

GRAFFITI: ITS IMPACT ON
ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

This paper briefly discusses graffiti art and the history of how it became a movement and part of the hip-hop culture in the 1970s and 1980s. The focus of this paper is the age of the artists behind the graffiti. The research questions used were 1. Does graffiti have an overall impact on adolescents? 2. Is graffiti used as a transitional aid during the time of adolescence? and 3. Is graffiti used by adolescents to communicate in a new form or is it used as an expressive outlet? Exploring the mutualistic relationship between graffiti and adolescents shows that there is an overall impact. This impact leans towards positively influencing adolescents to use not only their voice but also their imaginations. This is helpful during the changes that the adolescent goes through.

Introduction

Graffiti is a controversial subject. Some see the art and are annoyed, some are disgusted, some are intrigued, and others experience it and are inspired. When I see graffiti, I see a story: a history, a present, and a future. My newfound curiosity inspired me to find out how this form of art originated. I also wanted to see if graffiti has always been viewed in a negative context or if at one point in time it was positive. By collecting research on graffiti, I soon learned about the artists behind graffiti. It was not adults acting behind this movement, but rather kids leaving their mark on the world.

From that thought, I was inspired to find out more about graffiti adolescent involvement, and if graffiti has an overall impact on adolescents. I wanted to see if graffiti art can be proven to help adolescents during this transitional time in their lives, and if it has allowed adolescents to communicate in a new form as a new expressive outlet. If in fact this is a new way to communicate, I wanted to explore if this form of graffiti communication and expression is a more beneficial alternative to other activities, such as drugs or gang affiliations that adolescents can easily be involved in.

By examining the history of graffiti, and gaining a basic understanding of behavioral development of youth, it is easier to determine how these two subjects interact. In addition, this thesis examines the different cultural aspects of graffiti involvement, and explores whether the stigma behind graffiti differs from culture to culture as it involves adolescents. Considering that these young artists also grow into adults, one must wonder whether the adolescents will grow out of their artistic ways or if they will hold tight to their passion and involvement with graffiti into adulthood.

“If you’ve ever walked down the street, seen a name, and wondered what that marking meant, “I’ll tell you: It means somebody is telling you a story about who they are and what they are willing to do to make you aware of it. Every time a name is written, a story gets told. It’s a short story: “I was here.” Who is telling it and where they are telling it will determine how the story ends. Some stories will be adventures, some tragedies, and some courtroom depositions. But every single one has a star, a stage, and an audience, and that’s all a growing youth needs to have fun.”

-Stephen J. Powers, 1999

The Meaning of Graffiti

Graffiti can be defined in different ways, but the first thing is to understand what graffiti is. Graffiti by dictionary definition is writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place. One form of graffiti is tagging. Tagging is a quick writing that can be defined by five distinctive features, “simplicity, location, permanence, opportunism and creative expression,” (Russel, 2008, p. 89). This is used when individuals or gang members are trying to tag in their area and proclaim territory (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2006). A common form of graffiti is hip-hop tagging which originated in the 1970s. The second form of graffiti is graffiti art. At first glance it would seem that graffiti art is more complex than graffiti tagging. While a main feature of tagging is opportunity--how fast can the artist tag and not be caught?--, this is not the case for graffiti art (Austin, 2010, p. 35). It is usually a picture or a composition of some sort, often referred to as masterpieces or pieces for short in graffiti culture (Rahn, 2002). In a masterpiece artists plan the composition and the ideal location where their vision can be achieved. A third form of graffiti is a throw-up which is one step higher than tagging and involves only lettering and two colors. It is more difficult than tagging but not as complex as graffiti art (Rahn, 2002). The different types and style of graffiti can be very confusing, but a way that the different styles can be determined is by the measure of time and color involved. Rahn (2002) describes in depth the difference between the styles of graffiti:

A large piece is the standard of hip-hop graffiti, ranging at least six feet long and four feet high. Large pieces take hours to days, throw-ups take minutes, and tags take seconds. Murals, large pieces, and piecing, all describe large multicolored

complex letter combinations that sometimes include cartoon images or portraits.

(p. 14)

Both graffiti tagging, produced by taggers, and graffiti art, created by graffiti artists, have an artistic meaning. The meaning could be a form of expression, contain political meaning, or even be an emotional statement. This form of art is used because sometimes there are no words that can accurately communicate what a picture can express, like many other forms of visual art. This unspoken communication of graffiti has been seen through different public movements including social protests; it has been used as a “means of expressing opinions and feelings unsympathetically viewed and scarcely recognized by the authorities” (Luzzatto & Jacobson, 2010, p. 353). By using this nonverbal means of communication, they are not only making their audience (the public) think about their art and the statement they are making, but also showing the authorities that they do have political and social opinions that they are willing to challenge, and one way or another their opinions will be heard (Eyck & Fischer, 2012).

Where Graffiti Originated

By the current definition of graffiti, cave writings, tribal markings, and other identifiable historical writings can be considered graffiti because of their intentions and forms. However, it wasn't until 1856 that graffiti was attributed to being more than just markings and was also classified as historical documentation (Sheon, 1976). It was first perceived that graffiti was just scribbling and there was no point behind it. People took it at face value. After it was determined that graffiti was more than just markings, many historians started to look into the greater meaning behind these *proclaimed* works of art. Charles Baudelaire, investigated the historic and stylistic issues involved in graffiti. He came to the conclusion that graffiti was not just about the artist or the piece but that it encompassed the observer and their thoughts and response to the image (Sheon, 1976). This outlook found that graffiti does in fact have an impact on both artist and audience, concluding that graffiti in all forms is created with underlying motives for a specific audience.

Modern graffiti originated in the 1960s, largely attributed to the writers Cornbread and Cool Earl who marked their names all over the city of Philadelphia (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2006). Graffiti became more prominent in the 1970s by various tagging artists in the city of New York ("NYC") and surrounding areas, but the Hip-hop movement of the 1970s is where graffiti gained popularity, along with breakdancing, DJ-ing, and MC-ing (Rahn, 2002). A large part of graffiti's "function of tagging in hip hop culture is to act as a form of art that can empower and promote the writer to an increased level of fame and notoriety" (Russell, 2008, p. 92). In 1971, there was no law against graffiti. It was a rule that everyone knew you were not supposed to do, but that was as far

as graffiti containment went. It wasn't until 1972 that a law was passed against graffiti (Dickenson, 2008). This eventually led to the first declaration of war on graffiti in 1972 (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2006). This war on graffiti occurred when the city government, the media, and the business community formed together to take a stand against graffiti; it was ultimately a way to assert control (Dickenson, 2008).

This war on graffiti was directed towards tagging. Tagging's main point is to see how many tags an artist could get out in the public, and eventually making their tag known and creating recognition for themselves (Russell, 2008). Over time, this goal to maximize the number of tags an artist could produce proved that the graffiti writers flourished in this period. It was "a golden age, when the most prolific could become known as "kings" by going "all-city"—writing their names in all five boroughs" (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2006, p. 48). Everything from subway cars to vehicles to buildings had someone's tag on it, if not completely covered in it. The trains and subways provided an outlet for the graffiti taggers. City officials tried to control graffiti by attempting to get rid of it completely, consequently muting the positive attributes of graffiti (Dickinson, 2008). (The Metropolitan Transit Authority created the buff, a large machine that cleans the cars, buffing off the graffiti (Gonzalez, 2004). Image 1 is an example of a graffiti-covered subway car the city was trying to clean. In 1970, graffiti cost NYC \$250,000 trying to remove graffiti, followed by \$300,000 in 1971, and amassed up to \$500,000 in 1972 (Len & Cybriwsky, 1974). The last graffiti covered subway car was not removed until 1989 (Dickinson, 2008).



Image 1: This subway car is just one example of the hundreds that were covered by taggers during the time known as the war on graffiti.

There is a recognizable difference between graffiti tagging and graffiti art. As the graffiti tagging became more abundant in NYC, Jack Stewart, an artist and art historian, found a new way of differentiating graffiti art as a whole:

Graffiti art was historically unique in almost all of its significant distinguishing characteristics. Graffiti art's recognizable visually aesthetic intentions, the physical size of typical individual productions (throw-up, masterpiece), its rapid proliferation and collective coverage of urban landscape, and the complex social organization of graffiti art production are unprecedented in the history of graffiti. (Austin, 2010, p. 35)

Stewart's view of graffiti art versus graffiti tagging opened a door for the public to better understand the style, skill, and techniques that are behind the graffiti artist who created these masterpieces.

Not only was graffiti catching fire with the younger culture but also with the fine-arts community. In the 1980s, the art community started to recognize graffiti as an art form, even featuring graffiti artists in Times Square at an avant-garde art show, making them famous overnight (Kan, 2001). This art show was the turning point that allowed graffiti to be seen as art rather than just vandalism. This is due in part to the “historical era in which even avant-garde aesthetic assumptions and possibilities were fragmenting, shifting and perhaps decentralizing with the authorized, institutionalized New York City art world” (Austin, 2010, p. 37). The fact that graffiti artists from the streets were making it to art shows gave hope to younger taggers who were just starting off in their graffiti careers. It became their goal to become something, and this was seen as an opportunity to make themselves known. As more young people got involved with graffiti the older artists seemed to get discouraged from creating pieces because younger taggers or armatures, also known as toys (Russell, 2008), had no respect and would tag right over a piece. Toys were not respected, they were seen as rookies and not taken seriously to the more experienced graffiti writers (Rahn, 2002). It was at this time that the public desired a change. Image 2 below shows how prominent and invasive the tagging was in the 1980s. There was not a clean space on the subways cars in NYC. This was a great triumph for the taggers, but a nuisance to the public.



Image 2: This image shows how nothing was off limits to the graffiti taggers. Even the insides of the subway cars were a place to claim. Retrieved from: <http://avour.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/8452.jpg>

The public wanted to see the graffiti stopped; Dan Ollen, a former NYC prosecutor, said:

I believe the public got fed up with young men and women damaging property that did not belong to them. Remember, entire neighborhoods were under siege at this time. That led to increased public pressure on the police. Moreover, precincts began to form anti-graffiti task forces to combat the problem. (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2006, p. 124)

However, the original graffiti artists weren't upset. Lee, a well-known graffiti writer on top in the 1980s said the "crackdown on graffiti couldn't have come at a better time. Things had reached the peak of achievement artistically. The fine arts world was embracing it" as quoted in Ehrlich & Ehrlich (2006, p. 123).

Even though the graffiti era quieted down in NYC, the outbreak of graffiti appreciation did not stop with the streets. Companies started to use graffiti as a marketing style in order to target the youth culture, reinforcing “the notion of graffiti as an artistic form of expression” (Kan, 2001, p. 20). Sheon (1976) explained one reason graffiti has such a strong lure to adolescents is because their imaginations are so powerful and creative that they can see more than a simple object or a blank wall. Their creativity will flourish with ideas, and they can easily create masterpieces of their own. Another draw towards graffiti is that adolescents do not feel like they have freedom at school or at home; wherever they go, they are under some kind of rules or regulations (Kan, 2001). When adolescents are out in the world, whether they are tagging or creating a graffiti mural, there are no rules and no regulations. No one is hindering them from spraying exactly what they want, where they want, and how they want. In a time where they are not a child, but not yet an adult, this freedom can seem empowering.

Only recently has graffiti been viewed less destructive in certain areas but as something that adds value. Graffiti art is now often thought of as a progressive movement. Austin (2010) claims that the graffiti movement within the more recent years had been a global effort, not being limited to one area. Because of factors that graffiti entails, such as cultural and social messages, graffiti cannot simply be viewed as vandalism. It has so much more involved, it is not youth simply being vandals with random scribbling; it should be taken seriously and looked into for the deeper meaning.

The graffiti movement continued to grow. Graffiti art was being used to express more political and emotional statements. Image 3 shows how graffiti was used to express one of these emotional statements. In the upper left corner of the wall, it reads “graffiti is

art, and if art is a crime, let God forgive all.” Adolescents are naturally drawn to graffiti because of its innovative look and the creativity behind the art (Kan, 2001). Graffiti is “an outlet for often deeply felt but rarely articulated sentiments and attitudes” (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974, p. 492).



Image 3: In this 1978 photo provided by the Museum of the City of New York, the graffiti mural "Howard the Duck," is painted on a handball court in New York. *Source: AP*

Graffiti art continues to be a voice. Just as tagging was used to spread the names of graffiti writers and make them known in the 1980s, it is now used to spread knowledge, and make the voice of the people known. “Tagging is able to express views that challenge authorities, and empower writers to express conflicts and adapt deprived environments” (Russell, 2008, p. 90). Adolescents use graffiti in this day and age to proclaim their identity, to bridge the gap between childhood compliance and the relative

freedom of adulthood (Kan, 2001). Throughout history “graffiti was recognized as part of man’s basic creative instinct, his most primary form of art” (Sheon, 1976, p. 22). Graffiti has evolved in stages throughout its history; it has grown from cave markings to tagging to even entering the avant-garde art world. Graffiti has transformed from vandalism to art, even including murals painted for commission. The history of graffiti tells a story of the basic human desire to create, to be seen, and to be known. Now understanding the historical nature of humans to create graffiti, there needs to be an understanding of the adolescent’s way of thinking and processing.

Cognitive Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a time of change; mental, physical, emotional, and overall social change. It is widely accepted that the period of adolescence and risk-taking behaviors are synonymous (Othen-Price, 2006). It's thought to be a period of confusion and distress for the adolescent. "Changes in emotional and cognitive behaviour during adolescence are manifestations of ongoing brain development." (McCormick, Hodges, & Simone, 2015, p. 3). The adolescent's communication with the outside world is hindered and limited by an overall lack of verbal communication.

To test the different reasoning capacities of adolescents versus adults, a study by Hauser, Iannaccone, Walitza, Brandeis, & Brem (2014) compared participants ages 12-16 years with participants ages 20-29 years. The study tested the cognitive flexibility of the participants. Cognitive flexibility can be defined as sudden and understood shifts in one's ability to see future rewards that are determined by external factors (Hauser et al., 2014). An example of cognitive flexibility would be a child who gets a weekly allowance of \$1 and wants to save up for a \$5 video game; they currently have \$1. The cognitive flexibility of this child would be tested if an unexpected ice cream truck drove by and on impulse the child spends her \$1 on ice cream. The child does not understand the full concept of now having to wait another full 5 weeks to get that video game and the future reward of saving that \$1. Watson and Gable (2013) said "age related changes in neural alterations in various regions of the brain provides a biological basis for understanding adolescents' behaviors", thus providing an insight to understand adolescents reasoning behind decisions. Many articles show that during the time of adolescence risk-taking behavior is heightened but as Hauser et al. (2014) concluded "decision making in

adolescence goes beyond merely increased reward-seeking behavior—at least in the context of cognitive flexibility” (p. 353); therefore, introducing the concept that adolescents are able to make deliberate and thought-out choices. Watson and Gamble (2013) have shown that in regards to school work most adolescents are able to process information effectively, yet some have difficulties processing that same information. This difficulty can trigger an out-lash or other negative reaction from the adolescent and cause him or her to respond in ways that ultimately mask their frustration. If this is the adolescent’s response to difficulty in the classroom, what is the response when this same adolescent is dealing with social and cultural difficulties in everyday life? What coping mechanism will they choose then?

Art Therapy with Adolescents

According to Farlex medical dictionary online, art therapy can be defined as a therapy that encourages people to express and understand emotions through artistic expression and through the creative process. Luna (1987) describes how homeless adolescents would often turn to graffiti to tell their stories:

The graffiti of street youth present an unobtrusive glimpse of street life. Their meanings are associative, the graffiti captures the essence of the runaway, castaway, homeless youth experience. These graffiti have the capacity to unfold, revealing layer upon layer of inner meaning. (p. 2)

By homeless adolescents turning to graffiti, it allowed them to be expressive in a non-violent way (Luna, 1987). The healing nature of “graffiti” therapy allows adolescents to “vent their hostilities, express their fantasies, communicate their triumphs, declare their rebellion, and promote their propaganda” (Deiulio, 1978, p. 518). An article by the *National Catholic Reporter* discussed how an American street artist, Samantha Robison is trying to help Syrian refugee children through art. Robison hopes that the refugee children are able to cope and heal by expressing themselves. These seemingly simple drawings are packed with deep thoughts and emotions; a 9 year old Syrian girl said “I am drawing a bird flying in the air. To me, it represents the freedom we want” (Gavlek, 2014).

The question to consider is whether or not graffiti art therapy is effective. A post from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation tells how a youth welfare organization, Berry Street, put spray paint in the hands of emotionally detached youth. The results

reveal that the participating youth were able to talk about their pasts, express their feelings, and were ultimately able to vent on a deeply emotionally level (Partland, 2013).

The Social Adolescent

Social interaction and communication is important during the time of adolescence. Parents are concerned about the influence of peer pressure and the amount of resistance an adolescent may or may not have towards it (Pfeifer, Masten, Moore, Oswald, Mazziotta, Iacoboni, & Dapretto, 2011). Peer pressure can quickly escalate into more serious consequences; “For adolescents who lack positive family relationships, peer pressure plays a larger role in their psychosocial development. Peer pressure can range from positive effects to negative effects such as criminal behaviors” (Yavuzer, Karatas, Civilidag, & Gundogdu, 2014, p. 62). The company an adolescent has during this developmental time can have a great impact on the adolescent’s actions and choices. To be accepted by peers fulfills the need for belonging.

The need to belong to a social group is a basic human need (Russell, 2008). Without belonging to a group or finding a niche the adolescent is hindered. “The importance of social learning in adolescence is underscored by the marked dysfunction that is evident when deprived of social interactions during that period of ontogeny [development]” (McCormick et al., 2014, pg. 3). To avoid isolation and being deprived of peers, many adolescents involved in graffiti find a tagging crew to join. A loyalty is then developed between the adolescent crew members as they share tagging involvement and secrecy (Russell, 2008). They have formed their own peer group.

When thinking about art and how it impacts adolescents socially, societal standards also have to be considered. “Many children and adolescents stop painting when they realize how their “products” are evaluated by outsiders. They internalize certain

aesthetic standards and judge their abilities accordingly. Only those that are talented or that are encouraged by others continue to draw and paint” (Watzlawik, 2014, p. 406).

This withdrawal from such behavior demonstrates that society has a great influence on adolescents.

Social Graffiti Pressures

Adolescence is a time of high anxiety and rapid change physically, mentally, and socially. Taylor, Marais and Cottman (2012) “reveals that graffiti writing is primarily an adolescent activity, most frequently undertaken for the first time by adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years” (p 164). Part of the reason adolescents get so involved in graffiti art is their desire for recognition in the art world. During this time, adolescents want to be known for what they have to offer (Taylor, 2012). The adolescent is searching for individuality:

If we consider that one of the major tasks of adolescence is separation from parents. It also leads us to ask with whom the graffiti writers are trying to communicate. If you ask the writers themselves they say that it is with other writers and describe it as an activity from which the adult world is excluded. Yet it seems that the writers have an ambivalent relationship with the adult world and are very aware of the [restrictive] function that the adult world provides for the adolescent graffiti writers. (Othens-Price, p. 14)

An adolescent’s decision to get involved in graffiti is not always easy. The pressure surrounding the graffiti world “may create controversial feeling to be in situations with these opposing demands of a youth movement, that locate them in a secret society violating public space, and at the same time demands creative and competent artistic paintings” (Hedegaard, 2014, p. 391). However, graffiti can be an escape like in the case of Cornbread, a graffiti writer from Philadelphia, who turned to graffiti instead of joining a gang (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974).

Cultural Art with Adolescents

Many people do not like graffiti. It is commonly viewed as distasteful, unsightly, and overall degrading. This attitude towards graffiti is the standard in some cultures. But what causes someone to immediately be suspicious of graffiti? What causes someone to automatically not like the area where graffiti exists? Iveson (2013) explains how social perceptions of graffiti influence our overall view. The outside world greatly influences the overall mood and public tone towards graffiti. From politicians to media commentators and other influential sources, a message has been sent highlighting graffiti in a negative light. These public figures influence the idea that the very presence of graffiti sends a message of abandonment, neglect, and overall danger to the surrounding area that it occupies. The fact that they are insinuating that graffiti means danger only negatively enforces this perception to the public. This in turn makes people automatically feel uncomfortable and unsafe when in the presence of graffiti (p. 27).

It's hard to classify graffiti as destructive and unacceptable when the public is even starting to use it as creative forms of advertisement (Luzzatoo & Jacobson, 2010). The cultures are starting to pick up on what captivates adolescents, including graffiti. The Pepsi ad (Image 4) below is just one example. This particular ad located in Moscow demonstrates how "Pepsi's mural campaign in Moscow placed ads in "most crowded places of youth,"" (Business Insider); therefore proving that big companies are targeting adolescents by speaking their language. In this case, the common language was graffiti.



Image 4: This ad shows that there is a connection between graffiti and adolescence by the company creating a graffiti mural in order to advertise to the adolescent demographic. Retrieved from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/graffiti-mural->

Graffiti's Impact on Culture

Culture affects people everywhere, and it's what makes different places so unique. The cultural impact is felt by adolescents too, and they are affected differently depending on where and how they grow up. This is why graffiti as a global movement (Austin, 2008) can affect people in different cultures in different ways. In Dakar, Africa, graffiti is legal and welcomed by young graffiti artists who use graffiti to help their city. "They all see graffiti art as a force to cleanse and beautify the disintegrating spaces of their culturally rich but economically impoverished city" (Rabine, 2014, p. 91). Rabin (2014) observed the graffiti artists, referred to as graffeurs (pg. 91) as they hosted a ten day art festival known as Festigraff, in honor of beautifying the city. In Image 5, a young graffeur at Festigraff is teaching neighborhood kids about spray paint (Mission Local).



Image 5: This image highlights the natural curiosity that kids have towards graffiti. Retrieved from: <http://missionlocal.org/2014/06/mural-inspiration-dakar-2014/comment-page-1/>

Graffiti not only helps cultures beautify their cities, but also has been known to help cultures cope with traumatic loss. Luzzatto and Jacobson (2010) conclude “Graffiti as a means of expression has fulfilled the needs of thousands of youths and teenagers within the Israeli population, in coping with the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister, the late Yitzhak Rabin” (p. 351). Luzzatto and Jacobson even find that adults were using graffiti as a coping device following the example of their children because they were also having difficulty dealing with Rabin’s assassination. In this particular Israeli culture, graffiti was “considered as art not due to the aesthetic or artistic values of the work, but in virtue of the context by which and in which they were created, i.e. the respect shown to the late Yitzhak Rabin” (Luzzatto & Jacobson, 2010, p. 354). This

shows that the culture that surrounds graffiti may not have the same view on graffiti, but during different times within the culture's history graffiti has played a part.

Reasons for Adolescent Graffiti Involvement

Graffiti affects adolescents because it allows them to explore and express themselves; “This is so much what graffiti writing seems to be about: an experiment with one’s identity” (Othen-Price, 2006, p. 11). Along with learning about oneself, adolescents also use graffiti to explore their limits. They do this by “engagement in minor risk-taking, sensation-seeking, boundary-testing and rule-breaking activities fulfils the basic adolescent need for individuality, control, and autonomy” (Taylor, 2012, p.55).

Taylor (2012) explores a study done with different age groups about their reasons for graffiti involvement. This study found that between the differentiating age groups, focusing on early adolescents and older adolescents, the reason for graffiti involvement are varying instead of similar. As the adolescents grow and change, their reasons for graffiti involvement change as well. Taylor’s findings show that in early adolescents the top six reasons for graffiti involvement, in no particular order, are “alleviation of boredom, emulation of others, the rush derived from committing an illegal act, their rush gained from engaging in acts of aggression, the satisfaction derived from retaliation, and the reward of non-conforming social identity” (p. 57). These six reasons might seem ordinary and that there are better options to deal with boredom or to evoke these feelings rather than turning to graffiti. Solomon et al. (2012) found that “many adolescents have fewer resources at their disposal due to their age, thus increasing adolescents’ inclination toward negative coping mechanisms,” (p.163) making graffiti involvement more enticing. In older adolescents, the main four reasons of graffiti involvement are style recognition, gaining street recognition, gaining crew acceptance, and attaining a reputation (Taylor, 2012). Of the six reasons from early adolescents

compared to the four reasons from late adolescents, there is a shift change in the driving force behind their involvement. I personally noticed that in early adolescence the common driving force is for eternal personal gain; the adolescents want to alleviate a feeling, or invoke a feeling, but it is all within the adolescents. While the four reasons in older adolescents weigh heavily on peers; all these reasons have to do with others view and acknowledgement of the adolescents' self. Taylor's ultimate conclusion was that graffiti is an addictive behavior and that because of this view, graffiti should move from being in the "educational and criminal domains into the sphere of adolescent mental health" (2012, p. 66) declaring that graffiti is more than just a simple adolescent pastime.

Another reason that adolescents are drawn to graffiti are the forms of communication it provides with one another as well as with the world. Dickinson (2008) explains how the communication between the different taggers worked:

Graffiti emerged as a message-oriented form. A writer would write someone's name whose style they admired with her own name next to it and he or she would write back. Young people called this 'third rail mail'. This communication system transformed writers' spatially segregated communities into a citywide community of practitioners. (p. 31)

An example of the worldly communication given by Othen-Price (2006) explains how during this time of adolescence, the adolescent wants to be heard, but from the safety of anonymity. The graffiti done on trains is a "fleeting glimpse of something given by the adolescent to the adult world may be exactly what they unconsciously intend" (p. 11).

The Connection

The connection between graffiti and adolescents is undeniable. So much so that there have been different programs using graffiti art to connect with adolescents and teach them not only more about graffiti, but also more about themselves and their capabilities. In a study done in 2013, Eldridge observed a graffiti artist, Sentrock, as he went into public schools and taught 7th and 8th graders about graffiti art. Sentrock made a point to distinguish the difference between graffiti art and vandalism to his students. Kan (2001) discovered in a survey the majority of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 13 years old could not differentiate between what was graffiti art and what was vandalism. Kan continued to explain the confusion, “the art world and society send them [adolescents] contradictory messages; while one highly honors the achievement of individual graffiti artist, the other prohibits the work of unknown artists and even severely prosecutes those who are arrested” (p. 22). Gomez (1993) clarifies the difference between graffiti art and graffiti vandalism; stating that graffiti art is classified as art because of the intention of creating artwork with a masterpiece, while graffiti vandalism are classified by the “desire to mark territory, create notoriety, or show one’s defiance of the law and society” (p.1). Image 6 shows an example of graffiti vandalism compared to Image 7 that shows an example of graffiti art.



Image 6: This images shows the abundant graffiti tagging that contributes to the negative view and is widely considered vandalism. Retrieved from: <http://www.newswire.co.nz/2010/12/graffiti-vandalism/>



Image 7: The image above shows how graffiti art can add a layer of depth and culture to a seemingly plain area. Retrieved from: <http://www.newswire.co.nz/2010/12/graffiti-vandalism/>

The way graffiti art was handled and taught during this process gave the students a voice in a legal and non-threatening way. Eldridge (2013) shows that because of this

teaching style and subject “students who normally were disengaged during class were engaged in this unit due to the connection it made to what was important to them: street art” (p. 26). Graffiti is widely known to be costly and an anti-social behavior displayed by youth in rebellion (Taylor, 2012). The way graffiti is viewed while being taught and talked about in an educational setting is one of respect and community involvement. It aims to display graffiti in a positive light rather than as a delinquent act. People who are against graffiti art might wonder why any school would intentionally teach about graffiti, but as Eldridge (2013) has indicated, it is way for the youth to connect and see the graffiti in a manner of self-expression and possibility rather than one of vandalism:

Motivation to teach about graffiti art is anchored in a belief that the students [Sentrock] teaches have already had part of their lived experiences exposure to graffiti and the graffiti lifestyle, as a result of the lack of opportunities for low-income youth. [Sentrock] believes that graffiti art is an art form that contests systems of authority and conformity, and that teaching graffiti art to students is one way to disrupt a system that all too often teaches mindless obedience and conventionality. (Eldridge, 2013)

The Other Side of Graffiti

Even though graffiti can have positive benefits, it can have negative impacts as well. Othen-Price (2006) indicates that the perceptions of the adult observer when looking at graffiti are that “it can be quite disturbing, as it feels the intent is to spoil and destroy” (p. 7). When looking into the side against graffiti, the negative affects must be considered. Delinquency, damage, and community well-being are a few.

Graffiti and street art are acts of vandalism (Ross and Wright, 2014) and the adolescents involved are considered vandals (Dickinson, 2008). According to the Texas State Penal Code Section 28.08 Graffiti, the fines and charges of getting caught participating in graffiti vandalism depend on the extent of damage done. The charges range from a Class B misdemeanor if the evaluated monetary damage is less than \$500, all the way up to a first degree felony if the evaluated monetary damages are \$200,000 or more.

The lack of police involvement in graffiti has been somewhat intentional; Taylor et al. (2012) explains that the overall police view on graffiti is that it is a less serious crime done by mere kids “messaging around” (p. 164). However, this lack of involvement has consequences. A study done by Deiulio (1978) shows that 90% of the adolescents arrested for graffiti were between the ages of 11-15 years old. His longitudinal study followed these same adolescents to see the effect of the original graffiti crime. His results show that of the 90%, 29% of the adolescents were re-arrested for more serious crimes. This study along with Taylor et al. (2012) reveals that there is a small pattern of criminal

acts followed by graffiti involvement; however the number of criminal acts declines as the years pass.

It is a fact that graffiti damages the places where it is not intended to go. Graffiti is a very expensive act; within schools alone, it averages thousands of dollars to remove each year (Taylor, 2012). When estimating damage done by graffiti the “evidence photographs do not do justice when it comes to quantifying the damage that is caused or the more expansive consequences to the surrounding area such as additional crime or economic losses” (Hookstra, 2009, p. 8).



Image 8: This picture shows a group of youth in a program that offers painting over graffiti in order to receive court-ordered community service hours. Retrieved from: <http://www.co.washington.or.us/Juvenile/Gangs/>

In order to educate adolescents of the impact graffiti has, some areas are starting to create programs specifically for the effects graffiti has.

Graffitihurts.org is a website that is dedicated to informing teachers on how to educate their students on graffiti in the negative light. The learning modules that are provided all describe graffiti and its counterparts with disapproval. With the tactics of removal and education, GraffitiHurts is trying to show the low tolerance of graffiti as well as the damaging affects it has. Russell (2008) discussed how some communities see graffiti comparable to that of the broken window theory, whereas if a community does not take care and try to do something about graffiti it will show that no one cares and thus more graffiti will continue to pop up and plague the city as a whole.

Hookstra (2009) explains that graffiti is a “multi-layered” issue (p.10) so for the government to try to effectively deal with graffiti, they will need to take a “multi-layered” response. Hookstra suggests three steps in order for graffiti to be effectively handled and eventually eradicated; these steps being prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. Hookstra’s graffiti prevention plan has two parts: community outreach and education. Within the outreach section, the two goals are to “1) Educate residents about graffiti, to gain their support, and to encourage participation, 2) Educate young people about the connection between their actions and the consequences of graffiti vandalism, and teach them to make better choices” (2009, p. 11). The second step of intervention is to stop the young graffiti artists. This is by giving them a second chance once they have been caught and allowing them to turn their energy back into the community in a more positive manner, such as community service hour, instead of their normal activity of graffiti. The last step, Law Enforcement, utilizes the police department and their two methods of fines and the criminal justice system. The goal of the first option of fines is to associate graffiti with the monetary value of damage it causes. When law enforcement

uses fines to get the attention of graffiti vandals, it not only gets their attention because of their lack of financial resources to pay for fines, but also aims to get the attention of the adolescent's parents. By bringing the parents into the equation there is hope that they will become more involved in what their child is doing and ultimately lower adolescent graffiti involvement (Hookstra, 2009). However, the involvement of fines and the criminal justice system does not guarantee that adolescents will stop partaking in graffiti.

The Lasting Impact

Part of the lure of graffiti is the rush of adrenaline and excitement, the fact that at any moment there is a chance of getting caught, a chance of becoming known, and a chance of it all being over. But does the addiction to this feeling go away? Or is it true that once you are a graffiti artist, you are always a graffiti artist? This question especially comes into play when the stakes go up. After an artist turns 18, the seemingly harmless act of graffiti now could result in being tried as an adult, in a court of law. Othen-Price (2006) found that adolescents who participate in graffiti “consider this a temporary activity, one that is helping them to ‘get through’ a difficult period in their lives and it is unlikely that they will progress onto more serious offending behaviour, although this will not be the case for others” (p. 16). Taylor (2012) asked adult graffiti artists why they still participate in graffiti, all outcomes related to respect; self-respect, peer respect, community respect, and universal respect. It was no longer about the hype of adrenaline, or the recognition. The artists said that the desire to do graffiti does not go away. Although the urge might not go away, that does not mean that all adolescent graffiti artists continue to do graffiti art into their adult years. In fact, the majority of graffiti artists stop or reduce their works after adolescence. When an adolescent decides to stop participating in graffiti it is almost a “rite of passage has been completed and entry into the adult world has begun” (Othen-Price, 2006, p. 10).).

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have found that graffiti acts as more of a cultural spectacle than as a hindrance on the society. With that being said, I think that graffiti impacts adolescents and how they develop during this time by the way in which the culture embraces or rejects their involvement in graffiti, and in particular graffiti art. This theory is exemplified during the 1970s when there was a tolerance and cultural acceptance for graffiti, which allowed adolescents an outlet for self-expression. In contrast, during the late 1980s when graffiti became seen as a nuisance, society did not tolerate adolescents partaking in graffiti. During this restrictive period on graffiti, the young artists suffered by not being able to freely express themselves without serious consequences. The law has stopped some adolescent graffiti involvement, but some feel that it is worth the risk because at least they will leave their mark on the world.

Graffiti's impact on adolescents can be both positive and negative. While tagging is often seen as destructive and a precursor of more serious forms of disobedience, from different sources and stories revolving around graffiti and adolescents, it is evident that graffiti "tagging" is a passing phase that most adolescents grow out of. On the other hand, adolescents who became involved with graffiti "art" were more likely to continue with it past the coping and self-expressive phase, possibly even turning their talents into an occupation i.e. painting murals for commission. In both cases, the typical adolescent can find comfort in the graffiti world, whether it is being able to express their feelings through this form of art, or if it is the security of being around other adolescents going through similar changes who share their emotions on the walls of the streets.

The movement of graffiti art becoming socially acceptable is only now beginning. Graffiti is bringing life to lifeless walls and a greater depth to city cultures. Graffiti murals can completely change the atmosphere and overall feeling of an area. When activities such as using graffiti for therapy come into play, it is possible to see where graffiti art has so much more potential to grow. I believe that programs which allow youth to participate in graffiti legally will allow them to have an expressive outlet in a safe place.

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