

Correlation Between Behavioral Factors and Opinion of Graffiti

Abstract

Graffiti in the contemporary form has been present in many U.S. cities for generations since it rose in the 1970s. Public reaction to the many pieces located in their community has been scarcely mentioned in most literature focused on graffiti subculture. No study has analyzed in depth the correlation between someone's graffiti opinion and their specific behavioral or cultural profile. This study aims to fill that gap in research by gathering data on two topics: an individual's opinion on graffiti and comprehensive behavioral background information regarding the individual's creative and lifestyle habits. This study will investigate what behaviors and traits affect the formation of the subjects' beliefs about graffiti, which is considered illegal in most cases. By analyzing the correlation between many lifestyle and behavioral tendencies and the participants' tolerance of graffiti, this study aims to narrow down the commonalities to assess why an individual would be more likely to have a high or low tolerance of graffiti in their community.

Introduction

Graffiti is any writing or drawings sprayed, scratched, or scribbled illicitly on a surface in a public place. Its role in a community setting has been up for debate in many cities around the world, with contesting opinions on both sides of the art vs. public nuisance argument. The root of contemporary graffiti can be traced back to New York subways in the 1970s, where gang members and political activists used graffiti as a form of expression. The calligraphic nature of many pieces seen today became popularized in 1971 in an effort for each writer to stand as an individual in the ever growing community.

With programs like the Special Problems Unit, a task force with the specific job of identifying and punishing graffiti writers on the Metro, it is obvious that Los Angeles County and surrounding areas treat graffiti as a nuisance. The immediate and fast paced removal of graffiti in LA has attempted to discourage any future writers, or people who do graffiti. Currently in the Ventura and LA Counties, graffiti is considered an act of vandalism with consequences ranging from \$1,000 fines to imprisonment, even in the circumstances of nonviolent graffiti such as graffiti associated with gangs. The California Street Terrorism and Prevention Act (STEP Act) of 1988 made it possible for police officers to penalize writers more severely if they could prove the vandalism was backed by a criminal organization or a gang. In extreme cases, a small doodle made with a permanent marker could be labeled as a felony because of the STEP Act. More recently, lawmakers label graffiti as a quality of life issue, wherein the mere presence of graffiti is feared to be a catalyst for more illegal or dangerous activity in the area, thus strict laws are often placed to ban any type of graffiti. This phenomenon is known as the broken windows theory and is a reflection of the deep-rooted oppression of graffiti writers by city officials.

Although graffiti is illegal in the United States, many people believe it is an art form that should be appreciated. After its popularization in New York in the 1970s the graffiti movement has spread across the nation. In many cases it is a way for writers to express their emotions on social, political, and economic topics as well as personal frustrations. This often public form of media enhances many public spaces, and even attracts tourists to some cities. The city of Venice in Los Angeles County has a major graffiti and street art presence which contributes to increased community engagement and tourism. A piece of graffiti located centrally in a city promotes visual interactions and dialogue about its presence and visual themes. In one article that researched the definition of art vs. graffiti, Halsey and Young claimed that “graffiti art performs the theatrical right to the city, to the streets, to the shared public spaces of urban modernity. It enhances life”(as cited in Dovey Wollan, & Woodcock, 2012).

Literature Review

An important article that helped shape this study and many of the survey questions was “Visitors to modern and contemporary art museums: towards a new sociology of ‘cultural profiles” by Laurie Hanquinet (2013). Although the article is a study of the types of people who regularly visit museums, Hanquinet’s use of the ‘cultural background’ was relevant in this study regarding graffiti. The cultural profile disregards any previous assumptions made about a person based on their own socioeconomic status and instead focuses on the social determinants in their life that can more accurately bracket them into a category. For this research, cultural profiles created with the collection of multiple behavioral factors, along with people's opinions of graffiti will signify the correlations between graffiti opinion and cultural backgrounds. To define the cultural profile standards used in this study the survey asked many questions about their creative

preferences and tendencies in an effort to categorize whether or not someone was highly creative (Hanquinet, 2013). The data about graffiti opinion specifically compared creative activities, age, and location.

A study conducted by Gabry Vanderveen, an assistant professor of criminology at the institute for criminal law and criminology, and Gwen van Eijk, a criminologist and urban sociologist Erasmus University Rotterdam (2015), has attempted to answer a similar question about public opinion of graffiti. They studied why the Danish public might reject or accept graffiti in the context of different types of graffiti and their location. In the study they acknowledged the impact of the broken windows theory and strict regulation on graffiti as possible influencers on public judgement. It was found that both the location and type of graffiti affected the public's opinion of it. Therefore a tag, or a loosely signed signature using only one color, tends to have a much more negative reaction than a piece, which is a more elaborate style of graffiti. Graffiti is more likely to be condemned if it is seen as 'out of place', for example, on the front of a house, but it is not as negatively viewed in a skate park (Vanderveen & Eijk, 2015).

Most of the existing literature on graffiti is focused on why writers choose to do graffiti such as "Making their mark: A psychodynamic view of adolescent graffiti writing," in which Lindsey Othen-Price explores the range of motivators behind youth writers (2006). The act of vandalism that many young people participated in was in some cases an outlet for their frustrations and experiences, and vandalism and participation in illegal activities was their form of rebellion in many cases (Othen-Price, 2006). Other articles like "The Meanings of Graffiti and Municipal Administration" by Mark Halsey and Alison Young, who are professors of criminology at the University of Melbourne, researched the background of the individuals who

do graffiti, focusing on unbounding the many stereotypes that surround the sub culture (2002). Their data shows that the assumptions that “graffiti is the work of teenage boys, the result of unemployment or boredom, antisocial, associated with lower-income areas, and associated with other criminal activity” are completely false when examined closer (Halsey & Young, 2002).

Kim Dovey, Simon Wollan, and Ian Woodlock of the University of Melbourne concluded that “all graffiti conveys meaning, it is often the resident’s exclusion from this aesthetic field that marks graffiti as vandalism”(Dovey Wollan, & Woodcock, 2012). This study was important because it distinguished graffiti opinions as a personal and often complicated idea. He is careful to address the importance of presentation and content of each graffiti piece as a direct factor in people's opinion. This study reflected Dovey’s ideas in the distributed survey which questioned which components of a piece, ie. color or style, would positively or negatively impact their own opinions. By definition, graffiti is illegal in most cases, but this idea is not reflected in how people react to the graffiti itself. Peoples opinions range from highly tolerant, considering it an art form, to highly intolerant based on a number of factors.

Question/New Direction

After reading many other articles on the topic of graffiti and its varying roles in society, there was a clear gap that needed to be filled. Conclusions about the background of someone's detest or love for graffiti are unclear in the available research, this is a gap in research that this study aims to fill. Often the questions answered about this topic revolve around the motives of graffiti writers themselves. Few studies have looked to the other side of the graffiti, to the people that see it in their community or city. The input of multiple communities on the impact of graffiti in their areas and what that means to them is important to understand if future city planning

effort would like to tackle the subject. This study aims the answer the question: What behavioral factors affects someone's opinion of graffiti in their community?

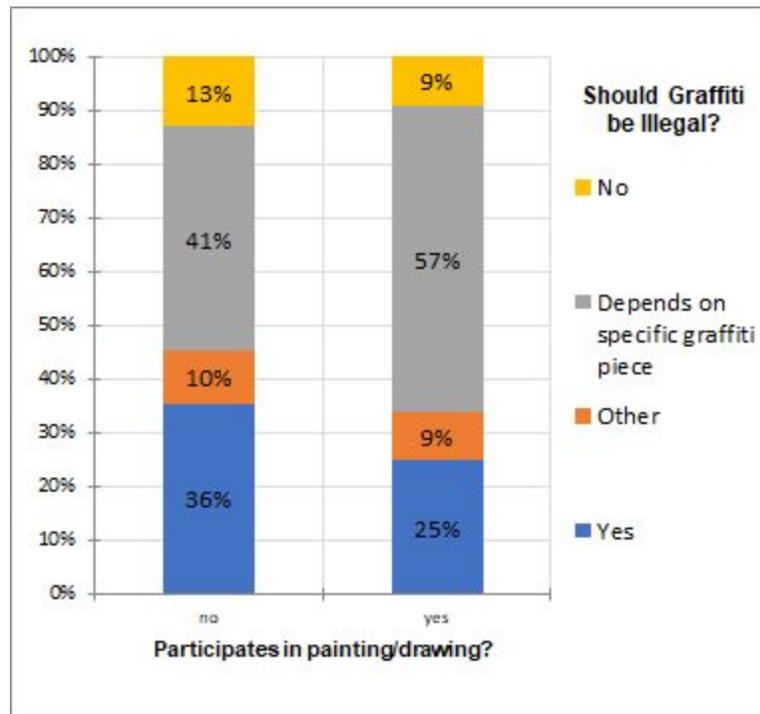
By analysing the correlation between many lifestyle and behavioral tendencies and the participants' tolerance of graffiti this study will narrow down the commonalities between them. This study hopes to uncover some specific occurrences in people's lives that have shaped their view on graffiti. A person's generation, music preference, book genre preferences, location, and participation in artistic and creative activities are examples of the factors to be investigated in conjunction with their opinion on graffiti. Currently, most research focuses on subjects' opinions of differing content in graffiti, what draws artists to graffiti, and population-specific research. The opinion of the public has been overshadowed mostly by the interaction between two groups: city officials and graffiti writers. This study will investigate what behaviors and traits affect the formation of the subjects' beliefs about graffiti.

Methods

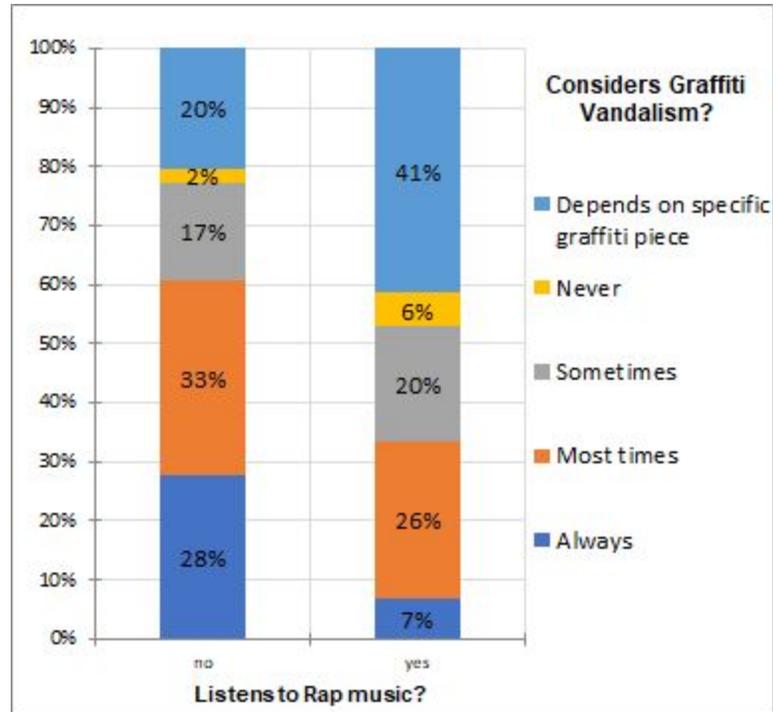
The data collected for this study was collected through online surveys sent out randomly through social media, face to face interactions, and email. It received 250 responses in total. This study includes at least 50 individuals from each of the included age groups. This included Generation Z (1995-2004), Millennials (1977-1995), Generation X (1965-1976) and the Baby Boomers (1946-1964). The study only included people ages 14-71 and for this reason, the included years in Generation Z has been shortened. Establishing who participates in the study in each age group will later help this study evaluate the correlation between behavioral factors and graffiti opinion, as this study is implying that age is an included factor. There are no other restrictions for this data set.

The survey questions can be categorized into two parts (located in appendix). The first half is focused on creative behavior, age, and location. For example, two questions ask those surveyed about their participation in activities like painting, writing, or photography. These questions aim to categorize the participants on a scale of highly creative or less creative. The second half of the survey is based around personal opinion of graffiti. By questioning whether they believe graffiti should be legal, or if it is an art, I hope to place participants on a scale of tolerance. In other words, if they answer many questions in favor of graffiti, such as always considering graffiti an art form the person will fall much higher on the scale of tolerance than someone who said they never considered graffiti to be an art form. Similarly, if a participant answers many questions in opposition of graffiti, it would indicate that they are less tolerant of it in general.

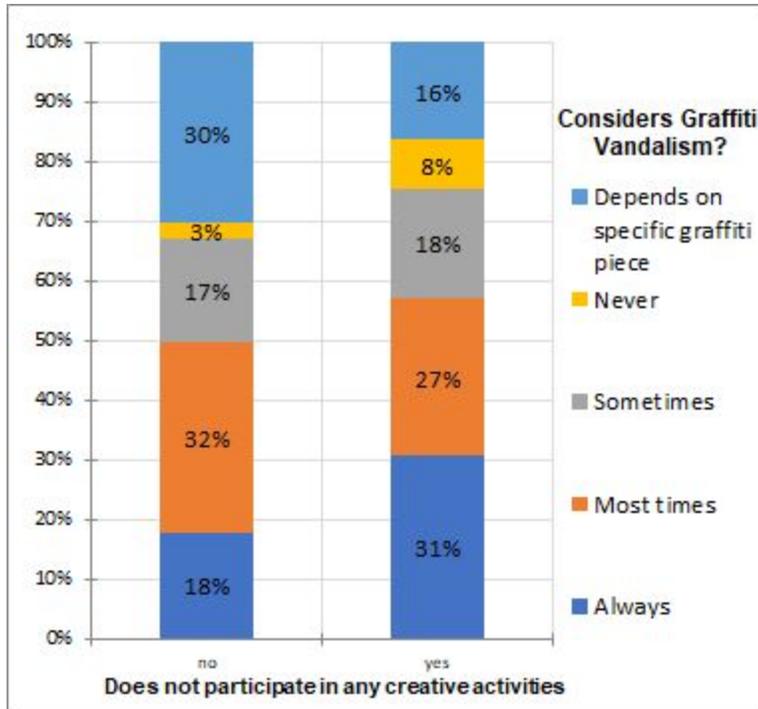
Results: Creative profiles



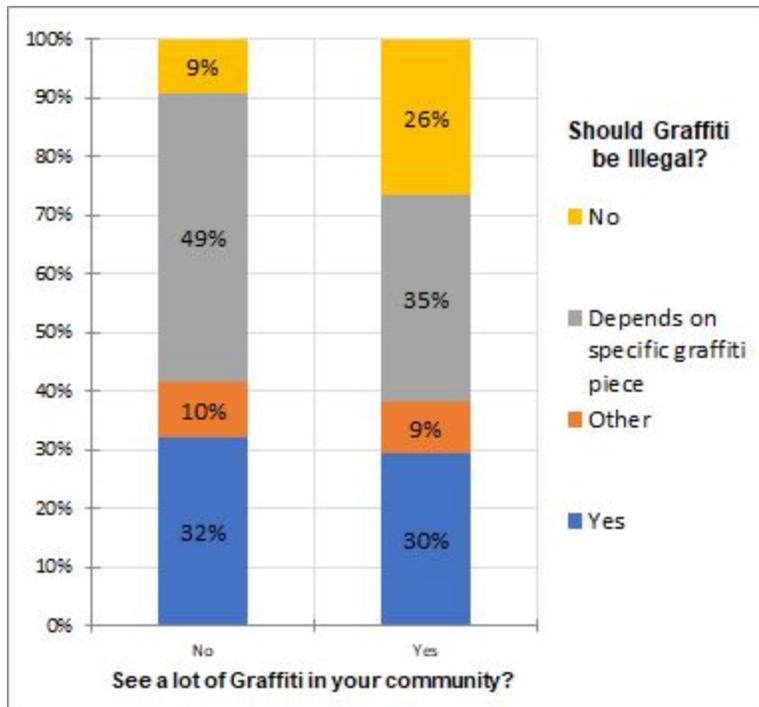
Thirty six percent of those surveyed that did not participate in drawing or painting agreed that all graffiti should be illegal according to the data shown in the graph above. On the other side, creative activity participants had very different responses. Painters and drawers had a lower percentage (25 percent) of yes responses. Based on the responses, the more creative group included more respondents that were lenient when considering it as either vandalism or not. The data from the related questions about visual factors influencing opinion leads to a conclusion that those who participated in more creative activities would take other visual characteristics of the specific piece into consideration at a higher rate than the non-painter and drawers.



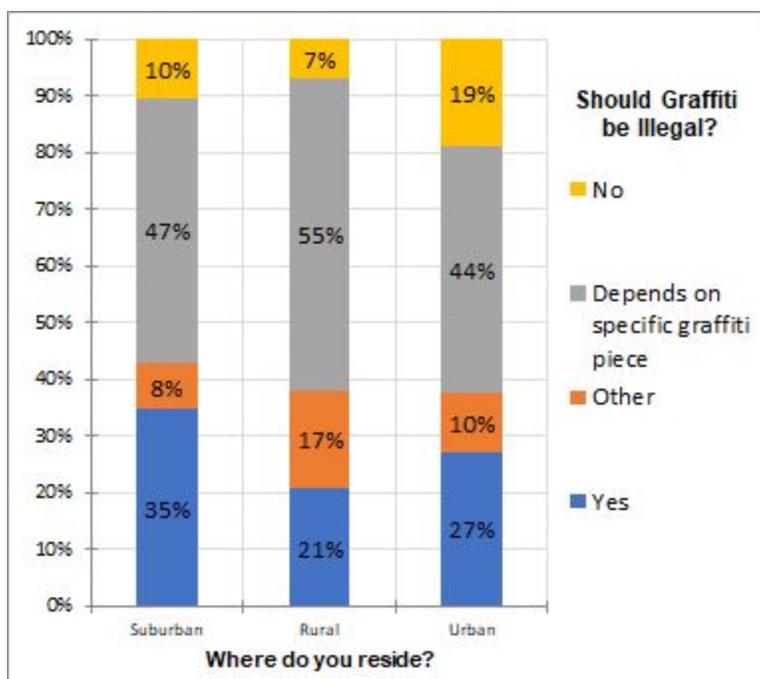
Compared to those who listen to rap music, a much higher percentage of those who do not listen have a stronger opinion against graffiti and always consider it vandalism. 28 percent of non listeners always would consider graffiti vandalism compared to only 7 percent of rap music listeners. This could be linked to the historical background of graffiti and hip hop music, so it would be likely for someone who enjoys rap or hip hop music to also enjoy graffiti.



The chart above helps to visualize how the largest percentage of people who always considered graffiti vandalism, 30 percent were those who did not participate in any creative activities, compared to only 18 percent of people who do participate in creative activities. The smaller percentage of those who consider graffiti to always be vandalism may be due to their increased exposure to multiple forms of art including dancing, photography, creative writing, and acting. Participation in these activities may have expanded their interpretation of what can be considered art, including graffiti.



As shown in the graph above, those who saw a multitude of graffiti in their community had a higher percentage of believing graffiti should be legal, at 26 percent, compared to only 9 percent of those who don't regularly see graffiti in their own communities. This statistic showcases the previously mentioned effects of interaction with different types of art, wherein those who were more accustomed to seeing graffiti often believed it should be legal. In places with higher amounts of graffiti, like many cities in and around LA County, there have also been many anti-graffiti programs to shut down this type of vandalism. As a result of the programs running in many cities, it would seem likely that those living in these areas would support the same initiatives that their city had implemented, however, the data shows the exact opposite.



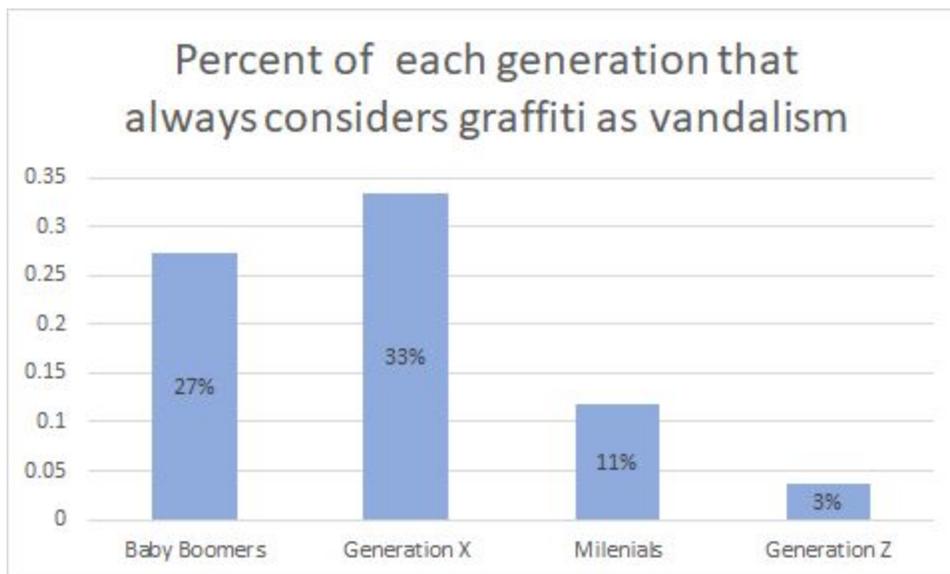
As shown in the graph above, those who live in suburban areas are more likely to have a low tolerance for graffiti compared to others that live in urban or rural areas. Since many government policies have been directed towards keeping graffiti out of the suburbs, it likely that those who live there have been predisposed to the backlash on graffiti, and therefore be less tolerant of it. Less than 10% of rural and suburban respondents reported seeing a lot of graffiti in their area, and 42% of urban-residing surveyors reported seeing graffiti frequently. Unexpectedly, there is no apparent correlation between the amount of graffiti seen and the attitudes towards graffiti legality.

Generational Differences in Graffiti Opinion

After analysing the data for trends by generation, there are obvious differences in the results from the different profiles. A total of 250 responses were collected including 84 Baby Boomers, 60 from Generation X, 51 Millennials, and 55 from Generation Z. These age group were chosen to accurately gage the differing opinions of people who were a variety of different

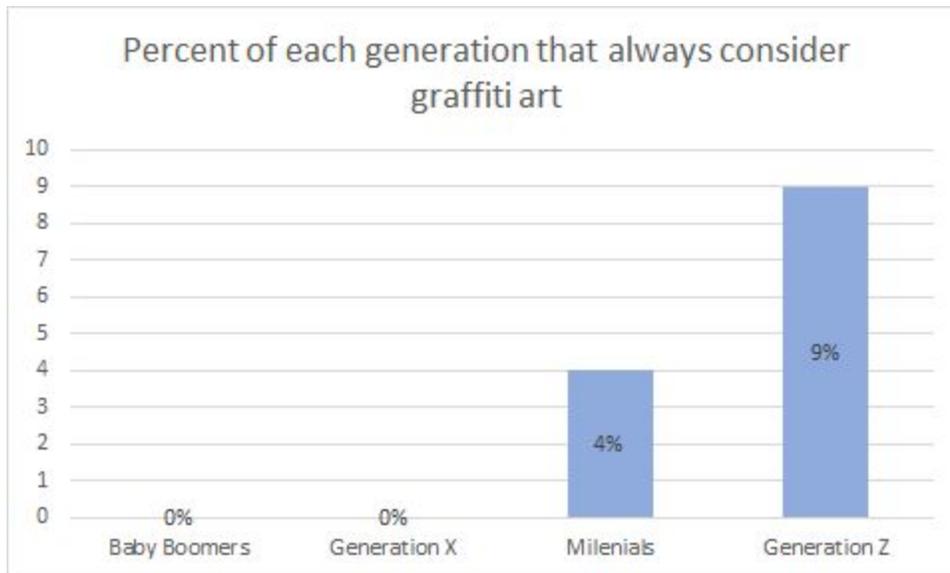
ages, instead of only including one generation. It should be acknowledged that the results of this study could be affected by the large population of respondents that do not regularly encounter graffiti in their community, but since the survey was sent out at random it is unlikely that these statistics could change if the study was replicated in the same fashion. Only 14% of respondents saw a lot of graffiti in their communities. Most respondents lived in a suburban area, 69%, with most other living in urban areas, 19%.

When asked whether they would consider graffiti an act of vandalism, 27% of Baby Boomers responded that they always would, compared to 3% of Generation Z as shown below.



Similarly, when asked if they would always consider graffiti to be a form of art, both Generation X and Baby Boomers always responded no. Generation Z had the highest percentage of always considering graffiti art at 9 percent as shown below. These results point towards a correlation between age and differing tolerances of graffiti. Without the other variables included, it is clear that current older generations have a much lower tolerance of graffiti. This could be attributed to the timeline of the rise of graffiti, which occurred many years after both older

generations were born. Those who were born after the graffiti movement were more likely to consider it an art, likely because they had never been conditioned to anything different.



These results indicate that the older generations included in the study are less likely to tolerate or appreciate graffiti in their communities. For both of the previous questions many participants chose the option “depends on specific graffiti piece,” indicating that the physical aspects of graffiti such as color and content may affect their opinion more than the title of graffiti. 15 percent of Baby Boomers, 20 percent of Generation X, 35 percent of Millenials, and 47 percent of generation Z said that their classification of vandalism depends on the piece that they are viewing. Similar numbers came from the question about considering it art, with 34 percent of Baby Boomers, 45 percent of Generation X, 52 percent of Millenials, and 40 percent of Generation Z answering with depends on specific graffiti piece. Overall, participants were more open to classifying an unknown piece of graffiti as art than they were to considering it vandalism.

To address the survey option *depends on specific graffiti piece*, the survey included questions about which characteristics might make it more likely for the participant to consider graffiti a piece of art. Out of all participants, the majority agreed that a colorful and abstract design were conducive with a graffiti art piece. This data aligns well with the responses to a photo of a colorful and abstract piece, pictured below.



Sixty five percent of the total respondents said that this would improve the image of their neighborhood, 11% said that it would damage the image of their neighborhood, 18% were neutral on whether it adds or takes away, and 6% did not have an opinion on the impact it would have. Based on this data, including a colorful piece of graffiti could be highly accepted by all generations. When considering visual characteristics, realistic pieces were voted third place by respondents who were questioned about what attribute would make it more likely for them to

consider it art. These numbers were reflected in the responses to a realistic piece by Banksy, a world famous graffiti artist. The image is pictured below.



When participants viewed this piece, 74% said it would improve the image of their neighborhood, 2% said it would damage the image of their neighborhood, 21% said that it neither adds or takes away from the image of their neighborhood, and 3% did not have an opinion. As previously stated, this and many other realistic pieces are more likely to be tolerated in a community, regardless of the respondents age.

In a similar question, participants were asked about the characteristics that would lead them to believe the graffiti was a disturbance or nuisance. The most popular response by large margins was the use of profanity. Understandably, the use of profanity would offend some people because of the negative connotations it has secured in conversation. In second and third place were bubble letters and block lettering, respectively. A picture of a block letter style

graffiti, shown below, was shown to the participants to further the data on disruptive characteristics of graffiti.



Sixty eight percent of respondents said that if this was in their neighborhood it would have a negative impact, 9% said that it improves the image of their neighborhood, 17% said that it neither added or damaged the image of their neighborhood, and 6% did not have an opinion on the image. The high percentage of negative responses to this image indicate that the placement of a graffiti piece of this style would come with mostly backlash in a community.

For the issue of legality the numbers reflected what was previously stated; when asked whether they believe graffiti should be illegal, Baby Boomers had the highest percentage of yes responses at 45% and Generation Z had the lowest percent of yes responses at only 10%. These differences indicate that growing up with different life experiences or beliefs can affect one's

opinion of graffiti. Generation Z might be more inclined to see graffiti as an art form because of the increased acceptance of many other art forms that are spread through social media. Baby Boomers growing up on the West Coast had less exposure to the graffiti subculture until it exploded in the early 90s, thus their opinions would have already been swayed by almost 30 years of no exposure to the medium. Most Baby Boomers growing up did not experience the subculture of graffiti like a Millennial or Generation Z individual could have, which makes a large impact on their tolerance of graffiti.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to uncover the influential factors that affect a person's opinion of graffiti. The survey aimed to uncover the variations in opinions affected by age, participation in creative activities, music preferences, and location.

As expected, the differences in opinions in relation to generations was significant. There were obvious trends that showed that the two older generations, Baby Boomers and Generation X leaned towards being highly intolerant. This is not to say that all of Baby Boomer and Gen X have the same opinions, however, the majority had a negative reaction towards the graffiti. The two younger generations, Millennials and Generation Z, were more consistent with mild or high tolerance of graffiti.

The effect of creative activities on graffiti opinion was less impactful than the age differences of respondents. Overall, those who participated in any kind of creative activity had a higher correlation with being more tolerant of graffiti. When looking at how the individual creative activities affected opinion, no single activities created any drastic changes in graffiti opinion. Those who did not involve themselves in any creative activities at all were more likely

to be less tolerant of graffiti, and included a higher percentage of people who prefer that it be illegal.

Music preferences were the least telling of graffiti opinion, and did not majorly affect people's opinions from genre to genre. Those who enjoyed opera music were not more or less likely to be highly tolerant of graffiti compared to rock listeners. The genre of music that did impact graffiti preference was rap music, which can be attributed to the long held connection between hip hop culture and graffiti.

Although only two question were asked about the location and amount of times that the survey taker sees graffiti in their neighborhood, these were very influential factors. Those who did not reside in a community with a lot of graffiti had a much lower tolerance to it compared to those that saw it regularly. On the other hand, the label of suburban, rural, and urban to classify different communities had much less of an affect on graffiti tolerance. The results from the questioning about location have determined that only the amount of graffiti seen by someone would affect their own opinion, but it is not relevant if they see a lot of graffiti specifically in either of the three areas.

Limitations

During the process of data collection the study failed to localize participants to any location. Since the surveys were distributed through word of mouth and social media the studied group of respondents escaped the originally set barriers of the Ventura and LA Counties. If this study were repeated, including more specific questions about location could lead to a more useful analysis and application of the data. Asking more direct survey questions about personal experiences with graffiti, vandalism, or street art could have brought forth more interesting data.

To gain more qualitative data about the topic interviews with a random assortment of people would have been beneficial. These responses could have lead to a different avenue of factors affecting graffiti opinion that was not questioned in the survey.

Conclusion

As a result of this study conclusions have been made about different variables that could affect someone's opinion of graffiti in their community. It has been found that age, participation in creative activities, a relative location to graffiti have had the largest influence on opinions, whether they be positive or negative. With these results available, it is now important to consider the future placement and regulation of graffiti in individual communities. As the variation in data shows, the behavioral characteristics included in this study predict the likelihood that someone would or would not accepting it their community, and this could be helpful for future city planning in the aspect of graffiti regulation. Those who have participate in more creative activities, are younger, and who live in urban areas are more likely to be highly tolerant of graffiti in their community, so the inclusion of more street art could benefit the area. On the other hand, places with high populations of Generation X and Baby Boomers or rural areas would not be as willing to accept graffiti as a form of art, and therefore more regulation and precaution should be in place to please the local citizens. Evaluating the existing population or the likely citizens of a new city for the attributes questioned in this study could indicate whether the citizens would have high or low tolerance for graffiti additions or removal. When creating laws and policies about a specific group of people, in this case graffiti writers, the opinion of all the community members should be gaged to plan appropriate follow through.

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Appendix

Behavioral Profile and Graffiti Opinion Survey

What generation applies to you? By year of birth.

Generation Z (1995-2003), Millennials (1977-1995), Generation X (1965-1976), Baby Boomers (1946-1964)

What kind of music do you enjoy listening to? Check all that apply.

opera, classical music, electronic, rock, pop, rap, world music, folk, country, other.

What kinds of books do you enjoy reading? Check all that apply.

Mystery, Classic literature, Practical books (eg. cooking), Comics, Historical fiction, Art books, Essays, Horror, Romance, Fantasy, Action and Adventure, Biography/Memoir, Other.

If you have participated in any of these activities in the past year indicate by checking all boxes that apply.

Watched a live play, Attended a classical or jazz concert, Attended a dance performance, Attended an opera, Visited a museum, I have not done any of these activities

If you have personally have participated in any of these activities in the past 6 months please indicate by checking all boxes that apply.

Dance, Acting, Photography, Painting/Drawing, Playing music, Writing, I have not done any of these activities.

Which option applies to the area you currently live?

Suburban, urban, rural.

Do you see a lot of graffiti in your community?

Yes, No.

When you encounter graffiti in your area how often do you consider it an act of vandalism?

Always, Most times, Never, Sometimes, Depends on specific graffiti piece

When you encounter graffiti in your area how often do you consider it a piece of art?

Always, Most times, Sometimes, Never, Depends on specific graffiti piece

Which characteristics would make it more likely for you to consider graffiti a piece of art?

Please check all boxes that apply.

Colorful, Calligraphy lettering, Block lettering, Profanity, Realistic, Stencil design, Bubble letters, 3D style, Abstract design, Other.

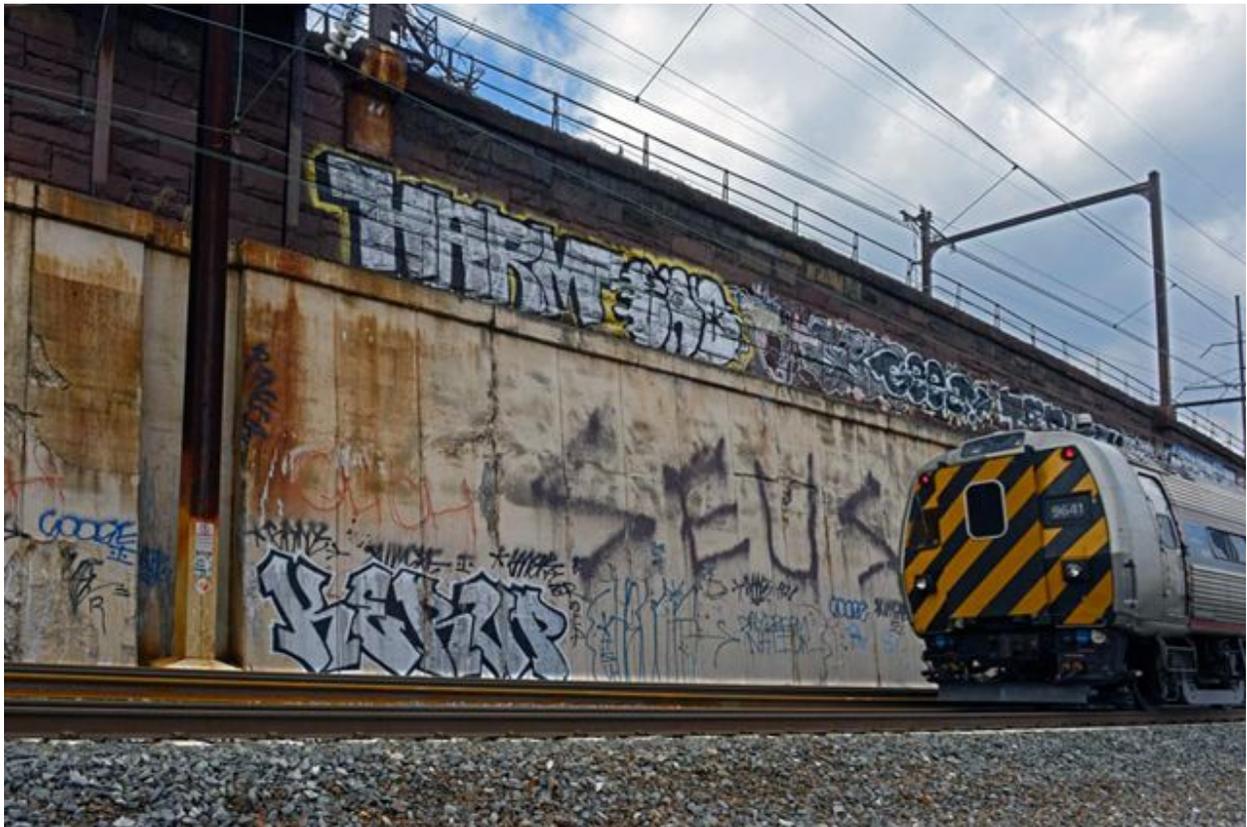
Which characteristics would make it more likely for you to consider graffiti as a disturbance or nuisance?

Colorful, Calligraphy lettering, Block lettering, Profanity, Realistic, Stencil design, Bubble letters, 3D style, Abstract design, Other.

Do you believe graffiti should be illegal?

Yes, No, Depends on specific graffiti piece.

If you saw this in your neighborhood would you say that it



Damages the image of my neighborhood, Improves the image of my neighborhood, neither adds or takes away from the image of my neighborhood, I don't know.

If you saw this in your neighborhood would you say that it



Damages the image of my neighborhood, Improves the image of my neighborhood, neither adds or takes away from the image of my neighborhood, I don't know.

If you saw this in your neighborhood would you say that it



Damages the image of my neighborhood, Improves the image of my neighborhood, neither adds or takes away from the image of my neighborhood, I don't know.

If you saw this in your neighborhood would you say that it



Damages the image of my neighborhood, Improves the image of my neighborhood, neither adds or takes away from the image of my neighborhood, I don't know.