in crime prevention to donate an interior or exterior wall for such a project. Fund-raising and donations helped secure the necessary materials and paint. Participants agreed to be interviewed after each mural. I had wanted to go out with the youths while they were writing illegally, but I could not secure permission from County officials.
CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF GRAFFITI

A social niche refers to a space in society that supplies a context for social actions (Aday, 1990). Accordingly, it consists of roles, relationships and rationales. Within the framework of social niche, a better understanding of social experiences is possible (Bryant, 1982). As people enter social niches, they find a myriad of behavioral expectations. These expectations that are attached to recognizable positions are called roles. Roles are inherently relational. They link persons and positions by common, complimentary, competitive or other types of interactions. Relationships, then, refer to the convergence between and among roles. Rationales refer to the shared meanings within the niches. These persisting understandings give form and focus to group life. They may encourage or even endorse deviant behavior. Finally, the patterned behavior that comes to typify group activities is described as social action. The primary social action within the Hip Hop subculture is graffiti-making.

The arrangement of interrelated social niches and the persisting and changing patterns of social action is defined to be social organization (Aday, 1990). Forms of organization are shaped by interaction, competition, and both informal and formal social
control. More specifically, social control is that dimension of social organization that enforces expectations and laws through sanctions. It is within this context that graffiti will be analyzed.

**A Description of Graffiti**

It's about 8:30 and nearly dark on a Saturday evening. Deep and his crew gather at his house to determine the night's events. They first stop at a local liquor store for a twelve pack of cheap beer, and then proceed to a near-by hardware store to purchase the necessary paint supplies. They plan to hit the backside of a nearby shopping center. Parking the car several blocks away, they walk down a side-street until they reach their target: the back wall of a pizza parlor.

Previous writers have sprayed names, phrases, and declarations. The skinheads also have left their marks, adorning white power slogans and swastikas on nearby dumpsters. Members of the Latin Kings, a street gang rising in popularity and strength, have marked the outer perimeters of the shopping center with various gang markings and symbols. Behind the Chinese restaurant is a throw-up done by a crew member several months before. It is an unusual piece, because his tag name has changed since he was arrested.

The selected location is covered with graffiti, forcing Deep and his crew to cover several large tags made by inferior writers (toyz). Deep and JP light a cigarette, pull from their backpacks several cans of spray paint, some are the more expensive Krylon brand and there are a few cans of Rustoleum. Distracted by the bright colors of the previous tags, they use a gallon of old white house paint to roll over previous work.

JP constantly refers to his piece book, carefully following the sketch done in markers. First, JP outlines his piece with light Krylon colors. He then steps back, examines his work and acts as a lookout for the others in the group. Working side-by-side, Dupe and the other crew members begin to paint separate and individualized throw-ups adjacent to Deep's piece. As they paint, they discuss the night, graffiti in general, and occasionally check the progress of each other. JP, being considered the best writer in the crew is frequently asked to grab a can of paint and fix a mistake on somebody's piece or to "spot dimensions" for others.

As cars go by, JP yells UC (stands for "do UC what I see?") and everyone jumps behind dumpsters and parked cars. As the outlines are finished, the process of filling in begins. The lookout position begins to rotate. Members take on the position of lookout as they finish their separate throw-ups.
Several of the more experienced members have "graff belts" which allow them to wrap the cans of paint around their body for quick and easy access. With paint caps removed, and a small piece of paper sprayed with the identifying color attached to the top of each can, they begin the process of filling-in. The weight of the can is used to gauge how much paint is left and members share if their stash runs out. Occasionally, someone risks exposure by shining a quick flash of light from a lighter or match. The light is quickly extinguished and painting in relative darkness continues.

It's now almost 11:00 and the enthusiasm for painting is being replaced with exhaustion, hunger, and the anxiety of arrest. They gather their gear and go, careful to collect all the empties, caps, and half-used paint cans. Walking through the backyards of nearby homes, they reach the parked car left several hours earlier. Once in the car, they make a plan to visit the wall the following afternoon. They discuss the painting process, and express a desire to see and admire each other's work in the daylight.

Social Characteristics of Suburban Writers:

**SUMMARY OF WRITER CHARACTERISTICS: N=35**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior research suggests that graffiti offenders are disproportionately lower class minority males, with relatively low education and low occupational prestige (Castleman, 1982; George, 1985; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1988). George (1985) argues that the heavy representation of African-Americans and Hispanics in the Hip Hop graffiti subculture is due in large part to their participation in perpetuating break dance and rap music. Brewer and Miller's (1990) study of Seattle neighborhoods and Ferrell's (1993) study of Denver's graffiti scene supports this notion. In contrast to previous research, only a small percentage of suburban Hip Hop writers in this study have ethnic minority backgrounds.
In addition, interviews with Long Island youth reveal that many graffiti writers (N=9) are upper middle-class males with aspirations of college and professional employment.

Previous research also suggests that Hip Hop graffiti writers are diverse in ages with the majority of writers reportedly falling within the range of twelve to twenty years of age. Lachman's (1988) study supports this notion and suggests that most taggers quit making graffiti by the age of sixteen. Interviews with suburban youth reveal a broader age range. Many youth reported tagging as early as ten years of age, and some continue to write well into their late twenties. Two respondents were 35 and 37 respectively. In addition, writers reveal that participation in subcultural activities vary. Writers drift in and out of the subculture as life experiences and conventional opportunities become more plentiful.

**The Crew**

The most basic social group in the Hip Hop graffiti subculture is a "crew."

Twenty-three crews were identified during the interview process (see Appendix A for crew names and descriptions). Crews are informally organized groups graffiti writers that often result from friendship groups, shared neighborhoods and school connections. Members' definitions of a crew include:

"Its just friends hanging out...we just like to write."

"A crew is just your buddies hanging out together...Its not a gang or anything....we're not out there killing anybody."

"Just people sharing a common interest...its no different than the football team only we get more recognition and fame than those jocks."
Membership in one crew does not preclude membership in other crews. Writers can belong to several crews simultaneously. "High status" or "respected" writers commonly express loyalty to more than one established crew. They do this by writing the crew's moniker adjacent to their graffiti. These writers also tend to form smaller and more localized crews. Two primary reasons were given for creating new and smaller crews. First, founding members are given the highest respect. Second, by forming smaller crews, writers of lesser abilities are given opportunities to harness new skills, become further entrenched into the subculture, and "keep the movement going." Because membership is constantly changing, crews form and break-up regularly.

Crews vary in size and geographical dispersion. Crews can range from three people to several hundred, and they can encompass a small township or may stretch across several states. Of the twenty-three crews identified, five were described as stretching across the United States, four were founded and restricted to New York City, and nine were local to the county. It is not always possible for every writer to personally know or associate with every other member. Writers secure a stronger sense of loyalty and commitment to the crew through friendship cliques within crews. These cliques carry the crew name in some modified fashion and are composed of youth who are roughly the same age. Three such cliques were described during the interview process. Menace states,

"The kids that are just starting graf want to belong, but don't have the style to get into the good crews. I formed a small crew in my school to give everybody a chance to improve their tag and work their way into better and bigger crews. SWO (Skilled Writers Only) is a way for my friends that don't have a lot of skill to still hang out and experience the graf scene."
As the crew matures, new graded groupings form from neighborhoods, schools, and acquaintances.

My research suggests that each friendship group has its own internal structure comprised of two primary classes of writers: piecers and taggers. Piecers are writers who concentrate primarily on creating full size murals. In contrast, taggers concentrate on getting a quick and simple name in as many locations as possible. These classes and the boundaries separating the emphasis on quantity or style are not mutually exclusive. Some taggers attempt to better their style by doing complex throw-ups and pieces, and some piecers try to gain wide-spread recognition by participating in tagging and bombing. Vek states, "I became king by getting my tag up everywhere. Now I mostly do pieces...improving my style and making art." Piecers comprise the smaller class. They are writers who view themselves as artists. Taggers realize that they must practice on visible walls in order to gain the recognition of respected writers and to improve their skills. As Deep states,

"Its art, so you're proud of it when you see it up. Cuz when you're not that good, you think you're that good. A lot of people have positive attitudes, no one puts each other's work down. Well sometimes they do. You say, 'Oh, that suck!' Then you laugh about it. Then you help the person get better. There's no one that says 'your work sucks, get out of here'--unless the people don't get along with you....if they're from a different crew."

Within both classes are sub-levels of status that are determined by style, proficiency, quantity, and risk-taking (Brewer and Miller, 1990). Toyz refer to writers who have limited experience. Often new to the Hip Hop subculture, toyz will engage in other forms of vandalism, such as smashing windows. They also may commit theft and
inform on other writers. They hope to gain recognition for their boldness. However, toyz often are criticized for their misplaced exurbance. "Old-timers" are writers who are older in age (usually between 25-35 years of age) and have been writing for several years. Often these writers drift in and out of the graffiti subculture. These writers appear to "exist in limbo between convention and crime, responding in turn to the demands of each, flirting now with one, now with the other, but postponing commitment and evading decision (Matza, 1964:28)." A twenty-nine year old writer (tag not given) states,

"I stopped writing for a couple years...I just started doing other things. But after a while, I picked it up again...it's like a disease that just keeps coming back.. It took a while to get my name up, but now I've got the fame I want."

Another status is that of king. A king is considered the "best" writer in a crew or geographical area. To maintain high status, a king must not only get his name up, but he must demonstrate significant talent and style.

Once a crew is formed, membership depends on a number of criteria. Novice writers may be asked to rack (i.e. shoplift) supplies, fill-in outlines for various members, or act as look-outs. Such activities help to prove new recruits' loyalty and their ability to manage themselves in stressful situations. The most common membership requirement is good aesthetic style. Booz explains,

"The only thing that matters is if the other members like your style. They see your tag on your notebook or in someone's blackbook. If they like your style, they'll ask you to be down with them. If the crew is large, you go seek them out, but you don't talk about crew membership, you just write."

Hence, most members were invited to "be down" with a crew. Thirty-two of the interviewed graffiti writers were asked to be down with their crews. It should be noted
that many city crews (N=4) have begun to imitate the initiation process of street gangs. Three urban crews identified by writers require new members to be "jumped in," (i.e., to endure a physical attack) prior to acceptance into the group.

When accepted (or "put down") into a crew, the individual is granted permission to write the crew's name adjacent to his work. This carries certain benefits, rights and expectations. If a writer is able to gain membership into a prestigious crew, his status in increased within the subculture. In addition, new members are exposed to illegitimate opportunities that, prior to membership, were unavailable. New members learn new techniques and a variety of stylistic interpretations from more skilled writers. In other words, membership provides a "learning environment" in which writers are able to enhance their graffiti potential. In addition to the above-mentioned privileges, new members are expected to demonstrate loyalty to the crew and its members. This is accomplished by getting the crew's name up and refusing to "rat" (give names to authorities) on fellow members. When transgressions are committed against fellow members, it is expected that new and old members will join together to address the problem. Members describe this process as a "battle" or "war."

A formalized leadership structure does not appear to exist within crews. Power and authority are held evenly by various members of the crew. A recognized "king" explains, "in a crew, everyone is their own leader." It should be noted that one or two writers within the crew often are singled out by other members because of their ability to "get up" or because of their stylistic talents. These writers are the "the most respected" members of the crew. Members demonstrate their admiration by allowing these writers
to select the first space on a wall, by racking supplies for them, by acting as lookouts, or by asking them for writing advice.

**Networks**

Writers socialize mainly with those writers who they meet in school or on the street. However, increased law enforcement and more stringent legislation have encouraged writers to expand their socialization outside of the crews. Hip Hop graffiti writers have built large networks of communication that use new advances in technology and media. Interviewed writers indicate participation in national video and photographic magazines, internet and underground newspapers.

Because the graffiti writing process is competitive, writers are very interested in new graffiti and the writers who are producing it. All interviewed writers admit to travelling around the community in search of new graffiti. New pieces and tags are evaluated and criticized. If writers are discovered by other writers in the process of making graffiti, introductions and conversation often follow. An independent piecer describes his networking style: "when I see other people painting, I tell them who I am. We talk, we might even have a lot in common. Maybe we make arrangements to go out bombing sometime." Contacts also are made and strengthened through the use and exchange of piecebooks. Piecebooks (also known as blackbooks) contain the signature tags, practice tags, sticker tags, and piece sketches of various other writers. All writers in the sample said they exchange these books with one another. Tags, similar to autographs, are compared and analyzed. Crew members may collectively draft a piece in a piecebook with the expectation of painting it "big" later on. Hence, piecebooks appear
to serve a number of functions. They are used to record personal graffiti, as a rough draft for larger painted pieces, and as journals of friendships and collective graffiti efforts. In addition, piecebooks help writers identify tags and graffiti paintings. Identification leads to crew recruitment and enlargement of the subculture.

On a broader scale, writers are communicating across counties, states, and countries through the use of modern technology. Graffiti magazines such as *Tag Rag*, *The Source*, and *Flashback* have allowed writers from various regions to share techniques and styles. In addition, writers aspire to be included in the communication process by submitting photographs of their paintings to the magazine. Videograf (a video magazine) is another method of communication within the subculture. Writers are encouraged to videotape their graffiti efforts and send the tape into VideoGraf. Several tapes are selected each month to depict current trends in the subculture, talent, and style. Regional differences in graffiti also become apparent as youth from various states participate.

The most significant growth in the Hip Hop movement occurred when communication was made possible and easy through the use of computers. Internet lines, E-mail, and Prodigy systems have not only facilitated but encouraged the growth of graffiti nation-wide. An examination of materials on the internet revealed that writers use these communication lines in the following ways.

(1) to get stylistic advice

**Internet 1995/ California**
"Is there any secret to having no-drip fills? I haven't been able to do one (particularly light-colored paints) yet."
Response:
"I don't know what you're doing, but hold the can a little bit back from the wall and move quickly so it doesn't pool up and drip. Light color paints are harder to get to fill evenly. Maybe do two coats?"

(2) to innovatively react to more stringent legislation

Internet 1995/Canada
"Where I come from, graff isn't considered that big of a threat that they have to lock down the cans...Yet. This is probably because the scene hasn't developed past being a minor inconvenience for most folks. The few of us are also not into racking our cans, which could be the other motivations for lockups. We're vandals, not criminals. Still, my man Task took it upon himself to get a business license and buy paint from distributors. Not too much cheaper, you have to buy mass quantities, but less hassle and a better selection of colors. The extra benefit has also been writers from different neighborhoods hooking up for a common deal and getting more familiar with each other."

(3) to purchase and price graffiti supplies

Internet 1995/California
"Have you ever heard of buying fucking caps? You know like NY outlines or fill caps? Or Germans or skinnys? I bought caps before, but people down here be charging up to .75 per tip! That outrageous because I know fools be buying them for like 500 for $10 straight from the paint companies. I'd like to find out where to get that hookup and I'd be set of like."

(4) and to simply discuss current graffiti fads

Internet 1995/New York
"I think stickers are nice for catching shit when your not out to bomb, i see no problem with it. I've seen some of the most respected writers with sticker ups, but I wouldn't respect someone who had only or mostly sticker ups. I wouldn't think any less of someone who had sticker ups in addition to their other shit. ....I carry stickers with me all the time. I have them 3x6 stickers and they have pencil pieces...I'm super lazy, I don't even write on each one, they are mass-produced....I have 3 rolls at my house. It's cool to be able to draw a little 3x6 dope letters, with a character, and not have to take 6 hours to get people to see it. I don't respect the people that just write with a little marker on the name tags...I think if you put a quality piece on the stickers (even if they're just copied and not re-drawn each time) then it's cool...because it's a piece to look at, and it won't get buffed."
Internet 1995/Massachusetts

"Although this is bad news, it is good to hear from other writers. Today it seems graffiti is going down the toilet. Writers are so busy crossing each other out that they are not uniting to fight this legislation and others like it. Yes I am over 18, but right now I have been getting paint in Colorado where I can get paint for less than $2 a can. I don't think paint sticks will replace the can, but I do see a large upswing in full color sticker bombing. Also, Shred of the Chicago crew DC5 thinks that this new legislation will get rid of the toys. Real writers will find a way to get paint. Hope to hear from you and pass the word."

Regardless of the topic, Internet, Prodigy, and E-mail systems have provided a means by which youth from various regions can share information, strategies, and techniques to further strengthen and augment the Hip Hop Graffiti subculture.

Roles

Within Hip Hop subculture, there exists several transitional roles that members and non-members occupy. These roles do not characterize the individual and are not fixed. Rather, individuals perform certain roles periodically to ensure the crew name gets up. Roles include writer, lookout, driver, videographer, racker and huffer. The first and most obvious role is that of writer. The writing of tags, throw-ups, and pieces is the central concern for subcultural members. Respect and acceptance in the "graf scene" is achieved when writers are able to get their name up in many locations. Writers collectively participate in the graffiti-making process. In addition, writers discuss the stylistic techniques of other writers, sharing criticisms and appraisals of various graffiti forms. These experiences help to solidify friendships and strengthen subcultural bonds.
Another critical role within the graffiti subculture is that of lookout. Lookouts watch for oncoming vehicles, pedestrians and, most importantly, the police. Writers alternate between writing and looking for police during the graffiti-making process. Often novice writers are assigned the position of lookout. This gives them the opportunity to observe the techniques of more experienced writers and to gain respect from crew members. Non-writers also function as lookouts, identifying peer pressure and appreciation as major reasons for involvement. A total of six non-writers, arrested for criminal mischief, were interviewed. These youths did not participate in the graffiti-making process, but rather acted as look-outs for their friends. A seventeen year old male states, "I never wrote graf. I like the stuff...there was nothing to do....so I went out with some friends. I stayed in the car and watched for the police, everyone else covered the Taco Bell with paint."

Subcultural members also function as drivers. Drivers transport writers and paint supplies to target locations. Not all crew members can function as drivers because some are under sixteen years of age. If several members have the necessary licenses and automobiles, driving responsibilities will be shared. Many non-members also act as drivers. They observe the graffiti-making process and feel part of something exciting while remaining relatively passive.

Non-writers and writers perpetuate subcultural activities by using video equipment and cameras to capture the moment. Writers borrow their parents' video cameras or ask friends to videotape the graffiti-making process.
"Sometimes we'll ask a friend who doesn't write but appreciates graff to come out with us and watch. If we've planned to do a large piece, we might ask him to borrow his father's video camera and tape us painting. We've sent five tapes to VideoGraf, but they haven't published any of our stuff yet."

Subcultural members also emphasize still photographs. Photos are taken and shared. This serves to strengthen the group experience. A non-writer states, "I would take photos of the crew and they would put me down with them. I wasn't interested in writing, but I like the graf scene."

Huffers form another component of the graffiti subculture. While many Hip Hop writers consistently incorporate some mix of cigarettes, liquor, beer, and pot with graffiti-making, most condemn "hard-core" drug users. Loco states, "those writers that go to raves and shit like that, they're freaks. Graffiti is about writing, sometimes you smoke a little pot or drink some beer to loosen yourself up, but its all about art, not drugs."

Piecers and taggers commonly come into contact with "paint-heads" or huffers. These individuals get high by inhaling spray paint fumes. Huffers will often try to ingratiate themselves to writers in the hopes of getting spray cans from them. They spray the paint into paper bags and Kleenex and snort the fumes.

**Relationships**

Within the Hip Hop subculture, certain relationships are formed and maintained. Interactions can involve subcultural members, different social niches, and various outside influences. Relationships include, but are not limited to, the mentor-protege relationship within the subculture, parental ties, and gang associations.
Research reveals that when a more experienced writer and a novice writer share writing experiences, a mentor-protege relationship is formed (cf. Brewer and Miller, 1990). Novice writers acquire skills and motivation from more experienced writers. Similar to Lachman's 1988 study, I found that novice writers acknowledge that first they were taught that there is an audience for graffiti. Lest states,

"I always liked graffiti, but it wasn't until I was thirteen years old that I really got into it. I used to visit my cousin, ....he was really into it. He gave me a name, he was One and I was Two and we would go out together. At first I did it to be mischievous, but soon other kids began to notice and talk about our tags. I decided to bring it back to Suffolk with me."

Novices are also educated in the rules and practice of the subculture. They often are taught new styles and techniques of writing, as well as how to successfully avoid authorities. Menace states,

"Of course I'd take an in-experienced writer out with me, its flattering, you know. I'll take him writing and show him some skills. If you go disrespecting someone just because he's not experienced, then the next generation of writers is going to do that too. If that happens, Hip Hop graffiti will just stop, and that can't happen. Its got to keep growing and gaining momentum,...that's what its all about."

The relationship benefits the mentor in several ways. He finds such admiration to be flattering. In addition, sharing knowledge with others give the more experienced writer a feeling of power and a sense that he/she has done something positive. Finally, some writers expressed the ability to propagate their individual trademark style through dedications and acknowledgements by novice writers.

The relationships between writers and their parents helps proliferate the graffiti. Some parents knowingly admit that their child is involved in illegal graffiti-making. Passive warnings not to get caught and to be careful are common with such parents.
Other parents feel more comfortable giving their child permission to paint selected rooms of the house. One parent exclaims, "he's going to graffiti regardless of what I have to say. At least when he paints the walls in my house, I know he can't get arrested." Finally, there are those parents identified by writers as "easy to fool." These parents ask questions and are involved in their child's life. Paint on hands and clothes, knapsacks carried at night, and blackbooks are noticed and interpreted as cause for concern. However, excuses such as "I was helping a friend paint his bike," "I've got some tapes and CD's in my knapsack," and "I just draw in books because everybody else does" are commonly given by writers and accepted by parents.

Gangs also play a role in graffiti-making. Originally formed as an alternative to street gangs, many crews have joined forces with gangs in order to protect themselves from increasing youth violence. Graffiti writers are employed by gangs to spread the gang name across town. In two interviews, experienced writers revealed that they design shirt, jacket, and baseball cap emblems for city and county gang members. In return, these writers receive paint, physical protection, and, in some cases, weaponry. Recently, many tagger crews have opted to carry razor blades, brass knuckles, knives, and guns. These crews include LOD, EBP and AOD. This increased tendency toward violence has further strengthened ties between crews and gangs.

Rationales that Promote Graffiti

Persisting social attitudes favor, encourage, and endorse graffiti-making. These shared attitudes include values, behavioral rules, motivations and rationales. Interviews reveal that the primary reasons for graffiti-making are the pursuit of fame, artistic
expression, boredom and rebellion. In addition, writers adhere to an understood code of
customs that inspires subcultural loyalty, confrontational avoidance, and limited writing
on personal property.

Fame is the most important goal and value in the Hip Hop graffiti subculture. It
encompasses the affiliated concepts of recognition, respect, and acclaim (cf. Brewer and
Miller, 1990). A twenty-seven year old writer talks of this motivation,

"You know I am really young, but they consider me an old man. That I have
been around and been painting for a while....Some hate me, but most look up to
me. They see my work as art and admire my ability to avoid the cops. I'm
painting for myself, but all those people admiring my stuff...it has an impact, you
know."

Data identify three basic dimensions of fame: quantity, exposure, and style (cf. Brewer
and Miller, 1990). Writers must actively get their tag up in order to demonstrate
dedication and discipline to other subcultural members. Vek states, "I bomb and tag all
the time, everywhere...fences, overpasses, trains, police stations, anywhere...that makes
me king. I know I'm king and everyone else knows it too." Long Island writers
acknowledge the short-term nature of graffiti, arguing that the paint out efforts of law
enforcement officials and property owners encourage their frequent and continuous
writing efforts.

Related to the principle of quantity is the notion of visibility. To guarantee
exposure, writers routinely choose target locations frequented by subcultural members
and, to a lesser degree, the general public. Thus, common graffiti sights include highway
overpasses, train tressels, and back walls of shopping centers. When Reip was asked
what significance, if any, visibility had in graffiti-making, he responded, "When I write,
I do it for myself, but I mostly write where other writers can see it...handball courts and overpasses...I'm trying to get into O.F.F. (Out For Fame) and the only way I can do that is to show those guys my style." An additional way to gain exposure is to have one's writings pictured in newspapers, magazines, movies, music videos and television. Computer communication lines are also quickly becoming an innovative method for writers to gain exposure.

**Internet: February 15, 1995**
Syse: I just got my scanner and as soon as I figure out how to use the damn thing, I'll be posting some phat ass flix."

Writers scan photographs of their tags and pieces into the computer, post these photos on cyber space communication networks and gain national recognition.

Style is the third method of attaining fame. Cooper and Chalfant (1984: 66) define style as "....the form, the shapes of letters, and how they connect." Selection of colors and the use of iconography are also important. Writers frequently strive to paint "burners" or pieces that prove their superior artistic abilities. Deep states "graffiti is all about art, style is everything....when you can take time and express yourself, well, there's nothing like it." This concentration on style is especially true for piecers (elite writers). Mastering techniques and properly using graffiti supplies is also a measure of distinction between writers. Dupe states,

"Yeah, there's a way you can make the paint spread wide out. You get a sewing needle and you heat it up and ya melt it, ya know the hole where the paint comes out in the cap...stick the needle in there and you make the hole bigger. Some people buy their caps, but I think it takes more talent to make the cap yourself. Either way, what you write and do with your graf tools determines the respect you get from others."
A manifestation of this goal is "battling." Battling entails writers competitively challenging each other to paint a better and more stylistic piece. This contest is judged by battling and non-battling writers.

Artistic expression is another primary concern for graffiti writers. Style and form are "not only a means to fame, but also an end in themselves" (Brewer and Miller, 1990). Working within a restricted vocabulary of letters and shapes writers combine forms improvisationally within a loose visual organization.

"A lot of colors can get some people respect. Like I said, I see colors of paint as colors of the heart. Its not like using white, like Peter or Joe. I ain't disrespecting them, cuz if that's what they want to write...that's fine...it's cool....but I am saying if you're gonna go out there and risk your ass you might as well be talented about it. I take time,...my pieces are big. Sometimes it'll take two to three hours to do my painting. Its all about expressing yourself...taking pride in your work."

Writers closely identify with their paintings, viewing their work as an extension of themselves. Veik contends that his work is "soulful" and expresses a part of himself not always visible to others. Even crew names such as Droppin Art, Artists Reign Supreme (A.R.S) and Living For Street Art (L.F.S.A.) attest to subcultural contentions that graffiti is artistic.

Many writers believe that they are providing a service to the community. They argue that graffiti transforms a shabby and rundown environment into a vibrant world of colors and originality. Gust defends his painting,

"The whole county is just God damn depressing....crime, drugs, and violence are everywhere. The City is even worse. Graffiti makes all these industrial-looking buildings that got no character come alive. You know, all the colors and styles,... it makes driving through the community worthwhile."

Similarly Word argues, "there's no hope out there,...drugs, aids, crime...nothing's getting
any better...us writers, well, we're just spreading the word...not to give up, you know...that's how I came up with my tag." Writers condemn the negative label of "delinquent, criminal and vandal" attached to them by authorities. While recognizing that their graffiti is illegal, writers protest the constant police attention and "extreme" punitive measures taken by the courts. Lest states, "If we weren't painting we'd probably be doing something else that's bad...at least painting doesn't kill anyone. If adults just took the time to look at it, I mean really look at, they would see all the effort and skill it takes."

Writers commonly express boredom as a prime motivation for graffiti-making. They complain about inadequate park and recreational facilities; frequently citing shopping malls and arcades as the only locations which permit youths to spend time together. In addition, many schools limit athletic participation by requiring students to pay monetary fees for intramural and sport teams. Lest states,

"There's nothing for us to do around here. If we hang out behind a store and play handball, the police come and tell us we're trespassing. If we go to friends, parents eventually kick us out. The schools make us pay to play on teams and even intramural sports. What else is there to do? The system leaves us no options."

Another writer supports his actions by arguing, "graffiti writing takes up time and gives me something to do....would you rather I spend time robbing stores and fighting?"

Rebellion is also valued within the Hip Hop graffiti subculture. The general public, municipal authorities, and politicians condemn writers and negatively label them as "vandals." Menace states,
"I do graff to show, like... anger. I do a lot,...so do others, showing, like we don't even give two shits. Like this world's a piece of shit, giving up, in a way like, and also it's so many different things for so many different people. Its very hard to, I can tell you what it is for me, its personal...I write when I'm frustrated and angry."

While writers acknowledge their deviance and criminality, most writers do not believe that graffiti warrants police attention. Lest argues,

"First of all, I think the system is totally messed up. I get 140 hours for doing graffiti ...for spray painting...and a guy driving drunk...its like giving a guy a gun...he's out there killing people and he only gets 28 hours. If the system really wanted to fix problems, politicians would concentrate on drugs, violence, and gangs."

Another graffiti writer exclaims, "Well, there were a lot of stuff going down, like, a lot of new rules that we didn't agree with. I guess that was our way of saying this is bull shit."

Subcultural Code of Conduct

In addition to shared values, Hip Hop graffiti writers follow certain rules and codes of conduct. Adherence to these codes yields respect and approval within the subculture. These behavioral restrictions include avoiding confrontation, keeping graffiti impersonal, and maintaining loyalty to your crew and the subcultural members.

Overall Hip Hop graffiti writers try to avoid physical confrontations. Writers talk about graffiti as a means of personal expression. This notion emphasizes art, not violence.

Internet: February 13, 1995

Dee Phunk: The first rule of tagging....AVOID CONFRONTATIONS...If a citizen sweats you just jet...The easiest way to get messed up is trying to argue or fight with a citizen about writing on the wall at night. A couple writers I know would try to tell people fuck you and keep writing, thinking they are big shit....I've never taken that attitude...You can get into some serious shit that way, especially today...people are tired of all these taggers."
Reip states,

"Our neighborhood isn't like those high class neighborhoods in the Hamptons and North Shore, but our town has a sense of pride, because we stick together. If somebody comes into our neighborhood, we don't go out and look for trouble, most of the time trouble finds us. If people come around showing you disrespect, your crew helps you out."

In recent years, the growing emergence of gangs in the area has encouraged a phenomenon, which has since been labeled "tag-banging." Tag-banging is the intersection of violence and graffiti. "Dissing" or going over other writer's work becomes a reason for violent interpersonal behavior. There are fights, and brass knuckles, knives, and guns are now being carried by many taggers, thus increasing the potential for violence. Often confrontations between two individuals become the concern of the entire crew, with crew members collectively attacking the disrespectful offender. In some cities, crew members travel by car looking for lone taggers. When spotted, this tagger is attacked and beaten for choosing to paint without the support of his fellow crew members. This is called slipping.

Writers avoid writing on "personal" property. This includes individual homes and motor vehicles owned by individuals. On occasion, writers will target a home, but this is usually because the owner has done something to anger the writer. Jev justifies his behavior by stating, "I painted someone's house once, but he deserved it. My friends and I were just hanging out one day...skateboarding in front of his house and he called the police. Why the hell did he have to get us in trouble...we weren't doing anything."
Exterior fences along personal property are frequently painted. Writers rationalize this location by arguing that if the fence faces a road and the owner doesn't have to see graffiti every time he/she goes outside, then it's not personal property.

**Internet: February 14, 1995**

When you're up on some tracks creating something kids all over the city will see, it's energy on a wall...Just like any scene, there are idiots and there are people who know what they're doing. There are so many vandals out there, it's astounding! ...these idiots in the vandal scene write on people's houses and churches with really bad styles....They just give graf a bad name.

Dupe states,

"If its somebody's house, a church or something like that...you just don't wreck somebody's house. If there was a large business, you know, we really didn't think, you know, the reasons for choosing it...probably figured that they had a lot of money and they could afford to get it painted over or something."

Writers involved in this research project unanimously agree that graffiti on places of worship, medical or mental hospitals, or national or state monuments is wrong.

However, a number of writers admitted that the idea of hitting a police station or car was appealing. Veik exclaimed, "it would serve those cops right...they're always on top of us, harassing us for no reason....if I knew I could get away pretty easily, I'd do it in a second."

Loyalty to crew members and the subculture is the prime directive of most graffiti activity. If caught by police, writers agree that refusal to cooperate with police is appropriate behavior. Deep states,

"I'll never rat out my friends...it'll never happen. While it depends on the person the police are asking about. If he's an asshole, then I'd definitely rat him out...but you know...if you have respect for your friends then you just don't do it."
Writers also know that writing over other people's work will not earn them any respect.

Lest describes his interpretation of loyalty and respect:

"If its a little crap piece and everybody's just writing on it, just to get stuff on the wall, then someone comes and buffs it just to get their piece on the wall, its usually not a big thing. But if someone takes out like a lot of time; like three hours to do a nice piece and then they come up and do something that shows no talent,.its disrespectful and we're all going to look down on him."

Allegiance to crew members extends beyond shared writing experiences. Writers express commitment to one another regardless of the situation. An older writer states, "my buds (writing friends) are like my family, I would do anything for them and they would do anything for me."

**Social Action: The Patterned Behavior of Hip Hop Graffiti**

**Tags**

Herbert Kohl (1972) describes a tag as a nickname given or devised by the writer that becomes acknowledged, included and individualized. He argues that a tag often is reflective of one's physical appearance or personality, and changes as new values, beliefs, status, and responsibilities are acquired. Current research on graffiti supports the notion that tags are developed to reflect subcultural identity (Brewer, 1992; Ferrell, 1993; Castleman, 1982). Fifteen percent of the interviewed writers described their tags as personal referents. For example, Swif created his tag as a reference to his speed in getting up and agility in the train yards. Loco's tag makes reference to his Spanish ancestry and his risk-taking abilities.
However, the majority of writers appear to construct tags not as personal references, but as reflections of visual style. Once lettering is selected, tag names are determined and change through negotiations within the graffiti subculture. Emphasis is placed on picking letters that "piece good." Long tags are undesirable because they are not as quick and efficient as the shorter tags. The visual possibilities of the letters themselves play a significant role in the creation of tags. Dupe describes his selection of letters as follows:

"It doesn't have to mean anything. Could be a name you got from somebody, or ... what I do is pick the letters that look good. You know, you just play with certain designs until you come out with a word. Then it goes up, until the cops start harassing you or someone bites (i.e., copies) your tag. Then you gotta go through the whole process all over again."

After getting arrested, Dupe withdrew from the graffiti scene for a while. In the meantime, a new writer in school adopted the stylized version of Dupe, changing the letter "u" to the letter "o."

"I had graduated from high school, and heard that someone else was using my style.... I found it kind of flattering. You know, that someone respects my work that much. This writer isn't that good, just a toy with some potential. I didn't want my graff to be confused with his, so I just switched my tag to Lest. I had been practicing in my piecebook, and got to be able to draw the letters "e" and "s" pretty good. I also, added arrows and some cartoon characters, like the scrubbing bubbles, you know, from Dow Bathroom Cleaner. I figure it's something everyone would remember. I haven't had a to use it (Lest), I don't know if I will."

Sometimes the transitions that result from biting (copying another writer's tag or style) are not so easily negotiated. Some of the interviewed writers protect their tags by verbally attacking new writers. The original writer claims that the new tagger lacks originality, is disrespectful, and is looking for trouble. Seven respondents acknowledge
resolving graffiti conflicts through physical confrontations and fist fighting. On occasion, crews will collectively engage in fighting (known as a "war") to defend their fellow crew member.

Writers create multiple tags to improve their stylistic abilities. As a writer's subcultural identity strengthens, so too does his or her artistic talents. Eager to try different techniques and stylistic variations, writers frequently switch tags. The writer is interested in "bettering his style," and "becoming the best in his group." However, this is often in conflict with the subcultural emphasis placed on getting up. To gain respect, the new tag must not only be aesthetically pleasing, but must also claim a significant amount of wall space.

Writers also create multiple tags to avoid pressure from law enforcement. Since his arrest, Veik has changed his tag twice, adding figures to his new tag to disguise his style. As Veik states:

"The cops are everywhere right now; they're just waiting to pounce on us. Why do they care about writing on a wall--there's so much stuff that goes on in the world that they should concern themselves with. We're just easier to catch. But they'll never catch me. I'm too fast. All I do is buy a train ticket and head to New York City for a while. I wait until the heat's off, and then I come back and fuck up the whole county. Sometimes, I just change my tag, it depends on how much money I have--either way I'll be getting up somehow."

Changing tags is a processual activity. Writers must practice certain letters and style techniques before feeling comfortable with a new tag. Often they will experiment with various words until eventually finding an appropriate combination of letters. Practicing these variations helps writers develop a better sense of style and also aids in confusing law enforcement's attempts to connect and identify taggers.
Writers identify themselves and other subcultural participants by their tags. Often when referring to one another, writers choose to use tag names rather than birth names. In fact, as graffiti writing has increased in popularity and the number of writers has increased exponentially, it is common to find that birth names may not even be known amongst writers. More important, fame and respect in the graffiti subculture often involves recognition of a writer's tag prior to acknowledging the individual writer. Placing a face to a tag is often made possible through the passing of blackbooks. A common introductory scene would proceed as follows:

"Is that your tag (pointing to a page in the writer's blackbook)?"
"Yeah, what do you think?"
"I've seen you around, you're up a lot and you're style is fat. You got talent, if you practice some more, maybe I'll put you down with our crew."

Patterned conversation such as that above is most likely to occur with new writers.

"The Rush"

All graffiti writers participating in this project appear to share a common experience: "the rush." Graffiti writers define this adrenaline rush in a variety of ways. Some writers talk about the rush derived from expressing a part themselves. Veik describes an incident which angered him into painting.

"I consider graffiti an art form...its heartful and full of my soul. Even though I know its wrong and I'm dodging or what ever, that's my piece of art and everybody's going to see that and be like 'oh that fucking graffiti artist' or whatever. I have this one piece with a baby free-basing on a pipe, I got that one day when I saw a twelve year old selling crack...it like, going through my head, I wish I could help this kid...I can't even help myself."
Similarly Dupe feels a rush when others admire his work.

"It sounds kind of weird but you know, you just get a sense of pride. Say somebody is looking at it and they say yo that's dope...and you're just standing behind them and you're like yeah that's cool ya know. They admire your work. Its just like you know you walk into a gallery in New York City and there's paintings on the walls only this is just a different kind of gallery that's all."

Lest and Reip describe several high points in the graffiti process.

"There's two kinds of rush. There's the rush from going there (You know I want to see what this place looks like) then while you're doing it (there's the rush that oh, the cops are going to come, no way were going to get up and planning it out before you get there and then afterwards, after you got away, the next day you see it, you drive by it on purposes to see how it came out (Oh that looks nice, its fat!) That's another rush or one day when you hit a truck and later on you drive by it on the LIE and yours is still up. There's all kinds of rushes."

"Yeah, its like while you're doing it, you're just like, ...its just a lot of fun that's all I can say. You're moving real fast just trying to get it up and you know you're running back and forth grabbing the paints...its just ...you get an adrenaline rush doing it. It's amazing. I mean I can sit at home and draw a picture ya know, and I can get into it, but its not a feeling like that. Where you're just rushing around....creating something huge ...its totally overwhelming."

Probably the greatest rush experienced by a graffiti writer is achieved when graffiti is recognized by various media forms. In past years, newspaper and magazine photos were the "ultimate fame." The advent of music videos and the use of real life settings in motion pictures and television have created a new and more exciting rush sensation.

**Internet, 1995**

"Yo, I was just watching the first Highlander movie a little while ago and in one of the fight scenes in the back alleys of New York City I saw a big piece by "Psycho" ...I think...what mad fame, immortalized in a movie (and a classic at that). Has anyone out there ever wound up on film? I know I've seen a bunch of NYC writers (revs, cost, and others) on TV shows like NYPD Blue and Seinfeld. Everyone please share your stories. I think its one of the most awesome accomplishments for a graffiti artist!"

It's important to note that while many writers admit to drinking and marijuana use during
the graffiti-making process, the correlation between writing and drug use is not strong. Most writers deny the need or want of drugs or alcohol when painting. Reip states, "I smoke pot, but it's just something I do. It doesn't have anything to do with my graffiti,...that's all about me."

Regardless of how it is described, all graffiti writers emphasize and aspire to greater sensations and thrills. Included in the rush experience is the level of risk associated with the chosen location. Risk factors include the time of day (daylight hours being considered the most risky), population surrounding target wall, and personal risk taken to get tag in target location. Deep states:

"The most riskiest thing I've ever done, on the expressway bridges, you know how they have those big pillars...drainage pipes...well, I climbed on to that and you know the green barrier part under the bridge, that's what I tagged. It was the biggest rush I have ever gotten in my life. I would have been dead if I fell. It wouldn't have mattered because I would have fallen into the highway...cars were going seventy mph. It's going to be hard to top that graff experience."

The need to increase the adrenaline rush is evident in many writers. Some writers describe graffiti as "a beautiful disease" and an "uncontrollable cancer." Some states have since adopted a "twelve steps" approach to graffiti addiction recovery.

**Racking**

It is a tradition among writers that most graffiti materials be stolen (Castleman, 1982). The shoplifting process has been labeled "racking." Similar to other forms of shoplifting, the writer takes an object, conceals it, and then exits the store as unobtrusively as possible. Oversized coats, baggy pants, baseball caps, and socks are common hiding places for stolen objects. Some writers use backpacks and army duffles
to carry larger quantities of stolen paint. Interviewed writers reveal that racking often occurs in small groups, with various crew members scattering throughout the store. Each person circulates throughout the store, stealing paint as they wander. The paint they are able to steal becomes their "stash." Some writers are better at racking than others. Those who are considered the best often take more paint than they need, selling the excess to fellow crew members at much lower prices.

In addition to paint, writers also steal markers. Larger markers used for tagging are often kept under counters, forcing writers to "bogart supplies." This method requires the rackers to convince the sales clerk to let them see the desired marker. When in the writer's hands, the writer says "thank you" and runs from the store as quickly as possible.

Many youth learn racking helpful racking techniques over the internet.

**Internet: January 24, 1995**
The only caps I've got, I ripped off from other spray cans in Walmart and shit like that but I can't seem to find any thin ones.

*Response:* Try racking caps off a Krylo Crystal Clear Acrylic spray (make sure there are pictures of paint brushes on the front of the can), that is a "liqua" cap which has a pretty thin spray.

Writers also travel to the city and purchase markers, caps (also known as fat caps and skinny's) and scribes.

Suburban writers prefer smaller hardware stores to the larger chains like Home Depot and Pergamente. Smaller stores often lack advanced security systems and employ only a handful of people. Doc states,
"I never do it (rack) in big places like Home Depot, it's too easy to get caught. Small hardware stores are better...you just go in, ...the places only have one or two people working. Everybody just goes to all different parts of the store. People just take turns going to buy the paint. We put the paint anywhere....coats, pants, backpacks...sometimes we ask someone to distract the employees."

Hardware stores often are selected due to their proximity to school. Writers periodically enter the stores and "check out the layout." If the store looks like "an easy mark," writers tell others about the store and their successful racking experiences.

Most of the writers interviewed, racked their supplies only part of the time. The potential for arrest prevents many writers from racking all their graffiti supplies. Doc states, "I don't really like to rack because if I'm going to get in trouble, I don't want to get in trouble for stealing." Legislation in the state, prohibits the sale of spray paint to minors. To circumvent this law, writers often ask older friends and siblings to purchase the paint for them.

"Our group got paint from Home Depot. It was purchased, but we didn't purchase the paint...the driver who was 19 got the paint cuz there's this law that says eighteen year olds can't buy it. Everybody just walked together and threw it in a box and brought it to the register...eight kids and one nineteen year old and the sales person didn't ask any questions or anything."

Due to increased legislation on retailers, a number of youth have turned to stickers to get their tag up. They collect free stickers from the Post Office and draw individual tags on each sticker. Underground magazines provide useful information on how to photocopy sticker/label pages for free.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL POLICY

The general direction of change in American society has been toward increasing differentiation. Prior to the 1900's, the society was organized in ways that suggested mechanically solid form, with a relatively simple division of labor and limited differentiation among social positions (Durkheim, 1963). Today's society is more organic in form with complex divisions of labor and high levels of specialization. However, it appears that increased differentiation has not been accompanied by mutual dependence. The result has been a long-term trend toward decreasing solidarity and, in turn, decreasing integration (Aday, 1990). The level and type of integration in the society directly affects the diversity of social actions and relationships among social niches (Aday, 1990). When integration is high, niches will be interconnected. When integration is low or weak, niches will be diverse and relatively disconnected from each other and potentially from conventional order (i.e. those norms and laws that are most likely to be enforced). Low levels of integration in American society have encouraged the emergence of new niches and the broadening of old niches to include diverse populations and collectively shared actions. Participation in unconventional social niches has increased the probability of learning deviant patterns of conduct, reduced attachment to social order and encouraged violating behaviors.
Aday's convergence theory attempts to understand the relationships between decreasing integration and increasing violative behaviors and social control. The theory begins by defining deviance as the intersection of violations (unconventional behavior) and social control (efforts to manage or eliminate violative behavior). The theory then argues that social control and violative behaviors contradict and complement one another. Behavior that violates norms and laws, or that might be so interpreted, must be adapted in order to persist. Through adaptations, violating conduct takes on certain characteristics. These features directly reflect social control efforts. Hence, social control does not eliminate violation. Instead, it creates deviance by transforming violation into something more than and different from violation. It is within this context that the social organization of graffiti will be examined.

The Relationship Between Graffiti and Social Control

"It is an interesting fact that most scientific research and speculation on deviance concerns itself with the people who break the rules rather than with those who make and enforce them. If we are to achieve a full understanding of deviant behavior, we must get these two foci on inquiry into balance (Becker, 1963 pp. 163)."

Over the past several decades, distinct youth groups have emerged in reaction to changing social conditions and attitudes. In turn, these groups have developed various styles and forms of graffiti. Whether involved in gangs, skinhead groups or tagger crews, individuals who take part in the graffiti-making process are given the means to learn about specific activities surrounding graffiti and eventually accept definitions that support graffiti and neutralize conventional prohibitions. In addition, social control efforts play a significant role in shaping and sustaining graffiti. In its most elementary
form, social control is a sanction. Sanctions come in a variety of forms and can reflect different purposes including rehabilitation, retribution, deterrence and restitution.

Regardless of their objectives, social control efforts often fail to address the conditions that produce graffiti and encourage violative adaptations.

**Informal Social Control; the Creation of Public Image**

The first social control strategy used by elected officials was the strengthening of public imagery. This is accomplished by addressing three levels of public anxiety. First, and most direct, elected officials endorse the public's fear over the monetary and social consequences that graffiti has on property owners and the general population. Concern is expressed for decreasing property values, reduced tourism and extended use of man-power as reasons for increased taxes. Perspectives which business and political leaders attempt to impart to the community are presented as coming from the community and for the community. A county official states,

"Graffiti is not a victimless crime. We as taxpayers are continually paying for the clean-up and re-painting of our buildings, buses and street signs. Left unchecked, graffiti breeds crime, erodes community spirit and reduces property values."

Graffiti is described as a social problem which threaten the human rights of all county residents, wealthy and poor, powerful and powerless.

The illusion of outraged citizenry sets the context for a second image that is essential to the construction of graffiti as a social dilemma. Politicians, anti-graffiti campaigners and the media link graffiti to issues of ecological destruction and decay. Law enforcement officials expand this imagery by comparing graffiti to rape, homicide, and other violent crimes. A railroad detective states, "Graffiti robs the community of
security and safety and helps to instill fear and anxiety throughout the community. It breeds more violent and harmful crimes." Graffiti is described as symbolic of the social disorder that will ultimately occur if graffiti is left unchecked (Ferrell, 1993). Such imagery characterizes graffiti as both causing and caused by the breakdown of social order, and taps into public anxieties about street crime, youth cultures, and other phenomena represented as part of this social collapse. These images banish graffiti and writers from an idealized suburban community; setting them in conflict with community values and concerns (Farewell, 1993). In a recent speech, a local politician exclaimed, "Those youth who participate in graffiti vandalism must be made to realize that graffiti will not be tolerated in any area of the community." This zero-tolerance approach is solidified with the use of war-like terminology when referring to graffiti. Catch phrases such as "war on graffiti, fight vandalism, combat graffiti and the battle is on" are frequently used to describe graffiti abatement efforts.

This conception is accentuated by the third image building element: law enforcement's portrait and typology of the sort of person who would threaten conventional communities. Officials refer to graffiti writers as criminals and delinquents who don't care about anyone or anything. Writers are typified as drug users, poor athletes, victims of "broken homes" and under-achievers. Politicians and school personnel characterize writers as "only a handful of people generating a significant amount of damage." This psycho-pathological portrait of the graffiti writer has been
elaborated through the deployment of derogatory images and catch phrases. County officials refer to graffiti offenders as "reckless renegades" and create analogies between graffiti writers and "dogs which instinctively need to mark their territories."

**Legislative Approaches**

Informal expectations and outrage have given way to laws and legislation. Over the past decade, laws and county ordinances banning graffiti and the possession of graffiti utensils have been adopted in various villages and counties throughout Long Island. In addition, the penalties for such offenses have increased remarkably. Captain Robert Moore comments,

"We ought to have some stiff penalties for graffiti writing and graffiti-related offenses. The argument that graffiti is art and freedom of expression is irrelevant...if its done without permission, it is vandalism."

Currently, violators are forced to appear in court, pay lawyer fees, spend time in a jail or shelter (if under the age of 16), perform mandated community service, pay monetary fines up to $10,000.00, risk their vehicle being impounded for up to one year and are given a permanent criminal record.

In addition, several county ordinances reflect official efforts to make graffiti-making difficult by restricting the sale of spray paint. They are:

I. No person shall sell or offer to sell an aerosol paint cans or broad tip marker to any person under 18 years of age.

II. No person under the age of 18 is lawfully able to purchase spray paint or broad-tipped indelible markers (usually defined as 1/4" or 3/8" or larger) unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.

III. All business that sell or offer to sell aerosol paint cans must keep them locked and only accessible by direct assistance of store personnel.
Legislators and law enforcement officials have mimicked political attacks on specific drugs. Politicians contend "if a dog relieves itself in the wrong place, you don't give it water." They argue that the only way to successfully combat the graffiti problem is to limit youths' access to "the corruptive influences of aerosol paint."

In a way that parallels the war on drugs, community leaders fail to realize that it is the social conditions surrounding the use of spray paint that encourage criminal behavior, not the paint itself. In fact, there have been several detrimental consequences since these ordinances were put into effect. The county has seen an increase in racking (shoplifting) by youths. Retailers report a seven percent increase in shoplifting since the ordinance banning the sale of spray paint to minors went into effect. It should be noted that this number is probably low as businesses often assume a certain percentage of store losses result from mishandled paperwork and employee error. In addition, interviews with graffiti writers reveal that the inaccessibility of spray paint has encouraged many of them to "rack" their supplies.

Writers also have devised innovative alternatives to obtaining paint. Such methods include buying and selling stolen spray paint on the street, mail-ordering paint out of state, establishing licenses to buy paint wholesale and using individuals over the age of eighteen to buy spray paint. Menace states, "this law is stupid, but I'm making it work for me. I rack my cans, stash my supply and sell the rest. These toyz are willing to pay $3.00 a pop, ...I'm making a nice profit." Store owners are negatively affected by writer reactions. Profits are reduced due to theft, costly re-merchandising and the need for increased security. This, in turn, strains relationships between small business owners
and community residents. Vendors feel that they are being "victimized twice; first by graffiti writers and then by community officials."

**Enforcement**

Of course, legislation and public imagery are only part of the process of social control. Enforcement of rules and laws represents a separate problem. In the process of making graffiti, writers drift in and out of unconventional activities that cross legal and moral boundaries. Youths under eighteen years of age who engage in graffiti-making are illegally possessing graffiti utensils. In addition, as writers tag, piece and mark county and private properties they often engage in vandalism and trespassing. Underage drinking, illegal drug use and shoplifting also often accompany graffiti-making and accentuate graffiti's criminality. Finally, graffiti-making has aligned itself with street violence. Aggressive behavior and physical attacks in relation to graffiti have been documented throughout the county.

During the early years, New York graffiti covered neighborhood walls and businesses. Law enforcement officials considered graffiti-making a minor offense unworthy of the paperwork necessary when making an arrest. Police further argued that it was pointless to arrest graffiti writers if the judges and courts weren't going to prosecute. As a result, arrest rates declined in the late 1970's. Police began to concentrate on more serious crimes such as homicide, rape and muggings (Glazer, 1979). A twenty-nine year old writer states,
"It used to be that we could write anywhere and anytime. Sometimes I would spend two-three hours on a piece. Once a cop drove by while I was working on a wall…saw me with a can in my hand…he just told me that I got talent. That would never happen now, they have quotas and stuff."

Veik describes a similar writing experience,

"About 12 years ago, I was out painting and two pigs (police) walked by. They harassed me up and down…told me that I shouldn't be doing graf and shit like that…then they just told me to go home, no arrest, no fine, nothing. Hell, I was out the next day, tagging the neighborhood…it was that easy!"

In the late 1980's, the relationship between graffiti writers and law enforcement officials began to change. Political opportunism paved the way for fiscal programs to discourage graffiti (Beswick, 1990). Graffiti squads and covert police operations were formed within police departments. Task Forces were created and the MTA began regular use of "the buff" (a chemical cleansing of subway and trains by the New York Transit Authority). In addition, municipalities, such as the Department of Public Works, began to prioritize graffiti removal describing graffiti as "predatory and aggressive."

Restoration projects began to occur throughout Long Island. As one writer remembers,

"Used to be that my pieces were up forever. I would write all the way into the city…then months later I would take the train and just admire my work. But after 1987, my pieces were painted over—dissed! At first I was angry…some of my best work was destroyed. After a while, I took the 'paint over' for what it was…a challenge."

Technological advances encouraged the use of video surveillance. Higher arrest rates and new county ordinances followed.

Political interest in graffiti has changed more about the graffiti subculture than arrest records. Under increased pressure and threat of arrest, writers began to disguise their identities with alternative tags. Word states, "I've changed my tag seven times in the
past year. The cops are all over the place, but they'll never catch me...I'm too smart."

Some writers even withdrew from illegal types of writing. Lest comments,

"I don't do graf anymore. I want to accomplish stuff in my life and getting arrested isn't going to help me do it. Sure, I still hang out with everybody...and I still draw in blackbooks, but you won't catch me writing on a wall."

Similarly, Dupe contends that he too has given-up graffiti-making. He states, "if I want to be a successful film-maker, I can't be getting arresting for stupid stuff. It's time to get serious about my future."

Social control efforts have also had counter-productive results. First, public attacks on graffiti writing have resulted in the recruitment of new writers. The more the police crack down on graffiti, the more attention it gets, and, therefore, the more youths want to participate. This results from media exposure and the nature of graffiti writing itself. Press releases increase the visibility of local writers. Hoop states, "used to be that graf wasn't that big, but with all the press, media hype and shit, there's a real pull to write." Heightened news accounts focusing on graffiti writers, vandalism and graffiti arrests have added greatly to the public fame of writers. Positive and negative press elevates writer status within the graffiti underground, the alternative art community and local music scene. Law enforcement exacerbates these conditions by using labels such as "vandal and criminal." In addition, "stacking charges" for graffiti offenses only acts to further alienate street youth and strengthens subcultural ties. Finally, heightened visibility and control efforts have translated into an increased demand for graffiti writer services. Commissioned murals from individuals, media personnel, bookstores, skateboard shops and other businesses has augmented the popularity of graffiti-making.
A second unintended consequence of control efforts is the substitution of pieces and time-consuming murals for quick tags and unskilled markings (Ferrell, 1993). This result directly contradicts Task Force objectives. The "messy and meaningless scrawlings on walls and buildings" (i.e. tags) are the primary target of anti-graffiti law enforcement efforts." However, by increasing covert and overt patrols and instilling the notion of stiff penalties and guaranteed arrest, writers no longer spend long periods of time mixing colors and enhancing their style. Instead, style techniques are collectively shared through the use of blackbooks, and the focus of street graffiti has become prolific tagging. Writers have also opted to use stickers as an alternative graffiti form. Innovatively reacting to increased law enforcement, writers use stickers to demonstrate style and get their tag up throughout the county.

A third negative consequence to increased law enforcement has been the tendency of writers to select obscure and often dangerous places to graffiti. Once able to write during the daylight hours and in relatively open locations, writers are now forced into secluded and untraveled areas. This might initially appear to be a favorable consequence. After all, if public roads and streets are not covered with graffiti, then aren't the efforts of the Task Force successful? Research reveals serious problems associated with subcultural reactions. Increased law enforcement and restoration have encouraged writers to solicit fame through the selection of increasingly dangerous and life-threatening surfaces. Water towers, electrical poles, roof-tops and overpass signs are common targets for graffiti writers. In addition to striving to tag higher and harder to reach surfaces, writers have expressed increasingly hostile remarks about police.
Writers view increased law enforcement as a direct challenge to subcultural activities.

Visa states,

"The word on the street is that the police are to blame for all the new arrests. They're tightening down on everything...nobody likes it. In fact, a lot of people are saying they are going to show the police who's in control...and it ain't them. I'm telling you, its gonna be an all out war...and we're going to win."

Writers express this anger by directly targeting and tagging police vehicles and police stations.

Finally, increased law enforcement efforts have heightened the intensity of "the rush." As seen in previous chapters, writers make graffiti to experience the "the rush" of illicit creativity, to mark territory (gangs), to express themselves and to gain recognition within the subculture. The challenge, defiance, and celebration of the illegality that accompanies graffiti is only exacerbated by the harsh efforts of law enforcement officials. JP states,

"Sometimes we wait until the police are real close...only a few yards away. Then we run like crazy. Its intense...I can't explain it. You just get this surge of energy...from painting, from the finished piece and from getting away with it."

**Graffiti as a Negotiated Outcome**

The convergence theory (Aday, 1990) and empirically based descriptions of the graffiti subculture suggest that social control never works exactly as intended. There are many unintended consequences. As participants in an ongoing process, graffiti writers and social control agents react to each other's reaction. Each negotiates the degree and level of criminality and enforcement necessary to reduce (or perpetuate) graffiti-making. Included in this process are issues of authority and power, subordination and
insubordinates (Ferrell, 1993). Graffiti-making reflects writers efforts to avoid detection and to adapt the limits set by control activities. As a result, graffiti-making and subcultural settings change and persist as does law enforcement.

The convergence theory suggests that informal social control is potentially much more potent than formal social control and that effective control depends on increased integration. Specifically, people across diverse social niches must accept, endorse and enforce the anti-graffiti values and beliefs perpetuated by elected officials without denying the political nature of vandalism issues. Workable programs that increase opportunities for conventional and respectable careers, neighborhood watch groups and nation-wide educational programs on community responsibility are just a few viable option for strengthening attachments and increasing societal integration. Only when efforts such as these are made, will the possibility for successfully controlling and eliminating graffiti be possible.
APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF CREW CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crew Acronym</th>
<th>Graffiti Crew Name</th>
<th>Geographical Expansiveness</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOA</td>
<td>Hooked on Aerosol</td>
<td>Nation-wide</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VISA</td>
<td>Vandalizing Illegally so Artistically</td>
<td>State-wide</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBM</td>
<td>We Beat Men</td>
<td>County-wide</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNC</td>
<td>Rough Neck Crew</td>
<td>County-wide</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td>WOW</td>
<td>We're Only Writers</td>
<td>Nation-wide</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td>FTT</td>
<td>Fuck The Toyz</td>
<td>School-based</td>
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<td>Strong Island Boys</td>
<td>Island-wide</td>
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<td>Droppin Art</td>
<td>School-based</td>
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<td>Nation-wide</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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APPENDIX B

HIP HOP AND GANG SLANG

13 or XIII—This means the 13th letter in the alphabet (M); which stands for the Mexican Mafia, a prison gang.

14—This number stands for the fourteenth letter of the alphabet (N); which stands for the Nuestra Familia, a prison gang

3 Fingers—a wide or large marker, ie., three fingers wide

All City—means that the writer's area is city-wide.

Arrowhead—Glass drill bit that is shaped like an arrowhead, used as a scribe to etch windows.

Backup—Taggers second name which is graffiti'd when the primary name is known by authorities. Usually only known by crew.

Bar Letter or Mechanical Letter—a style of graffiti that is almost impossible for an outsider to decipher. Extension bars and arrows are added to each letter and these bars twist and swirl in baroque patterns.

Battle—a contest between taggers or crews to write their tags or crew names in a certain area within a given amount of time.

Bite—to copy another writer's style or tag.

Bogarting—shoplifting technique that involves asking the clerk to show customer the object (marker or paint) and then running out of the store with object in hand.

Bombing—term which originated on the East Coast and it may be another word for piecing or the original style of balloon or bubble art or writing.

Broadway Letter—elongated letters which originated in Philadelphia and were used by graffiti writers on the Upper West Side of New York

Bubble Letters—large, rounded letters, filled in or only outlined.
Buff of Buffing—means that the wall or canvas has been painted out and is now a new canvas for the writer. In other words, to clean graffiti.

Bug out—to mystify; to impress with a display of originality

Bullet—one year in custody

Bumping Titties—fighting

Burn—to show up an opponent

Burner—is a very impressive aerosol effort; any multi-colored piece with vivid colors that shows original style.

Burnt—Something that can no longer be used (ex. tagging name known by authorities)

Busting—involved in a violent act such as fighting with fists or weapons

Cap, Fat or Skinny—interchangeable spray can nozzles to vary width of spray.

Check-court—beating a fellow tagger in your crew as a form of discipline

Checked In—initiated into a gang

Chill—cool, okay

Chillin' Out—relaxing

Chola (Cholo)—Girl (boy) involved in gang-type activity

Chuco—veterans of gangs

Claiming—to claim membership to a particular crew or gang

Clika/Clica—gang

Cloud—background for a graffiti outline

Crew, Posse, Set—Loosely organized group of taggers, a group of friends, a group of graffiti vandals who work together. Can also be spelled crue or krew.

Crush—to outperform; to destroy
Def--really good; short for death.

Destinations--the front of the bus, above the operator, showing the route of the bus.

Dis--showing disrespect, such as writing over another tagger's work.

Dog--to mark over someone's tag

Double Deuce--.22 caliber gun

Down--in part of the group or action.

Down by Law--automatically connected with something; to have high status

Driver's Side--writing graffiti on the traffic side of the bus; more prestigious.

Drop a Dime--to inform on someone

Durag--(pronounced doo-rag) handkerchief or bandana wrapped around a gang member's head

-er, -ster--suffixes added to writer's monikers, as in fric, "fricster."

Fade--blend colors.

Fill in--the color and design that is used to fill in an outline

Five O--(also called one time and rollers) the police

Fly--well dressed, cool, original, good looking

Four Five--.45 caliber gun

Fresh--really good.

Generic--no style, common.

Getting Up--means you have your tag or placa seen all over. It's a term for recognition within the subculture.

Gig--a gathering of taggers or gang members

Going over--writing over another tagger's work.
*Graf*—short for graffiti

*Grill*—rear grill of a bus; a prime location to tag

*Hangover*—high objects, freeway signs

*Hard*—strong-willed, unemotional or uncaring

*Head*—the best tagger in the crew; the one with the most artistic ability

*Heavens*—an overhead object that graffiti can be applied to; freeways, signs, water towers.

*Hero*—a person who tries to stop a writer from placing his/her tag.

*Hip Hop*—term used to describe rap/graffiti/break-ing/scratchin'

*Hit*—to tag any surface.

*Holding Down*—controlling a turf area

*Homeboy*—friend

*Hood*—term for neighborhood

*Hot 110*—a derogatory expression written over a writer's tag to indicate the writer is inexperienced.

*Illegal Wall*—a place where a tagger does not have permission to do graffiti

*Jack*—to rob someone.

*Jammed*—confronted

*Jerked*—cheated

*Joint*—the best

*Juice*—power, money, influence

*Kill or Killing a Wall*—means that you have hit the wall or written on it excessively; to obliterate with graffiti..
King--the best with the most

King of the Line--title given to a writer who dominates a particular subway line

Landmarks--writing graffiti on fixed objects; bridge, statue, freeway wall.

Mad Dog--staring or glaring at another gang member with intent to intimidate

Map the Heavens--to gag hard-to-reach freeway overhead signs

Masterpiece or piece--an elaborate design painted on the outside of a subway car.

Mellow--close friend

Mob--many members of a crew covering an object with graffiti at the same time.

Motion Bombing--bubble letters not filled in, accomplished quickly

Oner--a tagger who has no crew affiliation.

Packing--gang member has a gun on him/her.

Paint Stick--type of marker pen filled with paint

Piece Book--a writer's sketch book

Piecing--stands for masterpiece or piece of art. Piecing is a full size mural and may be 20 to 200 sq. ft. Piecing is usually the writer's name in large abstract letters, usually 4 colors or more, and often has several cartoon characters integrated into the legal or illegal mural. Piecing tends to go on more at night and may take 1 hour to several days.

Placa o Placque--term used by street gangs for their markings on a wall or structure; graffiti that identifies a gang or gang member.

Plugging--fighting

Power Scribe--etching windows, thick lines

Rank--to have the privilege of deciding who is in and out of your crew

Racking--term used by the writers when they steal aerosol spray cans.

Ranker--a tagger who fails to claim his/her crew.
Rank on--bring disgrace on, discredit.

Rata--snitch

Regular--usually young gang members, ages 14-20, who back up the hardcore members

Ride--car

R.I.P.--Often seen in graffiti and is a signal for pending violence.

RTD's--rapid transit district buses

Sakura's--a brand of marker containing paint

Scribe--metal etching tool used to place permanent graffiti on metal, glass and plastic.

Seek and Destroy--to tag everything in sight

Set--neighborhood

Side to Side--writing graffiti/mural on a bus/train from one side to the other.

Slash--cross out tagger and crew names.

Slipping--being caught by rival taggers without your homies to back you up

Snapping--to insult someone with verbal abuse; usually done in a joking manner

Spot--a store to shoplift from that is kept a secret from other crews and taggers

SRIW--stands for "super race is white"

Streak--a solid paint marker

Suckers--victims of graffiti

Tagging or Tag--this is the term used by social gangs when they put their alias (moniker) or nickname on a structure. The term tag signifies the most brief name on a wall.

TagBanging--to back up your tag with violence

Talking Smack--aggressive talking
**Throw up**—name or a character that requires more time to put up. Throw ups are usually more than one color, usually 2'x2' or larger and take 2 to 20 minutes to paint.

**Top to Bottom, End to End, or Whole Car**—terms used when writers put up their craft on an entire train or bus. Moveable vehicles are mobile billboards and the most favored structure of social gangs.

**Toss Up/Strawberry**—female who is used by the male gang members for sexual favors

**Toy**—an inexperienced or incompetent writer. Also used as a derogatory term for police.

**Treach**—short for treacherous; cool; original

**Turf**—an area, a block, a neighborhood or park that a gang claims as being under their control

**UC**—undercover police. "Do you see (UC) what I see?" is used to alert fellow writers to the presence of police.

**UP**—a writer whose tag appears regularly

**Wak**—substandard or incorrect; "fucked up"

**Wannabes**—not official members of a gang or crew, but claim to be.

**Whole Car**—completely covering both sides of a bus/train

**WildStyle**—a complicated piece constructed of interlocking letters.

**Word**—short for "that's the truth; used to indicate one's agreement with the statement

**Write**—to tag

**Writer**—a practitioner in the art of graffiti

**W247**—writing 24 hours, 7 days a week.

**Yard**—a gathering place where do graffiti.
APPENDIX C

FORMAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This interview is meant to be one-two hours in length. Most questions are open-ended allowing for detailed response and description. Prior to beginning, the respondent should be told that this interview is voluntary and anonymous. Therefore, the respondent is given the opportunity to refuse certain questions throughout the interview process. Each interview will be taped, and carefully transcribed. These transcriptions will be recorded by tag name and kept in a locked area as respondents potentially could be admitting to graffiti and related criminal offenses.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Tag Name: ________________

Residence (ie. township): ____________

Age: _____________

Gender: ___________

Grade Level (or last year completed): __________________

Grade point average: _____________

Plans to go to college (yes or no): ________________

Career aspirations (if any): ____________________

Average income of family: _____________

Parental status (married, separated, etc.): ________________

If separated, widowed---ask time of separation in relation to child and degree of contact, if any?

Siblings (how many, gender, and age): ________________

Job (if any, and number hours work per week): ________________
Personal alcohol and/or drug use/abuse: _________________
   What and how frequently?

Parental alcohol and/or drug use/abuse: _________________
   What and how frequently?

Sibling alcohol and/or drug use/abuse: _________________
   What and how frequently?

Do you have a driver's license? _________________

**RACKING TECHNIQUE:**

How do you get you supplies?
   ________________________________

Do you ever buy paint?
   If so, from who (no names, are they vendors, other youth, etc.)?

How is racking accomplished by one person (explain technique in detail)?
   Is it ever done in groups?

How did you learn how to rack (ie. did someone allow you to participate in their "rack", underground resources, et .)?

Racking technique (try to get writer to explain several different methods of racking and most popular locations, and rational behind selection of target store.

Where do you store supplies? If at home, how do you keep them hidden from parents and siblings?

Does your ability to rack earn you respect with other writers and peers?

**WRITING TECHNIQUE:**

How did you develop your writing technique (explain in detail, including age of first exposure, various influences encouraging writing, and what about it that originally attracted you)?

Do any of your siblings graffiti?
Do (or did) you use various underground forms of media and video to enhance your style?
   If so, what and where did you get access to these? ____________________

How did you come up with your tag? ________________________________

Does a person's tag ever change?
   Please explain why, how, and when a writer would decide to change his/her tag.

What type of paint and marker type do you prefer and why? _______________________

What type of surface type do you prefer and why?
   __________________________

What time of day do you prefer to write and why? _______________________________

If late at night, what do you tell your parents is the reason for staying out so late (if any)?
   ________________________________

How do you select the wall? (ie. is the visibility, surveillance, surface, etc. well thought out, does the writer stake out the area prior to writing to determine such factors, etc.)
   ________________________________

Do you drink or use drugs prior to writing (yes or no):
   ________________________________
   If so, what type and how much? ________________________________

Does a wall that is frequently passed by police discourage you from writing, or does someone get a better reputation for taking such a risk? ________________________________

Does most of your writing occur within your neighborhood (community) or do you travel outside your community? ________________________________

What form of transportation do you use? ________________________________

Are walls that are highly visible to the public more or less attractiveness for writing (yes or no): ________________________________

Have your parents ever questioned your activities (yes or no): __________
   If so, how did you explain yourself ________________________________
CODE OF CONDUCT:

Are there any rules that you follow when writing? ____________________________
If so, what are they? ________________________________________________________

If I were to say that graffiti is nothing more than property destruction, what would you say?
(Probe for various rationalizations)

Do you copy another person's style?
Why or why not? __________________________________________________________

Would you ever rat to the authorities about another writer?
If so, what would provoke you to do so? _______________________________________

Are there any buildings you wouldn't write on, regardless of visibility or "blank canvas"?
If so, what? ______________________________________________________________

Are some writers more respected than others? _________________________________
If yes, why? ______________________________________________________________
How does one earn respect?

How does one show "respect"? ______________________________________________

Are the less experienced writers taught by the more experienced writers? ________
If so, how does a rookie go about getting help and advice? _____________________

Are the more experienced writers protective of rookies (ie. protect graffiti, defend if dissed, etc)?

How do you move from being a tagger, to piecer, to king (ie. when do you know that you've established a strong enough reputation)?
Ask to define each (Are there other terms and levels of hierarchy)?
Do girls play a role in writing?
If so, what is it (ie. are they impressed and supportive of graffiti-way to get girls, do they rack for you, do they help write, do they help store supplies, do they act as look Outs, etc.)

Do writers ever get territorial about their work (yes or no)? ____________________________
If so, why? ____________________________

What are the rules surrounding "dissing" ____________________________

Does violence ever erupt due to "dissing?"
Is it expected? ____________________________
(please provide a personal example) ____________________________

What else could produce a violent consequence? ____________________________

When you write, who's respect is most important to you?
(Probe for peer attachment outside social niche vs. within the crew)

CREWS:

What is a crew?

Do you belong to one or more?
If so, what are their names? ____________________________

How can a person belong to more than one crew?

How expansive are crews (ie. do they go all the way into the city)? ____________________________
With so many people, how do you tell which writers are members?

Are there groups or divisions within the crew?
How are they determined (ie. age, clubbing, shared interests)?

Is there any level of organization, leadership or hierarchy within the crew?
(explain) ____________________________

How does one obtain membership into a crew?

Is there an initiation process?
(Explain) ____________________________
Do the members meet regularly (to go clubbing, or writing)?
   If so, where do you meet?

Do people in the crew share more than just a love of graffiti (ie. other
commonalities...body piercing, tattoos, etc.)? ________________________________

Do people in the crew go out writing together?

Explain "bombing."

When you do write together, is alcohol or drug use common?

When you do write together, do different people in the crew play different roles (ie. look-
out, provider of transportation, appraiser, etc.)?
   What are they (explain in detail)__________________________________________

CONSEQUENCES:

Is graffiti a crime regardless of how large the writing and where (yes or no)?

How would your friends react if you were arrested for graffiti (ie. would they think it
was cool-better reputation, feel bad, etc.)?

Have you ever been arrested for a graffiti-related charge?
   (Explain the process)____________________________________________________

If the judge sentenced you to paint over your work, do you think that would stop you
from writing again?
   Why?_________________________________________________________________

If the judge sentenced you to paint over graffiti in general (ie. someone else's work), do
you think that would stop you from writing?
   Do you see any problems with this approach?
   Why?

If you were personally fined for all the clean-up charges, would that deter you from
writing again?
   Why?________________________________________________________________

If you were sentenced to 100+ hours of community service (ie. cleaning up trash on the
highway, etc.), would that deter you from writing again?
   Why?____________________________
Do you think legalized paint-outs would work to combat graffiti? Why or why-not?

What do you think would be the best way to combat graffiti? (Ask for several detailed solutions)

Thank the respondent for his time and contribution to research.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Victoria Arriola Wilson