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School Resource Officers' Perceptions of In-School Graffiti:  
Disciplinary Measures and Prevention Efforts

Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist

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## ABSTRACT

### School Resource Officers' Perceptions of In-School Graffiti: Disciplinary Measures and Prevention Efforts

Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven

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The term graffiti has been adapted to mean any type of writings on a surface area that have been scratched, painted or marked. These writings, which are typically perceived from a negative point of view, may be something as small as doodles on a paper or something as large as paintings on a wall or the side of a building. Because graffiti is often part of gang culture and identified as criminal activity, when graffiti enters into a school the school's atmosphere and graffiti deters from a positive educational environment. In this study, five School Resource Officers from urban secondary schools in Utah were interviewed. These interviews were conducted in order to better understand Utah School Resource Officers' experiences and their perceptions of the most common types of graffiti being created inside their school building; what (if any) disciplinary measures are typically applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified; and what strategies are used to prevent future incidents of graffiti. Their perceptions and recommendations are considered and summarized to assist other school communities who face similar challenges with in-school graffiti. Overall, School Resource Officers' feedback indicates that graffiti is a major problem in public schools, particularly for high schools that have gang related graffiti. Implications for school-based interventions include the following recommendations made by the participating School Resource Officers. They emphasized the importance of closely monitoring and supervising students during school hours; rapidly removing graffiti in situations where graffiti is displayed; and clearly stating and enforcing consequences for students who participate in creating graffiti in schools. School Resource Officers also noted the importance of building trust with students and providing opportunities of anonymous reporting.

Keywords: School Resource Officer, graffiti, gang, tagging, intervention, prevention, adolescents, high school

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## DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis, *School Resource Officers' Perceptions of In-School Graffiti: Disciplinary Measures and Prevention Efforts*, is presented in a hybrid format. In this hybrid format, both traditional and journal publication formatting requirements are met.

The preliminary pages of the thesis adhere to university requirements for thesis formatting and submission. The first full section of the thesis is presented in the new journal-ready format and conforms to the style requirements for future publication in social science and education journals. The introduction contains important information from the literature review. This study's full literature review is included in Appendix A. Appendix B contains the approved consent form. Appendix C includes the list of guiding questions used in this study's one-on-one interviews with School Resource Officers. Appendix D includes the typed transcripts based on the five School Resource Officers' interviews.

Two reference lists are included in the thesis format. The first includes only the references found in the first journal-ready article. The second reference list includes all citations from the full literature review found at the end of Appendix A.

## Introduction

Graffiti is commonplace in both rural and urban areas in the United States and is frequently associated with gang activity (Staiger, 2005) and poverty (Neavling, 2013). Although graffiti may incite rage in some individuals, others appreciate graffiti as a form of art (Friedman, 2008; White, 2014).

The root of the word graffiti comes from the Italian words “graffiare” (Castleman, 1982) or “graffito” (Staiger, 2005), which means, “little scratchings” or “to scratch.” The term graffiti has been adapted in modern American society to mean any type of wall or surface writings that have been scratched, painted, or marked. The breadth of graffiti's context ranges from prehistoric cave paintings in the Chauvet Caves, as old as 32,000 years, to today's sexually explicit humor on bathroom walls and doors (Bocherens, Drucker, Billiou, Geneste, & Plicht, 2006; Castleman, 1982).

On one occasion, the Philadelphia Zoo staff discovered graffiti proclaiming a graffiti artist's name and message, "Cornbread lives." This message was painted on one of their elephants. This graffiti artist, Darryl McCray—AKA Cornbread—is commonly referred to as the "father of modern graffiti" (FiftyOne:FiftyOne, 2007). Similarly, on another occasion, a Philadelphia Zoo elephant's rump was decorated with bright red paint donning the name of another popular Philadelphia graffiti artist, Tity Peace Sign (Brown, 1978; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974).

Although graffiti has traditionally been associated with poverty and abandoned areas, currently the prevalence of graffiti is actually similar across large cities, suburban towns, and rural communities (Keep America Beautiful, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Additionally, graffiti commonly occurs inside and outside of schools: Based on the results of an



extensive study, half of public high schools and middle schools reported graffiti vandalism during the 1996–1997 school year and almost one-third of students reported seeing hate-related graffiti in their school (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Weisel, 2002).

### **Cost of Removal**

Unfortunately graffiti carries with it the cost of its removal (Keep America Beautiful, 2015). Emphasizing the cost of removal and other detrimental effects of graffiti, the New York State Police posted the following message on their website:

Graffiti costs American communities more than \$8 billion per year. It hurts property values, drives away business, and sends the message that nobody cares about the community. Graffiti is everybody's problem. (n.d., para.1)

Communities surrounding large school districts, such as Los Angeles, reported spending approximately 28 million in 2006 (Keep America Beautiful, 2015). Specifically, in regard to graffiti in schools, The San Francisco School District spent approximately \$277,800 during the 2012-2013 school year to remove graffiti from their schools (City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 2014).

The cost of removing graffiti is expensive, regardless of where the graffiti is displayed (Keep America Beautiful, 2015). Because the perpetrators are typically not identified and neighborhoods want the graffiti removed quickly, the cost most often falls on local taxpayers (Keep America Beautiful, 2015). Similarly, because, graffiti in schools is often linked to gangs and disruptive elements within the community, schools are concerned about the influence of gang graffiti and want graffiti removed quickly (Smith, 2013; Weisel, 2000). Although costs vary across the US, the dollar estimate for cleaning up after graffiti vandalism is approximately one to three dollars per taxpayer, per year (Keep America Beautiful, 2015).

In Utah the cost of vandalism cleanup, which includes graffiti, ranged from \$3,000 per year to \$210,000 per year (White, 2001). A single school in Salt Lake City Utah, Glendale Junior High spent between \$8,000 to \$10,000 on cleaning up vandalism and replacing items that were vandalized two consecutive years (White, 2001). It was estimated that the school year after security cameras had been installed the school would spend less than \$1,000 per year on clean up. Salt Lake City School District spent \$180,000 in the school years of 1996-97 and 1997-98 cleaning up vandalism and replacing items that were vandalized. Cameras were installed shortly after those school years and the dollar amount for cleaning up vandalism decreased to \$117,000. Five years prior to the article written in 2001, Granite School District spent \$210,000 annually cleaning up vandalized areas. Salt Lake City School District and Jordan School District in Utah were both willing to spend money to upgrade their digital camera systems in schools (White, 2001). Murray School District and Weber School District, which are located near the three previously discussed Utah school districts, did not spend as much on vandalism clean up. Murray School District spent around \$3,000 per year and Weber School District spent around \$25,000 per year (White, 2001).

### **Response to Graffiti in Schools**

In schools, responses to graffiti range from students and staff finding humor in the graffiti to students and staff taking the situation very seriously. For example, one teacher responded by mocking the school's graffiti and comparing it to a piece in the Louvre (Luippold, 2013). However, when schools are violated with graffiti, the local police are notified because this type of malicious destruction is considered a crime. Beyond the desecration of school property, some situations involve more than superficial damage. For instance, in one situation the creator used graffiti to threaten a mass school killing in Newark Memorial High School in Newark, New

Jersey (Megino, 2012). In another situation an individual's graffiti made threats to school staff and property (Sawyer, 2013).

Across the US, School Resource Officers (SROs) are responsible for dealing with graffiti problems in public schools and are experienced in handling juvenile criminal activity involving graffiti issues (DeLong, 2015; GOOD4UTAH, 2014; Navoy, 2011). Schools and communities look to SROs as knowledgeable in preventing and deterring graffiti and able to follow through with student disciplinary measures to address incidents of graffiti. SROs are police officers how serve as liaisons between the police force and schools (Finn, 2006). SROs are problem solvers, educators, safety experts, and law enforcers (Travis, 1999) as well as mentors for students.

### **School Resource Officers (SROs)**

School Resource Officers (SRO) are a bridge between the police force and the schools (Finn, 2006). An SRO is a law enforcement officer hired by the local police department or an agency that collaborates with schools. The SRO is sworn into authority and is expected to work policing the community (Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1998). The job of the Officer depends on the location (Travis, 1999). Funding is a key factor in determining the expectations of the SRO (Finn, 2006). The SROs benefit the school and the police by reducing patrol officer's workload, improving the image of officers among juveniles, creating and maintaining better relationships with the schools, and enhancing the agency's reputation in the community (Finn, 2006).

SROs are problem solvers, liaisons to community resources, educators, safety experts, and law enforcers (Travis, 1999) as well as mentors for students. School districts use SROs to improve safety in the schools since it is important for schools to keep students and faculty safe (Finn, 2006). They deal with violence and crime (Finn, 2006). Since graffiti is a crime, it can be

part of an SRO's duty to deal with graffiti-related problems. If the SRO deals with graffiti problems in the school, then he or she would be the person knowledgeable of preventative measures to deter graffiti and disciplinary measures to address incidents of graffiti.

### **Gang Graffiti**

Personal and group risk factors are frequently associated with the underlying influences that motivate individuals to create graffiti (Hasley & Young, 2006). The creation of graffiti and associated risk factors are present in schools and communities. Although there are different types of graffiti and associated reasons for displaying graffiti, the most concerning, prevalent, and persistent type of graffiti is gang graffiti (Weisel, 2002). Gang graffiti is a form of communication within an antisociety (Adams & Winter, 1997), an alternate society within a society. The intended messages communicated by gang graffiti are sometimes only understood by those within the antisociety (Adams & Winter, 1997).

Gang graffiti is used for a variety of purposes, as a way to express oneself, possessively mark territory, create recognition, solicit support, and strengthen social acceptance (Taylor, Marais, & Cottman, 2010). Additionally, gang members often use graffiti as a way to display power over rival gangs (Weisel, 2002). In areas that have an abundance of gang graffiti, crime rates are higher and property values are lower than in areas where there is less graffiti (Keep America Beautiful, 2015; Weisel, 2002).

### **Gang Graffiti in Utah**

Gang graffiti is a growing problem in rural Utah (Shethar, 2007) and urban Utah (Smith, 2013). In fact, police reports indicate that in downtown Salt Lake City, incidents of graffiti have nearly tripled over the past 10 years (Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) reports that, similar to other

large urban cities, Salt Lake City has a full-time crew solely dedicated to cleaning up graffiti—costing the city almost \$400,000 each year.

Because most of the tagging in Utah is considered gang related, the growing graffiti problem also represents the growth of youth gang activity (Smith, 2013). Currently, there are more than 200 documented gangs in the Salt Lake area (Reavy, 2014).

Gang activity and the associated graffiti are major concerns for Utah schools and communities (Reavy, 2014; Smith, 2013). Reavy (2014) reported that at the 2014 Utah Gang Conference, Utah police documented a five-year-old kindergarten student who tagged an entire West Valley City (UT) elementary school with gang graffiti. Although this event may appear to be a bizarre anomaly, known gangs in the Salt Lake area typically lure and recruit young students between the ages of 5 and 17 (Reavy, 2014).

### **Current Study's Proposed Research**

Schools are particularly concerned about gang related graffiti and its influence on youth and the learning environment. Graffiti is problematic in almost half of American secondary schools. Graffiti in schools is a crime that creates tension among factions of students and is costly to remove.

Utah schools are not immune to problems associated with graffiti. Utah police, SROs, and school staff are particularly concerned about gang related graffiti and its influence on youth and the learning environment. Through qualitative interviews with a convenience sample of five Utah SROs, this study gathered information regarding graffiti in Utah's urban and suburban schools. Interviews were conducted in order to (a) better understand Utah SROs' experiences with graffiti and their perceptions of common types of graffiti being perpetrated in their schools; (b) to investigate what (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for

graffiti are identified; and (c) to identify strategies being used to prevent future incidents of school-related graffiti. Participating SROs' perceptions and recommendations were considered and summarized in order to assist other school communities who face similar challenges with school graffiti and associated gang activity.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the SRO's experiences and perceptions of the most common type of graffiti being created in their school; what (if any) disciplinary measures were applied when those responsible for graffiti were identified; what preventative strategies were used to prevent future incidents of graffiti; and how gang graffiti differed from other forms of graffiti.

For the purpose of this study, the identifying term *School Resource Officer* (SRO) is defined as the law enforcement representative whose job deals with criminal activity perpetrated in schools or on school property. More specifically the SROs who participated in this study were law enforcement representatives who were responsible for assisting school personnel in identifying those who were responsible for graffiti within the school or on school property.

### **Sample Selection**

In this study, participating SROs ( $n=5$ ) were individually interviewed. The interviews were designed to gather each SRO's perceptions about the various forms of graffiti created in their assigned high school, located in an urban or suburban Utah school district. These schools were selected based on graffiti reported in Utah news reports (Cabrero, 2013) and through conversations with school district employees who identified high schools with incidents of graffiti.

SROs were selected based upon their occupational role in the identified school. These SROs were responsible for investigating criminal activity in their assigned school, including addressing incidents of graffiti. Participating SROs worked a minimum of one full year in the particular high school. It was important that the identified schools had chronic incidents of graffiti or a recent history of graffiti. Reported incidents of graffiti included graffiti on desks, in bathrooms, on school walls (hallway, classroom, and exterior walls), and on homework assignments, etc.

After the sponsoring university's Institutional Review Board (Brigham Young University IRB) gave approval for the primary researcher to conduct this study, the researcher identified the SRO's contact information from public information provided by the school districts and communities. The researcher then contacted potential participants by phone.

In this study, participating SROs ( $n=5$ ) were individually interviewed. The participants were all Caucasian males, ranging in age between 30 to 50 years old. All participants were employed in law enforcement, ranging from 12 to 23 years of service ( $M=17.2$  years). More specifically, they had been SROs for a range of 3 to 9 years ( $M=4.8$  years). The student population of the participants' schools ranged from 1,100 to 1,700 ( $M=1,520$  students).

### **Informed Consent and Permission to Participate**

Once contacted SROs were informed about the study and provided with a hard copy of the informed consent (Appendix B). The researcher obtained each SRO's signed informed consent to participate. Prior to the interview, the researcher also obtained permission (email correspondence) from the SRO's sergeant or lieutenant, documenting institutional approval. Each SRO's sergeant or lieutenant was provided with a copy of the consent form (Appendix B)

and semi-structured guided interview questions (Appendix C), so each SRO's supervisor understood the expectations regarding the interview and purpose of the research.

### **Research Method: Directed Approach to Content Analysis**

The information in this section provides information about the *directed approach to content analysis*, then describes this approach and platform and how these methods were employed in the current study. Additionally, this section describes the semi-structured interview questions that were intended to facilitate gathering information from SROs and how these data were analyzed.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) cited Berelson's (1952) definition of content analysis: Content analysis is "...a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Gall et al., 2003, p. 278). Krippendorff (1980) offered another definition for content analysis: "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21).

More specifically, Stemler (2001) noted that content analysis was not merely restricted to written material, but to any "data that are durable in nature" and can be investigated by others who might be interested in the data (p. 1). Therefore, recording and transcribing interviews provides tangible data for others to investigate and analyze.

The content analysis in the current study used the "directed approach" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). When using the directed approach, the researcher's analysis starts with an existing foundation of relevant literature gathered in advance of creating the guiding questions and ultimately conducting the interviews and analyzing data. When relying on the directed approach, extant literature guides the formation of the initial themes. These themes serve as the basis for coding and interpreting transcribed interview data. The current research coding themes



were based on existing research and information about graffiti and various aspects of graffiti, particularly gang related graffiti and its impact on schools and communities.

**Steps utilized in conducting content analysis research.** With respect to how content analysis is performed, Weber (1990) asserted: “There is no simple *right way* to do content analysis” (p. 13; ital. in original). Providing additional advice, he added, “Instead, investigators must judge what methods are most appropriate for their substantive problems” (Weber, 1990, p. 13).

Adapting recommendations of Gall et al. (2003, pp. 279–281) and the U.S. General Accounting Office (U.S. GAO; 1996), the primary researcher followed six steps to carry out content analysis: (a) identified research questions and objectives; (b) before reviewing the transcripts, developed an initial set of themes based on existing research; (c) gathered interview data (audiotaped interviews), then transcribed audiotapes for data analysis; (d) carefully read and then repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and conducted the content analysis, coding themes that aligned with existing themes and modified initial coding themes as needed to better fit data; (e) interpreted and summarized the results, based on the major coding themes; and (f) as a validity check, requested an unbiased professional experienced in qualitative research to review the transcripts and coding.

**Philosophical perspective.** When collecting and interpreting data, researchers operate in the presence of underlying paradigms. The philosophical perspective for this study stems from post-positivism. Post-positivism purports that even though we try to remain objective and seek truth, we fall short and only approach the objective truth. Therefore, as researchers we are describing subjective-reality as we interpret our data, and that despite our best efforts we are only able to approach the objective truth (Henderson, 2011). Our analyses and interpretation of data

are intertwined in our socially constructed reality, not an objectively determined reality (Noor, 2008). Objective reality cannot be understood solely through our observations, but “theory is needed to interpret the potential diversity of cause and effects” (Khakee, 2003, p. 341).

The data collection process may mirror the interest of the researcher and the conversation between the participant and researcher may mirror the interest of each (Henderson, 2011).

Henderson (2011) describe post-positivism in the following way:

Post-positivism is the presentation of a narrative that balances personal and professional experiences and theoretical interpretations with a compelling story. It enables researchers to be reflexive about their position related to a topic that they find compelling. Further, researchers have recognized that traditional survey research has limits, and other forms of inquiry such as visual analysis are needed. Thus, direct experience can be better understood using post-positivist reflections. (p. 343)

## **Interviews**

After participants signed the informed consent, a one-on-one semi-structured interview was held with each participant ( $n=5$ ). The primary researcher served as the interviewer. Interviews were held in a pre-identified schoolroom or public room that was quiet and free from distraction. Each interview was audio-recorded. The researcher led each interview with a scripted guide of potential questions (Appendix C). These questions were used to engage the SRO in a discussion about school graffiti. However, the questions were flexible and were not necessarily discussed verbatim, in a rigid manner, or in a defined order. The interview questions were designed to flow in a natural order and to assist the interviewer in covering the information related to the research questions. Interviews with the SROs varied depending on their responses

and the topics they chose to more fully discuss. Ultimately, these interviews provided rich descriptive responses.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the SRO's experiences and perceptions of the most common type of graffiti being created in their school; what (if any) disciplinary measures were applied when those responsible for graffiti were identified; what preventative strategies were used to prevent future incidents of graffiti; and how gang graffiti differs from other forms of graffiti. After completing the interviews, audio transcripts of interviews were typed directly from the recordings. Personally identifying information (e.g., name and school) was not included on the typed transcripts. Coded identifiers (numbers) were entered to indicate the participating SRO and school. Interviews ranged from 14 minutes to 35 minutes. The average (mean) duration of the interviews was 27.68 minutes.

### **Analysis**

The SROs' responses were interpreted for both generalized themes and specific content. A coding system, based on post-positivist philosophy, was developed to identify repeated themes and to organize and summarize the audio-recorded data. The primary researcher started with a priori codes based on existing literature. These codes were selected by the primary researcher and a co-researcher. The following codes were considered to be common topics reported in research focused on graffiti in schools: graffiti type positive, graffiti type negative, purpose of graffiti, discipline of perpetrators, gang-related graffiti, prevention strategies, and intervention strategies.

The primary researcher determined that after carefully examining the data, the original codes—that were developed a priori—did not fully account for SROs' responses. New emergent codes/themes were created to include the following themes: in school graffiti, purpose of graffiti,

identifying the perpetrator/creator, discipline process, prevention strategies, and gang influence. The primary researcher then took the main ideas summarized from each interview and placed these ideas within the emergent themes. The data were then compared across cases and organized, based on the specific responses that fit in these domains. These findings were not sequential. However, the primary researcher acknowledged that the predetermined coding categories might not fully align with information from the SROs' transcripts; therefore emergent codes were added as needed. After the final coding process, the relationships between and among the codes were re-examined. Questions and responses that provided substantial data and that were aligned with the research questions were kept and organized. Those responses that did not provide related and substantial data of interest were excluded from the analyses.

Audiotaped interviews were transcribed and carefully reviewed by the primary researcher. Quotes from each participant were categorized according to the identified codes. During the transcribing process, coded identifiers were used to protect the identity of participants and their associated schools. Data were also summarized to reflect what the participating SROs communicated in their interviews. For readers' convenience, SROs' incidental utterances were removed from the quotes cited in this manuscript.

### **Researcher's Personal Experiences with Graffiti**

The primary researcher acknowledges a very limited personal experience with graffiti and gangs. Having attended a small private school during elementary school, middle school, and high school, the primary researcher was only exposed to school graffiti related to adolescent romance, such as "Suzie + Billy = Forever" being scratched on bathroom walls. To her knowledge, the primary researcher had no exposure to gang members or gang-related graffiti during her primary and secondary schooling. At the beginning of this research project, her

knowledge of gang-related graffiti came from researching others' experiences and discussing gang-related graffiti with SROs.

## **Results**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the SRO's experiences and perceptions of the most common type of graffiti being created in their school; what (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified; what preventative strategies are used to prevent future incidents of graffiti; and how gang graffiti differs from other forms of graffiti. A brief summary SROs' responses is provided. This summary includes representative verbatim quotes that provide SRO's personal perspectives that support specific points taken by the researcher. For the readers' convenience, incidental utterances were removed from the transcripts.

Five participants participated in the interview process each having different experiences of graffiti in their schools. The verbal interviews were translated to textual descriptions. The purpose of this was to share the experiences each SRO had expressed relating to graffiti in his school. After these descriptions, the common themes between participant's descriptions will be provided. Although the SROs provided specific names of gangs in their schools, the gang names were not provided in this manuscript. Caution was taken to maintain confidentiality of specific schools and the gang names that were associated with those areas. This caution helped to maintain the confidentiality of each participating SRO.

### **Composite of Participants' Textural Descriptions**

From the participant's descriptions, common themes were examined and compiled to create an overall description representing their shared experiences with graffiti in their schools. The themes fall under the following three major overarching categories: (a) understanding Utah

SRO's experiences with graffiti and their perceptions of common types of graffiti perpetrated in their schools; (b) investigating what (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified; and (c) identifying strategies being used to prevent future incidents of school-related graffiti.

Based on the five SROs' interviews, eight common themes are subsumed under the three overarching categories. These eight themes are defined as ideas which were repeatedly expressed within the five interviews. The following list is a summary of these overarching categories and the eight themes which are included within the categories:

Category A: SROs' experiences with graffiti—understanding Utah SRO's experiences with graffiti and their perceptions of common types of graffiti perpetrated in their schools

Theme 1: Gang graffiti is found at each school.

Theme 2: Bathrooms are the most common place to find graffiti.

Theme 3: Gang members use graffiti as a form of communication to other gangs.

Category B: Discipline—investigating what (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified

Theme 4: Students caught creating graffiti are charged with a crime and suspended.

Category C: Prevention strategies—identifying strategies being used to prevent future incidents of school-related graffiti

Theme 5: Removing graffiti promptly is the most important response.

Theme 6: Cameras are used to find the person creating graffiti.

Theme 7: Building rapport with students may be beneficial.

Theme 8: Dress codes dissuade gang behavior at school.

## SROs' Experiences with Graffiti

**Theme 1: Gang graffiti is found at each school.** During each interview the participants were asked which types of graffiti were found at their school. The SRO's discussed various forms and rates of graffiti at each site. These forms were latrinalia (bathroom graffiti), gang-related, tagging, doodling, bullying, sexual, and pieces. Some SRO's reported much graffiti found at their school, while other's reported little graffiti found. The only form of graffiti that was reported as seen at each school was gang-related graffiti. This form of graffiti was created by gang members as a way to communicate, which will be discussed in a later theme. Gang graffiti can be problematic by bringing in tension and gang behaviors to the school.

- *I would say 99 % of the graffiti I'm actually dealing with is going to be gang related or if they're just a tagger...throwing up their moniker or something like that.*
- *I would say probably predominantly gang, and then close behind would be the sexual type of stuff.*
- *There's all kinds of graffiti. We've got gang graffiti, we've got graffiti where kids just write swear words, and then we've got graffiti that are sexual in nature.*

**Theme 2. Bathrooms are the most common place to find graffiti.** Participants reported graffiti was found in different locations on or near the school campuses. These locations varied with each school, except the bathrooms. The location the SROs most often reported as most likely to find graffiti was the bathroom. One hypothesis for this is due to cameras not allowed to monitor the inside of bathrooms. Cameras provide constant monitoring, which may deter students from creating graffiti. The areas with more monitoring and student traffic, such as the hallways, were least likely to have graffiti.

- *The bulk of it was in the bathrooms. So I think the biggest reason is...you don't have cameras in the bathroom and so the kids would go in there and they'd start tagging up stuff on the bathroom stalls or the walls or anything like that.*
- *Pretty much in the interior of the school is least common, except for the bathrooms. We do get a lot in the bathrooms.*

**Theme 3: Graffiti is used as a form of communication between gangs.** There were two reasons discussed about how graffiti is used for different gangs to communicate with each other. One reason is to show disrespect from one gang to another. The disrespectful conversations happen when gang members cross out rival gang graffiti and place their own gang name or symbol next to it. This form of graffiti can cause problematic tension in a school setting. The other form of communication is using graffiti to establish territory. By putting their name or symbol in an area they are claiming the school as their own. One SRO explained that gang members may fight for the school as their territory, but explained that so do school personnel.

- *But a lot of times with graffiti like I said they'll cross out, they'll disrespect, and of course that creates tension amongst your students. And so the type of kid that's going to be throwing up that type of graffiti, probably going to be gang related or gang involved or have cousins that are gangsters. Then that's how the whole cross out, the disrespect, the retag, all that stuff and it just gets bigger and bigger.*
- *While that is true in some cases I have found that most of the time the gang graffiti and the gang activity is targeted at gang other gang members.*
- *Kinda that turf that they fight for and even we do that. This is my school. We're not gonna have this in my school. Even as a police officer and administration of this school*



*we're fighting for our turf. So you put all of them together and I wouldn't say they fight inside the school... all the buildup happens in school.*

## **Discipline**

**Theme 4: Discipline.** Discipline is the only theme included in this category. Students caught creating graffiti are charged with a crime and suspended. The punishment for students who are caught can face criminal charges or school suspension for as long as ten days long. In some situations the student receives both punishments. These consequences happen when graffiti is created on the school or on school property, but not on paper or backpacks. The severity of the criminal charges is based on the dollar amount it takes to remove the graffiti. The more it costs to remove or repair the damage from graffiti, the more severe the charge may be. When the student is charged with a crime the student makes a court appearance and becomes involved with the juvenile court system.

- *You try to find out who it is. We can do one of a number of things. If we are going to charge them one I can charge them criminally. Any time you get in trouble in school, I use the analogy that it's like a dragon with two heads. You have the legal side like me. All I'm going to do is criminal law, right? But then you have the administrative side, suspensions, safe school referrals, whatever else. The school handles that. I don't do suspensions, I don't do safe school referrals. So technically at school you can get in trouble twice. Does that make sense? You can be charged plus you're going to get suspended and be given a safe school referral. And so that's typically what we do. A safe school referral means they go in front of a board, a panel of principals and teachers and whoever is assigned to the safe school community. They will take a look at the police report, they will look at the graffiti, they will look where it was. Was there a dollar*

*amount to get it cleaned up? Was the kid found guilty or not guilty? Are they going to plead guilty or not guilty if they haven't been to court yet? What's their side of the story? Because it's not a criminal act. Safe school referral's not a criminal act, so they're not necessarily entitled to their 5th amendment right.*

- *We automatically charge 'em obviously with destruction of property. You're marking it and you know there is a law that's specifically directed towards graffiti and defacing the property and then they are suspended for at least three days. If not more, depending on, you know the student, because if they've if they've been there before for the same offense then we'll suspend, suspend 'em longer.*
- *Well there's very little tolerance here at schools. So if they show any kind of signs or if they do anything gang related we automatically kick 'em out of school. We'll suspend 'em for 10 days, if anything.*

### **Strategies to Prevent School-Related Graffiti**

**Theme 5: Removing graffiti quickly is the most important response.** Each participant expressed the importance of removing graffiti as quickly as possible. One of the reasons behind removing graffiti promptly is to decrease the chances of more graffiti being created. Graffiti is infectious, meaning it will spread quickly because students will want to create more. Another reason is that graffiti may be used as a form of communication with gang members in a threatening manner or to claim the school as their territory. The process of cleaning up graffiti was similar for each SRO's school in the sense that the custodians were expected to clean it up or in cases too difficult for the custodian the school district would remove it. It is costly when the school district needs to come in to remove graffiti. The specific methods of graffiti removal varied from each school.

- *So our policy is to clean it up as quickly as you possibly can. I hadn't had any, all of last year I didn't have one incident and then this year we finally had some.*
- *So you want it taken down as quickly as you can. And the reason is, especially if it's gang related, is somebody from a different hood or different set will come in, cross that out, and tag over the top of it, and then somebody else will come cross theirs out, tag over the top of it so next thing you know it's growing like a tree.*
- *It's kind of infectious. I mean if you get some, you don't get it really quick, then it starts to spread, but if you get on it really, really quick, you can usually get it stopped and end really quick. But if not, then you'll have it all over. And then it leads into maybe fights and stuff like that. It could get worse.*

**Theme 6: Cameras are used to find the person creating graffiti.** One of the ways that was reported to be effective in finding the student responsible is through cameras that are placed throughout the schools. Even when cameras do not catch a student directly creating graffiti, like in the bathrooms, the cameras monitor who goes in and when. By monitoring who goes in the bathroom and when a pattern may be found to find the creator. However, in instances when the creator does not create graffiti often enough to for a pattern to be found then it is not possible to find the creator.

- *If it's outside of a bathroom, obviously I don't have cameras inside the bathrooms, but I have cameras on the outside. Watching people going in and out. Lots of times I'll have janitors be like "well, I just cleaned the bathroom and it was like 10:30 and we found this at 1" so I'll watch the cameras from 10:30 to 1. So how I caught this kid was exactly like that.*

**Theme 7: Building rapport with students may be beneficial.** Building rapport with students was very important to some of the SROs. They build rapport by making themselves approachable by giving out their cell phone number for phone calls or texts, open door policies, creating a Facebook page for students to report problems, and approaching students for casual conversations. The students are more likely to report problems in the school such as graffiti if there is a way to report it anonymously. Reporting anonymously, at least anonymous to other students, the reporter may feel more comfortable since they do not need to fear any repercussions from their peers. Based on the SROs' comments, this added confidentiality encouraged students to report and helped them feel safe when sharing their information with SROs.

- *I make myself very approachable. I give every kid in my school my cell phone number. They can call me anytime day or night. I also teach a class here, I give it to all my kids. I teach a parent's orientation night I give it to all the parents. I am not afraid to give people my cell phone number. And because I do that a lot of times I'll get anonymous texts because obviously they may have my number, but I don't have theirs.*
- *I mean they just come down to the office. We're really lucky we have a great rapport with a lot of the students so they'll come down and they'll talk to us. The vice principal and I are out there after and they'll come talk to us after, they'll say "hey this is gonna go on, there's going to be a fight here, maybe" or "yeah, there's graffiti up here in the girls stall" whatever it may be.*
- *I have a pretty good rapport with most of the students or the principals. I have an officer Facebook page where any student who wants can be on there or send messages on there, I guess it's not anonymously if they're sending it, but anonymous to others.*

**Theme 8: Dress codes dissuade gang behavior at school.** An aspect of gang culture is wearing clothing attire or style that represents the gang. Allowing students to bring in aspects of gang culture can be problematic for schools. Bringing in gang culture may bring in the illegal behaviors gang members engage in. A way to deter students from bringing this culture into the school is by implementing a dress code for all students. Each dress code was different based on the needs of the school, but they all influenced how gang members were able to dress during school. School policy also allowed SRO 3 to identify adolescents causing problems who did his school.

- *It's illegal to engage in the behavior that gangsters engage in. You can associate yourself with whoever you want. So here in school the only time I would get involved is if it's gang related. Gang clothing, violation of dress code, not necessarily a violation of state law, or federal law, but it's a violation of school policy, right? Bandana, same things. It's not illegal to have a bandana, but it's a violation of school dress code, school dress policy, right? It's our job to make sure that the campus feels safe and secure.*
- *They do. And that's a problem here at school is uh like uh (omitted gang name) wears red, and (omitted gang name) wears blue. You can have red and blue shirts on obviously. We limit, like they can't wear jersey. They can't wear anything that's certain football associated like (omitted NFL team name) or anything like that 'cause that's a gang sign and so we can make 'em take it off. They can wear red and blue, they can't hang bandanas, they can't do anything that symbolizes gang like they used to cuff their pant legs and that was a symbol of a gang and so we make 'em uncuff 'em...sometimes they try or they'll put notches in their eye brows. And so we make 'em either shave it off or we make them fill it in with a marker 'cause they're not allowed to do that here in*

*school. So just small stuff like that that's funny that they do that to show that they're you know, gang related and we take care of it as soon as we can.*

- *One thing our school does and they're very strict on is no hats. And I've found that's been awesome....whenever we have kids from other schools that come to our school to start a fight or trespass or something, they're not supposed to be there, it is so easy to distinguish those kids 'cause they're wearing a hat and you know right away that kid doesn't belong here.*

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to connect this study's findings with current research and to specify practical implications for effectively addressing graffiti in schools settings. Additionally, this section identifies the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research.

In summary, five Utah SROs discussed their experiences with the types of graffiti found in their schools, the purposes behind students creating graffiti, disciplinary measures implemented with offenders, and effective ways to prevent graffiti. Although participants shared many common experiences, they also had unique experiences specific to their school. However, in general, findings from the current study were aligned with existing literature.

### **Connection Between Results and Graffiti Literature**

The significant themes of the types of experiences with graffiti were derived from each interview are listed. The themes are listed below the respective research questions:

- a) Understanding Utah SRO's experiences with graffiti and their perceptions of common types of graffiti perpetrated in their schools
  1. Gang graffiti is found at each school
  2. Bathrooms are the most common place to find graffiti

3. Gang members use graffiti as a form of communication to other gangs
- b) Investigating what (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified
4. Students caught creating graffiti are charged with a crime and suspended.
- c) Identifying strategies being used to prevent future incidents of school-related graffiti.
  5. Removing graffiti promptly is the most important response
  6. Cameras are used to find the person creating graffiti.
  7. Building rapport with students may be beneficial.

These themes were considered significant, not only because they were shared by most of the participants, but also because they relate to the established research. Themes were discovered by repetitions found in at least two SROs interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The participants in this study were asked open-ended questions in order for them to provide original responses to align with consensual qualitative research methods. The participants were asked open-ended questions with the assumption that what was significant to the experience would be organic responses, unbiased by the investigator. These themes will be used to relate the current study's findings to graffiti literature.

**Common location.** The study by Staiger (2005) found the most common forms of graffiti are writings on walls, which are most often created by gang members. Weisel (2002) also supported the stance that gang graffiti is the most persistent form of graffiti. Gang graffiti is most often observed out in the open, but can be very difficult for outsiders to decipher because of abbreviations, spelling deviations, and written and numerical symbols in their lexicon (Adams & Winter, 1997). Based on the SRO interviews, gang graffiti was the only type of graffiti found at

each school. Each SRO reported other types of graffiti found at his school, however gang graffiti was the only type found on each site.

**Prompt removal.** Each SRO spoke about removing graffiti promptly. This action deters other students from creating graffiti in the same area. This was found in the research regarding SEPTA (Scott, 1989), which found that visible graffiti encouraged others to create more graffiti. The more graffiti in one location, the greater the chances were that there would be additional graffiti added to that area. A lack of graffiti tends to decrease the desire for people to create graffiti (Radin, 2005). According to Graffiti Hurts (2013) and Ashton and Mirakian (2001), keeping areas clean and neat prevents additional graffiti from being created. When graffiti is found, removing it within 24 to 48 hours greatly decreases recurrence (Graffiti Hurts, 2013; Richmond California Police Department, n.d.).

**Communication.** Graffiti can be used as a form of communication (Brown, 1978) and express the personality of its creator by showing hopes, fears, desires, hostilities and frustrations (Taylor et al., 2010). Graffiti can be used as a way to mark territory (Staiger, 2005; Taylor et al., 2010) as well as display power and inform rival gangs of plans to assault them (Staiger, 2005) and to indicate defiance and dominance (Brown, 1978). The results from this study support these claims. Similar across school campuses, the SROs reported gang graffiti being crossed out by rival gangs. Gang members crossed out the prior graffiti, then painted their graffiti, placing the new graffiti about the original piece. In this way, gang members mark their territory in the school, which creates tension and rivalry among groups in the school.

**Cameras.** There were two benefits discussed by the SROs for using cameras to monitor graffiti. The two benefits are cameras can be used to decrease instances of graffiti and increase the chances of finding the person creating graffiti (Radin, 2005). The SROs suggested the best



way to utilize cameras is by monitoring the school throughout the day in order to determine a time frame when graffiti is created. School personnel monitor the school by walking through the school throughout the day. After graffiti is found the SRO only needs to look over the video footage during this time frame when the graffiti was created and the previous school personnel was in that area. This decreases the amount of time the SRO needs to spend watching through the video footage and it decreases the suspect list by eliminating students outside of that time frame.

The SROs use cameras differently in the case of bathroom graffiti, because cameras were not allowed in school bathrooms. Instead of having access to direct footage of the student creating graffiti, they use the footage to find a pattern of who is going into the bathroom around the time the graffiti is being created. The SRO watches the footage between monitoring sessions when graffiti is reported. Then the SRO compares the footage from other instances of graffiti found in the bathroom. This process is more difficult when the student only creates graffiti once and no pattern can be found.

**Building rapport.** SROs are a benefit to schools and the police force by reducing patrol officers workload, improving the image of officers among juveniles, creating and maintaining better relationships with the schools, and enhancing the agency's reputation in the community (Finn, 2006). School districts use SROs to improve safety in the schools since it is important for schools to keep students and faculty safe (Finn, 2006). SRO 1 reported having a cell phone number that he gives to the students and parents to contact him whenever necessary. It allows the students to provide him with information without their identity being known. SRO 2 reported having a great rapport with many of the students in his school. He does this by having conversations with his students, even the students who are involved in gangs. SRO 3 reported

having a Facebook page to provide students with a way to send messages to him without other students finding out. These ways of building rapport make the SROs to be approachable to their students and the students are more likely to report problems.

**Dress codes.** Another form of communication with gangs is clothing. It was reported that gangs have a color to represent themselves. Gang members wear this specific color to communicate to rival gangs their pride for their own gang. Some gangs even have certain styles such as wearing their pant legs to a certain length or shaving their eyebrows a certain way.

Uniforms cut off these forms of communication (Ryan & Ryan, 1998). The schools these SROs work in have dress codes instead of uniforms. The school dress codes prevented students from wearing multiple forms of their gang color in one outfit. Statistics from a mandatory uniform policy in Long Beach, CA showed reductions of 74% in sex offenses, 66% in robbery, 50% in fighting, 34% in assault and battery, 32% in suspensions, and 18% in vandalism (Wade & Stafford, 2003). These behaviors are consistent with behaviors associated with gangs.

Some of the schools have a strict dress code to prevent the students from wearing gang related clothing during school. At SRO 2's school they make the student's change their clothing if they are dressed in gang related attire. He believes that the dress code prevents the non-gang member students from feeling fear and intimidation from the student's wearing gang related attire. SRO 3 reported that not only are the colors a way to represent their gang, but the style as well. Some students roll their pant legs up to show toughness. At his school there is a policy banning all hats. This policy helps the staff know who attends his school when problems arise between students from his school and students from other schools. He reported that the students who do not attend his school typically wear a hat, while his students are not. SRO 5 reported

that football jerseys are not allowed at his school because some gangs affiliated themselves with those teams. These specific jerseys become a representation of their gang.

**Suspension.** Many of the SROs suggested that out-of-school suspension as a punishment for students who created graffiti. Students who are suspended are much more likely to drop out of school (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Suhyun & Jingyo, 2007). Students who have been suspended are at risk of increasing maladaptive behaviors not targeted by the suspension and withdrawing or avoiding school personnel. Suspended students lose academic time in the classroom, which may negatively influence their academic skills (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). These students may also experience rejection in the larger community (Costenbader & Markson, 1998) as well as drug use (Swadi, 1992). If suspension is a school's disciplinary option, the school administration should carefully consider the drawbacks associated with suspension.

### **Implications for Practice**

Graffiti can cause major problems in schools (high school source) and can be very costly to remove (Keep America Beautiful, 2015; New York State Police, n.d.). Responses to graffiti vary from school to school (Cornell & Sheras, 1998; Luippold, 2013; Megino, 2012; Sawyer, 2013). School personnel should have a set plan of how to respond to graffiti in their schools in order to prevent greater problems or more graffiti being created. Responses should be made for each individual school since the type of graffiti varies at each school. Ideas that may benefit a school plan include (a) documenting then removing graffiti promptly, (b) building rapport with the students, (c) implementing a dress code to deter gang culture, (d) installing cameras to monitor the school, and (e) have a pre-determined punishment for those students, particularly for those student with the highest rate of graffiti.

Documenting graffiti helps determine graffiti patterns, which in turn helps SROs identify graffiti creators. Removing graffiti promptly is the most important way to prevent more graffiti from being made (Keep America Beautiful, 2015). SROs in this study reported the importance of having a good rapport with students and the importance of providing students with simple and anonymous ways to report problems like graffiti or fights in school. These forms of communication may be cell phone numbers used only for the school, a Facebook page, or taking efforts to make themselves approachable.

An aspect of gang culture is wearing certain clothing to represent their gang. Gang culture in the school can cause problems such as tension between students. By implementing a strict dress code gang members wearing clothing representing their gang will not be in the school. According to one SRO, it also helped him identify adolescents not from his school who were causing problems.

Multiple SROs reported having cameras monitor the school helps deter graffiti from being created. Cameras also provide documentation of who creates graffiti and where, which can be used to find the creator and allow the school personnel and SRO to punish the student. An SRO explained that a student caught creating graffiti in school faces two sources of punishment. The first is the school's disciplinary punishment and the second is the law enforcement agency's punishment. The law enforcement's punishment will already have specifically outlined consequences, such as involving the student with the juvenile justice system. However, in addition to specifying negative consequences for those who create graffiti, schools should also proactively create a plan for preventing future graffiti.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used during the interview process. These questions were used to guide the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. Although SROs had the opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the interview, guided questions used during the interview may have prevented SROs from freely discussing other graffiti related matters.

Krippendorff (1980) emphasized the importance of avoiding bias when analyzing qualitative data. He urged researchers to make their research procedures and data analyses explicit, clearly explaining their intended protocol, and sharing their findings with others who may want to examine the research data and replicate the study's analysis. When relying on the content analysis method of qualitative research, the directed approach presents some unique challenges. Although unintentional, approaching the data from the researchers' preset notion of anticipated findings may increase the potential for researcher bias (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When interpreting the data, readers must consider this potential weakness.

Another limitation is the lack of time to build rapport with the participants. Each participant spoke with the interviewer over the phone to discuss the possibility of participating in the study. They were then provided with a copy of the consent form as well as the interview questions. Each participant was ensured his interview would remain confidential. To ensure confidentiality, specific details from some of the interviews were altered or removed. Additionally, in the results section participants were given a code name.

Through researching this project, the primary researcher learned that graffiti has different meanings in different settings and various individuals have a variety of perceptions regarding graffiti. For example, a symbol in Salt Lake City may not communicate the same meaning in

Philadelphia, where the primary researcher currently resides. Therefore, research in one area of the US may not generalize to another area/location.

Additionally, the responses given by an interviewee working in one school may not apply to another SRO's experiences in another school. However, the overall perception of graffiti—as determined by this research—may offer insights to other SROs who are dealing with gang members and graffiti in their school halls and classrooms. Other schools in Utah may also benefit from the information gathered from this study's participating SROs. In particular, this information may help local schools identify more effective strategies to respond to and deter incidents of graffiti.

### **Directions for Future Research**

When conducting this study's literature review, it was difficult to find current research relating to graffiti. Although there have been a few recent studies, few studies discussed graffiti in schools. It may be beneficial to conduct research studies specifically in schools which report a large amount of graffiti. Some of this study's participating SROs reported that historically their schools had high rates of graffiti, however, during the previous school year there were fewer instances. The information provided from SROs working in schools with higher rates of graffiti may provide more information about the purpose of graffiti and how it influences the school's atmosphere. One participating SRO reported an elevated number of graffiti incidents in his community, inferring that the high rates of graffiti rates in his school were also reflected in the community. On the other hand, it may be beneficial to research school *and* community atmosphere when incidents of graffiti in school and community are disproportionate, investigating possible reasons for this disparity.

One of the SROs suggested that the recent decline in reported and observed graffiti may be influenced by gang members turning to online communications rather than relying on the older method of using graffiti. It may be beneficial to research new forms of communication between gangs. Future studies may consider investigating the perceptions of previous graffiti offenders, using their information to better understand current trends that may deter traditional graffiti and offer additional insights into changing gang communication tactics.

Based on the interviews, high school students displayed graffiti in the restrooms more often than any other location in the school. Restrooms are a difficult area to monitor, given the obvious need for students' privacy when using the restroom. Restrooms are minimally supervised due to the awkwardness of providing cameras and personnel to monitor this private area. It may be beneficial for future studies to focus specifically on latrinalia graffiti, how to effectively and sensitively prevent it, and the best way to deal with the graffiti once this type of graffiti has been displayed.

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## APPENDIX A: Literature Review

Today, the most common forms of graffiti are writings or paintings on walls, commonly associated with gang activity (Staiger, 2005). It is important to define the term "gang member" because definitions vary from state to state. For this study, since this research project was completed in Utah, the definition of gangs is based on Utah's legal definition [<http://le.utah.gov/~2012/bills/hbillint/hb0228.htm>].

According to Utah State regulations, a criminal street gang is defined as being comprised of three or more persons that are an organization, association, or group that is operated formally or informally. These primary acts of these individuals must include one or more criminal acts and have an identifying sign (Utah Penal Code §76-9-902). Further, new legislation effective May 12, 2015, clearly prohibits students from “marking school property, books, or school work with gang names, slogans, or signs” (Title 53A, Chapter 15, part 6, Section 603; Utah State Legislature, 2015).

Utah's definition differs from the United States federal definition (National Institute of Justice, 2011). The federal definition adds that gang members create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation through a common name, slogan, identifying sign, symbol, tattoo or other physical marking, style or color of clothing, hairstyle, hand sign, or graffiti. Part of the gang member's purpose is to engage in criminal activities and use violence or intimidation to further the gang's criminal objectives. Gang members commit crimes or acts of juvenile delinquency that, if committed by an adult, would be crimes with the intent to enhance or preserve the association's power, reputation, or economic resources (18 U.S.C. §521 a).

Prior to narrowing this literature review down to specifically focus on Utah's school graffiti, a background and history of graffiti are reviewed. This review will assist readers in

understanding the broad and rich context of graffiti, and will also build the case for Utah's concerns regarding school graffiti and the strong connection with gang culture. This literature review also lays a strong foundation for understanding gang culture and how gang graffiti promotes and lures youth into gang activity. In particular, gang graffiti which defaces schools crosses a critical boundary, threatening school learning environments and violating the public expectation for maintaining children's innocence and safety.

### **Forms of Graffiti**

There are differing opinions about gang graffiti and graffiti in general. Although many individuals consider gang graffiti as a form of criminal activity, the interpretation of other types of graffiti varies depending on the observer's perception and on the artist's/perpetrator's intentions. To gang members, their graffiti may be considered a form of communication regarding territorial boundaries and an indication of gang power and influence (Grant, 1996). In other situations, graffiti may be considered a work of art (Halsey & Young, 2002) or a way to express comments about social issues (Schreer & Strichartz, 1997). Various forms of graffiti include tagging, doodling, latrinalia, pieces, and gang graffiti. Each of these forms of graffiti is briefly described in the following paragraphs.

Tagging is graffiti that typically involves spray paints or etches (see Figure 1). The produced outcome is a person's or group's nickname painted or etched onto various walls or publicly visible surfaces (Grant, 1996). Tagging may be created by either a gang or a crew (Adams & Winter, 1997). A crew is a group of graffiti artists who work together. They are different from a gang because their main objective is to create graffiti (Cooper & Chalfant, 1984). The crew creates their artistic expression with an underlying desire to be known, thus increasing one's power and conveying rebellion (Grant, 1996). Taggers revel in placing their

graffiti in difficult and unlikely places, proving their ability to accomplish challenging and dangerous tasks (Adams & Winter, 1997). Each tagger has his or her specific signature. Each signature is unique and an expression of the tagger's individuality (Kan, 2001). Although non-gang related tagging is different from gang graffiti in content and creation, tagging may be a prelude to joining a gang (Adams & Winter, 1997; Kan, 2001).



Figure 1. Tagging by tracks of the Southeastern PA Transportation Authority train in Philadelphia, PA. Copyright 2015 by Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven.

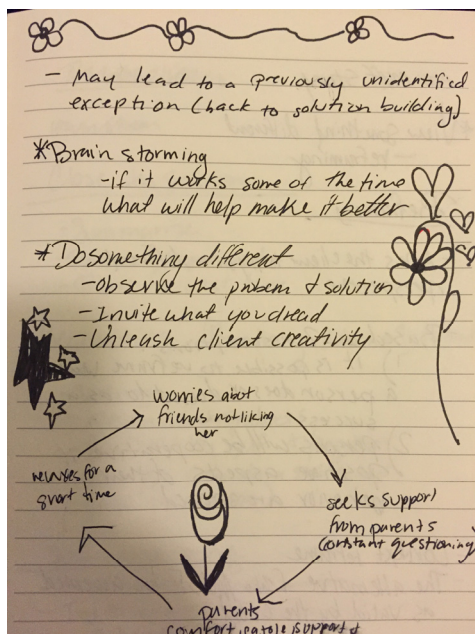


Figure 2. Doodling on student notes. Copyright 2015 by Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven.



Another form of graffiti–doodling–is a more individual and private form than other types of graffiti that are publically displayed (see Figure 2). When an individual is ignoring their teacher and focused on drawing or sketching, they may be doodling (Kan, 2001). In schools, students’ doodling is typically found on paper work such as class notes, tests, and homework. Doodling may or may not be gang related.

Phone numbers or sexual invitations seen on the wall of a restroom stall are known as latrinalia graffiti (Kan, 2001). Latrinalia also includes expressions that are scratched into the bathroom walls, including sexually explicit comments and degrading accusations against specific individuals (see Figure 3). Restroom graffiti may also include comments about social issues and trending topics of interest (Schreer & Strichartz, 1997).

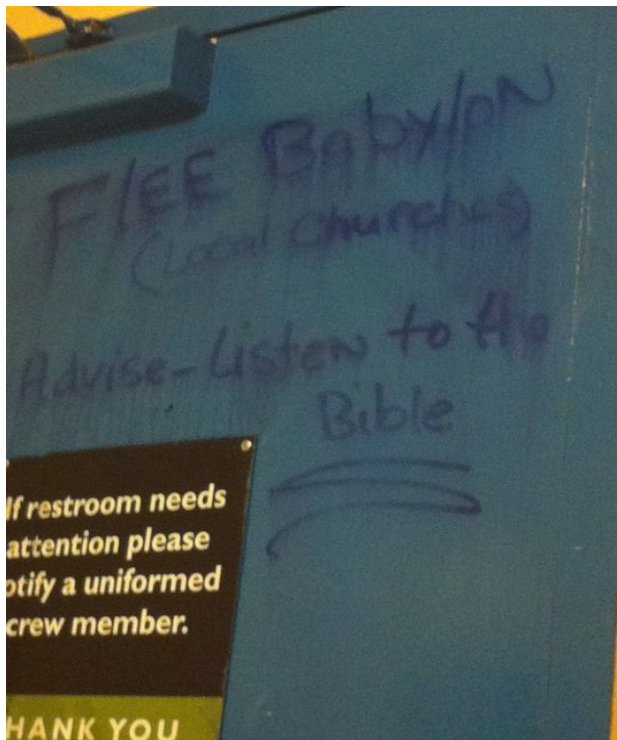


Figure 3. Latrinalia graffiti found in a public restroom in San Francisco, CA. Copyright 2015 by Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven.

The large, more polished, and extensive works of art on buildings and walls are called pieces (short for masterpieces), murals, or street art (Conklin, 2012). A notable example of pieces would be the extensive graffiti on the old Berlin wall. Every major urban city in the world has multiple pieces, many considered beautiful by mainstream society. One of many tributes to this form of art, Friedman (2008) spotlighted 50 pieces. In his tribute, a wide variety of styles distinguish a host of different artists who specialize in this intriguing form of artistic expression (Kan, 2001; McAuliffe, 2012).

There are many great murals in the city of Philadelphia (see Figures 4 and 5). Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program spotlights a website which advertises tours to see the murals throughout the city. The program began as part of the Anti-Graffiti Network in 1984 in order to redirect local artists' talent (City of Philadelphia MuralArtsProgram, 2015).

Gangs use graffiti, known as gang graffiti, as a form of communication. Gangs may use graffiti to mark their own territory, or gangs may cross into another gang's territory and spread specific graffiti to indicate defiance and dominance (Brown, 1978). Gang graffiti is a form of communication within an antisociety (Adams & Winter, 1997). An antisociety is an alternate society within a larger society. An antisociety may be one specific subgroup of a population found in a large urban city, such as subgroups in New York City's Chinatown and Little Italy.



*Figure 4.* Mural on a recreation center in Philadelphia, PA. Copyright 2015 by Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven.



*Figure 5.* Mural on the side of a grocery store in Philadelphia, PA. Copyright 2015 by Bobbi Sue Padro Van Leuven.

Gang graffiti is most often observed out in the open, but can be very difficult for outsiders to decipher because of abbreviations, spelling deviations, and written and numerical symbols in their lexicon (Adams & Winter, 1997). Graffiti is often expressed in a code and expression that is intended for a specific audience, who are typically part of an antisociety.

## Perceptions of Graffiti

There is a wide spectrum of opinions as to whether graffiti is art or mere vandalism. Many see graffiti as tacky and ugly—unsightly markings that deface building walls and public restrooms. To others, it is a form of art (Grant, 1996; White, 2014). There are people who believe graffiti is comparable to the rock and roll movement, because both are an outgrowth of defiant teens and young adults (Peretti, Carter, & McClinton, 1977). According to Geason (2004), this opinion would upset those individuals who spend time and money getting rid of graffiti. These differences in perspective can cause various problems; for instance while one citizen is actively trying to remove graffiti, another might be trying to support local graffiti artists by paying them to create graffiti pieces on the walls of stores and businesses.

## Underlying Reasons for Creating Graffiti

Stories of youth like Justin, Mirics, Aso, and Gear provide examples of how individuals create graffiti for a variety of reasons (Clemans, 2012; Rollins, 2011). The following four descriptions are based on Rollins' (2011) stories spotlighted in *The Lost Boyz: A Dark Side of Graffiti*. The information presented in Rollins' book is also supported by two researchers who specialize in gang graffiti and gang life, Clemans (2012) and Pietrosanti (2012).

Rollins (2011) described Justin, who made graffiti on trains as a way to *become somebody*. He started out by only making graffiti, but ended up joining a gang. This led to him engaging in extreme violence, crime, and self-destruction (Rollins, 2011). Another youth, Mirics used graffiti to advertise and to escape feeling like *a nobody*. He used symbols and names as way for him to find an identity (Pietrosanti, 2012). Offering another viewpoint, for people like Aso, graffiti is an art (Pietrosanti, 2012). He would sketch for hours and would only go out to tag when he felt like he had something to show (Rollins, 2011). For Philo, graffiti was a way to

show that he lived and existed (Rollins, 2011; Pietrosanti, 2012). For Gear, the fourth individual, he enjoyed passing by his own graffiti, but also enjoyed seeing others' artistic expression. Primarily, Gear focused on his crew (fellow artists) and enjoyed being recognized for his work, but also enjoyed seeing others' graffiti (Rollins, 2011).

These four boys expressed both common and unique reasons for creating graffiti (Clemans, 2012; Pietrosanti, 2012). The location did not necessarily determine the reason for creating graffiti. Similar to these boys, some adolescents may use graffiti as a way to find their identity (Clemans, 2012). For graffiti artists, the creator becomes connected with the surface or wall, which creates an affirmation of self on the surface and creates a sense of appropriation. The artist leaves behind personal traces in their creation, and at the same time is creating an outward identity with the graffiti (Pietrosanti, 2012).

There are many underlying motivations for engaging in graffiti activity. Expressions through graffiti reveal much about the personality of the creator, such as their hopes, fears, desires, hostilities, and frustrations. Additionally, graffiti may be a mode for communicating a group's or individual's social agenda, political views, and personal thoughts. Graffiti may also be created to gain fame, recognition, and social acceptance (Taylor, Marais, & Cottman, 2010).

Motivations underlying the reasons for engaging in graffiti influence the behavior and the type of graffiti created. The main behaviors that are discussed in research are power, risk taking, and finding one's identity (Clemans, 2012; Pietrosanti, 2012). According to Grant (1996), graffiti is a form of artistic expression which seeks acknowledgement and increased power, and may stem from rebellion. Graffiti is an effective way to get one's name or symbol posted around the community. Graffiti brings attention to the artist. When others take notice of the graffiti, the

creator feels the pride of being recognized. This increased notoriety and attention are incredibly reinforcing.

Creating graffiti is one strategy for gaining power through marking territory. Engaging in this activity is also a show of rebellion, since the most commonly created graffiti is considered criminal activity. This illegal aspect also brings a sense of excitement to the activity (Rowe & Hutton, 2012). Ex-graffiti writers report missing the adrenaline rush and flurry of excitement they experienced while drawing graffiti (Rowe & Hutton, 2012).

### **Gangs and Gang Behavior**

Gangs use graffiti expression to display power to rival gangs, to mark territory, and to inform other gangs of plans to assault a rival gang. They alert the rival gang by crossing out or painting over the posted names of rivals (Staiger, 2005).

Although the 1990s saw a decline in the level of gang activity, there has been a steady rise in gang activity since 2001 (Sharkey, Shekhtmeyster, Chavez-Lopez, Norris, & Sass, 2011). Some rates increased as much as 15% since 2002. By 2008, 32.4% of all towns and communities in the United States were facing gang-related problems (Sharkey et al., 2011). Graffiti is no longer specifically an inner-city problem. Graffiti and associated gang activity have expanded to suburban towns and rural communities (Keep America Beautiful, 2015).

While many adolescents are seeking a purpose to anchor their young lives, some decide to join a gang as a way of finding and creating their identity (Clemans, 2012; Vigil, 1988). Although nationally the average age for joining a gang is typically between 12 to 15 years of age, gang leaders tend to be adults (Knox, 1994). These adult role models hold a powerful influence over youth (Clemans, 2012).

As adolescents navigate this critical period of development, peer interactions are vitally important and hold a powerful influence on developing identities (Maxwell, 2002). Peer interactions help adolescents figure out who they are and who they want to become (Taylor, Marais, & Cottman, 2010). During adolescence, decisions regarding whom to associate with and which peer groups to align with may not be decisions that are carefully considered. The importance of long-term decisions are in opposition to the adolescents' focus on the *here and now* (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). During adolescence the brain is still developing (Taylor et al., 2010). This can inhibit the adolescent's full ability to understand the negative consequences to joining a gang or associating with certain peers. While joining a gang, adolescents may instead focus on opportunities to forge their personal identify (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005).

Although graffiti is seen as an act of youthful resistance it can be a *gateway crime* that leads to more serious crimes (Taylor et al., 2010). The most common form of this youthful resistance is displaying gang names in various public places (Adams & Winter, 1997). The other delinquent behaviors associated with gangs include defiance and association with antisocial peers. These behaviors lead to lower levels of school involvement, higher rates of school dropout, and higher levels of drug use (Sharkey et al., 2011). These delinquent behaviors are often associated with and included in the rituals of joining and participating in a gang.

Gang initiation involves several forms of gruesome rituals. These rituals tend to be violent—such as being brutally beaten by current gang members (Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004) or being expected to commit a crime (Bolden, 2012), such as raping a woman (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002) or alienating family members and non-gang members (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997). Once in a gang, the new gang member must be completely loyal. There may be

severe consequences for disloyalty to the gang (Sharkey et al., 2011). It can be difficult, even impossible for gang members to reject the gang rules and leave their gang (Clemans, 2012).

Joining a gang is associated with a variety of consequences. Gang involvement may lead to incarceration, drug and alcohol use, injury, and death (Jenson & Howard, 1998). Factors influencing an adolescent's decision to join a gang stem from five domains: individual, family, school, peer, and community (Hill, Howel, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999). When these domains were measured at ages 10 to 12 years, they predicted the likelihood of a 13 to 18-year-old joining a gang (Hill et al., 1999). Hill et al. (1999) measured these domains through a series of longitudinal surveys administered in 1985, 1991, and 1993. The results showed that a child with seven or more risk factors were much more likely to join a gang than those with one risk factor (Hill et al., 1999).

Sharkey et al. (2011) identified specific risk factors that increased the likelihood of a youth joining a gang. These risks included a variety of situations or conditions, such as family and peers who modeled criminal and gang behaviors (e.g., parents involved with drugs); a dysfunctional or unavailable family support system (e.g., a lack of male and parental role models); poverty and a lack of clear community expectations; limited reinforcement for achieving conventional success; and a lack of self-control to delay gratification and engage in academic pursuits. Additional risk factors include street socialization, gang members in school classes, and friends who use drugs or are gang members (Howell, 1998). These risk factors are especially problematic when an adolescent is looking for peer acceptance and friendship.

Peer influences are an important part of an adolescent's life (Maxwell, 2002). In order to be included, youth may seek street socialization and the friendship of gang members (Sharkey et



al., 2011). Peers hold an incredibly powerful social lure in influencing an adolescent to join a gang.

According to Sharkey et al. (2011), prospectus gang members typically have a history of prior delinquency and victimization. They also are rebellious against mainstream social expectations and align with deviant attitudes. Prospective gang members may exhibit aggressive tendencies and hold social expectations aligned with gang culture. Gang membership typically holds a social status and members have expectations concerning familial companionship and gang protection. Gangs actively recruit youth who have *street smarts* and a fatalistic view of the world. Potential members often own guns; engage in early sexual activity (especially among females); abuse alcohol and drugs; and exhibit problematic behaviors, such as hyperactivity and lack of refusal skills (Sharkey et al., 2011).

### **Correlation with Other Behaviors**

Graffiti can be a “gateway crime,” which is a crime that leads to more serious crimes (Taylor et al., 2010). Graffiti can lead to gang membership, which leads to other criminal behaviors. The National Institute of Justice funded graffiti related research in three communities in two states, which are Aurora and Denver, Colorado as well as Broward County, Florida (Huff, 1998). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention also funded research in Cleveland, Ohio (Huff, 1998). Each of these studies were funded to answer questions about gang membership, the nature of criminal behavior among youth gang members, and the magnitude of those behaviors on youth who are at-risk of joining a gang. They are determined to be at risk by the Huff’s (1998) referral sources.

These studies consisted of interviews with 50 gang members and 50 youth who were likely to join a gang. The behaviors in these studies include stealing a car, drive-by-shootings,

committing murder, and selling drugs. The researchers from the Colorado-Florida study found that 58.3% of gang members had stolen cars, while only 12.5% of at risk youth had done so (Huff, 1998). The researchers from the Cleveland study found 44.7% of gang members and 4.1% of at risk youth at stolen a car (Huff, 1998). When it comes to drive-by shootings, 40% of gang members had participated while only 2% of at risk youth had participated (Huff, 1998). In Colorado-Florida study the researchers found that 64.2% said members in their gang had committed murder, while 6.5% of at risk youth said their friends had committed murder (Huff, 1998). Gang members in the Colorado-Florida study reported that 76.9% was selling drugs, while only 6.4% of at risk youth were selling drugs (Huff, 1998). The researchers from the Cleveland study found that 72.3% were selling drugs and 9.1% of the at-risk youth were selling drugs (Huff, 1998).

Along with the interviews, the researchers analyzed arrest records from 1980 until 1994 (Huff, 1998). The point of this was to see how many arrests that were made had to do with gang members and their leaders. They found that 834 arrests were from 83 gang leaders (Huff, 1998). Out of these 834 arrests were 142 of those being violent crimes. During their analysis they found a pattern (Huff, 1998). Around the 1.5 years after peak arrest rate for property crimes (which includes graffiti), they had a peak arrest for violent crimes and a peak arrest for drug crimes 3 months after that (Huff, 1998). Students may start out with petty behaviors like graffiti, but research shows that they can escalate into much bigger crimes.

The data from the National Institute of Justice as well as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention show the various criminal acts that are associated with gang involvement (Huff, 1998). More than 80% of interviewees reported that members of their gang had carried guns into their school (Huff, 1998) and one-third of at risk youth had carried a gun

into school. Guns in schools create an unsafe area for students to learn. The influence gang members and graffiti have in schools can be very detrimental to the academic success of other students in the school. It is important for schools to have ways to implement strategies to deter graffiti and the gang culture and focus on the positive school culture.

### **Graffiti in Schools**

In 2001, across the United States 12% of students ages 12 through 18 reported that someone at school had used hate-related words against them (DeVoe et al., 2002). That is, in the prior 6 months, someone at school had called them a derogatory word having to do with race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. During the same period, about 36% of students saw hate-related graffiti at school (DeVoe et al., 2002).

In both 1999 and 2001, across the United States 36% of students saw hate related graffiti at school. In 2001, 20% of students reported that street gangs were present at their schools. Students in urban schools were more likely to report that there were street gangs in their school (29%) than were suburban and rural students (18 and 13%) (DeVoe et al., 2002).

In 2007, 35% of students between the ages of 12 and 18 had seen hate-related graffiti such as words or symbols at school (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2008). A public school student has a higher chance of seeing graffiti at school than a private school student. Only 19% of private school students reported seeing hate related graffiti (Dinkes et al., 2008). Seeing hate-related graffiti may not only hurt the person it was intended for, but it may also hurt other students.

Graffiti in schools can change the atmosphere and culture of the school. This may have a negative impact on many students. If they do not feel comfortable or safe in their school, this can hinder students' academic success.

The following example highlights students' feelings associated with graffiti. Cornell and Sheras (1998) reported on one high school's "Nonviolence Week." Even though this particular high school had never experienced any major violence, there had been an increased tension between White students and the Hispanic minority students. One Hispanic student noticed during the first week of "Nonviolence Week" that someone spray painted one of her displayed posters. The graffiti said, "Go back to Mexico!" Naturally, she became upset and reported it to the principal who referred her to the SRO. The officer offered a \$100 reward for the student who would identify the individual who ruined the poster with the graffiti racial slur. The next morning the reward encouraged a Hispanic student to turn in his friend, even though the officer reported that the most likely suspect had already been found.

By the end of the day, the Hispanic students were angry and demanded a meeting which principal agreed to host. This meeting created much controversy over who could attend. The original group of Hispanic girls thought it should be closed and private. However, there were phone calls made by White and Hispanic parents who felt they and their children should be allowed to attend. The principal gave in to the request and allowed open attendance to the meeting.

Many people attended the Thursday afternoon meeting. Most of the Hispanic students and about 50 parents arrived; even the local television station sent a crew. This meeting was for people to say what was on their mind. Almost immediately, people began shouting about racism and the school system. This contentious arguing lasted for about an hour. After many people—including the superintendent—decided to leave, the meeting broke up with little resolved. Friday morning, a White student tossed a soda container into a trash can in front of school. The soda

from the can splashed a Hispanic girl standing nearby. A scuffle broke out after two groups exchanged angry words. Two arrests were made.

The tension in the school was created by a single incident of graffiti and the following response to it. To avoid situations like this, it is important for each school to have a set plan before graffiti is created. The plan should have clear steps of who or where a student should report graffiti to and how it should be dealt with. In the case of the previously mentioned school, having a pre-established plan might have avoided the problems created from the graffiti. This situation escalated quickly into many serious problems and a plan may have prevented the negative relationships that developed between the school, the parents, and the students.

One school, like many others, faced problems with student cliques. Cliques can sometimes be classified as a gang if they meet the state's definition. One clique had around a dozen girls between ages 12 to 18 living in the same neighborhood. These girls had a rival clique and conflicts between the two would arise. What began as a series of unrelated, minor incidents, later became spiteful insults and rumors. Each group would graffiti their name on the school, which would later be crossed out by the other group. The graffiti in this case increased the already difficult tension between the two cliques of girls (Cornell & Sheras, 1998). Graffiti is usually not the only problem between gangs and cliques, but—just as this incident illustrates with these girls—it can increase tension between them.

### **Cost of Graffiti Clean Up**

Graffiti is often costly for cities and schools to remove. Locations throughout the country will vary in graffiti problems. This means that some cities will have high amounts in public places, while others might only have the occasional Sharpie doodles on bathroom stalls. Cities like Santa Monica, Melbourne, and Philadelphia have spent a lot of time and money to get rid of

graffiti and prevent it from being created. Santa Monica had as many as 120 phone calls a week in 2003 to have graffiti removed (Egilmez, 2004). During the last 6 months of 2002, Santa Monica city officials reported cleaning 2,157 incidents of graffiti or almost instances of graffiti a day. In the year 2003 they got rid of 5,222 acts of graffiti, which translates to roughly 14.3 instances of graffiti a day. The graffiti problem is large enough in Santa Monica that a large sum of money was invested for a project to create a technological analysis of graffiti in a way to reduce it (Egilmez, 2004).

Graffiti can be financially costly and also dangerous. Cleaning up graffiti costs the public transportation agency in Melbourne, Australia around \$5 million a year. Graffiti may be both financially costly and physically dangerous. There are youth who choose to create graffiti on the outsides of trains. In Australia, by 1988 six of these youth died and many more were injured while participating in the creation of graffiti (Geason, 1989). The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), which covers five counties in the Philadelphia area pays around \$2 million a year trying to remove graffiti from their properties (Scott, 1989; Stoiber, 2006). It takes SEPTA 3,000 man-hours, 900 gallons of shellac, paint and thinner, and 30 gallons of cantol (an industrial cleaner) to clean up 6 months' worth of graffiti. The SEPTA officials have gone to great lengths to prevent graffiti in their jurisdictions (Scott, 1989).

According to SEPTA, the best way to decrease graffiti is to get rid of graffiti. They believe that visible graffiti encourages the creation of more graffiti (Scott, 1989). The more graffiti left unattended in public areas, the greater the likelihood of additional acts of graffiti being perpetrated. In Philadelphia, the removal of most small acts of graffiti costs the city around \$100, though some removal projects amount to much more. If the removal or cover-up cost exceeds \$5,000, the act is considered a felony offense (Scott, 1989). In Utah, graffiti

removal cost only needs to be \$1,000 in order to be considered a felony (refer to this Internet site: [http://le.utah.gov/~code/TITLE76/htm/76\\_06\\_010700.htm](http://le.utah.gov/~code/TITLE76/htm/76_06_010700.htm)).

From September 1, 2008 to September 1, 2009 the Corpus Christi Independent School District in Texas cleaned up 689 cases of graffiti (Cavazos, 2009). The district spent around \$107,900 including the 2 full time workers and supplies to clean up the graffiti (Cavazos, 2009). The previous years show the pattern of how expensive graffiti can be in the schools. In the 2004-2005 school year they had 656 instances and paid \$115,350.52 in clean up. In the 2005-2006 school year they had 827 instances and paid \$144,728.65 in clean up. In 2006-2007 they had 919 instances and paid \$152,276.96 in clean up. In 2007-2008 they had 971 instances and paid \$153,054.23 in clean up (Cavazos, 2009). Cavazos' study demonstrates how costly graffiti can be for schools to clean up. In Utah, school districts do not have large budgets for their schools. Many would rather this money be spent on school resources instead of graffiti cleanup. Preventative measures may help decrease the amount of money spent on graffiti cleanup.

In Utah the cost of vandalism cleanup, which includes graffiti, ranged from \$3,000 per year to \$210,000 per year (White, 2001). A single school in Salt Lake City Utah called Glendale Junior High spent between \$8,000 to \$10,000 on cleaning up vandalism and replacing items that were vandalized two consecutive years (White, 2001). It was estimated that the school year after security cameras had been installed the school would spend less than \$1,000 per year on clean up. Salt Lake City School District spent \$180,000 in the school years of 1996-97 and 1997-98 cleaning up vandalism and replacing items that were vandalized. Cameras were installed shortly after those school years and the dollar amount for cleaning up vandalism decreased to \$117,000. Five years prior to the article written in 2001, Granite School District spent \$210,000 annually cleaning up vandalized areas. Salt Lake City School District and Jordan School District in Utah

were both willing to spend money to upgrade their digital camera systems in schools (White, 2001). Murray School District and Weber School District, which are near the three prior discussed school districts in Utah did not spend as much on vandalism clean up. Murray School District spent around \$3,000 per year and Weber School District spent around \$25,000 per year (White, 2001).

### **Interventions to Discourage Graffiti**

There are many different theories suggesting how to stop graffiti and gang behaviors. The National Institute of Justice article stated that it is important to find reasons for *not* joining a gang and then sharing these with the community (Huff, 1998). Possibly knowing ways to dissuade young people from joining a gang would be helpful in reducing gang recruitment of new members (Huff, 1998). Many young people reported no physical harm for not joining a gang, while others reported receiving physical harm, even to the point of life threatening injury for joining a gang (Huff, 1998). The initiation process with gangs is typically violent and the person receiving the beating must undergo it without argument (Ruble & Turner, 2000).

Another way to help prevent a young person from joining a gang is for the person to feel like a part of the community, which may sound like an easy, but can be a very complex endeavor. Adolescence is a phase that involves change in both physical development and societal expectations (Vigil, 1998). During the adolescent phase, individuals are developing their identity and sense of self. They feel motivated to become a part of something. If the adolescent is involved with the family, school, peer, or community then he or she may not have to look for a gang for inclusion (Hill, Howel, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999).

There are various opinions as to what is the best way to prevent and discourage graffiti. According to Radin (2005), reducing the visibility of graffiti helps decrease future incidents of



graffiti. When graffiti is displayed in public areas it tends to draw attention, increasing the likelihood of others displaying graffiti there as well. When there is no graffiti on the surface, the desire for people to put graffiti on that surface tends to decrease. Security cameras can help decrease instances of graffiti because it increases the chances of the person getting caught and bearing the financial burden of removing the graffiti (Radin, 2005). Another prevention for graffiti is putting plants around the building since there will be no visible wall to put it on (Radin, 2005; Richmond California Police Department, n.d.). Graffiti removal can be a difficult process. To help this process, commercial waxes have been developed. The wax allows one to rinse water over the graffiti for it to come off easily. Some schools prefer to simply paint over the graffiti. If this is a school's choice, it is important to paint over the graffiti in the shape of a square (Radin, 2005). Painting in a square instead of over the shape of the design makes it more uniform, removing the attention the creator receives for his or her graffiti. It looks more like a spot that needed a touch-up rather than an attempt to cover up the graffiti (Radin, 2005).

According to the Prevention First: Graffiti Prevention group (Graffiti Hurts, 2013), as well as Ashton and Mirakian (2001), one of the best ways to prevent graffiti is to keep the area clean and neat. The area could be a school, a neighborhood, or the whole city. According to data from 1,500 sites in Los Angeles County from 1990-1991 removing graffiti within 24 to 48 hours and it helps with nearly zero rates of recurrence (Graffiti Hurts, 2013; Richmond California Police Department, n.d.). Encouraging people to report graffiti incidences is another way to help decrease its prevalence. When graffiti is reported quickly it can be taken down sooner. Schools should have an established outlet for students to safely report graffiti. To help those who clean up graffiti, there are graffiti resistant materials in paint that help. The resistant material allows the graffiti to wipe off with water. The city of Tuscon, Arizona requires this

special paint for all of their new buildings to decrease the time and money it takes to remove graffiti (Graffiti Hurts, 2013; Prevention First: Graffiti Prevention, n.d.).

Another preventative measure to decrease the prevalence of gang activity in schools is requiring students to wear school uniforms. School uniforms can have a positive impact on decreasing the problems associated with gang activity, crime, and violence in schools. However, there are many factors that influence the success or failure of school uniforms (Wade & Stafford, 2003). Gangs have specific colors that are used to represent their gang and gang members like to wear those colors. When students of two different gangs wear their colors in the schools, it brings in the school the hate these gangs have toward each other as well as violence (Ryan & Ryan, 1998). Gang members use clothing to communicate with each other and a uniform would cut off this communication during school (Ryan & Ryan, 1998). The problems brought in by gangs makes the school less safe and more difficult to learn in. Wearing uniforms may decrease this problem since all the students would be wearing the same style of clothes as well as the same colors.

President Bill Clinton spoke about the influence of school uniforms in his 1996 State of the Union Speech. He said, "I challenge all schools to teach character education: good values and good citizenship. And if that means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then public schools should be able to require school uniforms" (Ryan & Ryan, 1998, para. 1). President Clinton's speech was influenced by statistics that came out of a mandatory uniform policy in Long Beach, CA (Wade & Stafford, 2003). This school had a decrease in fighting, assault and battery, sex offenses, robbery, suspensions, and vandalism. The highest reduction were in sex offenses (by 74%), then robbery (by 66%), then fighting (by 50%), followed by assault and battery (by 34%), suspensions (by 32%) and finally vandalism (by 18%)

(Wade & Stafford, 2003). These behaviors are consistent with gang behaviors. If uniforms are capable of decreasing these behaviors, they could help decrease the gang influence in a school environment including rates of graffiti.

### **School Responses to Graffiti**

Schools tend to respond differently to graffiti. Some responses are serious while others are lighthearted. Newark Memorial High School in California increased its police force when threat of a mass killing to happen in the school year was reported via graffiti (Megino, 2012). It was a necessary precaution to protect students and faculty. School members knew there was a chance that it was not a serious threat, but they felt the need to spend more money to bring in police. This one piece of graffiti cost the school a lot of money and negatively impacted the atmosphere in the school. Avon High School had a similar response and needed a police officer added to their school after vandalism that threatened the staff and school property (Sawyer, 2013). Once again, the safety of those in the school was threatened so the school felt the need to increase the amount of police to increase protection.

In a less serious case of graffiti, one teacher responded by mocking it. The results were posted on a website called "tumblr." One picture posted of graffiti said "420 erry Day." The teacher responded with what looks like a plaque in an art museum describing the graffiti as if it were a piece in the Louvre (Luippold, 2013). In this case no lives were threatened, so the teacher felt there was no need to involve police.

Neighbors of a middle school found vulgar graffiti about the school nurse and principal on the school and reported it to police. There was somewhere between 30-50 graffiti tags. The school responded by having a crew of custodians remove all the graffiti (Seavert, 2013). This

cost the school a lot of time and money, as custodians were not be able to do their daily work while occupied with cleaning the graffiti impacting the cleanliness of the school.

Some schools respond to graffiti by using rewards as a way to encourage finding the culprit. A school in Agoura Hills, California offered an award after racist graffiti targeting African-American students was found. The first incident was a hate message, but the second instance was a so-called hit list found in the restroom. The list included specific students as targets (KTLA 5 Web Staff, 2013), which made it even more important for the school to find the maker.

One of the many problems that are faced while dealing with graffiti is fame-seekers. There are those who are most likely creating graffiti for name recognition, fame, or attention. To avoid this, police will not discuss the names of those who create graffiti (Scott, 1989). They believe that not discussing names will show potential offenders that creating graffiti is not a way to become famous.

### **School Resource Officers**

School Resource Officers (SROs) are a bridge between the police force and the schools (Finn, 2006). An SRO is a law enforcement officer hired by the local police department or an agency that collaborates with schools. The SRO is sworn into authority and is expected to work policing the community (Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1998). The job of the Officer depends on the location (Travis, 1999). Funding is a key factor in determining the expectations of the SRO (Finn, 2006). The SROs benefit the school and the police by reducing patrol officer's workload, improving the image of officers among juveniles, creating and maintaining better relationships with the schools, and enhancing the agency's reputation in the community (Finn, 2006).

SROs are problem solvers, liaisons to community resources, educators, safety experts, and law enforcers (Travis, 1999) as well as mentors for students. School districts use SROs to improve safety in the schools since it is important for schools to keep students and faculty safe (Finn, 2006). They deal with violence and crime (Finn, 2006). Since graffiti is a crime, it can be part of an SRO's duty to deal with graffiti-related problems. If the SRO deals with graffiti problems in the school, then he or she would be the person knowledgeable of preventative measures to deter graffiti and disciplinary measures to address incidents of graffiti.

### **Summary**

How individuals perceive and respond to graffiti is highly dependent on the type of graffiti and the context in which the graffiti is displayed. For example, graffiti may be artistically displayed with no underlying message or graffiti may be associated with gang culture and create fear and dissention within the community. When graffiti associated with gang culture enters schools, students and staff report a negative impact on school atmosphere (Staiger, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Additional graffiti can be very problematic and costly to schools. Each school has their own responses to graffiti. SROs commonly deal with crime perpetrated in schools, which includes graffiti. The SRO's perceptions may help communities to better understand the problem in their local school, how this problem is being addressed, and what interventions may deter future graffiti incidents.

### **Proposed Questions to Include in Interviews**

Regarding Utah SRO's perceptions of in-school graffiti, the following questions formed the basis for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with SROs. These questions were developed in order to investigate the perceptions of SROs serving in urban-Utah secondary

schools. Basically questions were associated with graffiti cleanup, the discipline process for those who participated in graffiti activities, and the impact graffiti has on the school.

1. What type of graffiti is the most common in the identified schools?
2. What was the purpose of or what was communicated by the school's graffiti?
3. What (if any) disciplinary measures are applied when those responsible for graffiti are identified?
4. What measures or responses to graffiti (if any) are perceived as effective in preventing future incidents of graffiti?
5. What preventative strategies (if any) are currently used to prevent future incidents of graffiti?
6. What additional preventive strategies, beyond those currently implemented, might be helpful in preventing future incidents of graffiti?
7. In what ways does gang graffiti differ from other forms of graffiti?

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## APPENDIX B: Informed Consent to be a Research Participant

### Title of Research:

In School Graffiti: School Resource Officers' Perceptions of Factors Related to Graffiti and Prevention Efforts

### Introduction

My name is Bobbi Sue Van Leuven. I am a graduate student in School Psychology at Brigham Young University. I am conducting a study about School Resource Officers' perceptions of in school graffiti. I am requesting your participation because you fit the criteria for my study. This study will help identify prevention and intervention efforts to more effectively address in school graffiti.

### Procedures

I would like to conduct a one-on-one interview with you in a private room within your school. I will audio record the interview to understand your perspective of graffiti in your school(s). The interview survey will consist of 14 questions and it will take approximately one hour of your time. During the interview process, should you feel uncomfortable being recorded the device will be stopped. Once the analysis is complete, a final summary will be sent to you.

### Risks/Discomforts

You may feel uncomfortable if your answers reflect the school, students, or faculty in a negative light. The interview questions do not probe for specific details about your experiences and you are able to skip or discontinue answering any question you desire. Another discomfort may come from the interview being audio-recorded. You may feel uncomfortable discussing certain situations or cases while being recorded. In those cases the recording device will be turned off. You may feel uncomfortable discussing certain cases due to legal problems. Once again, you will not be probed for specific details and you may skip or discontinue questions.

### Confidentiality

The summarized results of this study will be included in the researcher's thesis, which will be available to the general public, and it will also be submitted to an academic journal for publication. Your specific information, such as name, school, and city will not be used for either the thesis or the publication. In order to maintain your confidentiality you and your school will be given pseudo names. All the data collected will be kept in a locked safe and only the primary investigator and supervising faculty member (Melissa A Heath, PhD) who are directly involved will have access to the data. Once the research and associated thesis are completed—after the information from the audiotapes have been transcribed (with personally identifying information changed)—the audiotapes will be destroyed.

### Benefits

We don't anticipate any direct benefits to you from participation in this study. However, your school/s may benefit from other schools' ideas regarding prevention and intervention efforts.

Compensation

Participants who complete the interview will receive a \$15 generic gift card (money will be placed on a Visa credit card). This gift card will be given to you after you have completed the interview.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without negative consequences.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions regarding the research you can contact me, Bobbi Sue Van Leuven, at (801)-403-4145, [bobbisuepadro@gmail.com](mailto:bobbisuepadro@gmail.com) or the supervisor of this project, Melissa Heath, at (801)-422-1235, [melissa\\_allen@byu.edu](mailto:melissa_allen@byu.edu).

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the BYU IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461, A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

**Note: By signing below, you are telling the researcher “Yes,” you want to participate in this study.**

**Please keep one copy of this form for your records.**

Your Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: Guiding Questions

1. Which types of graffiti have you seen in your school? (Gang; Latrinalia; Tagging; Doodling; Bullying; Sexual harassment; Pieces; Other)
2. Where are graffiti most commonly found in your schools? (Bathrooms, classrooms, desks, hallways, specific classrooms, etc.)
3. Where are graffiti least commonly found in your schools? (Bathrooms, classrooms, desks, hallways, specific classrooms, etc.)
4. From your perspective, what do you believe are factors influencing the amount and types of graffiti in your school? (Gangs/boredom/bullying)
5. Describe the impact of graffiti on your school:
  - a. School atmosphere
  - b. Student's academic success
  - c. Student's emotional well being
  - d. Student's social lives in school
6. Do you have gangs in your school?  
If so....
  - a. Which gangs are found in your school?
  - b. How many students are involved with the gangs?
  - c. Are there a lot of gang families in the area?
  - d. Do these gangs wear specific colors, designated as their colors?
  - e. If so, how do these colors affect your school?
  - f. Do you worry about gang recruiting in school? Why or why not?
7. Do you have interventions specifically designated to address situations involving graffiti in your school?
  - a. When graffiti is found on walls, what is your school's policy to address this situation?
  - b. When graffiti is found on a student's school work, what is your school's policy to address this situation?
  - c. When a student is caught creating graffiti, what is your school's policy to address this situation?
8. Is there a pattern of decreasing or escalating rates of graffiti in your school?
  - a. Has there been an increase or decrease over the years?
  - b. Is there more graffiti at the beginning of the school year compared to the end of the school year?
9. In your school, do you have specific protocol for students to report situations involving graffiti?
  - a. Is there a specific adult the students are supposed to report graffiti to?
  - b. Do students report graffiti to the Resource Officer, teachers, or both?
  - c. Do the student's get a reward for reporting graffiti?
10. Are there discussions in the school with students about graffiti? If so, describe these discussions and the context for these discussions. (Are these discussions with individuals, small group, classroom, or school-wide?)
11. How is graffiti cleaned up? (Who cleans up the graffiti and how is it cleaned up?)
12. Describe the impact of your school's efforts in dealing with graffiti?
13. How is your school making improvements in controlling and reducing incidents of graffiti?
14. What additional preventive strategies, beyond those currently implemented, might be helpful in preventing future incidents of graffiti?



## APPENDIX D: Summary of Interviews

### Participant 1

Participant 1 was a Caucasian male in the age range of 30 to 35. He had worked in law enforcement for 13 years and spent 5 of those years at this school. School 1 had approximately 1,700 students. The student population consists of White students (63%), Hispanic (24%), Asian (5%), Black (3%), Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (3%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (2%). In School 1's city there are 11.7 % of the residents living below the poverty line compared to the state rate of 12.7 % living below the poverty line.

**Graffiti in school.** Gang members and non-gang members created graffiti in the schools and each group created graffiti for different reasons. SRO 1 only becomes involved with graffiti in School 1 when it is gang related, which is the majority of graffiti at this school. At this school, gang graffiti comes in various forms, including doodling. The common factor between different types of graffiti is defacing property, which is typically someone else's property. Graffiti is created through different forms such as ink-based graffiti or etched into surfaces. Gang related graffiti may influence rival gang members to cross out the original graffiti to show disrespect and post their gang name above it. This often leads to the creation of more graffiti.

- We have an opportunity to see just about everything because we have tagging, which is not necessarily gang related. Kids will just have a tag that they'll throw up, you know a quick throw up that they'll do. But we also have gang related graffiti. If you look up the legal definition of graffiti it's basically defacing any type of property so you'll also see, you know, "Billy Loves Suzy" or whatever on the desk...the only time that we would really get involved would be if it's gang related. If they're just drawing little sunflowers or something like that, no.

- But a lot of times with graffiti like I said they'll cross out, they'll disrespect, and of course that creates tension amongst your students. And so the type of kid that's going to be throwing up that type of graffiti you know is obviously, probably going to be gang related or gang involved or have cousins that are gangsters and then that's how the whole cross out, the disrespect, the retag, you know all that stuff and it just gets bigger and bigger...then you have all these you know, disrespectful things said back and forth to each other.

**Purpose of graffiti.** The majority of graffiti found at School 1 is gang related. SRO 1 reported that 99% of the graffiti he deals with is either going to be gang related or a tagger creating a quick tag or moniker. Although there are other types of graffiti he reported that he has not seen graffiti used to bully other students.

- The bulk of what we get is, especially recently, has been gang related. I would say 99% of the graffiti I'm actually dealing with is going to be gang related or if they're just a tagger and they're just throwing up a quick tag, throwing up their moniker or something like that.

School Resource Officer 1 named many of the cultural gangs in the school, however, due to confidentiality the specific gang names will not be provided. According to SRO 1, the majority of the gangs in his school are cultural gangs. The students creating this graffiti may be in a gang or be affiliated to a gang through a family member. He gave an example of this process and the effects of creating gang graffiti using the gang names for crips and bloods, since they are very common gangs. Since they are not unique to his city these gang names have been provided. It can potentially be hostile because each gang knows the other gangs. There is no ambiguity of who created the graffiti, which could create problems in and out of the school.

When the graffiti is immediately cleaned up, the culture surrounding graffiti is reduced and its visible presence and lure are subdued. There are some students raised in a culture where there is value to their graffiti. To these students it can be difficult to see graffiti and not cross it out or retag it. If they are part of the initial tagging group they may add to it.

- Then you have the 1% or maybe less than 1% that actively are engaged in tagging or graffiti or anything gang related where you would get that type of behavior...Let's take the two most infamous gangs, crips and bloods, red and blue. If somebody tags in a hallway, "crips something" in blue, you know and they're (the bloods) like "ah no no no, this is our school" so then they cross that out and write you know "crip killer" you know "blood something something said" right? And that keeps going, well that can potentially lead to a hostile, 'cause they know who each other are. There's no, there's no "I wonder who wrote that" right? So it could potentially lead to a "well whose school is this gonna be?"
- You know, to some kids it means something. You know, it has, has value to it. So and to those kids that, that are raised in that culture or are participating in that culture it would mean something and may be more difficult for them to work with or deal with without crossing out and retagging or if they're part of the same set they would tag additionally to it.

He joked that the drama room, choir room, band room, and orchestra rooms had the highest rates of graffiti, and then admitted that the bathroom is an area that has much graffiti. There were incidents reported of graffiti in classrooms on the desks and outside the school on the building exterior. Cameras can be used to monitor school grounds and find those who create

graffiti there. There are cameras in many areas of the school, except the bathrooms. This influences the student's to create graffiti in the bathroom.

- The bulk of it was in the bathrooms. So I think the biggest reason is, you know obviously you don't have cameras in the bathroom and so the kids would go in there and they'd start tagging up stuff on the bathroom stalls or the walls or anything like that.
- The drama room, choir, band, orchestra, no just kidding. You know I think everywhere, except for the bathrooms. I don't know why the bathrooms are such a high profile area, other than they think that they're not going to get caught there. I'm trying to think, I've seen it on a couple of desks inside of classrooms, obviously the bathroom stalls, the bathroom walls, sometimes you'll see it outside of your building on the exterior stuff like that so it just kinda depends.

**Finding the graffiti's creator and determining the discipline process.** School Resource Officer 1 gave an example of the discipline process from a recent experience. New graffiti was popping up at school, mostly in the bathroom. He was able to connect a new student to the graffiti because of the process the school uses of collecting evidence and using camera footage. First, school personnel collected photos of the graffiti the student continued to put on the bathroom walls. SRO 1 has a camera in his desk. If he is at the school the janitor will find him. If he is not at the school then this camera can be used by any school personnel to provide SRO 1 with a picture of the graffiti.

- Our intervention is instantly, if the janitors find it they call me, if for some reason I am not here, they know where the camera is in my drawer. I just have them take as many pictures of it as they want...All different angles, flash on, flash off, whatever makes you

happy. If you take a bunch of pictures I'll look at them when I get back if for some reason I'm not here.

School 1 has adults continuously monitoring the bathroom because it is the only area in the school where they cannot put up cameras. However, there are cameras outside of the bathroom, which can monitor the students going in and coming out. When graffiti is found in the bathroom SRO 1 will look at a pattern of student's comings and goings between the time period when the bathroom was last seen without graffiti and when the graffiti was found. This footage helps SRO 1 narrow down his suspect list. Once SRO 1 has a list he can look through the student's book bag and locker to see if there is similar graffiti in those areas. SRO 1 reported it is typical for the student to have graffiti on the book bag, in the book bag, on notebooks or other items that may be in the book bag.

- I try to find out who it is. If it's outside of a bathroom, obviously I don't have cameras inside the bathrooms, but I have cameras on the outside. Watching people going in and out. Lots of times I'll have janitors be like "well, I just cleaned the bathroom and it was like 10:30 and we found this at 1" so I'll watch the cameras from 10:30 to 1. How I caught this kid was exactly like that. I watched the cameras between 10:30 and 1 on all these days. Oh and there's only 1 boy and it's the same boy so that's kinda how I develop a suspect. (I) instantly try to get involved, try to develop a suspect, once I have a suspect I am bound as to what I can do for search and seizure.

Although creating graffiti is breaking a school rule, SRO 1 will only get involved when graffiti is gang related; SRO 1 will only get involved in a situation if there is a violation of a law. He does not become involved in situations such as wearing gang clothing because it is only a violation of school policy. SRO 1 reported that he works with a small portion of the student

body who have engaged in this type of illegal behavior. This small portion of approximately 10% of his students takes up around 90% of his time.

- The only time that we would really get involved would be if it's gang related.

Our policy is to clean it up as quickly as you possibly can. I hadn't had any, all of last year I didn't have one incident and then this year we finally had some. The bulk of it was in the bathrooms.

- It's illegal to engage in the behavior that gangsters engage in. You can associate yourself with whoever you want. So here in school the only time I would get involved is if it's gang related. Gang clothing, violation of dress code. Not necessarily a violation of state law, or federal law, but it's a violation of school policy, right? Bandana, same things. It's not illegal to have a bandana, but it's a violation of school dress code, school dress policy, right? It's our job to make sure that the campus feels safe and secure.

If there is a new spike in activity, taking photos allows SRO 1 to document the incidences. If there is graffiti on an assignment, most teachers will not accept it. The teacher may give the assignment to the SRO. This may help the SRO 1 determine who is creating graffiti on other school surfaces like walls and desks, by comparing the graffiti. Reading graffiti is like reading the newspaper, it can tell the SRO about what is happening as well as which people are creating it.

After SRO 1 obtains a picture of the graffiti he sends it to the local police department to collaborate in order to determine if there is similar graffiti in the community. This collaboration may help the SRO 1 narrow down a suspect list. SRO 1 explained that the school is a direct representation of the area it is in. Graffiti in the city will influence graffiti in the school.

School Resource Officer 1 reported that at School 1 the school personnel have different case law and different policy than the SRO. School personnel are allowed to search students before SRO 1. He needs a legal reason to search before he can search a student compared to school personnel who need the student to only break school policy. When SRO 1 or school personnel find items in the back pack that are the same or similar graffiti or tagging found around the school the student's parents become involved. If the student is on probation their probation officer is contacted. The combination of parents, school personnel and SRO 1 try to change the student's behavior and have an intervention in the student's life. In the opinion of SRO1, most of the time the students do not want the intervention.

School Resource Officer 1 used an analogy of a two-headed dragon to explain the legal side and school side of disciplining a student at school. The two headed dragon means the student can get in trouble twice. The legal side can charge the student criminally. The school side can suspend the student, give safe-school referrals, or other options. A safe-school referral at School 1 means the student goes in front of a board of various school personnel who are assigned to the safe school committee. They look at all the information given to them such as the police report, graffiti, location, cost of graffiti removal, was the student found guilty or not guilty in court, did the student plead innocent or guilty in court, what's the student's side of the story, etc. SRO 1 reported that the safe school referral process is very different from the legal process. The committee is interested in what the student has to say. They also have the option to send the student to a different high school or an online school. They may suspend the student as well.

- You try to find out who it is. We can do one of a number of things. If we are going to charge them one I can charge them criminally. Any time you get in trouble in school, I

use the analogy that it's like a dragon with two heads. You have the legal side like me. All I'm going to do is criminal law, right? But, excuse me, then you have the administrative side, suspensions, safe school referrals, whatever else. The school handles that. I don't do suspensions, I don't do safe school referrals. So technically at school you can get in trouble twice. Does that make sense? You can be charged plus you're going to get suspended and be given a safe school referral. And so that's typically what we do. A safe school referral means they go in front of a board, a panel of principals and teachers and whoever is assigned to the safe school community. They will take a look at the police report, they will look at the graffiti, they will look where was it, was there a dollar amount to get it cleaned up? Was the kid found guilty or not guilty? Are they going to plead guilty or not guilty if they haven't been to court yet? Um, what's their side of the story? Because it's not a criminal act. Safe school referral's not a criminal act, so they're not necessarily entitled to their 5<sup>th</sup> amendment right. If they say "tell us your side bud. Why would you do this to our school?"

When the student gets charged criminally they are charged with criminal mischief for damaging someone's property. The courts determine how much the student has to pay, which is based on the dollar amount it cost to repair or replace what had graffiti on it. Each act of graffiti is different based on location, size, and product used to create graffiti. Cleaning the graffiti may be something simple that the janitor can clean up or it can be something more difficult that the district needs to hire someone to pressure wash it off. The janitors have chemicals used to wash graffiti off desks and other surfaces.

Even if the graffiti is simple to wash off, the student is punished because they are wasting the janitor's time and the school's money cleaning it up. SRO 1 has zero tolerance for graffiti.



When the student who created the graffiti is caught, the student is charged. Even if the justice system is not hard enough on the students, SRO 1 wanted the students to go to court and explain to a judge why they did what they did.

- And if they get caught of course we charge them with criminal mischief for damaging somebodies property. Then they have to pay depending on the dollar amount it would cost to repair that or replace that, or to scrub it off or whatever else. Yeah, zero tolerance. If you get caught you are going to get charged, period. There's no we're gonna give you a warning this time. There's nothing like that. If I have probable cause to charge you then I will.
- There's no ands ifs or buts about it. I know that juvenile court is rainbow hugs and butterfly kisses for the kids that go over there, but you have to go tell a judge why you defaced public property at the school.

**Effective ways to prevent graffiti.** In the opinion of SRO 1, the biggest preventative strategy in regard to graffiti removal is to remove the graffiti as quickly as possible. In order to remove graffiti immediately it needs to be reported and pictures need to be taken for documentation. The reason for removing the graffiti quickly, especially in the case of gang related graffiti, is that more people may be add to it. With gang related graffiti a different gang may come in, cross out the graffiti and tag over the top of it. Then the same process can happen to the second tag and the disrespect toward these students will continue. The need to curb the disrespect and involvement is why there is the policy to clean it up as quickly as possible. When they clean up the graffiti quickly the gang culture is not around the school anymore, which helps the students feel safe.

- So our policy is to clean it up as quickly as you possibly can. I hadn't had any, all of last year I didn't have one incident and then this year we finally had some. The bulk of it was in the bathrooms.
- So you want it taken down as quickly as you can. And the reason is, especially if it's gang related, is somebody from a different hood or different set will come in, cross that out, and tag over the top of it, and then somebody else will come cross theirs out, tag over the top of it so next thing you know it's growing like a tree.

Another strategy SRO 1 uses is to make himself approachable to students. His job is safety and security in School 1 and he explained that when the students report that the school does not feel safe then he feels that he is not doing his job. After receiving a report that the school feels unsafe he questions why the students do not feel safe and what is happening at the school to influence this. SRO 1 gives his cell phone number to every student and tells the students to call anytime day or night. SRO 1 gives his number out to the students who attend a class he teaches. He also gives his phone number out to parents at parent orientation. Because he gave out his phone number he has received anonymous texts about what is happening in the school. He becomes more approachable and accessible to his students when they need him, even when reporting graffiti.

- I make myself very approachable. I give every kid in my school my cell phone number. They can call me anytime day or night. I also teach a class here, I give it to all my kids. I teach a parent's orientation night I give it to all the parents. I am not afraid to give people my cell phone number. And because I do that a lot of times I'll get anonymous texts because obviously they may have my number, but I don't have theirs.

There are cameras everywhere in the school, except the bathrooms, which are a high target area for graffiti. Having these cameras may decrease the amount of graffiti in the school. At School 1 students are not rewarded for reporting graffiti to school personnel. There have been rewards in the past for turning in students who have created the graffiti, but this no longer happens. Students have discussions about graffiti with school personnel if they have been caught creating graffiti. SRO 1 reported that he has a zero tolerance for graffiti in his school. If the student is caught, the student is charged. Graffiti is also not allowed on backpacks. A custodian at this school told the SRO 1 that since SRO 1 has been at that school the rates of graffiti have decreased.

- I don't know why the bathrooms are such a high profile area, other than they think that they're not going to get caught there. I'm trying to think, I've seen it on a couple of desks inside of classrooms, obviously the bathroom stalls, the bathroom walls, sometimes you'll see it outside of your building on the exterior um stuff like that so it just kinda depends.
- So I think the biggest reason is, you know obviously you don't have cameras in the bathroom and so the kids would go in there and they'd start tagging up stuff on the bathroom stalls or the walls or anything like that.

**Other possible options.** Each participating SRO was asked, "What else might be helpful?" SRO 1 could not think of anything that could be more helpful. According to the janitor at his school, what is currently implemented has decreased the rates of graffiti in the school. SRO 1 believes this may be influenced by his zero tolerance for this.

- After graduation, he had actually told me he said, “Since you’ve been here, our graffiti incidents have gone down so much.” And I thought that is so cool. Thank you for saying that, but I don’t know if I did anything on purpose.
- I don’t know what I have done different, I don’t know. I don’t know what impacted I had other than I have zero tolerance for it. If I catch you, I’m going to charge you. There’s no ands ifs or buts about it. I know that juvenile court is rainbow hugs and butterfly kisses for the kids that go over there, but you have to go tell a judge why you defaced public property at the school.

**Gang graffiti and gang behavior.** Not all graffiti is gang related such as tagging.

Doodling can be gang-related graffiti depending on what the actual graffiti is. SRO 1 will only become involved with graffiti related problems if the graffiti is considered to be gang related.

SRO 1 named gangs in his area, however, due to confidentiality the names will not be put in this paper.

- The only time that we would really get involved would be if it’s gang related. If they’re just drawing little sunflowers or something like that, no, no. But if they’re throwing up, you know, (omitted gang name) and stuff like that, yeah we’d get involved.

There are instances when a rival gang member will cross out the gang name and graffiti their name above the original. Adding to graffiti will likely happen repeatedly. This is a form of disrespect toward rival gangs. The majority of the graffiti (estimated 99 % by SRO 1) at the school is gang related. This form of rivalry can also be a territory problem. It starts by a gang member creating graffiti of their gang name on the school wall then a member of a rival gang notices it. The rival member thinks something like “no, this is my school” then crosses out the original piece. The rival member then creates a new piece that represents his gang to mark

territory at the school. The tensions between these gangs rise with this type of graffiti, which can cause problems in the school. As stated earlier, being in a gang is not illegal, but the typical behaviors of gang members are often illegal.

- I would say 99 % of the graffiti I'm actually dealing with is going to be gang related or if they're just a tagger and they're just throwing up a quick tag, throwing up their moniker or something like that.
- But a lot of times with graffiti like I said they'll, they'll cross out, they'll disrespect, and of course that creates tension amongst your students.

Participant 1 showed the interviewer pictures of graffiti that he recently had acquired. With permission from the student's parents he was allowed to show the interviewer the graffiti, but she was not allowed to take the pictures or be shown personal information. SRO 1 described what was happening in the graffiti and explained what the graffiti meant to the student. What may seem like a simple letter or number may have a direct link to the gang. The student who created this graffiti had a number on his notebook, which represented a letter in the alphabet that was the first letter of his nationality. These clues, SRO 1 called them help narrow down the suspect list.

- I've got permission from this kids parents so this is what I was having pop up on, and let me make sure this kids name isn't on here, I don't think it is. This is what I was having pop up on all of my bathroom stalls, bathroom walls, bathroom mirrors, all this other stuff. So I had 2 different bathrooms, far away and one in the middle. Luckily I have a camera on the outside. So all I did was watch and see who was coming and going the first time. What kids were even in the area and it happened during lunch so there was a lot of kids coming and going. So I watched the second video after it was tagged again

and it was exactly the same tagging. Same style, same everything So, I went and watched that camera. Exact same time frame. It was during lunch except one kid so once again, in my line of work we call that a clue. Right? So I called the kid down, he denied, denied, denied. This was what was inside of his book bag. So a lot of times, you will get a lot of tagging on their book bags, sometimes on their assignments but the teachers will not take an assignment if it has tagging on it. So, it's not, they won't take it. They'll make you redo the assignment.

School Resource Officers may get involved with students who are affiliated with gangs or gang members. This may influence students to not draw attention to themselves. Most students prefer to not have their locker, car, or friends searched. They decrease bringing attention to themselves by wearing a small amount of gang related clothing compared to the past when much of what they were wearing was gang related. They wear only a red shirt instead of a red shirt, pants, shoes, hat, and bandana.

- Do we sometimes have to get after them? Yes. But most of our gang kids know that we will get after them and they don't want the attention, right?
- So they try not to draw attention to themselves...So, a lot of times they wont or if they do they'll wear like a red shirt not red shirt, red pants, red shoes.

The type of gang graffiti in the school is a representation of society and the city where the school resides. There is a difference between the number of officers in schools and in the city. The school may have one SRO compared to the many officers on duty in the city plus detectives and other agencies working for the city. The city has more personnel to deal with these situations. Because graffiti in the city is often similar to that seen in schools, the methods used by city officers and agencies may be helpful to SROs when establishing methods for dealing

with graffiti in schools. Additionally, collaboration between SRO and city police officers allows for the sharing of graffiti documentation. By sharing photos of graffiti found in the school the SRO maybe able to determine if the graffiti is also found in the city.

- Schools are interesting because schools are a direct representation of society. What's going on out in town is going on in your school. There, there's nothing different, other than your school has one officer. Sometimes if they're lucky they get a part-time guy maybe one or two days a week, right? Maybe? But for the most part they get one full time officer and that's not all schools, that's only some schools. And so, but out in town we have however many officers are on patrol plus if they need help they can call the, the detectives that are on duty, other agencies can come over to help. So at the high schools, what's going on here, or what's going on in town is going on here. So if you have a gang related tagging graffiti deal going on, out in town, what's going to happen at your school? The exact same thing! It's, it's, it's they're exactly the same. There's no difference. Out in town, what's going to happen at your school? The exact same thing! It's, it's, it's they're exactly the same. There's no difference.

According to SRO 1, the gangs in Utah consider school to be a neutral ground. He suggested that this may reflect the states' values of the importance of education. It is important that schools have policies such as dress codes to continue to influence the school as a neutral territory. The students may wear some clothing representing their gang at school, but it is likely to be a smaller amount to avoid being searched in violation of dress code.

- Utah's gang culture is very unique compared to the rest of the United States. And that, I'm not gonna say blanket and say all, but most gangs, consider school to be a neutral place. You know most gangs would also say that you should get an education, versus in

other state's that's not the case. And so Utah's gang culture is very unique compared to the rest of the United States. So here kids are still encouraged to go to school, but to go to school you are not allowed to wear blue on blue on blue or red on red on red, does that make sense? You have to break that up. You're not allowed to have graffiti on your backpack. You know you're not allowed to have those things 'cause it's a violation of dress code. So the schools will actually make you change or send you home. Or whatever else. So, do they wear colors? Yes. Um, I've caught a couple of kids here with rags, you know a bandana, um, and obviously we instantly take that because we don't condone that culture here. We don't do that here. Our school is neutral. And so once that message has been sent you know, if, if you can curve the gang related behavior, if they're, if they're going to be in a gang it's not illegal to be in a gang,

## **Participant 2**

Participant 2 is a Caucasian male. His age is between 45 and 50. He had been in law enforcement for 23 years. He has worked in this school for 1 year and in the school systems for 9 years. This school has approximately 1,500 students. The student population is predominately White (64%), Hispanic (27%), Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (3%), Asian (2%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1%). The city population has 15.4 % living below the poverty line compared to the 12.7 % of the state living below the poverty line.

**Graffiti in school.** School 2 has little graffiti. In the previous school year of the interview there were only two incidences of gang graffiti. SRO 2 reported that these were found in the hallway and bathroom. Graffiti can be found at School 2 in student's notebooks and backpacks. The least likely place to find graffiti at School 2 is the classrooms.



- This year I've been at (omitted high school name) so I've been out in schools for quite a while, but this is, last year at (omitted high school name) we saw a little (omitted gang name) graffiti, but that's it. I mean, maybe 2 incidences.
- It was, one was on the brick wall as you're going up some stairs and the other was in a bathroom stall.
- We'll see it on notebooks and on backpacks.

Graffiti can be easily spread, meaning once there is graffiti on a surface more graffiti is likely to appear. Removing graffiti quickly decreases chances of it spreading. If the graffiti is not removed quickly it will likely spread quickly. Graffiti could lead to fights and makes situations worse such as with the example provided earlier with Murdoch High School.

- It's kind of um, infections, I mean if you get some, you don't get it really quick, then it starts to spread, but if you get on it really, really quick, you can usually get it stopped and end really quick. But if not, then you'll have it all over. And then it leads into maybe fights and stuff like that. It could get worse.

**Purpose of graffiti.** Boredom and gang relations are two possibilities provided by SRO 2 of why graffiti is created. Students will typically only doodle when they are bored. In SRO 2's experience at his previous school gang members used graffiti as a way to mark their territory. The students typically create it the most during the beginning of the school year and then again at the end of the school year.

- You have your boredom as you said, sometimes they'll doodle and just stuff like that. But for the graffiti itself it would be the gangs influence it for well, I don't really, like I said, it could be doodling too. It just I wouldn't say a major, cause it's both.

- At my previous school... you would definitely have the beginning of the year they're coming in to mark their territory stuff like that and then usually at the end of the year. That's when you would have your two biggest spurts of both problems.

**Finding the graffiti's creator and determining the discipline process.** The process of finding the creator of graffiti can be a difficult one. SRO 2 reported that finding the creator of the graffiti is the most difficult problem to solve, but also the most important. Finding the creator may deter the person from creating more graffiti in the future. At this school, like that of the SRO 1, there are cameras recording various areas throughout the school. Cameras allow SRO 2 to look over the footage to find the student responsible for creating graffiti. If the student is caught, the student may face suspension. Additionally, the student will likely be charged with vandalism, typically resulting in a Class B Misdemeanor. The charge is determined by the amount of money it cost to remove the graffiti. This processes also enters the students who are caught into the juvenile justice system.

- We use cameras, anything we can. Because if you can catch 'em, then that's the best thing you do, because then they know you're right on top of it and they likely won't do it again. If you can catch them, but that's the hardest thing to do. School you can solve almost anything, because there's eyes, ears, and cameras, but the graffiti's a hard thing to, to solve, that's really the only hard thing to solve.
- They'll suspend 'em... sometimes. Like I said, call home and even charges, now we just don't put up with that. We'll charge it with vandalism and stuff like that.
- You know, um it's usually just, we'll get them for a Class B Misdemeanor, because it's usually not over x amount of dollars to go any higher, but it gets them into the juvenile justice system if they have to.

School Resource Officer 2 will call the parents of the student involved with the graffiti to inform them of the incident. The administration and SRO 2 agree on the importance of being on the same page with the parents when it comes to the determining consequences of the student's actions. The reactions from the parents differ from each other. There are parents completely unaware of what is happening with their child, while there are other parents who are less surprised because they have seen changes in behavior at home. As stated before, it is important to get the parents, administrators and SRO 2 to agree with the consequences given to the students.

- They'll take it. A lot of times what we do, like I said I have a great working relationship with the administration out at (omitted high school name) so a lot of times we'll call home you know? We're on the same page what we're gonna do. Let them know "hey your kids got gang graffiti here, I don't know if" and get the parents involved.
- Sometimes the parents are blind you know and, and, and don't know what's going on sometimes. "Yeah, he is. He's been acting like a jerk." Sometimes they just barely startin' to get recruited into it and they'll say, "ok, yeah he has. His grades are slipping real quick." And stuff like that, so.

**Effective ways to prevent graffiti.** The first step taken after graffiti has been discovered is to notify the custodians. The custodians are responsible for removing graffiti from school surfaces. Removing graffiti typically prevents more graffiti being created in that spot. The school district is called when the graffiti is too much for the custodian to clean up. There is a special cleaning crew used to remove graffiti to assist the individual school in their graffiti removal when the school district is called. After the graffiti has been dealt with SRO 1 looks

over the camera footage in an attempt to discover who created the graffiti. Catching the student after creating graffiti may prevent that student from creating graffiti again.

- The first thing we do is notify the custodians to see if they can get it cleaned off. Like I said, if you can get it cleaned off immediately it usually doesn't continue to go on. If it's something more than they can handle they'll contact the district and the district will send out a cleaning crew to take care of it. And also we use cameras, anything we can. Because if you can catch 'em, then that's the best thing you do, because then they know you're right on top of it and they likely won't do it again.
- The custodians will start. They have some sort of high power cleaner that just, you get it in sharpie a lot. So, and it takes it off.

Photos are taken of the graffiti are taken in case the student continues to create more graffiti. If it is an ongoing problem then an investigation begins. After an investigation they prosecute the student. This past year the school has not had problems with graffiti, but he is not sure what the next year may bring.

- So our dealing with it's just like on an individual basis and like I said a couple of 'em were tagging so they were just cleaned up, but what we would do is we would take a photo of it in case it continues and all of these were really isolated events so, I had you know four pictures of four different things, but we'd take a picture, if it was an ongoing thing then we would investigate it really hard and try and prosecute it and stuff like that, but we haven't even had to try to prosecute or anything.

School Resource Officer 2 reported he has a great rapport with many of the students in his school. He has conversations with his students, including the students involved with gangs. He will approach students and talk to them if he believes they have created graffiti. They may

not confess, but they will know SRO 2 is on to them. He believes that he is lucky, because the students will come down and talk to him to report problems such as graffiti or fighting. The teachers who stand in the hallway and are very approachable. The school administration has an open door policy. Between the teachers and the administrators there is an open door policy for reporting graffiti at School 2. After the student has reported graffiti he or she usually receives a candy bar as a reward. This reward for reporting is not advertised to the students.

- If I know somebody has probably done like it's uh, it's uh (omitted gang name) tagging or something like that, and I'll go up to those kids and I'll start "hey there's" and I'll talk to em that way. They're not gonna admit to anything, but at least they'll know we're watching and stuff like that.
- I just think that we just, like I said we have a really open door policy and we always are out and about, we have teachers in the hall and in the administration where we're very approachable, so they can come up and talk to us and we can be able to you know make sure any concerns or anything like that we can get to, if they have uh graffiti in that.
- I wouldn't know about a reward, but what we usually do is take 'em back and give 'em a candy bar.

If a student at School 2 is found with graffiti on his or her homework or class work the work is taken away from the student and involve the parents.

- They'll take it... I have a great working relationship with the administration out at (omitted high school name) so a lot of times we'll call home you know? We're on the same page what we're gonna do. Let them know "hey your kids got gang graffiti here, I don't know if" and get the parents involved.

At School 2 there are discussions with the students about graffiti. There are also discussions with the individual students or cliques involved with creating graffiti.

- There's not a really big, like an assembly or anything like that, talkin' about it. That we have or anything. But if we know somebody's doing it or it's coming from a specific clique then we'll go there and we'll talk to those people.

**Other possible options.** SRO 2 expressed his opinion that School 2 has good current policies relating to graffiti. One way to improve the current process is to make changes to the penalty process. He would like for the law enforcement to provide a quicker and harsher penalty. The current legal process for graffiti typically takes weeks before the student faces a judge or commissioner. In the time it takes for the student to appear before the judge or commissioner the student might engage in creating more graffiti or committing other criminal activities.

- I think they do, we do a pretty good job where we're at, you know, I don't know maybe if there was more harsh [a harsher] penalty or something and a quicker, swift penalty from law enforcement view from the law enforcement side. Because to me, I really think a juvenile has to have the punishment swift and quick to learn by it and the way the juvenile justice system it usually takes weeks before they go in. To do, to see the judge or the commissioner or whatever it is. And so, I think if it was more swift and quick, the punishment for what they needed to do, it might. Yeah, it might help them, now because they're gonna probably do 10 other things by the time they get to there and then when they see the commissioner in 4-6 weeks it's gonna be old news.

**Gang graffiti and gang behavior.** At School 2 there were around 15 students involved in gangs. According to SRO 2 some of these students are second or third-generation gang

members. Being a generation gang member means the gang member's parents and possibly grandparents were involved in the gangs; being in a gang is part of being in the family. Students involved in gang families are rare, but there have been some at School 2. During the school year there have only been two instances of gang related graffiti.

- Maybe that I know of, maybe about 15?
- There are some kids who are you know, second sometimes maybe third generation, but they're far and few between you know it seems like.
- This year I've been at (omitted high school name) so I've been out in schools for quiet a while, but this is, last year at (omitted high school name) we saw a little (omitted gang name) graffiti, but that's it. I mean, maybe 2 incidences

School Resource Officer 2 and the vice principal work together to get to know the students involved with gangs. They sit with gang members during games and they speak with them after school. This allows the student's to know that SRO 2 and the vice principal know what is happening in the school.

- What I do is I get to personally know all the kids that are gang involved in that. So, me and the principal, vice principal, we have a great working relationship, excellent working relationship. So we'll go and we'll introduce ourselves, if we're at a game and we see some of the gang members come up, we'll go walk up and we'll sit in the midst of them and talk to 'em and stuff like that. So they know we're right on top of it. And they'll come out, we'll be in front of the uh school at the uh end of the day, they'll come up and shake hands and leave and stuff like that.

School 2 has a strict dress code to prevent the students from wearing gang related clothing. Clothing is a way for gang members to show which gang they belong to. If a student is

dressed in clothing considered to be gang related they are told to change their clothes. How these students dress projects an aspect of fear and intimidation. School 2's dress policy helps decrease those problems.

- Yeah, they'll wear the red. So they'll wear red t-shirts, or and black deckies, and red tennis shoes, red shoe laces, but we have a strict dress code so if they're dressed that way then we'll have to tell 'em they need to change and stuff like that. Oh yeah, because everybody knows, you know, then it puts an aspect of fear out there kinda, intimidation somewhat.

### **Participant 3**

School Resource Officer 3 is a Caucasian male. His age is between 35 and 40. He has been in law enforcement for 12 years and working in the school for 3 years. There are approximately 1,600 students in this school. The students at School 3 are predominately White (53%), with others being Hispanic (36%), Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (5%), Black (3%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (2%) and Asian (2%). The city population has 14.6 % of the residents living below the poverty line compared to the 12.7 % of the state.

**Graffiti in school.** SRO 3 reported seeing various types of graffiti throughout his school such as gang, latrinalia, tagging, bullying, sexual harassment and pieces in his school. He discussed a unique property by his school that attracts creators of graffiti. It is unique enough that information about the property will not be provided to keep the identity of the SRO 3 confidential. SRO 3 documents the graffiti on that property because it can be school-related. He documents it for intelligence purposes and to ensure that the graffiti is cleaned up.

- *When asked if he has seen gang graffiti, latrinalia, tagging, bullying, sexual harassment, pieces*



I've seen all of that in my school. One kind of unique thing about my school just (omitted high school name) is there's a (omitted property) the school and it's kinda of it's on, it's a (omitted location) so it's real, it's not actually on school grounds, but that's where a lot of school related graffiti goes on (omitted property) cause of its proximity to the school so. I deal with that graffiti as far as trying to document it. For my intelligence purposes and also making sure that it gets cleaned up.

There have been instances when students have climbed onto the school roof in order to create whole panels of graffiti. A panel twenty to thirty feet long was found by the main doors of the school. Graffiti has been found on buildings all over the campus as well as in the bathroom. The least common place to find graffiti in the school is hallways. The type of graffiti found on the inside of the school is different from the graffiti on the outside on the building.

- I've had students climb actually on the roof of the school and do like whole panels on the wall where like the auditorium wall sticks up from the roof um recently we've had large like 20 or 30 foot panel graffiti's by the front main doors of the school. A lot of times on the exterior walls we have a baseball field there's some buildings back there, the sheds, buildings get a lot of graffiti on there and the fences on the outside of the school get graffiti. The bathrooms often get graffiti as well. It's usually different graffiti than what's on the outside though.
- Gang graffiti and the tagging style graffiti. And then every once and a while just silly stuff.
- In the hallways. So I don't have like a lot of graffiti scratched in the walls or the windows. So I would say, just pretty much in the interior of the school is least common, except for the bathrooms. We do get a lot in the bathrooms.

**Purpose of graffiti.** The most common types of graffiti found in School 3 are graffiti and tagging. SRO 3 believes that the pop culture of tagging influences the tagging he sees in his school.

- Gang graffiti and the tagging style graffiti and then every once and a while just silly stuff.
- From my perspective it is the pop culture of tagging.

The gangs have turned to social media to communicate their threats and challenges to each other. There is an influence created by hip hop and rap artists who glamorize tagging. People also use forums and Facebook to share tags. The people who posted the photos on the internet do not identify the creator. The creators of taggings may be involved in a crew. A crew engages in less criminal activity and is less violent than a gang. Crewmembers typically spend time with each other and create taggings.

- I think gangs have gone a lot more towards social media to communicate their threats and challenges to one another as opposed to you know in the 90s when they used to tag on the wall and cross it out and do those types of things.
- I think there's a lot of hip hop and rap artists that in in the movies in, that glamorize that behavior of tagging and you know there's forums, social media forums online. A lot of times the taggers, we see, they post their stuff on their Facebook. They don't claim that they did it, but they'll just take pictures of their work or their friends work and put it on there.
- They doodle it a lot at school, but yeah, I think that's the biggest influence. Is just that it's the cool thing to do. And it's the cool thing to do to that specific crowd of youth that kinda likes the hip hops, rap style music. May or may not be, you know, think that gangs are cool, but even the ones a lot of the tagging, they're not necessarily gang members or

part of a gang, but they also get into their groups, their crews and it's not so much as much as a criminal violent enterprise as a gang so to speak, but some of them are affiliated with gangs also.

Graffiti is the least likely to be found in the hallways. According to SRO 3 the students at School 3 have a rough reputation. However, these students are respectful of the interior of the school, meaning he does not find graffiti scratched in the walls or windows. The exception to this respect of the interior is the bathrooms. The rates of graffiti found in this school are increasing, mainly in tagging, but also in gang graffiti. He often finds more graffiti at the end of the school year. The amount of graffiti found at the school is increasing.

- For having kind of a reputation for being a rough school our kids are actually pretty respectful of the interior of the school. So I don't have like a lot of graffiti scratched in the walls or the windows
- Pretty much in the interior of the school is least common, except for the bathrooms. We do get a lot in the bathrooms.
- *When asked about increasing or decreasing instances of graffiti*  
Yeah, increasing.
- The tagging culture is the main thing. And also I'm noticing some gang um increasing.
- *When asked about if he sees more graffiti at the beginning of the school year or the end*  
I think more at the end.

**Finding the graffiti's creator and determining the discipline process.** SRO 3 documents incidences of graffiti by taking pictures of it. The pictures can be used to determine who created the graffiti and determine if there is a pattern. If the piece is big enough the school

district is informed to remove it. Cleaning up graffiti quickly is the most important part of dealing with graffiti it.

- It's reported to me, picture, if I'm not there like over the summer we had a big tagging on the outer wall and one of the principals took a picture of it, sent it to me and said "hey just so you know we got this" and then (omitted name of school district), they contacted them and they (the school district) come out and clean it off right away.
- So clean ups the biggest. Getting it cleaned, cleaned up right away is the number one priority. Documenting it with a picture that way I guess if you, if there's something specific about the tag that you could, or the graffiti that you could that you could tie to someone who you may catch in the future. Tie those cases together, you know taking pictures and documenting those keepin' track of what's trending. But other than that, that's kind of the protocol.

There is no policy addressing removing students' homework or classwork if the student has graffiti on it. SRO 3 sends school wide emails telling teachers to take pictures of homework, schoolwork, textbooks, or folders with tagging or graffiti email the picture to him. The teachers each have school I-pods or personal smart phones, which both can take photos. Teachers bring papers with graffiti on it to SRO 3. He prefers to have photos instead of the original paper to prevent the students from being aware of him having a copy.

- *When asked if homework is taken away from the student for having graffiti on it*

As far as I'm aware there's not an actual policy. However, as the School Resource Officer I've sent e-mails to staff at my school letting teachers know that if they see home, school work or text books or folders with tagging or graffiti doodling if they could take a picture of it and e-mail it to me cause at our school all our teachers have school I-pods

and with the ability to take pictures or everybody has smart phones now a days so they can do that.

- Most the teachers just bring me the paper and say “here I got this” and I kinda would prefer that they take a picture and then do whatever they would normally do with it so that the students not really aware.
- I only got like maybe 3 or 4 incidents where teachers gave me pictures or brought me the work last school year. I think it’s happening more than that and either a) teachers aren’t recognizing what is and what isn’t tagging and graffiti or b) possibly they’re just, they feel like it’s not their concern. I don’t know.

When a student is caught creating graffiti he or she is charged with criminal mischief and referred to the juvenile court. The student is suspended from school. There are instances when a consequence may also include for them to do restitution, which includes helping the janitors clean. SRO 3 volunteers to supervise the students who create graffiti clean up graffiti on a Saturday. Making the student clean up the graffiti shows them how difficult cleaning it up can be. He then will drive the students home. There has not been any instances of students attending his school being caught, however students from other schools have been caught creating graffiti on his school.

- They’re charged with criminal mischief, referred to the juvenile court. They’re suspended from school and sometimes the school also has ‘em do restitution where they come and help the janitors clean and so forth. And we haven’t caught our students tagging our school we did catch some, some kids got arrested for tagging on our school, but they weren’t our students, earlier last year. They were charged, but I know that if my students, if we catch our students tagging um I’m definitely gonna have ‘em, spend a

Saturday and I'll take my time if I have to supervise and make them clean, paint over that whole (omitted property) and all the telephone poles and utility boxes in the area. So they can see that it's no fun to have to clean that up and kinda just drive that point home to 'em.

When a student is charged for creating graffiti, the criminal mischief charges are based on the dollar amount it takes to remove graffiti. The majority of the graffiti found in schools fall under a Class B Misdemeanor. If they are caught creating graffiti there is a charge of a misdemeanor and if they are caught trespassing it adds another misdemeanor to that charge. That is not a serious enough offense to take a juvenile to a detention center. The student's parents are contacted when the student is caught.

- Yeah, criminal mischief charges are based on dollar amounts. Based on the classification of the crime and for a Class B I think the limits now 500 dollars or and or less than 500 dollars is a Class B misdemeanor and so I would say most graffiti is gonna be, fall in that category and on a Class B Misdemeanor it's not on level of offense in Salt Lake County where you would actually take a juvenile to DT for it. It doesn't meet at DT they have to have either a felony or 3 misdemeanors which are non-status offense so. That would be one misdemeanor if they were graffiti if they were trespassing that would be two you know. So, yeah just getting a ticket basically and contacting parents and doing the suspension.

**Effective ways to prevent graffiti.** Custodians are in charge of cleaning the bathrooms when magic markers and such are used. When stronger substances are used like spray paint, the school district sends a cleanup crew. The cleanup crew is sent within 24 hours of the graffiti being reported. As mentioned by the two previous SROs, immediately cleaning up graffiti is the

most effective way to prevent graffiti. There are many ways for students to learn about graffiti through friends, the internet and documentaries on Netflix and YouTube. When graffiti is cleaned up quickly the creator does not get notoriety for it.

- Custodians will clean like the bathrooms, the magic markers and stuff that goes on there. The paint, the spray paint, they have, I guess there's school district graffiti cleanup crew that goes and responds to all the schools within 24 hours of the request or whatever and cleans up graffiti.
- Nothing stands out that they're doing to do that except for cleaning it up quickly. And really that's kind of one of the most effective ways to do it because like I say the people who do graffiti have adapted and they do it in ways I mean they have, they learn all the all the stuff from their friends and from the websites and everything that they, and there's even, I mean you can go on Netflix and watch documentaries about graffiti or YouTube or whatever. I don't think there's really anyway that we're ever gonna stop it from happening or have a, a major impact on it except for cleaning it up quickly. You know, if it gets cleaned quickly they don't get the notoriety.

There is no specific protocol for students to report graffiti in school. SRO 3 reported that the students know they can speak with their counselor or with him. He has a good rapport with the students. SRO 3 has a Facebook page for students to send him messages. Students can use these resources to report without other students finding out.

- No, not that I'm aware of. Not a specific protocol. I mean, all I think all the students know that they can talk to their counselor or come to, to me. I have a pretty good rapport with most of the students or the principals. I have an officer Facebook page where any

student who wants can be on there or send messages on there kind of, I guess it's not anonymously if they're sending it, but anonymous to others. If they wanted to, but.

When the students report graffiti they are rewarded with a candy bar. This reward is also for reporting a fight or any type of problem in school. He was not sure if they always receive a reward, but if they do receive one it is a candy bar.

- *When asked if the students receive a reward for reporting*

Yeah, they, we give 'em a candy bar. If they report there's gonna be a fight or any type of problem, we always try to reward that. I can't think of any instances specifically where a student's reported graffiti and got a reward for it but that's probably how that would happen if that did happen.

There have been discussions and presentations with the teachers and parents about gangs and graffiti. These discussions and presentations are for teaching how to identify graffiti and the different types of graffiti. The discussions also include how those attending can decrease the graffiti in the school and identify the students responsible for creating graffiti. The students are not involved in these presentations.

- We've had discussions with the teachers in staff meetings about identifying graffiti and the different types of graffiti and how they can help us to try to suppress the graffiti and identify those who are responsible. We've done that with parents as well. With gang presentations and graffiti presentations, but not with students I don't think. I think the only impact the school has in dealing with graffiti is cleaning it up quickly. I mean the reason they put the graffiti up there is for the notoriety. It's kind of, you know who's who knows, knows that I did that or whatever and so the quicker you can take it down



then the less notoriety they can get. Hopefully they run out of paint, but I think they just steal more.

**Other possible options.** SRO 3 believes that conferences between the student, the parents and the teachers discussing the graffiti issue after the guilty student has been found might be an effective way to deter the student from creating more graffiti. He believes this does not happen because teachers either do not have enough time or they do not want to have that level of confrontation with the parents.

- Unless they sit down with the student and they want to have like a student or parent-student conference and say, “You know, this is, this is kind of an issue. What’s going on here?” think that would be really affective, but most teachers don’t have the time. Or maybe that, they are uncomfortable with that level of confrontation.

Candid conversations in certain classes may impact those preventing graffiti from being created. The discussion would involve the cost graffiti has on society. Not only should financial cost be discussed with students, but the cost of how graffiti reflects on the community.

- I think if we did have maybe in certain classes that all the students take at one point during high school, if they had a good candid discussion with students about the costs of graffiti on society. And not just the financial costs, but also a lot of the things that we’ve talked about how it kinda makes our community look bad and it makes our school look bad when there’s graffiti everywhere. And I think most students already know that. The ones that are taggers and the ones that are doin’ it, they don’t care. So, unless there was some type of program I guess that was more specific to that group.

After students are arrested for creating graffiti they could be put into different treatment programs. There are currently drug programs and nonviolent crime programs, but not graffiti.

SRO 3 suggested that graffiti crimes would fit into a nonviolent crime program.

- When they're arrested having some type of, I mean, you know they've got drug treatment programs and different programs for different types of nonviolent crimes, which I think graffiti kinda falls into that non-violent crime category. If there was some type of program that could maybe be an alternative and maybe there's some type of carrots they could dangle to encourage them to participate in that program.

**Gang graffiti and gang behavior.** The major types of graffiti created in the school are gang and taggings. Graffiti is around in the community. According to SRO 3, the students do not feel uncomfortable with the graffiti in the school because it is a typical part of their community. Graffiti in the school might have an impact on people who are not from the city, such as school district personnel. People not affiliated with the school come to the auditorium for various activities such as voting or dances. The graffiti gives a negative impression of the students at the school.

- I don't think so with the students. I think for them it's kind of a normal, especially with the community in (omitted city of school location). There's lots of graffiti in the community and I think they don't feel uncomfortable about it. It's just kind of a normal part of their community. However, when the graffiti is actually on the school, like when they paint on the exterior walls and the graffiti that's on the school grounds I think it does affect the way that other members of the school district who come to our school, we do have a lot of, where they rent out the auditorium and they have special activities that where the school does rentals to for like dance companies and lots of other public. They

have voting registration and voting that takes place at the school. So you get a lot of other people who aren't students at the school and when they see the graffiti on the school, you know, it kinda gives them a false impression that this is a bad school and that the kids at this school are bad kids. I think that is one of the negatives that it does.

There are not many students at the school who overtly show their gang affiliation. When students show affiliation they do so by wearing certain colors or rolling up their pant leg in a certain way. There are some who show indicators that they might be involved in the gangs. Gang expressiveness has changed from wearing colors to using social media. Gang members tend to blend in with the other student body. SRO 3 believes the change may come from knowing that law enforcement document and intervene based on the gang member's behavior and dressing attire.

- I don't have a significant gang problem where there's like a gang stands out, that represents themselves overtly in the school, however there are many individuals in the school that have indicators that they're probably related to a gang. It's the gang culture has changed from wearing the colors and repin your sets and so forth, to now you know, things that are social media. They dress normal. They blend in and I think they're a lot more sophisticated and they've figured out you know, that one of the ways that law enforcement suppresses gangs is by documenting and intervening because of the way they look and the way they act and so with that being said, I don't have a lot of obvious gang members in the school, but I would be naïve to believe that there are not gangs in my school.
- I don't think the colors a real big thing for them, but there's other things besides colors. They'll kinda roll up their pant leg and cinch it tight around the bottoms of their shoes.

And I think a about half the kids that do that it's kind of a style thing, where I guess it's kinda cool cause that's what they, you know that's what the gangsters are doing so they'll do that to try to be tough. So it's real hard to distinguish, but that's another indicator besides the colors.

There are students in the school who dress in gang member attire and get in fights with other students. When students are involved in gang-related problems the school personnel confront them about it.

- They dress it and they kinda sometimes get in little fights and stuff. Saying kinda gang related stuff to each other. Then maybe 10 or 15 that admit that they're gang members an' they have tattoos and...doesn't seem like they rep it really like obviously, but you know we have issues with them and you confront 'em about it and they're documented gang members and everything.

When a student is suspended for a gang-related fight or gang-related graffiti the principal works with the student and their family to create a gang contract. This contract is an agreement stating that the student will no longer participate or represent his or her gang in any way at school. The student is also not allowed to bring weapons or drugs to school. If the student's gang has a specific color to represent their gang the student is not allowed to wear that color at school. If they are caught breaking the contract then they are suspended. The parents typically agree with the contract.

- However, when we have a student, when we encounter a student that's being suspended because they got in a fight and it's gang related or graffiti or some other issue that's pretty obviously gang related the principals work one on one with that student, with their families and they have a what's called a gang contract where the student agrees to not

participate or represent their gang in any way at school and if they do then they can get suspended. And there's another safe school and so forth. Part of their contract is no weapons, no drugs, you know all, all those obvious things. With those students specifically they can say "you cannot wear blue to school" if they're a (omitted gang name) member or a (omitted gang name) member. Then in that particular instance they'll tell that student with that and the parents and usually the parents are on board. I think if that were challenged, the school would have difficulty enforcing that. Because if you're gonna do it to one you have to do it to all. You can't discriminate.

School 3 has a no-hat policy. The teachers, hall monitors and principal enforce this policy. Gang members use hats to represent their gang through by wearing certain teams or letters. This policy has helped them know when students from other schools are coming to School 3 to fight or trespass. If they are wearing a hat they typically do not attend School 3. Other clothing that is not allowed is drug or weapon related, nudity, shorts that are shorter than finger length and tank tops.

- One thing our school does and they're very strict on is no hats. And I've found that's been awesome. They can justify that because it applies to everyone in the school, it's not singling out any groups. Whenever we have kids from other schools that come to our school to start a fight or trespass or something, they're not supposed to be there, it is so easy to distinguish those kids 'cause they're wearing a hat and you know right away that kid doesn't belong here. The teachers are pretty good overall making sure the students comply. The hall monitors and the principals are all very strict about it, if they do wear the hat they take it away and they give it to them at the end of the day and if it's a continuous problem then they'll keep the hat and their parents will have to come get it at

the end of the year and so forth. And that seems to help a lot because hats are one of the ways, certain teams, and letters and things from the teams represent their gangs, the colors of the hats and kind of the style of it so that.

- Other dress code things that I think helps is our school uh has a dress code that no drug related apparel can be worn so like shirts with marijuana leaves... smoking pistols or guns cause they don't want people to feel like that gun or violence...then also nudity, shirts that have provocative pictures of women on it. That's real popular for whatever reason right now...then the other dress codes, which really doesn't isn't gang, but the shorts have to be finger length on the thighs and no tank tops

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 is a Caucasian male. His age is between 35 and 40. He had been in law enforcement for 17 years and working in his school for 4 years. School 4 has approximately 1,700 students. The students are predominantly White (70%). There are Hispanic students (21%), Asian (2%), Black (1%), Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (2%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1%). In this city, 8.9 % of the population is living below the poverty line compared to the state rate of 12.7 %.

**Graffiti in school.** School 4 has mostly gang and sexual type graffiti, but also latrinalia, tagging, doodling, and bullying graffiti. The graffiti is most commonly found in the bathroom. Graffiti is also found in the classrooms on desk and even books. Graffiti on books is not likely to be reported to SRO 4.

- *When asked if he has seen gang, latrinalia, tagging, doodling, bullying, sexual harassment, pieces*

Uh, all of it. All I would say probably predominantly gang, and then close behind would be the sexual type of stuff.

- *When asked where graffiti are most commonly found in the school*

Bathroom.

- *When asked if he gets it in classrooms*

Yeah, you do. You get it on desks. From time to time in the books and stuff. But even then if it is in books a lot, they don't report it to me. I've seen one or two things in books and that's it but. Most, I'd say majority of time in a classroom it's gonna be on a desk.

**Purpose of graffiti.** The purpose of graffiti is dependent on the type of graffiti. SRO 4 discussed the three types of graffiti and the motivation behind creating them. Gang graffiti stems from gangs establishing territory. They use their graffiti to target other gang members and not the general population at the school. Gang members tend to go after other gang members, not cheerleaders, football players or chess club members. Sexual graffiti is created to shock others or because the creator is bored. Taggers create graffiti in order to become famous.

The pattern of graffiti in this school is that it happens during the first term of school and the last month of school. At the beginning of the year students are trying to establish themselves and their territory. By the end of the semester many of these students are gone because they have dropped out or are in an alternative school. When a student is not punished for creating graffiti he or she will continue to create graffiti.

- If you're goin on the types there's in my opinion you've got your gang, which is gang fueled. I mean they're trying to establish territory. You have some of the boredom stuff and I think is more your sexual um graffiti is more boredom or shock value. They think

it's funny. And then you've got your tagger, your third category which, which is in their words "to become famous." Because they're putting themselves out there. So, those those are really the three types of graffiti and the three motivations behind 'em.

- My impression of gang activity in general and I think it certainly goes hand in hand with graffiti is that they mess with each other. The gang kids...they go after other gang members...half the kids don't even know what it is.
- You do see a fair amount at the beginning and you see a fair amount at the end rather at the beginning for the first, I would say term. And at the end I'd say the last month or so...And once they get away with it they'll do it again...I think the beginning of school because they're trying to establish their territory or they're trying to establish themselves I think it is, everything's worse at the beginning of the year. And at the end you always have a little spurt. But most of 'em are gone. I think from drop out or because their grades aren't you know once you've missed so many classes you can no longer if you passed every single class you could not graduate from the main stream high school so they'll send them to an alternative high school.

**Finding the graffiti's creator and determining the discipline process.** A picture of graffiti is taken when it is reported to SRO 4 or the custodian. The photo is given to the SRO 4 then it is removed in approximately ten minutes. When graffiti is on the tile floor, hand sanitizer is used to remove it. When the graffiti is too large for the custodians to remove the school district is called. They send in a pressure washer or someone to paint over the graffiti. School 4 will make a copy to keep on file and give the original photo to SRO 4 or School 4 will keep the original and provide the copy to SRO 4. There are teachers who continuously turn in graffiti, while others do not. There are students who create graffiti in their bookwork.



- We do. As soon as it's reported either myself or a custodian or somebody will go up and take a picture of it for me and then it is immediately cleaned off. And I'm talking from the time it's reported till it's gone is maybe 10 minutes.
- They've got it down to a science. For example, and I had no idea but we've got a tile floor with wax on it, hand sanitizer! They pour it on there and it takes up sharpie... 'Cause the alcohol and it doesn't hurt the wax.
- Depending on what it is. We had some graffiti (omitted date of incident)... the district has the maintenance come out because that's beyond what our custodians are gonna do, they don't have a sand blaster or a pressure washer. They've got different people that paint the school that that go around. They've got a paint crew that goes to all the different schools and so they'll have to call them in... it's typically that day they get it cleaned up fairly quickly.
- What the school has done was, they will either take the original and photo copy it or they would just take the original and they will usually pass it on to me... There's some teachers where I'm getting it all the time from those teachers and there's other teachers that I've seen any from... if the kids in this class, it doesn't mean he's doing it here and not here, I just don't think it's being reported to me.

There are different consequences for creating graffiti based on the location of the graffiti. When a student is caught creating graffiti on their own schoolwork or homework there are no consequences given besides a verbal prompt to not do it again. This frustrates SRO 4. When a student is caught creating graffiti on the school building or somewhere else then they will be suspended for 2 or 3 days and arrested for vandalism. The student will be cited for the graffiti or criminal mischief depending on the dollar amount in cleanup. The dollar amount decreases

when the custodians at this school have figured out how to clean up graffiti quickly and efficiently. This will decrease the student's punishment.

- It frustrates me a little bit, they don't do anything. They tell em' "hey don't do that" and that's it. I haven't seen anything on the administrative side. I don't recall a single time that it's even been addressed.
- Now on the paper work now, if we catch 'em in in a bathroom or somethin' doin' it. Then they've suspended and they'll do that. But on their schoolwork or their notebooks or anything else I don't think there's ever been a consequence that I can think of.
- So if it's like vandalizing the school building then there's a consequence, they'll be arrested for vandalism or graffiti and then they're usually suspended for 2 or 3 days.
- If we catch 'em vandalizing then yes they get to court they get cited for like I said either graffiti or criminal mischief depending on what it fits and the graffiti there is a certain dollar amount to where it enhances it from a class.

When students want to report graffiti they go to the itinerant's offices (i.e. where problems are taken care of). The area is where the offices of the principal, assistant principal, and the SRO 4 are located.

- I think they would come into the itinerants offices, is the general place for them to report things like that...I mean that's where you would, that's where all the assistant principals and principals offices are, that's where my office was and so I think that's the natural place for them to report that type of thing.

The school does not address graffiti with the students. They do address gang attire with their students.

- Usually the orientation we talk a little about gang attire, I don't know that gang graffiti or graffiti period is addressed. I'll say it's not, but I don't I don't recall that it is.

After a student reports graffiti SRO 4 thanks them. Thanking a student for the help they provided is very important to him.

- I'll thank them. Is that a reward? I mean I really do... Before I was an officer I pulled up on a fight just driving my car I see these two people fightin'. And I got out and I said "hey, knock it off guys" and they both kinda turned and started yelling at me and I go "whoa hey why don't you go over there and you go over there" and the officer showed up and an' asked me if I saw what happened and I said "well, I didn't see what started it, but I kinda broke it up" and he goes "ok, you can go" and that was it! There was no thank you. And I thought "gaul" I coulda let them fight. You know, I've always been very conscious of trying to thank people for getting involved when they didn't have to. And especially where the culture in high school is not to snitch on anybody.

**Effective ways to prevent graffiti.** When graffiti is found in School 4 administrators, hall monitors, and the SRO 4 monitor the hallway and bathrooms. This allows for them to look back on the camera footage by the hour to narrow down the suspect list. If creating graffiti occurs during lunch period the chances of finding the student decreases due to how many students go in the bathroom.

- We especially when we get a pattern where it's very consistent that everyday it's happening in this bathroom, like we'll get the upstairs boys bathroom just for an example, every day.... And so what we would do is an administration including the hall monitors who are adult employees of the school we would go and we would walk though and we would kinda, I would make sure at least once an hour that I walk through because the

more often I walk through, when I went back to look on cameras to see who had been in and out of that bathroom I could see when I went in it was clear, the next time I went in it was graffiti and so I know here to here is the time period I'm lookin'... When we got a consistent graffiti artist who would do it very consistently, that's what we would do.... During lunch time, there's a million and one kids going in and out of those bathrooms, you're just not gonna get it, but typically they're doing it during class time because there's nobody around.

**Other possible options.** Enforcing consequences may decrease the amount of graffiti. According to SRO 4 there should not be any tolerance for gangs in the school. Sending a student home for a short time period after creating graffiti might stop them from creating more in the future. SRO 4 explained that these consequences should happen after more serious offenses unlike doodling one thing on their notebook. He gave an example of not suspending someone for writing "sk," which stands for soreno killer once on the notebook. However, writing "sk" multiple times on the notebook would be worthy of suspension. According to SRO 4, writing it multiple times over the student's belongings makes it more violent than only writing it once.

- I'm a believer in enforcement. I think there should be a consequence for it. I think even in paperwork um you know, the dilemma is that school certainly doesn't want to hurt their education, but again, stereotypically, when a kids got 8% at the end of a quarter, and you send him home for a day, it ain't gonna hurt him. I think, because of the gang, drug, marriage, and the violent nature of it, the intimidating factors about it, to be honest with ya, my opinion is that there shouldn't be any tolerance for the gangs in schools...I'm not saying, you know, suspend 'em for a year because they doodled "sk" in their notebook but you know soreno killer, I mean that's not a good thing when you're writing soreno

killer all over your stuff, I mean that's violent. Why not send 'em home for a day. Do something other than go "hey don't do that. Now go back to class Jonny." That just doesn't work. So a little bit more strict consequences in my opinion.

**Gang graffiti and gang behavior.** Graffiti is connected with gang activity. Gang members use graffiti as a way to communicate with other gang members. This communication, which is typically negative, may impact people's concern for school safety. Even though in SRO 4's experience gang graffiti is mostly targeted toward other gang members. This year there has been no gang fighting or graffiti in the school.

- To be quiet honest with ya, my impression of gang activity in general and I think it certainly goes hand in hand with graffiti is that they mess with each other. The gang kids...go after other gang members and on the other side of the token if somebody who is not a gang member walks into a bathroom and they see gang graffiti they go "oh that's not nice" half the kids don't even know what it is.
- While that is true in some cases I have found that most of the time the gang graffiti and the gang activity is targeted at gang other gang members.
- But no graffiti this year no fights with 'em, they're kinda dying.

School Resource Officer 4 expressed that many gang members continue to be in gangs once they have joined one, but there are instances when they do leave. He has seen gang members graduate from high school and want to become police officers. Often, gang members have little or no support from their family. In some instances the lack of support comes from unfortunate circumstances, such as single parent homes where the parent works two or three jobs and the child takes care of his or her siblings. That is the difficult problem when working with gang members.

- No, a tiger doesn't change its stripes. I'm not saying that a kid can't get out of things because they can. In fact, I've had quite a few kids come back after they've gone out of school and gotten their diplomas or graduated and say "hey listen, I appreciate ya and I'm sorry" and they're out of those gangs. I've even had a couple of gang kids "hey I'm gonna be a cop." Often, very often your gang kids have gotten little or no support from their family. Sometimes it's not the family's fault. I mean, you've got these a lot of single moms, and I come from a single mom, but they're working 2 or 3 jobs. A lot of these gang members, when they go home they take care of their siblings. A lot of them are parents to their little brothers and sisters. They do not come from a household like mine. I had a great growin' up as a kid. I had a single mom. Oh my gosh it was great. I never had to worry about this or that like they do. They do have hard lives as a general rule. Some of 'em they don't, but some of 'em they really do. It's the home that will change these kids. You know the homes the influence, there is definitely friend problem, but it's the home life you've got to change. That's the difficult thing that's the uphill battle you find.

When new students come into the school from two different junior high schools they try to establish themselves as the dominant gang. To reduce establishment of dominant gangs School 4 has dress code that does not allow students to wear certain colors affiliated with their gang. SRO 4 is also aware of other ways gang members like to show their gang affiliation including having a pen the color of their gang behind their ear or whistling a specific tune. To stop the establishment of dominance SRO 4 lets them know that this behavior is not allowed at school.

- Because they come in from 2 different schools so they're trying to establish themselves as the predominant, you know students in the school at least in the gang circles. So once we tell 'em to stop wearing their solid shirts the kid had black jeans that had red stitchin'...(omitted gang name)...they're red and the reason I bring that up is because blue... we have blue pens we have black pens but they always wear a red pen in their ear. So silly things like that, we'll suspend 'em for gang activity and the parents kinda like "why are you susp-" well he's wearing a red pen. And so they're very subtle with it now...and really now it's the whistling. There's a specific whistle that's (omitted gang name), (omitted gang name)...then you'll hear it down the hall somebody repeat it, you'll hear somebody down the hall repeat it or when I walk by because I'm a cop they'll do this whistle and so I caught on what it was and I would turn around and say "uh uh. We're not gonna do that."

One of the problems that gangs bring into the school is when there are interactions with rival gangs. SRO 4 and the administration enforce the rule that gang members are not allowed to fight over the school as their territory, which influences the students not to fight in the school. Although the fighting does not happen in school, the tension may build up between gangs during school.

- You'll get 5 or 6 of 'em they're standing by the heater or wherever they stand, they've all got their subtle reds and rosaries is a real big one to identify gang members. And then somebody from the opposing group will go by, well the problem is, if you want to keep away from (omitted gang name) then you keep away from (omitted gang name) and (omitted gang name). It's very easy but the problem is you got to go to school and so all the gangs are in school. And there kinda that turf that they fight for and even we do that.

This is my school. We're not gonna have this in my school. Even as a police officer and administration of this school we're fighting for our turf. So you put all of them together and I wouldn't say they fight inside the school... all the buildup happens in school.

### **Participant 5**

Participant 5 is a Caucasian male. His age is between 45 and 50. He has been in law enforcement for 21 years and he has been at the school for 3 years. This Participant's school had approximately 1,100 students. The ethnicity of the students is predominantly White (48%) and Hispanic (49%) with few students being American Indian/Native Alaskan (1%), Asian (1%), Black (1%), and Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander (1%). There are 23.3 % of the residents living below the poverty line compared to the state 12.7 %.

**Graffiti in school.** There are many types of graffiti found at this school. SRO 5 has seen gang graffiti, curse words, and sexual graffiti. Sexual graffiti at this school may be human anatomy like the penis or sexually explicit toward certain people of the school.

- Ok, there's all kinds of graffiti. We've got gang graffiti, we've got graffiti where kids just write swearwords, and then we've got graffiti that are sexual in nature. So I don't know what you've had in other interviews, but basically for some reason people like to draw pictures of the human anatomy, that's like penis, they draw it everywhere and write words that are sexual explicit towards certain people and so those are the main ones we get here.

**Purpose of graffiti.** The most common area to find graffiti at School 5 is the bathroom followed by the locker rooms. SRO 5 believes this is due to not having cameras in the bathroom. The next area to find the most graffiti is the parking lot. School 5 has many cameras in the parking lot, which makes it easier to catch students who put graffiti there. Graffiti is also found



in the hallways, common areas, and classrooms. The teachers lock their classrooms as a way to prevent students from putting graffiti there when the teacher is out of the classroom. The hallways are the least likely place to find graffiti as well as the auditorium. The auditorium at School 5 has recently been remodeled. Because of the remodel the school keeps it locked up at all times.

- The most common place is the bathroom and that's primarily because we haven't got a camera in there. So the second place would be the locker rooms, we haven't got a camera there and then the other biggest place is usually out in the parking lot on cars. Most the time we catch them 'cause most of the parking lots we have covered with cameras...we still have stuff in the hallways. We still have stuff in the common areas. Some in the classrooms cause the classrooms don't have cameras as well. The classrooms not as much because the teachers are in there and especially here at (omitted school name) they lock the doors when they leave.
- The least common places are two different areas. They are in the hallways because there's cameras and the other one is our auditorium, which has been redone and remodeled...so those are the two main areas where you don't have any damage or anything 'cause they're trying to protect 'em.

Some students may create graffiti because they are bored, messing around, or being funny. They ask students why they made it and some of the responses they receive are "I thought it was funny" or "I'm just trying to be funny." There are instances when gang members use graffiti as a way to communicate by using their sign or crossing out other's graffiti.

- I think it has a lot to do with boredom. I also think it has a lot to do with people just messing around and bein' funny. You know, cause a lot of time we'll ask 'em like to do

it, “I thought it was funny” you know, they’re tryin’ to show off to their friends...most of ‘em say “I’m just tryin’ to be funny” and it’s not funny.

- You get the gangs and you get ‘em cross it out and stuff like that and they’ll write their group sign and then they’ll have ‘em cross it out and, but that happens very little because you know, within a couple hours we usually find it.

The amount of graffiti in School 5 has remained the same for the past two years; however, he reported that rates of graffiti have decreased since he attended high school.

- *When asked about the pattern of increasing or decreasing rates of graffiti*

I’ve only been in the schools for two years, so you know for me it’s probably been the same, but if I look like I told you from when I was in high school versus now I think for me there’s less.

School Resource Officer 5 reported that the most graffiti is created in the middle to the end of the school year. Students are trying to figure out what’s happening at school at the beginning of the school year.

- Definitely not the first of the year. It’s funny ‘cause the first of the year everybody’s kinda feeling things out and seeing you know what’s going on. So I’d say most of it’s in the middle or towards the end.

**Finding the graffiti’s creator and determining the discipline process.** Students typically report graffiti to the teachers, janitors, or SRO 5. If the graffiti is more serious the students may report it to SRO 5. There are areas in the school with high rates of graffiti. The custodians walk through these areas often to remove graffiti promptly.

- You know, a lot of students they’ll go in and tell the teachers. It’s not per se any sign out there telling ‘em to report it...they won’t come in and report it directly unless it’s

something more serious. So most of the time it's a teacher or janitor. 'Cause we have certain areas where the graffiti's at so the janitors will walk that all the time just to check it so they know when something's new. It's always clean so they'll catch it within that day, if there is graffiti.

- *When asked if the students report graffiti to him*

Yeah. They'll come directly to me or they'll tell a teacher and the teacher will call me.

When a student is caught creating graffiti the student is charged with destruction of property. The student is also suspended for at least three days. The suspension may go longer if the student has committed the same offense before. The student is charged a fine and he or she needs to pay restitution as well. After a student is caught three times he or she joins other individuals and they clean up graffiti throughout the community as community service. This SRO 5 believes that sometimes the punishment is not severe enough.

- We automatically charge 'em so we'll charge 'em with destruction of property. You're marking it and you know there is a law that's specifically directed towards graffiti and defacing the property and then they are suspended for at least three days. If not more, depending on, you know the student, because if they've been there before for the same offense then we'll suspend 'em longer.
- So, there's so much of it out in the city actually juvenile court has a system. So if you're charged the first time I think, don't quote me on exactly, but I think there's a \$50 fine so they go in there and say, "ok, yeah I did it. You get fifty dollars." And then you have to pay for whatever the restitution is to clean up. If it's just paintin' over it you know, they'll charge 'em twenty bucks or thirty bucks for the paint. Anything beyond that then obviously the costs are gonna go up now if it occurs again then obviously increase, it

goes up to a hundred dollars. It like doubles and then on the third time they actually put them...on group of individuals or kids that that actually have to go out and clean the other graffiti...so they give 'em the paint, they give 'em the chemicals or whatever else to clean it out. They go around the city and we report it to the city and the city comes out and cleans it and they have to do that for a certain amount of time, however many hours the judge sees fit, they do. So that's just, just a way to deter them from doin' it again so, it's pretty effective. Kids are sometimes the juvenile court system I don't feel is hard enough or harsh enough 'cause obviously their goal is to rehabilitate them and not necessarily mark them and so sometimes they're a lot more lenient than they should be. Students are occasionally rewarded for reporting graffiti to school personnel. This reward is a gift certificate to a restaurant, but not cash money. The teachers may also give a different reward as well.

- *When asked if the students get a reward for reporting graffiti*

I don't know if the teachers will usually do something, per se we don't. We have had certain cases where we will offer a reward but other than that we don't. It's usually a gift certificate, like a restaurant or something like that, not necessarily money but it's some type of reward system.

When graffiti is found on a student's work the student can keep it unless it's threatening or directed at someone or doing something that is illegal. The student may be asked to put it away or to not continue drawing it and focus their attention on something else.

- Most the time they, unless it's threatening or it's directed at somebody they usually won't take it. They'll ask 'em to put it away or...put it in their book bags or not draw it during class to focus their attention elsewhere.

- It depends. The only time we have, and they do have it they'll draw certain things. We will only take it when it's pertaining to some type of threat. Yeah, I mean, if they draw gang graffiti, we usually won't take it. Unless it's some type of threat or some type of directed towards hurting somebody or doing something that's illegal.

**Effective ways to prevent graffiti.** The janitors are the most influential aspect of preventing graffiti. They go to the areas where graffiti is most occurring to clean it up quickly. The most difficult graffiti to cover up is when the graffiti is carved into a surface. In these instances the janitors put putty in the graffiti and paint over it. The graffiti is documented first and then cleaned off or painted over the day it is found or the day after. The school personnel or SRO 5 document graffiti by taking pictures of it.

The teachers are another important aspect in the school for dealing with graffiti. The teachers stand in the hallways and watch the students. There are designated teachers who check the bathrooms for graffiti. This prevents students from spending too much time in the bathroom and creating graffiti.

Graffiti on vehicles is slightly different because outside sources fix the damage. Graffiti on vehicles may need to be buffed out, scratched out, and or repainted. Most of the graffiti found on cars is just drawing on dirty cars, which can be removed by washing the vehicle. The student creating graffiti may be responsible for paying to get the vehicle fixed. At School 5 they have teachers monitor the hallway to deter students from creating graffiti.

- The biggest thing is the janitors, they get sick of cleaning it up so they are very diligent in basically going to certain areas that it's most occurring. They'll go to the bathrooms almost every time and they'll check a certain hallway we don't have a camera in and so

they're always walkin' there and they'll tell the teachers and they'll check it too. So that's the biggest thing that we do.

- If there's any kind of graffiti we immediately like document it and we either clean it off or repaint with in that day so it's usually not there very long and the kids know that there's cameras everywhere and so you know there's not much graffiti.
- They document it. We'll usually take a picture or write a short report on it then that day they either clean it off or like the worst stuff is where they actually carve it into the wall. They'll actually putty it and repaint it that day. We get it done that day.
- Automatically they'll paint over it or they'll wipe it clean. Like the cars sometimes we have had damage to the point where it's actually engraved in the car, they actually have to pay for that and have the car repainted. And so, once that happens then obviously they've got to go get it buffed out or scratched out and repainted and so we've had one case where they did that. But for the most part...they're dirty cars, and they'll draw figures in it so much and so you can just wash it off and it just goes away.
- Anything on the school ground, the custodians will deal with. Unless it's on personal property like you know obviously the cars and or book bags.
- The biggest intervention we have is um you know obviously we have teachers that stand out in the hallway and watch students but the other thing is we have designated teachers that also have to go in and check the bathrooms.

School Resource Officer 5 has discussions with the students about graffiti. He explains that they will be charged for damaging property. He has these discussions at the beginning of the year. They usually take place in the physical education class because there are sixty or seventy students in those classes. That way he can reach more students during that period of time.

- We talk specifically about graffiti and obviously...we're gonna charge 'em because you're damaging property and you know then we talk about other things as well like graffiti's one of 'em that we talk about, usually in small groups. I'll teach like my biggest thing is the first of the year, most people have to take P.E. and there's 60 or 70 students in each class. If I do all the classes, then I usually hit most of the students, I don't hit 'em all, but I hit most of 'em. That's usually where I do it.

**Other possible options.** Expelling students for multiple offenses may decrease the rates of graffiti in the school. SRO 5 has addressed this idea of expelling with his school district.

- Usually it's the same kids over and over again and so I've actually addressed the district in stating that certain kids that if they have certain multiple offenses they should be expelled from school. They're not here to learn, they're just messing around a lot of 'em could care less so let's get 'em out of here 'cause right now it's in place that they get suspended for 10 days. That's the most we can do with anybody and I'm like "you know, the kids that who don't want to be here and are just causing problems, you know, just get 'em out of here" so, we'll see what they say I don't know if they'll implement that or not.

**Gang graffiti and gang behavior.** There is a very low tolerance at this School 5 for any gang related activity. If a student is caught engaging in gang related activities, he or she may be suspended for ten days. Because of this policy gangs are not as influential in the school as they are on the street. There have been many problems in the school because of gangs. The SRO 5 can charge students if there are two or more documented gang members together that do anything gang related at school. After they are charged they are sent to juvenile court.

- Well there's very little tolerance here at schools. So if they show any kind of signs or if they do anything gang related we automatically kick 'em out of school. We'll suspend

'em for 10 days, if anything... and so influential gangs, very little here. A lot more out on the street than in here. They know they can't express it here so they'll go out on the weekends or whatever else and do things or more. It's not it's not a big prevalence in the schools just because we have what's called the gang injunction here in (omitted city name) city. Because we had so many problems with gangs that if you have two or more gang members that are documented gang members together then we can charge 'em and so they know that if they're here in school obviously they are going to be together, but if they do anything that's gang related then we can charge 'em all and so then we'll send 'em to you know the juvenile court for those reasons. So they do very little here and that's the reason why.

When gang graffiti is found, gang members are shown a photo and asked if they know whose marker in the photo. Some graffiti is generic like swear words, but other times it is specific to gang members, which helps identify them. There are times when the gang members who are asked about the marker will tell SRO 5 who created it.

- Well let me tell you this though the other big thing is it's the gang, it's the graffiti itself. As far as symbols and stuff like that it's quiet unique. Like I said, we've have people writing swear words like the "f" word and you know like slut, and the "c" word and really explicit words... They'll do graffiti or they'll write their gang signs or whatever else and then they'll do like a tail or they'll do some other little thing and that's a their moniker and it always bring back to them. So you bring a picture of some of the other gang members that will talk to me and I'll say "ok who drew this" and they'll say "that's so and so. That's his moniker." We've caught 'em that way too.



- Yes. So you get the gangs and you get 'em cross it out and stuff like that and they'll write their group sign and then they'll have 'em cross it out, but that happens very little because within a couple hours we usually find it and then paint over it.

The gangs at this school have designated colors. The school does not allow students to wear certain football jerseys because some gangs affiliate themselves with some teams. They cannot wear bandanas, cuff their pant legs or anything that symbolized their gang. There are gang members who put notches in their eyebrows. When this happens the gang members are told to shave it off or fill the marks with a marker.

- They do. And that's a problem here at school is (omitted gang name) wears red, and (omitted gang name) wears blue. So you know, you can have red and blue shirts on obviously. They can't wear jerseys that's like certain football associated like (omitted NFL team name) or anything like that 'cause that's a gang sign and so we can make 'em take it off. They can wear red and blue, they can't hang bandanas, they can't do anything that symbolizes gang like they used to cuff their pant legs and that was a symbol of a gang and so we make 'em uncuff 'em. It was just small stuff like that. Sometimes they try or they'll put notches in their eye brows and so we make 'em either shave it off or we make them fill it in with a marker 'cause they're not allowed to do that here in school. So just small stuff like that that's funny that they do that to show that they're you know, gang related and we take care of it as soon as we can.

Students are more affected by gang members spending time together than they are by gang members wearing gang colors.

- It's that's kinda hard to say. I don't really think it affects it, I think what happens is here at the school is the color but you also see kids that are associated with each other. So at

lunch time we'll have a group of kids and I know (omitted gang name) and so they hang out together and they sit there and they don't do anything but they are intimidating for other kids that aren't associated with any gangs and so that kinda stuff we break them up, you know you can't you know there's only so much you can do.

Graffiti is not always a gang related. In this SRO 5's experience graffiti is made by an individual or group of individuals. These individual's may be creating graffiti to be funny or just mess around. There are instances when it is gang-related. When students are caught creating graffiti they are charged. This usually deters others from creating graffiti.

- We kinda always associate gangs with graffiti and in reality I deal with graffiti it's usually an individual or a group of individuals and it doesn't seem to be the same people. Some group of people just messing around or screwing off and then they think it's funny and they're good kids they don't have anything else, they're just messing around and so then they get charged and then they know 'em and then there's another group...And a lot of kids usually get away with it and so it's not a big issue. I'm really quiet surprised at how it's not as big as I thought it would be when I came into the schools. I thought there would be more of it. You know, and so we're pretty on top of it. And like you said, when I, when we do catch 'em we charge 'em and then we get 'em out of here. So it usually deters a lot of it.