

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

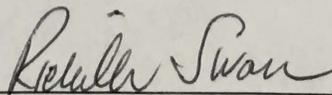
THESIS TITLE: WRITING OUTSIDE THE GENDER LINES: WOMEN GRAFFITI WRITERS OF
CALIFORNIA AND THEIR NAVIGATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

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DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: April 12, 2018

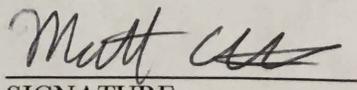
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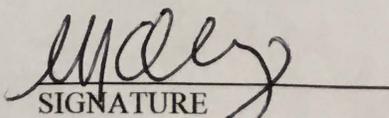
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Writing Outside the Gender Lines: Women Graffiti Writers of California and Their
Navigation of Public Space

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of women graffiti writers of California as they navigate within its public spaces. Current literature on graffiti writers focuses primarily on male writers or women writers on the east coast of the United States and limited research has addressed women's graffiti writing on the west coast. This study addresses this gap in the literature through the theoretical lens of feminist standpoint theory. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who self-identified as being graffiti writers in California. The findings of this study show that identity formation, socialization, sexism, internalized sexism and norms related to women's safety influence women graffiti writers' navigation of public space. Women resist hegemonic masculinity by not only jumping out of their 'lanes,' but also writing outside of their normative 'lines' in order to 'get up.' They are resilient and resist the patriarchy by creating their own opportunities in the graffiti world and challenging gender norms and restraints in order to make the invisible, visible in women's graffiti writing.

DEDICATION

My thesis, “our” thesis is dedicated to three young women who have been one step ahead of me since day one: MY grrrls: Cassidy, Gabrielle, and Rachel aka Kashew, Gabs and Raychie. THANK YOU! I wouldn't be here had you not been there to read my endless rewrites, listen to my rants and kept me in check when I doubted myself. All three of you pushed me with your strength and determination in your own lives to make me want to do more, to do better than before and to succeed. You three were and are my inspiration to go forward in this world, to make it better and to fight for what is right. It is through all of you that I see hope and love, for the next generation. Now it is your turn; to kick some ass, and to be more of who you already are and remember no matter what follow your passion!

I love you, forever and always...ma meré

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I suppose if I began where I should this would be longer than my entire thesis. I will condense this to just a few and to the rest you know who you are and I love you for being part of my journey.

To my Mom and Dad: You may not have understood as to why I didn't get that 'government' job right after my Bachelor's, but you also didn't say I was wrong.

Ray: My *Somebody*, Thank you! As you have allowed me to share my innermost thoughts, my intimate details, and stood by my side and were my support.

To my thesis committee:

Dr. Richelle Swan: For always having a warm smile, guidance, and, for being the voice of reason when all I saw was chaos.

Dr. Matt Atherton: We still need to do coffee!! Thank you for the years of being my mentor and for demanding in a gentle way that I always put my best forward even when it meant doing more than the rest.

Dr. Marisol Clark-Ibáñez: Thank you for pinch hitting as my member of my committee.

Dr. Jill Weigt: Thank you for not letting me slack so that I could be so proud of who I am, when I got here.

To the amazing women and men who were my inspiration:

Dr. Bruce Hoskins: Are we crackalackin' yet? So much thanks, first, for always believing in me. Second, for letting me be your intern and lastly, for continuing to instill in my soul the passion to want to teach and just not "teach" but to TEEAAACH. I am honored to have been your student and even more honored to call you my colleague.

Larry Burns: I ate that elephant one freakin' piece at a time! Thank you!

Anthony Blacksher: I doubt I would be here had I not stumbled into your classroom so many years ago. Thank you from the bottom of my 'woke' heart. Forever in your debt for laying the foundation of what I strive to be in an educator.

To my tribe outside my tribe: I would have never had survived without you especially those that buffered most of my insanity: Dr. Heidi Schneider, my coding GOD!!! Blanca Castro, forever love you, from Daisy. and lastly to Arnold Burgos, who kept me going with all those silly texts!

To the professors at CSUSM; and especially to Professor Sharon Cullity, thank you for making me feel normal in a very less than normal world.

Lastly, to the amazing women who made this happen, I hope I did you proud, I hope I wrote your words correctly, and most of all I am forever grateful to Blondy, Meme, DJ Agana, Glow, Dime, Mist, Quean, Gazm, & Esme You all are so freakin' DOPE!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
DEDICATION	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	4
INTRODUCTION	6
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
HIP HOP GRAFFITI 101: AN OVERVIEW	12
CRIMINALIZATION OF GRAFFITI.....	17
HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY.....	20
BREAKING PAST THE BOYS’ CLUB: UNDOING GENDER, FEMINIST ART AND RESISTANCE	28
THEORETICAL APPROACH.....	33
STANDPOINT THEORY AND BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS	34
METHODS.....	37
SAMPLE	38
TABLE 1.1	40
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	40
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	42
REFLEXIVITY	43
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	43
IDENTITY FORMATION	44
SOCIALIZATION	45
RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE AND NAVIGATION THROUGH THE ROADBLOCKS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY	50
Feminist Consciousness Raising:.....	50
Undoing of Gender:.....	51
Breaking Past Hegemonic Masculinity Ideology:.....	53
Support of Young Girl and Women Writers:.....	60
Resilience through Motherhood:	62
CONCLUSION.....	63
RECOMMENDATIONS	65
REFERENCES	67
APPENDIX A	72
GLOSSARY	72
APPENDIX B.....	76
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	76

INTRODUCTION



“...women who say fuck that, I can do this shit. I have always been that ‘girl.’ ” (Blondy 2017)

My crush on letters began about the same time my training in cursive handwriting began. Whether it progressed because of my ability to never stay on task or because I was sent to my room more times than I could count, I do not know. However, I do know that a child forced to practice her handwriting instead of being a kid, will find ways to escape. Armed with Crayola markers, I found escape from the structure of cursive madness and began my journey into letters, fonts, and colors. I would drift away from the rigid lines of conformity and begin to write my name again and again in big bubbly letters, falling in love with how the letters took shape and took space. As I grew into my high school self, my letters followed me. They went from the big rainbow bubble letters to letters written with teenage angst; more jagged, angry and edgy. Creating a new font would become my therapy from a chaotic life. Letters became my place of escape as were the many walls and trains that I passed on the I-5 freeway between Oceanside and Santa Ana or better known as the pass offs of a child of divorce. These trips as well as other encounters with graffiti and letters made me want to know more, I wanted to know who painted the tags, whether they were done with a reason, and what the stories were behind them behind it. I

have never officially put up my tag, although I do have one locked away in my brain, if ever there is a need to claim my 'space', I am ready. However, while I may not 'do' graffiti, I can seek to find more, to know more, to share narratives of women writers through my research to advance the knowledge and visibility of these women and their writing.

Under California law, the act of graffiti writing is considered to be vandalism, when the writer is not the owner of the public property. I can say that I too, believed writing on walls to be an act of vandalism, however, I do not feel the same anymore. I now see women graffiti writers from their perspectives; their need to re-claim space and their need to bring to light their presence in our society. As Jessica Pabón (2012) states:

As Jessica Pabón (2012) states:

Graffiti is a form of writing and writing is fundamentally a form of communicating. So, these writers are reclaiming public space. They're asserting their presence. They're saying, "I was here and here, and here." (TEDxTalks 2012)

This form of communication, however, cannot be artist or gender-identified due to a lack of obvious brush strokes. Each piece of graffiti is only identifiable through a writer's certain style and signature. Through these tags¹ and throw-ups,² a claim is made; a claim to a specific piece of space, at a specific time, by a specific writer. According to Pabon (2013c) "a writer's tag is an assertion of self (I did this! All by myself!), a call to the graffiti writing community...and a challenge to be bettered. A tag is also simultaneously, a response to writers who came before...Your tag name is your alter ego"

¹ TAG: (n) A writer's name and signature. (v) The execution of a signature (see Appendix A)

² Throw-up: (n) A quickly executed piece consisting of an outline with or without thin layer of spray paint for fill-in. (see Appendix A)

(36). Pabón (2016) also states that men occupy this public space overwhelmingly more than women graffiti writers.

In this research, I identify how women participate and navigate the public space of graffiti and what influences their experiences. By deconstructing hegemonic masculinity in the world of graffiti, I explore how women in California have navigated the subculture to reclaim their public space--to say they too are “here.”

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM



“...men like being territorial “you can’t do that” you can’t go here, it’s not safe for you cause you’re a girl” Get the fuck out of here. I travel on my own...I’ve been damn fine and now you are going to say I can’t paint here because you are worried I am a girl... like I understand there is a little concern but really, it’s about a power trip (Meme 2017).

Graffiti can be seen as the renegotiation and rewriting of a space for the urban underclass, and a reclamation of this space that allows men of color, to occupy space that has been taken from them (Lombard 2013). Masculinity claims this public space and creates a “masculine” feel through symbols such as tags, throw ups or pieces.³ When a woman writer enters this cityscape, she is quickly made to see this space was not created for her (Lombard 2013).

³ PIECE: (n) A writer’s painting, short for masterpiece (see Appendix A)

Throughout the subculture of graffiti's history, women have been repeatedly rendered invisible (Kelley 1997; Herse 2013; Lombard 2013; Pabón 2013c; Pabón 2016). Many popular books and films about graffiti have paid insufficient attention to the exclusion of women. For example, in Craig Castleman's critically acclaimed book *Getting up: Subway Graffiti in NYC* (1982), he states that in the early 1980s in New York there were fewer women writers than men. He recalls Carmen, "who was a member of the Funkadelics, a writing group based at the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan [who] was not allowed to go with the male members of the group to write in the train yards. Her friend SonOne said, "Some of the guys...they want graffiti to stick to the guys" (Castleman 1982:69). Other writers extended that sentiment with "we don't bring the girls to the yards 'cause if they get hurt we feel responsible" (Castleman 1982:69). Although Castleman points out the gender discrimination in graffiti in the examples above, he discusses the beginnings of hip-hop graffiti in his book as an almost all-male phenomenon. There is only a brief mention of the first women writers who were directly involved in the development of hip-hop graffiti, which occurs when Wicked Gary, a writer interviewed by Castleman (1982), states:

One of the things that played well was that our girls were basically good looking 'cause they were into themselves. And since they weren't about fighting, they didn't have to be like hard rocks and they could still be girls and have something about them, like shape and jiggle and all that stuff happening. And the Spades were like, "Hey man, I'm gonna joining the Vandals; you see their women? (108)

Women writers were not seen as equals, but objectified and sexualized to bring status to their 'crew', thus again establishing and maintaining a male dominated space for 'boys to be boys'. Mainstream documentaries that are seen as iconic in relation to the history of graffiti, such as Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver's *Style Wars* (1983), show their viewers the art of graffiti, but only from the viewpoint of young boys and men. In *Style Wars* women were seen, but only as mothers to the writers who expressed their feelings about their sons' graffiti writing.

While there is research on women in the graffiti subculture, the research tends to examine women abroad, in New York, or street artists. According to Luisa F. Hernandez Herse (2013) who considers graffiti in Mexico, it is possible that women participate more in street art than they do graffiti writing because of their different relationships to public and private space. Graffiti writing is typically focused on the creation of letters with a spray can in a public space, while street art incorporates stencils, paste-ups, stickers, and posters created in private spaces that are then brought to public spaces. It may be the case that women feel safer in the private realm and do not feel welcomed or safe in spaces that are known to be male dominated (Herse 2013; Pabón 2013c). In part, this may be due to the widespread perception that the risk of being attacked or raped in public are higher, especially at night (Ganz 2006). The absence of women on the streets normalizes the participation of men and maintains the invisibility of women in graffiti both in Mexico and the United States. Herse (2013) goes on to explain that there is an "underlying sexism in our society and that reinforces the idea that 'the place of the woman' is in the domestic or private space (64). Women are discouraged from being in public spaces engaging in

risky, rebellious acts such as graffiti writing, which are labeled by the authorities as vandalism.

Women graffiti writers are rendered nearly invisible in the subculture of graffiti. Pabón (2013c) states that while claims of women being invisible could be due to the term ‘subculture’ having deep masculine overtones, concludes with the argument “I’d like to suggest that perhaps it is not always that scholars are not “looking in the right places,” but rather that we are looking in the right places through the “wrong” lens. Until now, Hip Hop graffiti art has been perceived through a lens that was manufactured (consciously or not) to highlight male masculine performance” (20).

There has been little sociological examination of women’s graffiti in California using the ‘right’ lens that Pabón refers to above⁴. This study on women graffiti writers’ navigation of public spaces in California begins to address this gap in the research. I seek to understand women writers’ experiences, how they are currently impacted by marginalization related to their social locations (based upon gender, and/or race/ethnicity) and how whether they work to challenge the restrictions that they face in male-dominated world of graffiti.

⁴ Two recent publications on women graffiti artists: Patton, Joseph. 2017. “Performing Identity: Exploring the Gender Politics of Graffiti and Street Art in Oakland, California.” Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Geography, University of Arizona. Secoquian Suarez, Kim. 2016. “Female Graffiti Writers in Los Angeles: Case Studies of Jerk, Petal, Blossm, Kym, Perl, and Kween” thesis. Department of Art, California State University Los Angeles.

LITERATURE REVIEW



“Hip hop is revolutionary! Graffiti is one of the only elements of hip hop that has been criminalized and that has made art so hard to be accepted” (Dime 2017)

The following literature explores the experiences of women graffiti writers within the subculture known as graffiti writing, a practice that is traditionally part of hip-hop graffiti.⁵ To better understand women writers and their negotiation of public space, I will provide an overview of the history of hip-hop graffiti, and then I will examine the criminalization of its participants. I will also consider the literature on the challenges women graffiti writers encounter, how hegemonic masculinity has impacted women writers, and finally, how women use their writing while navigating public space as part of this subculture.

Hip Hop Graffiti 101: An Overview

From the beginning, hip-hop culture was fluid, and acted as an umbrella that held under its protection: rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti art. Hip-hop gave a voice of resistance to the socially marginalized who were racially and economically oppressed. The hip-hop culture was “born from the working-class black and Latino youth” (Peoples 2008:22).

Susan Phillips (1999) describes hip-hop graffiti (also called “graffiti art”, “New York-style graffiti,” or “subway art”) as “the right now” and taking over the

⁵ I will use the terms graffiti writing and hip hop graffiti interchangeably in this study.

world faster and more effectively than any revolution ever could (53-54).

According to Craig Castleman (1982) hip hop graffiti isn't something that was "just" invented to blend with an environmental aesthetic. He states that the "writing of graffiti dates back to the wall paintings of prehistoric humans" (Castleman 1982:52). Hip-hop graffiti is an evolution of graffiti with a distinctive style that was developed in the late 1960s in the boroughs of New York City and began with "a Washington Heights teenager named Demetrius who first started writing his nickname 'Taki' and his street number, 183 on walls, stoops, public monuments and especially in subway stations, all over Manhattan" (Castleman 1982:53). Graffiti is counter movement or act of reclamation of space; graffiti writers see their work as a remake of the visual landscape and the making of new symbolic codes of public life (Ferrell 1999).

According to Jeff Ferrell (1995:34), hip-hop graffiti emerged out of the "economic, political, and ethnic inequalities epidemic of the United States." Susan Phillips (1999) adds more to that description with research that shows people writing hip-hop graffiti, do so to "represent themselves within an arena of hip-hop graffiti writers, they work to establish a name and position within that arena for reasons that are additive and positive. Hip-Hop graffiti is about creation, not destruction" (Phillips 1999:311).

Phillips (1999) further discloses that a hip-hop writer's mindset is to produce graffiti first, vandalism second. Writers may know that they are committing a crime in writing but that may not be their intention when tagging (Phillips 1999). Hip-hop graffiti is also linked in the minds of the public to

violence, due to the connection with gang graffiti and continuance of the stigmatization of the urban underclass as deviant or criminal (Phillips 1999). Despite this connection to violence, graffiti can also be seen as a counter to violence. Lombard (2013) states, “in a similar way, graffiti fragments the body and self, however instead of projecting self through violence on the body of another, graffiti writers project pieces of their selves onto walls and trains” (Lombard 2013:183). This fragmentation of self as Ferrell (1997) explains is a countermovement as one in which young people claim cultural space in a society where they are continually controlled and marginalized by dominant ideology. According to Ferrell (1997) a graffiti writer’s goal is for reclamation of cultural space, which allows these young writers to “construct meaning, perception and identity” (22).

This construction of space becomes a power struggle between those who hold the power and those that live in urban spaces. A writer’s attempt to combat the inequalities and the marginalization by those with the power, is then criminalized, to establish control and containment of the people who sit within the boundaries of the carved space (Ferrell 1997; Lombard 2013). As Ferrell (1995) posits, hip-hop graffiti writing disrupts the functionality of authority that is dominantly in place to allow “space” to some and then systematically exclude it from others. Graffiti is the “middle finger” to all systems of control; this can be seen with how writers work almost always at night, which is outside of society’s curfew for our youth and allows to even go unseen under the watchful eye of today’s surveillance (Ferrell 1995).

Hip-hop graffiti is the “highly-stylized form of non-gang graffiti writing, writing transforms language into a competition for public space, fame, art and social recognition amongst a subculture” (Ferrell 1995:35). There are key differences between what is defined as hip-hop graffiti and other types of graffiti, such as gang graffiti. A key difference is related to tagging. Hip-hop tagging is not confined to a neighborhood or area such as gang tagging, which is typically only found in the area local to a gang (Phillips 1999). Second, the formation of a “crew” versus the formation of a gang is different. The people involved may share the same social links, such as class, race, and location, but they have different goals. According to Phillips (1999:312) crews are “not driven by protecting the neighborhood...their goals always relate to their art: achieving fame and respect...Crews are all about graffiti, plain and simple.” (Phillips 1999:312). As Jeff Ferrell poetically titled his 1996 book, graffiti artists truly produce *crimes of style*.

This production of “style” is typically male saturated and men are the primary contributors to the subculture of graffiti. A woman’s contribution is limited to a secondary or subordinate role (Revière & Austin 2001). This limitation may be linked to “key cultural meanings associated with property relations. Property is central to the Western cultural concept of self. One is defined by what one owns and controls” (Revière and Austin 2001:346). Within this scope, property equates to power, meaning then that the acquisition of property by “getting up,” (writing) a tag strengthens the ideology that those with more power control the space that surrounds them. Hegemonic masculine

thinking allows the male writer to appropriate space and to claim it as his (Revière and Austin 2001). The continued male dominance of space is an expectation or right to ownership, a privilege that comes with being male; women are socialized to not expect this right (Revière and Austin 2001). Pabón (2013c) furthers that the within the gendered politics of Hip Hop graffiti culture, women in graffiti subculture are subject to the same rules and regulations as their male counterparts such as getting up and taking risks, yet they still must “inhabit and engage with them differently because they are women in a male-dominated subculture” (30).

Written accounts of graffiti have shown the early writers of hip -hop graffiti were both men and women, yet, male graffiti writers and their art is primarily what the public talks about. Castleman (1982) only briefly mentions women writers, such as: Barbara 62, Eva 62, Charmin, Stoney, Grape I 897, TNT, Toni, and Swan. Yet, as hip-hop graffiti history shows, it was a woman that first tagged the Statue of Liberty: ‘Charmin’... (Castleman 1982). Mainstream hip-hop graffiti was and is still overtly characterized by hegemonic masculine ideology. There is a continued promotion of sexualization and marginalization of female writers that runs as a social norm in this subculture. In many cases in the past, women were not allowed to go out with the men from their crew to write in train yards. Men wanted writing to stay within their gender group, or felt that it was their duty to feel responsible for the women and keep them safe from the streets.

Nancy MacDonald (2006), in the introduction for *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents*, asked prominent writers like Lady Pink what they encountered when they first become part of the subculture of writing. Lady Pink

recalls that the constructed image of what is typically feminine is assigned to every woman that wants to write, she is seen as frail, timid, delicate and has the “tendency to burst into tears at the slightest hint of danger,” (Ganz, Swoon, & McDonald 2006:12). MacDonald quotes Lady Pink, “They didn’t take me seriously...I got the ‘you’ll scream, we’ll have to protect you’...” Lady Pink finishes with “I had to prove myself, that I wasn’t a wimp” (Ganz 2006:12). Male writers must prove themselves too, prove to be men, while women must disprove that they are ‘women’, that they can ‘ball up’ or be a ‘dude’ to be taken even slightly serious as a writer (Ganz, Swoon, & McDonald 2006). Claw, a writer from New York echoes the same oppressive culture in writing (Ganz, Swoon, & McDonald 2006). She recounts that to shatter the belief that women were not as good, she had to prove it by pushing herself harder by painting in places that when her art seen, it is understood that it was risky and edgy to complete. Claw’s reasons are simple “So people would say, “How the fuck did SHE do that?... I am doing this to say, “You and your closed little mind, we can do this, anybody can do it, as long as they have the will and desire to do it” (Ganz, Swoon, & McDonald 2006:13). “Life as a female graffiti writer is extremely hard. But she persists” (Ganz, Swoon, & McDonald 2006:12).

Criminalization of Graffiti

Depending on how people perceive a piece, a tag, mural or throw up, it will determine whether a person will see it as visual crime or if they approach it with *verstehen*, the subjective appreciation of others’ actions (Ferrell 1996; Young 2014). In relation to seeing it as a crime, research establishes that the fear of graffiti and perceptions of safety vary according to the gender and race of the

community members and their victimization experiences (Austin and Sanders 2007). Austin and Sanders addressed what they call the “incivility” of graffiti by considering its possible role in perceptions of neighborhood deterioration or fear. In contrast with the perceptions assumed by ‘Broken Windows’ theory, which states, “physical decay and neglect in the neighborhood provides clues to would be criminals that the informal social controls of the neighborhood have broken down and the residents no longer care about the social and physical conditions of the area” (Austin and Sanders 2007:293), they found people varied in how threatening they found different forms of graffiti be. Not all people see hip hop graffiti, for example, and interpret it as a sign of neighborhood incivility or crime, even if it technically is. Ferrell (1996) posits that graffiti is used to create a “moral panic”, where city officials and those in control, reconstruct graffiti in a negative light, through campaigns and media. Graffiti then becomes the perceived “incivility”, the root to social problems such as social values and decline in property values (Ferrell 1996:134). Austin and Sanders (2007) interpret the usage of the word “incivility” in relation to graffiti further by stating: “Graffiti may take on various forms and be used for a variety of purposes. Some graffiti is produced under the auspices of local authorities with the purpose of beautification or to convey anti-crime messages. Other types of graffiti may increase perceptions that social controls have broken down,” while to others this shows the opposite. Therefore, these authors claim that graffiti is not unidimensional, as it can be seen as both art and crime (Austin and Sanders 2007:296).

Through moral panics and perceived stereotypes, labels are placed on graffiti writers—they are thought to be marginalized community members who do disrupt what the mainstream art scene. Dominant society is shaped by most institutions to see graffiti as a violation of the “aesthetics of authority,” which is key in maintaining their dominant hold on the urban environment (Ferrell 1999). Moral panics concerning girls, as Dorothy Bottrell (2008) posits “may be as much about their transgressions of femininity as legal transgressions” (37). She states that the simple presence of women in subcultures such as graffiti is an act of contest against gender norms.

While the validity of the legal definition of graffiti as a crime is questioned by many and is related to individual’s perception, the gender of the graffiti write is usually referenced as being male, and the streets are the spaces he occupies. Lombard (2013) discusses this space of male power, space that is one of domination, hierarchy, and conquest, men claim and fill the space. Urban, public space is the cite of hegemonic masculinity; young male graffiti writers hoping to claim space with their writing and then the uniformed masculinities, trying to maintain social control, through regulating and dominance (Lombard 2013). As a result, the act of the crime of graffiti writing is not seen as a space occupied by women.

Campbell (2005) explains that women may have a heightened consciousness of crime that possibly could inhibit how their mobility and freedoms are restricted, while men may be less afraid of crime, allowing for their higher mobility and freedom in public spaces. Research indicates that women

frequently position themselves in relation to feelings of vulnerability, protecting themselves spatially from unknown men in public spaces (Campbell 2005). The distance between women and men on how they view public space, directly relates to how each gender's feelings of fear (or lack of such feeling) affects how they navigate through public spaces (Campbell 2005). Consequently, there are barriers constructed for women who want to engage in the same public behavior, such as graffiti writing, as their male counterparts. The literature establishes that fear of rape and other violence, in our culture socially controls, restricts, and constrains women's movement in public space. The social construction of graffiti as a masculine crime can act as a deterrent for women writers.

Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Aida Hurtado (1996), for manhood to exist, the need and control must also exist as well. Dominance is essential for the assertion of manhood (Hurtado 1996). Established space or roles for women are socially conditioned to only accept the "domestic" space that they are allowed to occupy. Women who detour out of their allotted spaces, or seek opportunity to move into spaces that are occupied by men, are often seen as traitors to their gender. Women graffiti writers can be seen as a "disruption" from the conformed lines of society's roles of gender. Their work and their gender are delegitimized by male graffiti writers in order to maintain the hegemony of masculinity.

By definition, according to R.W. Connell (1995) hegemonic masculinity is the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the

dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). Hegemonic masculinities are not a fixed type that is labeled the same, always and everywhere. More so, it is masculinity that dominates unseen patterns of gender relations called our patriarchal society. A society where the latter holds the majority of institutional power and hegemonic masculinity and is an unseen benefit; an unfair advantage that men gain in the overall subordination of women (Connell 1995:79). He states that men gain several legs up on women in terms of power, prestige and wealth. Bourdieu (2010) explains that those with higher cultural capital, typically men, have a higher gain in society, which brings higher attainment of social capital through a created network of resources. This gain is what leads to higher wages men earn over women, and explains the fact that men are more likely to be heads of companies and control the majority of wealth in the United States. Men are also likely to hold state power ten times more than women (Connell 1995: Collins and Makowsky 2010).

By the same token, in American culture, the dominant concept of masculinity has been constructed by white males and is identifiable “as the dominant form among all racial, sexual and class based masculinities” (Nagel 1988:247). This construction begins with a direct bonding of cultural ideology and institutional power at a collective level. Baker-Kimmons and Mcfarland (2011) explain this further that the “imperialism of hegemonic manhood and US culture causes them to exchange with one another the most masculine ideas submerging alternative, empowering masculinities. Women are constantly being policed by either fathers, boyfriends or husbands to maintain male dominance. Robin Kelley (1997) states, “...Young women and girls have even fewer opportunities to engage in either work or play. They have less access to public space, are

often responsible for attending to household duties and are policed by family members, authorities and boys themselves from the “dangers” of the streets” (54). This gender inequality in the division of labor is seen in the areas of child rearing responsibilities and household daily chores. Parents in these communities further make the divide of gender between males and females, by imposing strict curfews, and limited time outside the house, these controls are in place to maintain the violence and teenage pregnancy.

These controls can be seen in social media which continues to reinforce gender roles. A quick web search of “female graffiti writers” finds more articles than not with headlines that give you the top ten “female” writers or articles comparing all women to a single famous male individual such as Banksy. Social media may give women writers their space but only to compare them to their male counterparts or even worse, to describe them in sexualized language like ‘big brown eyes’, and ‘her cute pouty lips’ which shifts the focus away from her graffiti and onto her bodily attributes. The chronic comparison to men reinforces the invisibility of women in graffiti (Revière and Austin 2001).

Carol Caldwell (2015) relates this to something she calls “sexist gatekeeping” that excludes women in a given space. Caldwell furthers her “sexist gatekeeping” as a gender imbalance, where women are made to feel vulnerable or unwelcomed in public spaces. Alison Stine (2016) interviewed graffiti artist, Stephanie Rond, from Ohio, who stated “Outdoor space is a male world. Women have [had] to look at outdoor space in a different way than men because of personal safety” (Stine 2016:np). This form of sexism in the public graffiti world is not surprising because women in the Western world are typically associated with

being “passive, delicate, virtuous, domestic, caretaking, a model of proper morality, obedient, and limited to the private realm” (Pabón 2013c:82). This designation of private realm or space to women could be why when looking at various mediums of art, graffiti writing stands out to be the most male dominated area (Adeline 2009).

Sexist gatekeeping comes in various forms of gender control. Revière and Austin (2001) explain how the simple act of a male writer doing a throw-up of his girlfriend’s name to pay homage to his ‘lady’ allows for the continuance of the male ideology. Public space is carved out by men or boys and there is little space for women or girls, sexist gatekeeping is not exclusive to graffiti,. This is seen in other subculture such as skateboard parks, where ‘skater’ boys dominate the park, singling out and policing ‘skater’ girls with harassment (Pomerantz, Currie and Kelly 2014). The gatekeeping of these subcultures of public space sends the message that women are not expected nor wanted in this space.

Kelley (1997) further states that these communities limit a woman’s access to public space such as sports, hang out in parks, street corner and other forms of recreation that are key to the construction of masculinity in boys. Hegemonic masculinity interconnects different ideas of masculinity, these ideas are formed with dominance and subordination. They are constructed through practices of sexism, objectification, policing, to exclude, intimidate, exploit and control women (Connell 1995).

This ideology is referred to as doing *gender*. Gender “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1987:127). West and Zimmerman (1987)

state that doing gender consists of doing the appropriate give and takes of masculine and feminine behaviors. This doing of gender maintains the created differences in boys and girls, men and women. “These differences are not natural, essential or biological...they are used to reinforce the “essentialness of gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987:137).

This reinforcement or regulation as Butler (2004) further explains is that persons are regulated by gender, and that this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person. To veer from the gender is norm is to produce an aberrant example of regulatory powers.

Reinforcement of gender happens in various ways in graffiti. Women graffiti writers are under constant judgments based on their gender versus that of their skill, as seen in comments such as “That’s good for a girl”, “Her boyfriend must have done that for her”, “She didn’t do it”, “She copies his style” or “she had sex with him” (Pabón 2016:94). Sexual rumors seem to be used the most to deflect a woman’s writing or piecing skill. In the subculture of graffiti men are constantly recognized for their talent with a spray can, while women are recognized for what they can do with their body (Ganz 2006). Lady Pink (Ganz 2006) recalls: “Graffiti writers would just bad-mouth me and say I’m just some little slut. I’m probably doing just everybody when I go to the train yard,” (Ganz 2006:15). Identifying with being female automatically clears the path for judgments based on being a woman versus your skill. Women writers are often told they do not possess the qualities of male writers, such as strength, the ability to disregard authority, stamina and agility (Pabón 2016). The reputation of a male writer is built on his created identity of his graffiti, a woman’s, her sexual activities. Male writers’ reputations are built on his masculinity and how he performs it, women’s reputations are

created by how they are not able to perform to the masculine standards set by this subculture of graffiti (Ganz 2006). MacDonald (2001) writes that acceptance in graffiti subculture “a girl must behave like a boy. She must act ‘as if’ she has ‘balls’, that is, demonstrate the same attributes that are thought to possess. Masculinity is upheld as her goal” (131). MacDonald (2001) posits further that boys start equipped with a constructed gender (male) that guarantees their acceptance, thus girls start with one that must be disguised or rejected (103) due to the biological difference of ‘lacking balls’. This ideology is reproduced and reinforced to construct women as the ‘other’, simply because their bodies are not associated with the ideology of what is masculine (Herse 2013; Pabón 2013; MacDonald 2002).

Revière and Austin (2001) further establish that another form of reinforcement of the gender imbalance is the act of ‘cross(ing)-out.’ Cross-outs are when a writer paints or crosses out another writer’s work. This can be done to declare one writer’s talents over another man by ‘crossing-out’ or placing their own tag over that of another man’s tag. However, when women’s work is in the spotlight to be ‘crossed out’, words are sprayed over their work with names such as ‘girlie,’ ‘slut,’ ‘bitch,’ or ‘whore’ (Revière and Austin 2001). There is a gendered difference in these acts. The derogative cross-outs done to the work of women writers suggest that it is the “artist’s gender and sexuality that are lacking the desirable qualities and not necessarily her artistic skills...” (Revière and Austin 2001:344), while the men’s crossouts are not derogatory terms about their gender.

Another form of sexist gatekeeping could be how graffiti is passed down to new writers. According to Herse (2013), “graffiti is a practice that is not

spontaneous or capricious, because it has certain rules and mechanisms of transmission, knowledge (for handling spray and certain techniques...) that are not always transmitted to women, in an effort to exclude them from culture capital and symbolic capital offers” (67). This transmission of knowledge of graffiti and its rules is often transmitted through a ‘crew’; which has a main purpose in establishing a small community of writers that share a same purpose (Pabón 2013a). When a young male writer enters into the world of graffiti, he seeks out experienced mentors. These mentors are typically an older brother or friend, who then mentors them with their knowledge of graffiti (Pabón 2013a). Women can be excluded in this space and denied entrance into this culture for a variety of reasons. Male writers with experience may find teaching a woman to write as a ‘waste of time’ and not worth it to pass on their knowledge or will avoid women after being rumored that she is graffiti writing only to gain attention from her male peers (Pabón 2013a). This ideology of male dominance is passed down and could be one of the reasons women do not have a strong presence in the graffiti world. Neonski, a male graffiti writers, was asked by Kari Jane Lombard (2013) what he thought this lack of strong presence could be related to. Neonski replied “cause they’re not strong. Writing isn’t a woman’s thing. It’s a messy, lonely art from without much credit or acknowledgement.” He also stated that graffiti is “essentially male” (Lombard 2013:186).

Most graffiti crews are created to discuss new techniques, paint, expand territory, and create a network of like-minded male graffiti artists (Castleman 1982). The formation of crews serve as mini-families or communities that represent a point of pride, graffiti

crews have certain rules and codes of conduct (Pabón 2013a). Even in this space of a crew, women writers were still subjected to overt sexism and were constantly on alert to protect themselves from possible sexual assault while executing their writing (Herse 2013, Pabón 2013a). Crews are created to add upon the elders' or 'king's'⁶ knowledge of writing or to 'hang out' for social support. Thus, at times, making crews of males unattainable to woman writers, and excluding them from gaining or maintaining social capital.

This 'hanging out' with just males in attendance is not a new social phenomenon. This 'boys' club' is a replication of the white colonizer's control that continues to marginalize men of color (Lombard 2013). Both white, black and brown men throughout American history have had groups that are often referred to as the 'Boys' Club' or the 'Old Boys' Network'. As Bierma (2009) states, these all-male "networks" have been in place visibly or invisibly in all areas that are male dominated. The best example is the workplace. In the workplace, this network has been a systemic employment barrier that women have had to endure in their quest for advancement up a corporate ladder. This informal, invisible "network" is known to be highly exclusive that "affords inside information, facilitates advancement, and provides social and support network to its members" (Bierma 2009:3). Thus, the exclusivity of a 'Boys' Network' can and is formed within any race and or class; subcultures are not an exception. Graffiti crews are known to be predominantly male and reproduce the ideology of masculinity.

⁶ KING: The most accomplished writer in a given category (see Glossary).

Breaking Past the Boys' Club: Undoing Gender, Feminist Art and Resistance



(Gazm 2017)

Aquí en la soledad prospera su rebeldía, en la soledad ella prospera (Anzaldúa 2012:23)
(Here in solitude her rebellion grows. In solitude, she prospers)

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) define resistance of needing two core elements: action and opposition. Therefore, uses of resistance need a sense of *action*, an active behavior in the forms of verbal, cognitive, or physical. *Opposition* then is defined as to counter, to enact social change, to contradict, or to challenge, to disrupt (Hollander and Einwohner 2004).

As literature has established, hip hop graffiti, is a male-dominated subculture and much like other subcultures, women have resisted and opposed this dominance. Second wave feminism shows this through the establishment of such movements like the Riot Grrrls, a movement according to Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo (1998), to “reclaim the vitality and power of youth with an added growl to replace the perceived passivity of “girl” (809). Riot Grrrls, however, gave a voice to just white girls, excluding in their resistance, girls of color. To counter or resist this and male dominance, third-wave feminism addresses the real realities and needs of women of color (Peoples 2008). shati jamila⁷ (2002) voices this exclusion “as women of the hip-hop generation, we need a feminist consciousness that allows us to examine how representations can be

⁷ Author’s spelling of her name

simultaneously empowering and problematic” (392). Peoples (2008) furthers the birth of hip-hop feminism so that it might be “best understood as a means of reconciliation and reclamation on the part of young black women in the U.S. trying to create a space for themselves between the whiteness and/or academically sanitized versions of university-based feminism, where most first encountered a conscious naming and exploration of feminism, and the maleness of the hip-hop culture that most grew up on” (26). She furthers the image of a hip hop feminist agenda is one that takes its cue from bell hooks and others by using the critique to fashion an individual, social, and political agenda of inquiry and action for the contemporary moment. In hip-hop graffiti, women writers are seen as showing their reclamation of space whether it is by means of ‘passing’ in the beginning or by giving a voice to their oppression in bold colors, location or by exerting Pabón’s feminist masculinity. This can be seen not as a counter to males but an exploration of both men and women writers, by having a consciousness of both maleness and femaleness, writers are able to express who they are.

Recalling Nancy MacDonald’s (2001) ‘having balls’ in *The Graffiti*

Subculture this is not really the big picture and rather does not allow for or under minds theories such as Judith Butler (1999) who posits:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and a woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (3)

As Pabón (2013c) explains “...we are *all* acting *as if* (*we have balls*) and therefore becoming whichever particular performance because “[t]here is no “proper” gender, a

gender proper to one sex than another which in some sense that sex's cultural property" (62-63). She furthers that "having 'ballisness' is a performance of self, a set of behaviors available to individuals regardless of biological make-up. Leveled against women on the basis of a biological difference, this "as if" I had balls rhetoric reproduces and reinforces the ideological perspective that determines graffiti subculture as a boys' club" (Pabón 2013c: 62-62). Pabón (2013c) terms this feminist masculinity, built upon Jack Halberstam's concept of female masculinity.

Halberstam (2002) states that female masculinity disrupts contemporary cultural studies accounts of masculinity within which masculinity always boils down to the social, cultural and political effects of male embodiment and male privilege...female masculinity reduces the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone (Halberstam 2002:345). Pabón (2013c) establishes feminist masculinity as:

...female graffiti writers paint outside the lines of the heterosexist gender binary; they create a physical and psychological space where deviant gender performance is not always already a direct expression of homosexuality or a gender queer trans identity. Feminist masculinity does not come at the cost of femininity; it is a contextually specific enactment of self that embraces the complexity of gender expression (61).

Resistance is seen across the United States, Latin America and internationally in the form of *all-girl* crews. They are gaining in strength and power (Ganz 2006; Herse 2013; Pabón 2016; Syrup and Cyrus 2015). Women graffiti writers from Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Macedonia, Kenya, Afghanistan and more, are reclaiming public space with their bombings and tags. All-girl crews may only consist of two writers, yet do a subculture that excludes primarily on gender, "having each other is

invaluable, usually when something happens to one of us the other has already experienced it so we offer each other advice and when it comes down to it, we have each other's back" ("Illegally Blonde" Syrup and Cyrus 2015:13). The crew *Stick up Girlz* (Syrup and Cyrus 2015) was originally a one-woman crew who travelled the globe. As the founder recalls; it was rare to meet other women artists. Yet, she persisted and today has woman writers all over the globe who are part of the *Stick up Girlz* crew who "share in their passion for creativity" (Syrup and Cyrus 2015:22). *Girls on Top* out of the United Kingdom (2017) are a crew of 10 and they formed their crew to unite girls in graffiti (Girls on Top 2017). Pabón (2013) found that in Chile and Brazil, all- female crews were breaking the patriarchy of graffiti, and were offering young women a positive space with support, mentoring and friendship. Yet, they did not identify with being a feminist (Pabón 2013a). To them, the role of graffiti writer/artist comes first. After reclaiming space, they ignite a female action, "with every line sprayed on the wall she protests her invisibility, claims space in a subculture where the walls 'belong' to men" (Pabón 2013a:89). *PMS*, a crew that originally was an all-female crew but like its acronym, can change with the mood of the writer, now has men as members. "They are a part of the experience and it doesn't take away from the essence of it, which is boiled down to its essence is: women are equal to men ("Claw" Syrup and Cyrus 2015:37). Other groups such as Few and Far Women in Northern California are a group of female writers sharing the same commitment to having their voices to be heard through their murals in their community, in hopes to bring awareness to their rights along with other inequities in our world.

Street Heroines and *Girl Power* are both documentaries containing collections of stories that honor the women graffiti writer, created and produced by women.

They were created to show that as women, they do belong right along the streets with male writers and both have hopes to show other women that they do not have to be afraid to express themselves through their art (Few and Far Women 2016; GirlPower 2016). These women, whether writing solo or in a crew are creating not only their own space, they are passing on their knowledge to other women, sharing their passion for graffiti, and want to be mentors to a future generation of women writers.

We know that culture forms our beliefs and that culture is created by those that hold power—Men. Men then make the rules of social norms and the sanctions that govern them when they are broken, while women are meant to only transmit them (Anzaldúa 2012). Judith Butler (2004) also states “that a norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. The norm is actively conferring reality; only by virtue of its repeated power to confer reality is the norm constituted as a norm” (52).

The subculture of graffiti is created by these constructed by male-centric beliefs, and society only sees graffiti writing as public space that is dominated by men. Yet, women do bomb, they do tag, and they are piecing, is this the beginning to access to public spaces that men typically see as theirs? The literature supports a hegemonic masculine stronghold that is present on and off the streets, subways or buildings, that women writers are challenging in both the private and public spaces of graffiti because equal space is not being given to them for their writing.

Through my research, I unpacked this *space* of male exclusivity by looking at the experiences of women graffiti writers. By looking at their experiences, we are able to see through their narratives how they navigate this public space, social controls of graffiti, and how they resist the continued sexism in order to “get up.”

Their experiences further teach us how they navigate daily through their stories or ‘herstory/ies)’ which will add to existing literature on the marginalization that women endure as a graffiti writer in order to be seen. I build on the notion that the criminalization of graffiti is done through a gender lens, that through the social constructs of hegemonic masculinity and culture, women are not allowed to navigate freely within this space. My work builds upon the literature about women graffiti writers and their journeys.

THEORETICAL APPROACH



(photo used by permission by Lady Pink)

“Guys are extremely macho and chauvinistic and they fought tooth and nail not to have a girl infiltrate the boys club.”-- Lady Pink

(Satanstein 2014: para. 4)

In this section, I use theoretical concepts to show the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity and/or class can impact women graffiti writers. I unite the theoretical frameworks of Dorothy Smith’s standpoint theory and concept of bifurcated consciousness, Patricia Hill Collin’s standpoint theory through her concept of the matrix of domination and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of

intersectionality. These theoretical frameworks and concepts allow for a rich understanding of the experiences of the sample of women graffiti writers who participated in my research. This research draws on these theoretical frameworks to show how women develop their identities in the face of hegemonic masculine ideology and how women in California, through their art, counter a male-dominated space of graffiti.

Standpoint Theory and Bifurcated

Dorothy Smith's standpoint theory states: "...knowledge is and should be situated in people's diverse social locations. As such, all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed" (Mann and Kelley 1997:391). With regards to the latter, Smith (1997) furthers this with ethics of objectivity that separate what the observer knows from their personal bias and interests. Smith explains further (1997):

There are and must be different experiences of the world and different bases of experience. We must not do away with them by taking advantage of our privileged speaking to construct a sociological version that we then impose upon them as their reality. We may not rewrite the other's world or impose upon it a conceptual framework that extracts from it what fits with ours. (25)

In other words, Smith states (1997) that to speak about women, one must begin from the standpoint of women, "is to insist on the validity of an inquiry that is interested and that begins from a particular site in the world. It is to be

committed to an inquiry that violates the conditions of sociological objectivity and yet insists that there is something to be discovered, to be known, a product of inquiry that can be relied on” (33). In her recent studies, Smith furthers that “(1) no one can have complete, objective knowledge; (2) no two people have exactly the same standpoint; and (3) we must not take the standpoint from which we speak for granted. Instead, we must recognize it, be reflexive about it, and problematize it. Our situated, everyday experience should serve as a “point of entry” of investigation (Smith 2005b:10). Smith’s standpoint theory allows insight to how gender relations are systemically structured and are tools used for dominant members of society to subordinate others. Smith furthers her theory of feminist standpoint through the concept of bifurcated consciousness. Bifurcated consciousness draws upon the ideology of W.E.B Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness that he used to explain about the duality of being black in America. Both show that either gender or race forces the subordinate to create a duality in their lives, one that actively experiences the world and one that is seen by the social world and demanded to fit into normative structures set by the patriarchy or be reprimanded. Smith (1990) continues to explain that how our (women’s) knowledge is “mediated to us becomes a problem of knowing how the world is organized for us prior to our participation in it” (26). Standpoint theory then is a counter to that, and becomes a sociology for women that examines a socially constructed world from the inside, being an insider, rather than an outsider or observer.

White feminists, however, define how they are dominated, marginalized

and discriminated only in terms of gender and class. So, while white feminism is all encompassing of being a woman, it excludes women of color. As a result, the exclusion of women of color and their experiences go unheard or unrecognized. Patricia Hill Collins (1999) posits that when placed in certain situations of being listened to, oppressed groups answer with dialogue that is familiar or acceptable to the dominant group. Collins shares Smith's standpoint conception that all knowledge is constructed by those not situated in the action thus seeing or observing the social world quite differently than it really is (Collins 1999; Smith 1990). Collins furthers Smith's standpoint theory by also using concepts of intersectionality, recognizing that gender oppression is "only one of multiple forms of oppressions that characterize modern societies" (Mann and Kelley 1997:395). Collins (1999) posits that in order "to get at that "piece of the oppressor within each of us, we need at least two things. First, we need new visions of what oppression is, new categories of analysis that are inclusive of race, class, and gender as structures of oppression" (26). She asks that we step away from comparing and ranking of oppressions, that we do to see who has been "more oppressed" but rather we examine our different experiences within the framework of damnation and subordination. She suggests we recognize race, class, and gender as "interlocking categories of analysis that together cultivate profound differences in our personal biographies" (28). Along with Collins, scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) developed the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality states that women of color are excluded from both feminist theory and anti-racist policy discussions because both are based on

the experiences of either white women or Black men. These separations of oppressions do not include or reflect how the intersections of race, class, sexual orientation create further marginalization of women of color. Crenshaw (1989) states that black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination that fall outside the lines of what is seen as “race” or “gender” discrimination or rather white women’s and black men’s experiences only.

Therefore, it is through theoretical frameworks of Standpoint Theory, and the concepts of the matrix of domination and intersectionality can be used to better understand the navigation of women graffiti writers in the public space of California. By looking at their stories, their narratives, we can better understand how women find their place in a male-dominated world.

METHODS



How long do I have to prove this, that I am a worthy female? (Meme 2017)

In order to study women graffiti writers and their navigation of public space in the male dominant world of graffiti in California, I used qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews in order to answer my research question

through “herstory,”⁸ a women’s personal narrative. The importance of interviewing according to Siedman (2013) is that interviews are people’s stories, and these stories are “a way of knowing.” He goes on to state: “Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience” (9). Following his approach to interviewing, I also used “assumptions drawn from phenomenology” (Seidman 2013:17) in my interviews. Thus, for most of my interviews I used open-ended questions, which allowed participants’ responses to not be anticipated, and could be built upon to better explore the narratives of the participants (Seidman 2013).

Sample

I interviewed or surveyed nine women (See Table 1.1) who are or have been graffiti writers in California. For this research both purposive and snowball sampling were used. In, purposive sampling “each sample element is selected for a purpose, usually for their unique position” (Schutt 2012:157). Purposive sampling can involve a subset of the desired population and/or targets those that are extremely knowledgeable about the “cultural arena or situation or experience being studied and willing to talk” (Schutt 2012:157). While a purposive study involves only a subset of the population, the completeness of the study as Schutt (2012) describes as an overall sense of meaning to both the concept and theme of this research and allowed the selection of interviewees to bring their lived

⁸ The debut of the word ‘herstory’ was seen in Robin Morgan’s early 1970’s *Goodbye to All That* in the acronym as a member of W.I.T.C.H. or “Women Inspired to Commit Herstory” as a feminist claiming of history from her perspective (Morgan 1994).

experiences, navigations and negotiations of a woman graffiti writer. Snowball sampling was also used and is a sampling method used “for hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify populations for which there is no sampling frame, but the members of which are somewhat interconnected...sample elements are identified by successive interviewees” (Schutt 2012:157-158).

I utilized purposive sampling among my participants due to the nature of graffiti writing. I selected women on social media outlets such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and graffiti websites based off their social media pages that inferred they were/are graffiti writers in California. I relied on my own judgment when I sent an initial email to the writers and asking them to participate. I did not know more about the writers other than they may be female and they were graffiti writers based off of photos on their Instagram account. While I had originally wanted to utilize the method of snowball sampling solely, this proved impossible for this research. I was able to use snowball sampling to recruit some of my participants. I asked several of the women who participated in my research to recommend other graffiti writers that were women. Through the writer Meme, I was able to recruit Dime and DJ Agana for my research through her emails to these women. Blondy had also given me several names, however, they were not included in this research.

TABLE 1.1
List of Participants, Age and Location

Participant	Age	Location
Blondy	37	Southern California
Meme	mid-30s	Northern California
Mist	24	Central California
Quean	19	Southern California
Dime	30s	Northern California
Glow	42	Southern California
DJ Agana	34	Northern California
Gazm	23	Southern California
Esme	23	Southern California

Data Collection and Analysis

I planned to do interviews in person, on the phone, or via social media. In the end, I needed to conduct interviews in both spoken and written formats due to the preferences of two of the participants. Before conducting my interviews, I presented them with the informed consent forms and asked for their signature before I proceeded. I did this via email as well as having a hard copy on hand for those interviews done in person(see Appendix B). I conducted two spoken interviews in person and five over the phone. I used a digital voice recorder to record our conversations. These interviews ran from about 45 minutes to over 90 minutes in length, with one interview lasting 150 minutes over the span of several days due to the availability of the participant. All interviews consisted of a group of basic questions to determine where the participants were from, how they discovered graffiti, what keeps them in graffiti, what got them out of graffiti (if relevant),

what influences them, what it is like to be a woman, their thoughts on graffiti culture when they started versus today's culture, and other related topics (see Appendix B). The in-depth spoken interviews allowed me to be engaged and an active listener that allowed participants to speak for themselves. They allowed participants to be able to speak freely and to say whatever they needed to say to convey their story, and I was able to shift my questioning based on what transpired in each conversation. All spoken interviews were conducted in places of the participants' choosing such as at a coffee shop, on a college campus, or by phone.

The written interviews had less flexibility; I simply sent them a set of questions via email and was unable to shift the conversation based on the responses of the participant. I did ask them if I could email with follow-up questions and both writers agreed to that request and furthered any questions I may have had.

After I had completed nine interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings and along with the written interviews, I analyzed all the content to find a thematic schema and connection to the research in question. Foss and Waters (2007) define this process as creating codable data. This process will include identifying the "unit or units of analysis... A unit of analysis should be a concept, idea, or action that illuminates the significant features of your data so that the question you asked, can be answered" (186-187). This is what Saldana (2007) refers to as a 'code'. A code is a qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and /or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (3). In the process of bringing my units of analysis into coded data, my first step was to find examples

and then isolate my units of analysis, in order to work with them (Foss and Waters 2007). After the coding of my data was complete I would remove the coded excerpts from my written transcripts, these excerpts would then be placed in piles that were then labeled to create an explanatory schema. Saldana (2007) states that rarely anyone gets coding right the first time. He explains that as one “codes and recodes, expect – or rather, strive for – your codes and categories to become more refined (10). Therefore, my ‘piles’ were constructed and deconstructed in order make sure the coded excerpts connect and support each labeled topic. My explanatory schema was created from these coded excerpts that would later enable me to accomplish and ground my interpretation of my research.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the personal, emotional and legal implications of this subject matter, ethical considerations were given unique and special attention. I asked each writer for permission to record when applicable, and reassured each participant that their identity and confidentiality were protected. Each writer was given the option to choose a pseudonym, but every writer chose to go by her tag. I reminded the participants either verbally or in writing that their participation was voluntary in this study and they were free to decline to participate and/or withdraw permission or consent at any time. I also made it known to each writer that they could skip any question they did not feel was in their best interest to answer.

Those interviews that were recorded were done so with a password-protected device. In order to maintain confidentiality, I have omitted any familiar place or person that was talked about in an interview. The overall well-being and protection of all the writers was my one and only concern. While some of the writers chose to omit references

to specific places or incidents on their own, I assured all my writers of the safeguards that were previously stated (Appendix B).

Reflexivity

As a woman and an outsider to the subculture of graffiti writing, I maintained a reflexive agenda so that I could be aware and acknowledge my privileges while conducting this research. Reflexivity is the ability to understand, as researchers; the worlds of others (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2014). Although I am a woman, I cannot fully relate to the graffiti writers' narratives. As a result, I can only accurately relay their truths by talking to them, hearing their stories, seeing their realities and acknowledging any obstacles they may face.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



Women have less freedom because guys can go painting by themselves without having to fear that someone is going to hit them or rob them or take them. (Mist 2017)

Women graffiti writers are influenced to navigate and negotiate for public space due to socialized norms that construct gender in our society. Three major themes emerged in my interviews with women graffiti writers in California: 1) established gender norms or roles shaped how woman graffiti writers formed their identities, 2) their socialization into the world of graffiti influenced their writing, and 3) they fight against roadblocks of hegemonic masculinity through various means of resistance and resilience. The purpose

of my research was to examine the experiences of women in California in the male-dominated world of graffiti. The data from my interviews revealed rich in-depth details to further illuminate why there is a limitation of space given to a woman and how women are not only jumping out of their 'lanes,' but also writing outside of their normative 'lines'.

Identity Formation

Identity formation played a large role in women's entry into the world of graffiti writing. Gender identity through society's established norms and roles define how one's "bodies, personality characteristics, and predispositions align or don't align" (Killerman 2017:2). Most of the women in this study noted that they were socialized in non-conventional ways during their youth and influenced by hip hop culture.

The writers interviewed were claiming space in a subculture that is dominated by a male presence--a subculture where being a woman challenges gender norms and constructed masculinity (Hurtado 1996). Many of the women interviewed were seen to be 'undoing' gender roles before they started writing, writers such as Quean and Meme grew up in households where gender roles were blurred and as Butler (1999) states "gender becomes a free-floating artifice" (3).

Childhood for many of the writers did not typically follow the gender lines that society sets forth, where girls play like girls, and boys play like boys. While no participants shared the same exact childhood, a majority did not grow up in a typical normative standard of socialized construction of gender. Meme, a writer from the Bay Area, shares her childhood as:

I never, like, fit into how society wanted me to be. As a kid, as a girl, I always dressed like a boy, I thought I was male. My brother even told me "well the reason you don't have a wiener is because it got cut off and sold to the hot dog

factory and that's why we don't eat hot dogs." So, from ages 3 to 7, I thought my wiener was gone. A lot of my life I felt I was a boy in the sense I peed standing up, copying my brothers in everything I did...I didn't have any girls that lived by me...there was never discussion of me being a girl.

Meme also attributes how she grew up to her grandmother who "was a truck-driving, hardcore, white lady, that wore a bunch of gold rings, smoked cigarettes and didn't give a fuck about no man...She was just an all-around ultimate woman, a little too harsh at times but she and my mom build the drywall in our house...She taught me that you don't need any man to do shit for you."

Meme did not play into the traditional gender roles that society has established, instead due to her family socialization, gender roles were bent and Meme grew up to be both masculine and feminine:

Oh, I am a girl, I am not supposed to do that, I am supposed to play with dolls...as a kid I wasn't given babies, I didn't have Barbie dolls. I wasn't allowed to have them. So, you know a lot of my personality comes from when I was a child, cause, I wasn't doing what normal little girl do.

Quean, age 19, my youngest participant also expresses how she isn't 'lady-like', "I don't wear make-up, I don't wear heels." Quean remembers growing up around older male cousins who were into tagging. This along with her account of her youth where:

All my friends were guys, [in] elementary school were guys, my best friend in first grade was a guy. I would always play with guys. I think that is because there is a two-year gap between me and my sister...my mom was always with my sister and I was with my dad...I was kinda brought up to kinda be like a man even though I was a female...In middle school I tried to act girly, I acted girly for a week.

Socialization

Gender identity along with race and class are not to be compared and ranked but rather examined to show the intersection of oppressions that shape our differences in our own personal biographies (Collins 1999). Therefore, each writer interviewed had

different paths to claim their space due to the shaping of their personal environment due to different responsibilities deemed by their individual household, or perhaps by policing by their family and friends, and societal constructs on “dangerous” places for women (Kelley 1997). Except for Esme, all the writers shared ethnicity of either being Latina or Native American.

Along with gender, other factors influenced how these writers began their path to being a graffiti writer. Other participants had childhoods that fell outside social constructs of normativity. DJ Agana, age 34, who is Venezuelan, grew up on the run from her mother’s ex-husband, a member of the Italian Mafia, due to death threats against her mother and herself. She moved around a lot, the longest stay was in the Bay Area. Other participants endured trauma, such as neglectful parents or mental health issues like depression. Dime shares her story on how graffiti writing gave her happiness while struggling with depression:

... I struggled from depression since I was a child even more so reaching my teens. I remember sitting in my closet drawing letters, and feeling so much happiness. Also, coloring would make me happy, mixing colors and coming out with so many different layers. The paint yards where my therapy, the walls, spray paint, letters, going out on missions... my ways of coping with death, pain, suffering and feeling rejection and abuse.

Graffiti also worked as therapy for other writers such as Glow who also shared how her ‘art’ became her therapy:

I use art as therapy, most of my art is the therapy that I need to keep going in this world. Where my experiences come in this relative reality, all my art is my therapy. I think the projections of me being a woman, me being a mom, being a source of information for other people, a visual therapist for the viewer. And it influences them more than me.

Societal class also was discussed amongst several of the writers, while graffiti goes across social class lines, most of my writers were from a blue-collar to urban working class upbringing. Blondy recalls her childhood:

In general, in my own knowing multiple writers I would say I am consider middle class. My dad is a hard-working construction worker, and my mom always worked. We didn't have a ton a money growing up. I can see where it would relate, a lot of times I was by myself, my mom had to work, my dad had to work, and I was watching my little brother. I would sneak out of my house at night time, things like that so I guess I can see that. But I would say knowing most of the writers I would say they would fall in the same. Everybody I have ever known is every color of the rainbow every aspect of everything.

Social class also has impacted how these writers see their world: they have not accepted today's inequalities as status quo. Those holding the wealth and power have shaped and constructed these writer's perceptions through social normatives and sanctions. Graffiti then is as a deconstruction, one that allows for possible systemic change for minorities in class, gender and race. Quean shares her childhood memories of where she grew up:

I think it's just because of where I grew up, it's not ghetto or super bad but you are exposed to that lifestyle... and if nothing will change, like if people don't try to help others in the ghetto or the government doesn't help and gentrification keeps happening, graffiti isn't going to stop there is something to be said. That's a way to be known. Like you want to come and destroy my life I am going to destroy your property. Same background, I feel like brought up low- income, poverty-like ghetto they grow up with that. You want to express yourself and put it out there and see how others react

Quean was born into a household with young Latino parents that were directly influenced by factors that produced the need for hip-hop. She was very aware of her surroundings and her oppressions. Gazm also expressed her struggle growing up, rebelling within a system that systemically stacks the deck even more so if you are a woman and a minority:

I guess we just like to leave our mark. I feel also graffiti is a sense like of a lot my friends that are Hispanic/Latino, that minorities are out here struggling, going through stuff, a lot of people who are going through a lot...it is kinda like a rebellion against the system. I feel like that's also another way going against the system the structure of it.

Social class structure continues to structure family life as well. Meme, when asked what shapes a person's writing, shared that:

Definitely everyone's life experiences (shape their writing) some people will stop spray painting, not only is it super hard in a male dominated subculture, it is a tough a thing as it is. Now it's more art students and graphic designers that become graffiti writers...like back in my day, it was like you had to be a piece of shit or just a person that your family was abusive or a hard background. I came from all of that. Coming from a place of harshness and I got myself into it, you know what I mean, I think that reflects into my graffiti a lot.

Other writers shared that an escape into graffiti stemmed from coming from a home that lacked in parental love or guidance. For Mist, letters, writing and colors were the ways that allowed for all of the above to be forgotten:

I'd say writing for me is my way of expressing myself looking for the attention my parents never gave me. I grew up neglected always searching for my parents to be there for me but they come from that "tough love" generations, which was all I ever received from them. I grew up depressed and troubled and always drew as a past time to forget about things. My style and color choice now I'd say is emotion based. Some of my best flows of sketches come from my saddest or angriest days. As for the colors, I use I have always used vibrant, pastel colors and more than 5 colors in a fill because I'd say my life is colorful. I've learned to paint the pain away to only reflect what I want to feel and bright colors make me feel happy.

Formation of writers' identities directly relates to how the women were socialized prior to finding graffiti writing and after, through various means. Several of the writers interviewed claimed hip-hop culture as a big influence on their beginnings. This coincides with past research that states hip-hop emerged due to economic, political and ethnic inequalities (e.g., Ferrell 1998).

Embodying the 'aesthetics of hip hop culture' was also an overarching force in

the development of the women graffiti writers' socialization into the world of graffiti.

Hip hop, according to shani jamila (2002) is the dominant influence on our generation.

Women as a marginalized group want to be heard; my research found that a majority of the writers interviewed recognize hip hop as part of their style. For example, Gazm noted:

Um, I feel definitely that my writing stems from hip hop. I personally love old school hip hop just like aesthetic of it, something you can't describe... it's just a culture and you are part of it. You are part of it so you don't tend to objectively look at it.

Dime also expressed how hip hop influenced her as she began to write. The more she wrote, the more she learned about the culture,

Hip hop is revolutionary! Graffiti is one of the only elements of hip hop that has been criminalized and that has made art so hard to be accepted. When I started to write, I knew little about the origin, and didn't care if it was hip hop. But, as I got older I learned the culture and how so many before me paved the way; how the culture started in the streets and young lower class youth created this movement and art to express, tell stories, have fun.

Quean shared how hip hop was something that she knew before she was born, coming from young parents and her culture:

I think hip hop music influenced me a lot to do graffiti, I had young parents and so they listened to Snoop dog, DJ Quik, Aztec tribe out of San Diego. That's what influenced me as a child my parents were younger, my dad was a gangbanger he does art, he doesn't do as a job but just on paper like doodles. So, growing up seeing that that kind of like I want to do stuff like this. My dad does do graffiti like he has done letterings. When I was little I had on a piece of paper not a plaque but it was my name and my dad had done it. So that always influenced me. Hip hop is really dominated by men and I was really inspired by Lauren Hill, Queen Latifah, female rappers. So, seeing that Queen Latifah was able to come up in a male-dominated industry and that influenced me with my name you know. She was able to do that for herself in a male industry.

Meme stated when asked what characteristics do graffiti writers share she stated; *we are so hip hop, old school hip hop.*

When the writers were asked if hip hop is part of their aesthetic in writing, many

responded with an absolute yes. While there are many aspects of hip hop that have been discussed, here I state that these women as young writers were influenced and submersed into a subculture that in some areas is very highly male dominated, thus sometimes influencing norms and rules associated with being a hip hop graffiti writer.

Resistance, Resilience and Navigation through the Roadblocks of Hegemonic Masculinity

Feminist Consciousness Raising:

While being labeled a feminist isn't always what these writers identified with, their acts and actions spoke along the lines of non-conformity and Pabón's feminist masculinity. Quean shared that for her and her tag... *"it is letting other women know you can do this even though it's normalized that only a man can write, you can do it too"*.

Meme who identifies as a feminist stated:

Yes, I do consider myself a feminist, ...I think in all societies, there are broken pieces and if we keep walking over it, you can't feel it festering your foot and if you leave it there it turns into something not healthy and ugly...whether its sexism or racism, everything that has been oppressed has the right to break that oppression. So, for me, I consider myself a feminist...I stand for a lot of woman's rights and I feel it is very important.

Gazm also considers herself a feminist: *"I definitely do more so now that I did before, I definitely think it's important to represent women in graffiti and to empower other women to create together and support each other doing the same thing. That we can mentor to each other."* She goes on to also discuss how we, as women need to stop the hate and to move past it:

...when I was growing up there was a big battle between women, who was better...talking shit about teach other. Empowering each other was not there. Now it is about bonding and empowering each other and trying to get together to build something of their own. Women have their own thing in graffiti now, and I think that this is part of this whole movement of women trying to move forward and that this is just another part of it.

Gazm furthers this by explaining that graffiti is a rebellion:

...for me a rebellion of our structures in our systems...I go to school now and I am taking classes, I feel I know a little more and see the structures that keep my friends in places they can't come out... For me, I understand graffiti is illegal, but well, there are a lot of things that are in place to 'protect' us that don't, so why should I care?

Quean shares similar views that the illegalities are sometimes worth the risk:

I think it is like a cry out, you need to do something... I just think it is a protest against being oppressed. Women contributing to that, makes sense. Women are able to do write more and we put our own twists on it. I think women think more about what they are going to put up. Things for a lot of us are how we are feeling and what we do is emotional or emotionally attached. It is more of a personal thing.

Undoing of Gender:

Octavio Paz (1961) writes as: "[T]he ideal of manliness is never to 'crack, ' never to back down. Those who 'open themselves up' are cowards. Women are inferior beings because, in submitting, they open themselves up. This inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals (29-30).

During my interviews, participants shared their stories on how they started graffiti and were at times obstructed by sexism and hegemonic masculinity. Many of my participants expressed socially constructed fears. Quean voices her concerns about writing at night:

If you do something at night you are always thinking what if a guy comes after me? What if a guy tried to rape me? What if ? You know, it is always a what if, if you are a female. You don't have the freedom of saying "let me go out at night cause I can". As a woman have to think twice about it.

Blondy adds that being more known and with age has created more freedom but there was a time...: *"I went by myself and was told "we're gonna beat your ass" and I was "like what the fuck, you are gonna beat a girl's ass?...I do carry mace, I have a little*

knife, it's probably not gonna do much but it makes me feel like I am doing my part."

Gazm states, "*she has always has gone out with her best friend, a girl, and for the period of time her friend was in Mexico, chose not to go out and write*". Mist brings a lot of fears together with her statement:

Women have less freedom because guys can go painting by themselves without having to fear that someone is going to hit them or rob them or take them. Females on the other hand can't go out painting late at night by themselves because then they're running multiple risks of putting their life in danger.

In order to break from the dominant ideology that the streets are not safe for women, some of the writers talked about what can be seen as Smith's concept of bifurcated consciousness. These women while having established roles of being a mom, daughter or girlfriend also had the role of an experienced writer, who was able to claim public space with their writing. A role that may not use the femme spray paint tones of pinks, blues and yellows, they would perform the 'passing' as a male writer either by using certain colors in the beginning in order to be seen as a 'boy'. It in this space that we do see bifurcated consciousness that Smith talks about because they 'dress down' in order to get up. This costume when writing does not mean they are any less feminine or less girly. They expressed how through fashion of loose baggie hoodies and pants as Meme explains characteristics of graffiti writers: *We all have paint on our clothes, I can look down and know I can look at their nails. I can look at their hats, the brands, Northface jacket, new balance shoes, black dark jeans and a dark shirt.*

Bifurcated consciousness or 'passing' is seen as resistance and resilience in order for this group to gain access to knowledge and space. Gazm did talk about hiding her gender in her writing in the beginning; *I tried to not look feminine, no hearts or anything*

that would symbolize that I was a female I did that a lot in the beginning.

The writers I interviewed were/are gaining empowerment for performing outside of their identified gender. Some of the writers continue by the undoing of gender, or as Pabón (2013c) terms female masculinity. This masculinity is seen in some of the writers' style of writing. Dime states:

I like straight letters; simple black and white. Color is real nice but growing up, black & white or a nice chrome was always my favorite. I think style has always been important to me. The less color the better, that way if all 10 colors are taken away you can still see the style.

As Pabón (2013c) states, this is produced by female graffiti artists who (consciously and subconsciously) resist misogyny, reject empty capitalistic girl power, and embody the foundational aesthetics of hip hop culture and feminist ideology (Pabón 2013c:65). The women of my research do participate in this female masculinity and or gender bend. If by our societal norms, masculinity is part of the hegemonic patriarchy expression that men exert, thus by women undoing gender they were/are gaining empowerment for performing outside of their heteronormative gender (Pabón 2013).

Breaking Past Hegemonic Masculinity Ideology:

My findings support the concept of hegemonic masculine controls established from childhood, and does in fact, limit access to public space when a writer is a woman. Roadblocks produced by a patriarchal society can start with how a girl is socialized by her family and continue as she grows. Other writers recall how they began being dictated by masculine guidance such as Mist who shared how she got her tag name: *Tops was like "you should write, like a be a tagger."* He then asked me if I had a name for myself and I said "no" and he was like *I'm a gonna call you Mist then.* Quean recounts her father finding her drawing: *"he ripped up my notebook and asked why I would draw this... you*

can be a chola...members are going to see you just as sleeping with them.” Masculine dominance is a theme in how most of the women writers began graffiti writing, either through men teaching them or through defining them by their tag.

Writers spoke of how they got started and while they wanted to learn, they were often put down and made to feel the lessor. One writer, Mist told me how when she first began her old writer friend (a male) would feel free to revise her sketches and tell her *“...how shitty they were and that he was just being honest and helpful. That it was his ‘honest’ opinion that sprouted my need to grow. I had a desire to prove people wrong, that I wasn’t shitty and that I could paint and most of all my gender had nothing to do with my talent.”* Mist later added *“a good female writer will give you a 4-5-letter word with so much style and structure you will automatically think a guy did it. That is how you know when a female is good.”* Overcoming sexism both internal and external, is something that most of the writers have had to do.

Connell (1995) posits that hegemonic masculinity dominates seen and unseen patterns of gender relation, thus creating our patriarchal society. Hegemonic masculinity then gives not only legitimacy to patriarchy but also distributes privileges to those that perform masculinity, typically men. These privileges are vast and in the subculture of graffiti, culture capital is gained from those that hold it. The biggest privilege is public space--space that excludes women from gaining access.

Participants also told of various times that they were told to stay in their lane through constant feedback that was neither asked for nor wanted. Quean states that: *“guys are very dismissive. It’s very male dominated, this is their area and girls should not be here...Even the words they use are meant to be demeaning...such as cute.”* Mist

commented: “I usually get ‘you’re not bad for a girl,’ which is one of the most annoying things to ever hear in life.” Gazm, 23, adds:

...when I was younger and first started writing , I would hear shit talking “her boyfriend did that for her” or “oh, the only reason she is in that crew is because she slept with everyone”, a lot of women are talked down especially when they are good, men try to always put them down. A lot of things I hear “oh, you are a lot better than these guys out here.” To be compared because you’re a woman and the other person is a guy that you are better than, why does gender play into that? It sucks.

Meme expanded on this with great insight:

I get a lot of disrespectfulness from my peers even those I consider to be my friends. “Well, you can’t do that.” “Why are you going there?” “You sure paint a lot.” “You should be careful” or just telling me to slow down, “you’re doing too much, you are showing off.” And it’s like no, I am just doing what I’ve been doing, so that’s been a challenge, and also, men being territorial “You can’t do that!” “You can’t go here, it’s not safe for you cause you’re a girl.” Get the fuck out of here! I travel on my own and lived in ghettos done a lot of things I’ve been damn fine and now you are going to say I can’t paint here because you are worried I am a girl.

Among the participants interviewed, an overarching theme emerged that as women writers they were sexualized as a form of gatekeeping. One participant however did not feel any constraints to being a woman, Esme, age 23. Esme states, “I often feel protected not just because I’m a woman, but because this community believes that everyone should have the freedom to express themselves.” Esme identified as an Anglo woman. While other participants were around the same age as Esme, her race/ethnicity was different from the others in the study. Meme also identified as white, but with Native American ethnicity, and she has had different experiences than Esme:

I am attractive, and um, that I am good looking girl, it took me a long to time embrace my womanhood, to wear make-up, I didn’t shave until I was 26 years old. I had a shaved head, dread locks...I was teased for looking like too much like a boy... now I am bullied for being too feminine and it’s like make up your god damn mind. You are in competition when I look like a guy but the fact I won’t get with you, you now see me as a threat. Men try to sexualize me a lot...most men sexualize me, you know what I mean, they see it as a conquering, “I wanna get

with her.” People are so quick to spread lies. Even if I was painting for someone, someone would spread lies that I made out with them or hooked up with them, things like that. (When asked if she were male would this be the same?) No, this would not happen.

Blondy elaborated on similar experiences,

I get the weirdest direct messages (Instagram), literally I will open it up to dick pictures, from two or three different people. I am tired of dick pics; my boyfriend is tired of dick pics. Also, a lot of male graffiti writers have this fantasy of the female writer, so I get a lot DM’s saying they have had this fantasy of a female writer and going to the yard having sex in the year and this ‘n that.

She further stated,

I know as a female, I would never tell that to a man, I don’t understand why a man feels the need to tell a girl that, and I am not the only one, I’ve heard that from most girls that have an Instagram, they say they get that all the time.

When asked would a writer support or encourage their daughter, niece or other woman to be involved in graffiti writing, Mist replied:

... I wouldn’t want to see someone close to me see or deal with a lot of the things I have dealt with being a female writer. Male graffiti writers tend to use their art to sleep with multiple women while having a baby momma at home.

Meme noted how men oppress women writers to stay in their own ‘lane’:

...really, it’s about a guy’s power trip... “we don’t want you going there because we don’t want you doing more than us.” That’s a recent thing I had happen. It wasn’t even the guy’s train yard, because he lives close to it, he feels that he needs to control me and this other guy, a friend I am not talking too, “he goes you need to respect the yard.” “No”, actually, this yard is open to anyone, I parked in the right spot, I am watching my p’s and q’s I know what the fuck to do. If I were a man they would have never talked to me like that. So that’s one thing of many times I have to prove myself, that I am down, how many times I’ve gone to jail, I’ve done this, I’ve ran from cops. I’ve hide in bushes for hours, I have broken things, I have sliced open things. How long do I have to prove that I am this worthy?

When women again and again are met with this male construction of ‘worthiness’ more obstacles are placed to further keep women writers from claiming public space.

Cross-outs are common among all writers, yet with women writers, research has shown cross-outs are done with more direction to bringing gender to the forefront. Glow brought

up that the cross-outs she has seen included, “*mainly, little penises on girl’s work...beautiful characters by a girl and they just draw little penises all over it. Guys don’t know what else to draw.*” While talking with Gazm, she brought up that this just happened to her friend: “*...One of my friends just got crossed out with a penis on it.*”

Penises seem to be a recurring cross-out aimed against women writers. Blondy remembers this piece done on a rooftop in San Diego:

One of the well-known crews came through and they turned my ‘O’ which was very yellow and very circular into balls and then made a dick coming off it. They had it jizzing on my piece. What’s funny, I don’t have any problem with this crew and I know personally three or four of them that I know were there that day, and so why did you let this happen, even though we are friends, you allowed your crew to do this. So, it was weird, I was pissed, like “why the fuck would you do this?”... There’s been time even at the Writer’s Block where I did something like a quick little thing and gone on the other side, my friend was on the other side, and came back around and literally someone had gone over my stuff...I don’t know that if they would have done that had they saw a guy there painting you know, I think because I was a female that it’s some stupid girl, she doesn’t know what she is doing, and they just went over my stuff.

Most of my writers were able to talk about many ways they were prevented from writing either by their peers, family or other writers. They were very aware that women have less freedom in claiming of space and pointed to tools of sexist gatekeeping. A couple of the writers talked about how they were told they were only good due to who they were going out with, or if they didn’t sleep with a certain someone, their writing was discounted or they were told that their sex was the only reason they were allowed to be seen with other writers. Writers also shared how they were talked to by other male writers they considered peers. That they were bullied or told they didn’t belong because it wasn’t safe for women. Gazm wouldn’t write without other women and stop writing for a period until her friend came back to the states. Several of the writers carried weapons of defense

and did have it in the back of their mind that they were going out at night. Typically, a space not inhabited by women due to conceived safety notions. Being sexualized was seen as well in a lot of the writers' 'herstory'. Writers such as Meme noted that for a period of time she hid from being a woman in her dress and style, in order to not have men bother her with sexual advances and to have to deal with the negatives that come with being a woman writer. While cross-outs are part of being a writer, most of the women talked about how or when their tags or art were crossed out, penises were usually involved.

The writers in this research are very aware of the constructs of Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity and how sexism, objectification, policing and finding ways seen and unseen to control women and they have risen to the challenge to overcome these roadblocks as shown in the next section of resiliency.

Yet, in dealing with the systematic barriers to their full participation, some women also have internalized the sexism and misogyny that also contribute to why there is less of a woman's presence in the public world of graffiti. For example, Mist spoke:

...of girls that ruin the image of graffiti by trying to paint flaunting their ass and tits on purpose. I am not that girl. or when a girl writer goes around dating a lot of writers. One thing I have never done is dated another male graffiti artist for this reason. I never wanted to give anyone the reason to talk about me. I have seen female writers date writer after writer only making themselves look stupid.

Some of the writers express this through the creation of the 'other', blaming their own gender the flaunting of their 'tits and ass' to get space or even accepting when a government official looked her up and down like an object, that she was 'taking one for the team'. Internalized sexism as well as normalization of the objectification of our sex begins. Blondy shares her narrative of her experience of almost getting caught, which

shows that women have been conditioned to see the objectification and sexism as okay:

We were painting trains and we were on the line...and so, we came out of the yard as he was pulling up. We just stashed all our stuff. And we were just like 'ok, I am the only girl, all guys (that's typically how it's been when anything has happened) and you know we came off the line, like we are just hanging out taking pictures. We just kinda walked up to our car casually and he was like "Whoa! Whoa! where do you think you are going?" It was funny as it was four of us, my friend, me and two other people, um, and he was just kinda focused on me. I had a pair of really dark sunglasses on and I was acting like I wasn't watching him but I kept seeing out of the corner of my eye, just looking at me and looking at my identification. He was like "What are you doing here?" and I am like "what do you mean, I am just hanging out with my friends." He was just like "what are you doing here though? You are way too pretty to be doing this." ...He kept looking me up and down and I was really grossed out. For whatever reason, he was very focused on me, asking questions if I was single and things like that, it was super weird...That's not the first time and I've been fortunate to be able to use that. That was the first time it happened to me where I go I can get out of things because I am a girl like okay let's try that again. It did happen a few times after that and similar situation, it's super weird and uncomfortable and my friends are "just do it, take one for the team" and I am always the one that takes one for the team. But um, yah, it's definitely being female in a male dominated world like that definitely has its ups and downs, I guess that is one the ups, I don't know.

Through these roadblocks of masculinity, a production of invisibility was created.

Seeing women write wasn't something that was being done. Blondy recalls seeing graffiti on "walls, freeways, things like that. It was really cool, I just didn't see any girls doing it, it was all guys, all boys. I got teased a lot."

Dime voices the same sentiment of the invisibility of women writers:

When I started doing graffiti in East Oakland I only painted with my neighborhood friends, the boys. In my generation, I didn't know any girl taggers, so I thought that it would be a lot different if I painted with girls and for some reason-- maybe the fact that I was told would never happen, I always wanted it too. One day I met someone that asked me if I tagged with any female... I said no, because I haven't met any in person; just would hear rumors of who might be a girl.

The lack of other women on the scene of graffiti was then in itself a roadblock,

hindering women to claim their 'space'. Yet, still they persisted through the empowering and enrichment of young women through various avenues.

Support of Young Girl and Women Writers:

The writers in this research spoke of empowerment through the formation of crews⁹. A number of the writers discussed the formation of all-women crews. Meme is the founder of Few and Far Women, an all-woman crew of writers and all-female skateboarders, whose goal and commitment is to empower women and girls. Meme shared how Few and Far, was created:

In 2011, I found a wall I wanted to paint with help from a friend and my ex-boyfriend and I found a wall. I asked for permission, got permission over two large buildings then I got with some of his connections a paint sponsor. I think with the paint sponsor it was like if you build it they will come. I had a natural knack to bring people and things together. So, having my vision and then pulling it together, I got eighteen girls out in a half raining day in June in Oakland. I didn't know what I was doing, it was my first mural, legally, I had ever done. It turned out really good. The skate jam started when I said let's make this into something we do yearly, then I said let's turn it into an organization and I said, "fuck it, let's make it a crew." Because I just don't want anyone to get it that's the thing it's like nobody can get it, you can come skate or you can come paint. But what if you are a shady person, what if I don't like your attitude and I don't like you. I want a choice of who is part of it. I had other girls part of it and they left. Maybe it wasn't the right fit for them or for us... Everyone in the world wants love and acceptance. People get that from graffiti they get it from their peers, other writers... Girls seeing other girls linking up together, I can comfortably say that Few and Far has influenced a lot of females into graffiti and murals.

Few and Far has members from Oakland to Australia, among a vast number of other places. As per their website in 2012: ...a road trip with Few and Far members along the West Coast in 2012 produced civic sanctioned public works in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Tijuana (Few and Far 2017).

Blondy also was in an all-female crew where she shared a few insights into her

⁹ See Appendix A:Glossary

crew, the Man-eaters:

We were very much about female empowerment, female focused...I tried my hardest to encourage young females to do what they what to do...So, yah, like I was really focused on pushing a lot of younger girls and being in an all-female crew. It empowered me a little bit because I didn't know a lot of girls writing, I only knew guys. Once I met them all, I was part of something. I was like Whoa! I am not the only one that does this and that's cool to see... We were all over the board and there was a lot of different styles... We had girls from all over.

Another predominant theme among several of the writers was how these women have occupations in areas that encourage and further provide space for young artists. As noted by DJ Agana,

My main job is being a mom now (DJ recently gave birth to her first child), but when I go back to work it's a visual arts coordinator at a youth center (Omitted by author for ethical concerns) and basically, I work with a cohort of youth artists. Our mass media coordinator and I, help our youth get paid to do projects they want to do, plus skills to do a resume. Basically, supporting them in those areas. I do this on my own, do the research on the community we are painting in so that we can leave something behind that will hopefully inspire people and make them think about connections to others. There are walls and borders all around us but the way to unify is to put art on them and keep us connected.

Agana, Blondy and Dime shared their jobs, and the correlation between these three were that they all had jobs that helped others create and created community as well as societal acceptance as to graffiti writing and street art.

Dime: I juggle a few jobs. I'm too creative to have a long 9-5... I currently work at a middle school, as a Family Liaison; I've been at this school for ten years. I began painting a mural one summer with the kids and got hired for the fall as a Graffiti Teacher, I've wore many hats there and now I support families with resources, translation and anything they need; So, that is one of my jobs. My other Job is at (Omitted by author for ethical concerns). I have been here since I was a pre-teen. It has been one of the places that has helped me develop as an artist and cultural worker. I love being there, it's more of a second home...my mentors and elders believe in my visions and support art projects and ideas I have to better our community and use art to heal and tell stories.

The writers shared an overarching theme in their occupations and that is to better

not only their community, but to also show and promote graffiti/street art to young girls and women.

Resilience through Motherhood:

Another act of resilience is how some of the writers celebrate their role as a mom. These women perform the act of motherhood as well as a strong, continued promotion of doing what they love; graffiti. While socialization and gender roles promote the acceptance of inequality in child rearing, pushing most of the responsibility to the woman, these women have embraced their role as a mother. These women not only rise to the challenge of motherhood they continue to get up with bigger and better pieces. Fatherhood does not appear to restrain or stop men in the same manner as it motherhood does for women. Glow mentions: *“We have been educated in a machismo world where men dominate and women are set to sit and watch and doing labor that guys won’t touch.”* Yet, motherhood is an area of resilience for many women graffiti writers; when I asked Blondy, a very proud mom to a beautiful one-year old girl as to how writers who are men see motherhood, she responded with:

...it’s funny, I was telling all my boys when they go “let’s go paint” and I am like it doesn’t work like that. Like you are cool, ‘cause your chick has your baby and you don’t have to really worry about it, I AM the chick, I am the mom. I am the one that is there with the baby. I always tell them it’s easier for you guys it’s not as easy for me to get up and go. It’s funny too as they are just like “have your mom watch her” ... So, it’s like you guys don’t get it, there never going to get it as they are never going to bear a child so yah it’s a little frustrating.

Other writers who are also mothers have shown that becoming a mother does not hinder their writing, it just changes how they do it. Glow has older children and one child has autism, DJ Agana became a mother during the time we interviewed and Blondy is the proud mom to a beautiful one-year-old girl. Esme is also a mother. Blondy, who is

currently still in the new motherhood stage, was able to share insight as to what being a writer and a mom means:

Life has affected me, just having a baby that affected me being able to paint. I can't go up and paint like I use to I can't do the 1000 hours, I can't keep putting in the work where I keep progressing because I do have to focus on raising a baby and so...it's frustrating and something you love and are passionate about and you also have this baby that you love and are passionate about... I am happy she is here, I tried for a very long time to have her it is hard but it is also I am willing to put aside the things I love for her.

When she was asked if having a child will stop her from writing, Blondy shared that it would not. She elaborated more with:

...It is like I don't know but something compels me to want to do this all the time. It is something I enjoy and something I love. Like its funny, I will be places where I can't always paint but I have stickers and I am putting stickers up and my daughter's in the stroller and here I am putting stickers up, looking around and making sure no one is watching or catching little tags or even for the weekend there's the trains and write Blondie and (omitted). She is always with me she will little partner in crime forever. So, it is one of those things that I will never leave. It will never go away.

My data was able to show women and their resistance against male-centric ideology, and coming together to support and empower other women to write and 'get-up'. These women shared how that when they started it was rough, but through persistence, practice and other women, they could continue their passion of writing.

CONCLUSION

Hip-hop graffiti, the subculture, was created in the boroughs of New York City in the late sixties, creating space socially by and for people who lived below the national

poverty line; the working class, the urban underclass, those that society took all that they could and pushed out. Hip-hop was used as a vocal or visual voice, to show that this group was here and while the world around them continued/continues to marginalize their race, their class, and their gender, space is made for their voices. Hip-hop graffiti represents resistance and resilience to the social injustices that in 2018, are still needing to be seen and heard as the racism, sexism, policing on the bodies of all people of color, both women and men rises at astronomical rates.

Drawing upon theoretical frameworks of Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill-Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, this study gave voice to nine women writer's narratives; to speak from their standpoint, their social location. As Smith posits "no two people have the same exact standpoint and taking this for granted is incorrect" (Smith 2005b:10). Therefore, their narratives were told from a different lens that further provides insights into the navigation of women writers in California. Intersectionality of different narratives through race, class, age and gender identity allowed for an analysis of all women, not to compare or contrast but to create and further a feminist consciousness in the reclaiming of space.

A majority of those that were interviewed identified with being part of an ethnic group that is considered to be a minority in the United States. These same women also identified as growing up somewhere between what they considered to be low middle class to a lower urban class or as one writer stated she grew up in the 'ghetto'. While class and race has been researched at great depth by Ferrell and others to cover all classes and race, my research has shown a link between gender, race, and class that led to roadblocks during these women's beginning careers in graffiti.

Graffiti writing is within the public space where males have fewer restrictions than women, and women, are restricted to when and where they can express their angst, their love, and their passion. This research adds to the needed attention of women's experiences as a graffiti writer, their struggles, their victories, and how they have reclaimed space, typically not made for them, in California. The findings from my project examined why women graffiti writers are less visible than their male counterparts, how they work within a male-dominated subculture to express themselves, and how they make meaning and significance of their creations. Findings of this work could be used to support efforts to provide women with culturally attentive art programs or other programs that would increase their visibility in public spaces and boost their rightful sense of belonging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research indicates that women are gaining access to space in order to be seen. Data provided shows that to 'get up' some women writers would do so in an undoing of gender, and their pieces would reflect that as well. Experience and growth as a writer has changed that for some writers such as Blondy; *"I've been painting for 30 years and I can use whatever color I want. People, that are brand new are fuck that, I am not using pink!"* However, this access like the wage gap, is still not at an equal status for men and women.

Therefore, I recommend that providing young women open public space through urban places like the Writerz Block in San Diego, a wall like the Venice Beach art wall in Los Angeles, or the defunct Psycho City in San Francisco, that is exclusive to women. This would highlight their work and their voices.

A harder recommendation to enact would be to break down rape culture and the safekeeping mechanisms in place that contain women to the private spaces of their homes rather than the streets at night. Fear of being sexually violated directly relates to how women position themselves in areas of public space.

Perhaps education beginning with primary education institutions through secondary education, that breaks down gender roles and does not position “boys to be boys” or “girls to be girls” could help foster girls’ public creativity. The creation of institutions that allow for artistic ability in any medium and allow both girls/women and boys/ men to equally experiment with a spray can or a paintbrush. Not only would this further the move to access equality, but also lead to the beginning of a balance of culture capital amongst women and men. It might also contribute to the deconstruction and reconstruction of popular views about women, oppression, and resistance.

Limitations of this research were the exploratory aspect of the data. Using qualitative methods, I was limited on data from a small purposive group of women writers. This paper cannot and will not speak for every women writer in California, thus a full comprehensive conclusion cannot be written. However, this paper can add to the research that is building in all disciplines with regards to women being heard in a male dominated society. Future research would include a bigger scope of view and narratives of female writers, this would require funding and time in order to track down writers and then ask permission to invade a world that I do not belong in. Other possible research could include an examination of possible collusion or counter to women’s voices with the inclusion of men who graffiti write as well in order to go more in depth into the reclamation and renegotiation of public space.

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APPENDIX A

Glossary

WRITER'S VOCABULARY (Permission to reproduce with consent from Eric Deal of @149th st.com)

The following is provided primarily for the use of people outside the writing community.

BEEF: Disagreement or conflict.

BLOCK BUSTER: Wide lettered piece stretching from end to end done below window level on subway car.

BOMB: Prolific writing

BUFF: Removal of writing/art work

BURN: 1. To outdo the competition. 2. To wear out.

BURNER: A technically and stylistically well-executed wild style piece. Generally done in bright colors.

CAPS: (Fat, skinny, German thin) Interchangeable spray-can nozzles fitted to paint can to vary width of spray.

CREW: Organized group of writers

CROSSING OUT: To scribble or write on someone else's name. It is considered highly disrespectful.

DOPE: Excellent, of the highest order.

DOWN: Part of a group or action

FADE: Graduation of colors.

FAMLIES: Rows of throw-ups of the same name.

GETTING UP: When proliferation of name has led to high visibility.

GETTING OVER: Succeeding

GOING OVER: Writing over another writer's name. It is the ultimate sign of disrespect.

FILL-IN: The base colors of a piece, falling within the outline.

HAND STYLE: Handwriting or tagging style.

HIT: (n) A tag, throw-up or piece (v) the act of writing.

KILL: To bomb excessively.

KING: The most accomplished writer in a given category.

NEW SCHOOL: Contemporary writing culture (post 1984).

This date can vary greatly depending upon who you ask.

OLD SCHOOL: The writing culture prior to 1984.

This date can vary greatly depending upon who you ask.

OUTLINE: The skeleton or frame work of a piece FINAL OUTLINE: After fill-in and designs have been

applied the outline is re-executed to define the letters.

PIECE: A writer's painting, short for masterpiece.

PIECING: The execution of a piece.

PIECE BOOK OR BLACK BOOK: A writer's sketch book. Used for personal art development and or the collection of other artist's work.

PRODUCTION: Large scale murals with detailed pieces and illustrations. (Contemporary term used mainly for street murals.)

PULL-IN PULL-OUT: This is essentially a five to fifteen-minute lay-up. At the end of some subway routes trains park in a tunnel for several minutes before going back into service. During this time, the trains are written on. Due to time constraints pull in-pull outs were generally utilized for throw-ups. It was one of the more dangerous approaches to writing.

RACKING OR RACKING UP: Shoplifting or stealing.

RACK: A store where shoplifting can be done.

ROLLER LETTERS: Names rendered with bucket paint and rollers.

STEEL: Any type of train. New school term used to distinguish train and wall work.

STYLE WARS: 1. Competition between artists to determine superior creative ability.

2. Documentary film on Hip Hop by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver (RIP). Proved to be an extremely inspirational element for the New School.

TAG: (n) A writer's name and signature. (v) The execution of a signature. The most basic form of graffiti, a writer's signature with marker or spray paint. It is the writer's/ logo, his/her stylized signature (Pabon 2013a:279).

TAGGING-UP: The execution of a signature.

TAGGER: As opposed to "writer"; this term is usually used to refer to those who only do tags and throwups and who never piece. Some taggers seem to like more destructive methods such as scribers and sandpaper in addition to markers and paint. Some taggers do get interested in piecing, some don't. Taggers who never piece are sometimes called "scribblers" by more experienced, piecing writers (Pabon 2013a:279).

THROW-UP: A quickly executed piece consisting of an outline with or without thin layer of spray paint for fill-in.

THROWIE: Contemporary term for throw-up.

TOY: 1. Inexperienced or incompetent writer. 2. A small felt tip marker.

UP: Describes a writer whose work appears regularly on the trains or throughout the city.

WALL PAPER: Repetition of a name written making enough coverage so that a pattern develops, much like wall paper.

WAK: Substandard or incorrect.

WILD STYLE: 1. Bronx crew from the 1970s led by Tracy 168. 2. A complicated construction of interlocking letters. 3. Classic film on Hip Hop culture directed by Charlie Ahearn.

WRITER: Practitioner

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Beginnings:

1. Tell me how you started graffiti writing.
2. Tell me about your tag.
 - a. How you settled on the name (history)?
3. How did you learn you to write? Tell me about it:
 - a. Tell me about your process of learning to write
4. What style of graffiti do you prefer?
 - a. Can you tell me about it?
5. How have your life experiences affected your writing?
6. When do you think you will stop writing and why? If you are no longer writing, why did you stop?
7. Optional demographics: age, race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion
8. Are there messages that you hope to communicate in your graffiti writing? Have they changed over time?
 - a. Does being a woman ever affect your choice of theme? If so how?
 - b. Is your graffiti done to send a message and if so what? Or is it primarily about style?
9. Tell me about any times you have been caught writing graffiti.

Being a woman writer:

10. How does gender shape your writing? How has that changed over time?
11. Tell me what you know about graffiti and the history of women as writers?
 - a. Do you hear more about female writers today versus when you started?
12. How do people react to you as a woman in graffiti?

13. Tell me about any times you have written anonymously to hide your gender.
14. The research on graffiti writing says that women's tags are often crossed out and written over with labels such as "bitch" and "slut". Have you seen that? If so, how did you react to that?
15. As a woman, do you feel like you have as much freedom as men in graffiti writing? Please explain. (Probe for issues of safety)"

Crew:

16. Have you ever belonged to a "crew"? If so, who was in the crew and what was your role?
 - b. What does the word "community" mean to you?
 - c. What was important to you about belonging to a crew?
 - d. Can you tell me the history of your crew and what each member does to make it a true crew?
 - e. Is your crew "local" or does it spread broadly over the globe?
 - f. Has the internet helped in the formation of crews?
 - g. Given a choice would you rather be in crew that was co-ed or an all-women crew? Please explain.

Essence of Graffiti writing:

17. Graffiti is often "seen" as resistance against those that have power, does your writing have that meaning? Please tell me about that. (Does your writing resist gender relations?)

18. What do you hope to communicate in your graffiti writing? (Probe: Does your graffiti send a message? What is that message? Or is it primarily about style?)
Have that changed over time?
19. What characteristics do you think graffiti writers share? Habits?
20. What emotions are associated with the creation of graffiti for you?
21. If your daughter, niece, cousin, friend came to you for advice as an aspiring graffiti writer, what would you tell them?