



**GRAFFITI VANDALISM**  
**THE MOTIVATIONS AND *MODUS OPERANDI* OF PERSONS WHO DO GRAFFITI**

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**Crime Prevention Division**  
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## 1. BACKGROUND

There has been a significant increase in the number of graffiti vandalism incidents recorded by the NSW Police over the last decade. Graffiti vandalism is a crime that has significant financial and social impacts on the NSW community, affecting government utilities, public transport operators, local government, business owners and residents. The cost of graffiti management diverts government funds from important services for the community.

The NSW Government has a long-standing commitment to dealing with the problem of graffiti in the NSW community. This commitment has seen the establishment of graffiti taskforces, such as the Anti-Graffiti Action Team (AGAT, established in 2006), changes to legislation and the provision of funds to Local Councils to implement targeted graffiti management strategies. The NSW State Plan deals with graffiti management under Priority R3: Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour.

A broad range of programs and initiatives aimed at reducing graffiti vandalism have been introduced across Australia and internationally. However, there is little evidence available on the motivations and *modus operandi* of the people who commit graffiti vandalism.

## 2. THE GRAFFITI OFFENDER RESEARCH PROJECT

The Crime Prevention Division of the New South Wales Attorney General's Department (CPD) under the auspices of the New South Wales Anti-Graffiti Action Team has undertaken a number of research projects that examine graffiti vandalism, with a view to providing information for the development of a comprehensive strategic framework for graffiti management in NSW.

In 2008-2009 CPD developed a Graffiti Offender Research Project that aimed to better understand the motivations and *modus operandi* of graffiti offenders.

By discerning the motivations and *modus operandi* of persons who do graffiti, the project aimed to inform NSW Government policy by exploring the:

- Motivations for and perceived benefits of graffiti activities
- Trends in the graffiti activities conducted by individuals
- Main type(s) of graffiti drawn
- Common locations and peak periods to engage in graffiti
- Practices and measures used to overcome barriers to graffiti vandalism and avoid being caught and seen

and to aid in the development of appropriate countermeasures to decrease the incidence of graffiti vandalism in NSW.

### **3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 *The Interviews: Structure and Questions***

The project utilised a qualitative instrument: in-depth, semi-structured interviews with graffiti offenders. This research is based on qualitative data obtained from 38 in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews that CPD conducted with 52 participants between March 2008 and February 2009. Seven of these interviews with 10 participants were conducted as pilot interviews. The interviews were, on average, between 45 and 60 minutes long.

A mixture of interviewer-participant approaches was used: generally, two researchers conducted interviews with one respondent however there were cases where only one researcher was present. On other occasions, participants would only consent to be interviewed in small groups so there were a number of two-on-two interviews.

The interview questions explored participants' perspectives of and practices in graffiti vandalism, including:

- History of graffiti vandalism activities
- Main type(s) of graffiti drawn
- Common locations and peak periods to engage in graffiti vandalism
- Motivations for and perceived benefits of graffiti vandalism
- Activities associated with doing graffiti vandalism
- Practices and measures used to overcome barriers to graffiti vandalism and avoid being caught and seen.

Basic socio-demographic data (age, gender, education/employment status) was also collected from the participants at the interview.

An interview guide comprising open-ended questions was used to assist the interviewers in conducting the interviews. The interview guide was trialled on 10 participants. The questions were altered slightly before the guide was used for the general study. The final interview questions are included as appendix B of this paper.

Initially, an online survey was created as an additional data source, but the quality of the data collected in this way was discredited by a significant number of submissions that contained nonsensical and/or offensive information. As a result, no data collected online was included in the results of the research.

#### **3.2 *Recruitment of Interview Participants***

The vast majority of the 52 interview participants were recruited through youth or community centres. CPD contacted the centres directly and asked whether:

- Any young persons would be interested in participating in the research and/or
- The centre would distribute postcards to promote the research and encourage participants

With permission from the centres involved, the research team conducted interviews at a number of youth and community centres' graffiti workshops and legal art projects. Conducting interviews in this context was convenient for the participants and provided a comfortable, familiar environment. On a number of occasions the researchers engaged four or five separate participants at such sessions. This method of recruitment accounted for the majority of the interviews conducted.

Other participants were sourced through word of mouth and responses to the promotional postcards. A 'freecall' 1800 number was advertised to attract participants to the research. Only a small number of participants were recruited in this way.

Participants were recruited from urban, suburban and regional settings including: Albion Park, Bligh Park, Bossley Park, Campbelltown, Dulwich Hill, Dundas, Glebe, Harris Park, Hornsby, Maroubra, Marrickville, Menai, Merrylands, North Sydney, Taree and Waterloo.

### ***3.3 Inclusion Criteria for Interview Participants***

To participate in the interviews, candidates were required to meet the following criteria:

- The person reported being aged 14 years or over
- The person reported doing graffiti
- The person had the ability to understand the requirements of the survey and the purpose of the research
- The person was able to verbally consent to participate in the research
- The person volunteered to participate in the research

### ***3.4 Informed Consent***

Informed consent was obtained for each interview. CPD developed the process for obtaining informed consent in accordance with the requirements of The Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, The NSW Commission for Children and Young People and the Justice Health Human Research and Ethics Committee. This ensured that the young people included in the research were treated appropriately.

CPD assessed each potential participant using the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for working with young persons. The interviewer explained the interview process and research purpose to each candidate in lay terms and the candidate was asked to repeat that process and purpose back. This process ensured that the young person understood the purpose of the research. It was intended that any person unable to do this would be thanked and excluded from the research, however no person needed to be excluded in this way.

The verbal consent process ensured the anonymity of the research and enabled the recruitment of participants with varying literacy skills. The consent statement was refined to ensure that the terminology was appropriate for young participants.

### **3.5      *Transcription and Analysis of the Interviews***

The interviews were professionally transcribed by a third party and analysed by CPD using data analysis software. The most common themes and threads were identified and are elucidated upon in this document. Hence, not all the information collected in the interviews has been included in this report.

### **3.6      *Caveats***

The following caveats should be taken into account in considering the results of this research.

The research results presented in this report are based on the responses given in 38 interviews conducted with a sample of 52 graffiti offenders. This number is a small proportion of the graffiti offenders in NSW and may not be representative of graffiti vandals as a whole. In addition, due to the subject matter of the research, participants had to be prepared to volunteer details of their illegal behaviours and this may have affected the mix in the sample.

The majority of participants were recruited through youth and community services and this may contribute to an age bias in the sample.

The research may have missed certain segments of the graffiti community. For example, many of the participants talked about 'Lads' who do illegal graffiti, act aggressively and wear a particular brand of clothing.<sup>1</sup> The researchers were unsuccessful at recruiting these persons to the study.

The research explored the development and changes in individuals' graffiti styles over time. This analysis should be treated as a 'snap-shot' of graffiti development because each graffitist can only comment on his/her development to the point at

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<sup>1</sup> Several of the participants described these 'Lads' the same way.

which the interview was conducted. We do not know how or if the style or behaviour of each participant may change in the future.

## **4. RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **4.1 *The Sample: Demographics***

#### **Age and gender**

Fifty-two persons participated in the research. Of these, 47 persons had their reported age recorded. The average age of these 47 participants was 16.6 years of age, with the youngest participants interviewed being 14 years of age for ethical reasons and the eldest 38 with a graffiti history of around 25 years.

Of the participants for whom gender was recorded the majority were male (n=37) and there were twelve females. Another three participants did not have their gender recorded and their genders could not be ascertained from transcripts.

The age and gender make-up of the research sample is consistent with data available from the police, which, though limited due to under-reporting of graffiti vandalism and low rates of graffiti offenders being proceeded against,<sup>2</sup> suggests that graffiti vandals tend to be young males. In 2008, NSW Police proceeded against 1,910 persons in relation to graffiti offences: 87% of which were male (n=1,669), 76% were under the age of 18 (n=1,456), and if these two categories are overlaid, males under the age of 18 are seen to account for 65% (n=1,247).<sup>3</sup>

The average age of this sample is also consistent with the average age of the 44 'graffiti writers'<sup>4</sup> interviewed by Halsey and Young in their South Australian study in 2002, which was 16.8 years, though as with the current research, these participants were also largely recruited through youth services<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Place of residence and domicile**

Participants were sourced from urban, suburban and regional settings including: Albion Park, Bligh Park, Bossley Park, Campbelltown, Dulwich Hill, Dundas, Glebe, Harris Park, Hornsby, Maroubra, Marrickville, Menai, Merrylands, North Sydney, Taree and Waterloo. The vast majority of participants reported living at home with family, while a handful reported living alone or sharing, and very few reported living at a half-way house or youth centre.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Proceeded against' includes court and non-court legal proceedings. Non-court legal proceedings included: Youth conferences, cautions under the *Young Offenders Act*, criminal infringement notices, infringement notices, warnings or 'legal process nfc'

<sup>3</sup> Source: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research NSW Recorded Crime Statistics 2008.

<sup>4</sup> This term was used by Halsey and Young to address the participants in their study.

<sup>5</sup> Halsey and Young (2002)

The research conducted by Halsey and Young in 2002 among graffiti writers in South Australia concluded that graffiti writers are: mostly male; most likely to be aged between 12 and 25 years, with younger writers almost always engaging in tagging and older writers doing pieces; from a broad range of social backgrounds, with around a quarter of writers having been alienated from academic institutions; and, often deeply engaged in writing for a limited period of time (perhaps 2-3 years)<sup>6</sup>. In contrast, a population-based study involving 2,603 13-year old school students in South Australia identified similar proportion of graffiti behaviour in girls (10.9%) and boys (12.3%).<sup>7</sup> The study concluded that adolescents who graffiti are also likely to experience a number of other family, parental, behavioural and psychological problems.

## **4.2      *The Motivations of Graffiti Offenders***

Several authors have related graffiti vandalism to a range of motivations. Recognition, identification and self-esteem are common motives identified for graffiti vandalism)<sup>8</sup>. Negative motivations such as anger, boredom, resentment, and defiance of authority have also been linked to graffiti vandalism. Halsey and Young suggested that the causes of graffiti vandalism are multiple and stem mainly from a lack of 'legitimate' activities for young people to immerse themselves in. They also identified that most "graffiti writers" are introduced to graffiti through friends or acquaintances<sup>9</sup>.

This research corroborates a number of previous findings in identifying a wide range of reasons why participants do graffiti, including:

- Pursuit of 'illegal fame' or recognition
- An adrenaline rush
- Emotional expression
- Malicious damage
- Art
- Fun
- Political expression
- Competition
- A hobby
- To meet people or for social reasons
- Because it is funny

It is important to note that a number of participants expressed more than one reason for doing graffiti. Motives expressed by participants appeared to be contextual depending on the person's length of involvement with graffiti, his/her

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<sup>6</sup> Halsey and Young (2002)

<sup>7</sup> Martin et al (2003)

<sup>8</sup> Fuller et al. (2003), Geason & Wilson (1990), Halsey & Young (2002), Weisel (2004)

<sup>9</sup> Halsey and Young (2002)

emotional state, the influence of other graffitiists or friends and the type of or target for graffiti.

Of motivations identified in this research, the most common reasons given were: pursuit of fame or recognition, an adrenaline rush, emotional or political expression and artistic expression. These are discussed in more detail below.

#### ***4.2.1. Pursuit of 'Illegal Fame' or Recognition***

The pursuit of *illegal fame* and peer recognition were the motivations most commonly identified by interview participants. The pursuit of illegal fame may be distinguished from peer recognition by the extent to which the graffitiist identifies with the graffiti subculture. The participants who identified pursuit of *illegal fame* were immersed in, and identified with, graffiti culture to a greater extent than those who sought peer recognition alone.

Illegal fame or simply fame is referred to in early graffiti magazines such as *Subway Art* and there is even a popular graffiti magazine called *Illegal Fame*.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that a significant number of graffitiists are motivated by (illegal) fame.

Interview participants indicated that *illegal fame* could be earned through prodigious *tagging*,<sup>11</sup> doing graffiti in risky or dangerous locations such as the third storey walls of industrial buildings that may only be reached by scaling drainage pipes or highly visible locations such as *track sides*<sup>12</sup> or rail corridors. Fame may also be earned by doing high quality *pieces*<sup>13</sup> that other graffitiists will travel to see or by having a distinct style that others recognise as being done by a particular graffitiist.

One interview participant commented, "You know, it's cool to have a style where people know that that's you and stuff just by that. They don't even have to read it." For many of these graffitiists individual fame and crew fame are interconnected.

Interview participants who pursue illegal fame typically choose hard to reach, dangerous or mobile targets for their graffiti "Because people recognize you for getting somewhere hard, like you go and it's just like leaving your mark so that people know you've been there".

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<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether or not the graffitiists interviewed for this research adopted the term from reading the magazines or through peer groups or some other source.

<sup>11</sup> A tag may be a particular word or name, an acronym, postcode or even a picture or symbol that represents the person or group

<sup>12</sup> A track side may refer to areas adjoining railway tracks or to an item of graffiti drawn next to the tracks.

<sup>13</sup> A piece is a painting, short for masterpiece. A piece requires considerably more stylistic input than a tag, will involve multiple colours and be completely filled in. Often a piece will be a more complicated version of the graffitiist's tag or crew tag, or it may be another word, a character or another picture altogether.

Similarly, high visibility or mobile targets are valued:

*Graffiti is like advertising, you advertise your name, so I'll do it on trucks because they will drive around and it will get my fame around in more places than just in a fixed spot. That's why people do it on trains, because trains are moving.*

Another interview participant commented that:

*Like if people have tags on the (train) lines and stuff. There's like risks to getting out there and doing that whereas if you're in a toilet you're in a confined space ... Like in train toilets, if you bomb in the train toilets it's pretty toy<sup>14</sup> whereas if you bomb on the outside it's more risk so you don't really deserve that fame (that comes from bombing in the toilets) ...*

It is evident that the choice of target is affected by the person's motivation.

The pursuit of fame can become competitive: a couple of interview participants talked about being motivated by competition with other graffitiists. One competed with a friend to do better graffiti "you know me and him were always like competitive, trying to be better than one another." Another competitive participant described graffiti "... like a sort of competition to so see who gets up the most." This is linked to a subset of graffitiists that may be described as 'prolific taggers', who may pursue illegal fame.

Many graffitiists were motivated by peer recognition, which was characterized by the number of graffitiists who show their graffiti to friends or who derived pleasure from their friends or other graffitiists seeing their graffiti. These persons did not see themselves as pursuing 'fame' or being immersed in a graffiti culture.

#### **4.2.2. Adrenaline Rush**

A significant number of participants indicated that their motivation for doing graffiti was an adrenaline rush or thrill arising from the risk of being caught or suffering personal injury.

Despite many graffitiists identifying an adrenaline rush very few of these persons were able to clearly elucidate this feeling. Common responses included "You're doing something wrong and you can get caught and it's just adrenalin pumping" and "It's fun I guess. I like it. Adrenaline rush."

One participant cited particular enjoyment from hiding from the police "Like you hear sirens and you hide and it's just fun I guess."

Some of the participants who said they do graffiti for an adrenaline rush also said that they prefer to have a friend along with them to watch their back or to make it

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<sup>14</sup> 'Toy' is a word used to describe something that is amateur or not cool.

safer. It seems that company may help to mitigate the risks of getting caught, fighting with other graffitists or personal injury. This appears inconsistent, why are risk seekers bringing friends along to minimise the risk? It may be that these persons are actually motivated by recognition; they want their friends to see them taking risks and derive pleasure from that rather than from the risk itself.

Issues to do with risk are explored further in section 4.3.5 'Perceived Risks'.

#### **4.2.3. Emotional Expression**

Another common motivation given by participants was emotional expression. One participant spoke about writing 'Rest in Peace TJ' in reference to the Aboriginal teenager whose death sparked protests in Redfern. "So that's all I tag now, I just tag my name, and I just tag his name. You know, 'Rest in Peace TJ'."

One participant suggested that graffitists can read each others' emotional states from their graffiti: "So when people write the words and they've been writing for a long time they can see that their word – when you go out at night doing graffiti – say that's just to get away from (expletive)." The same participant went on to say that graffiti is an outlet for his emotions: "I mean if you're angry you can go out to do graffiti just destroying heaps of (expletive) and that makes you feel better about yourself."

Several participants talked about doing graffiti because they are angry. One seemed particularly angry: "Half the (expletive) houses that we write on they're all (expletive) rich stuck up (expletive) that talk (expletive) anyway, hey just write in them people's houses. You can tell hey. If it's a cheap house don't write on it."

#### **4.2.4. Malicious Damage**

A distinction can be drawn between those persons who often do graffiti and on occasion deliberately do damage to property as an outlet for their anger and those persons who almost always do graffiti for the sole purpose of destroying things. These individuals were exemplified by this comment:

*I don't like graf(fiti). To me, it's totally a wank. (Expletive) pretending they're arty and (expletive). I write on stuff coz I want to wreck stuff and you're less likely to get caught wrecking (expletive) with a bit of ink than you are if you smash stuff up.*

Few interview participants indicated malicious damage as their motivation for doing graffiti but they do represent an important sub-category of offenders that should be considered in developing graffiti reduction and management strategies.

#### **4.2.5. Artistic Expression**

A small but interesting number of individuals attributed their graffiti to artistic expression. One participant commented:

*Graffiti is, in my opinion, one of the last true remaining art forms, because it's an underground art form. It's what art, to me, should be about. It should be about your own self-expression, not about for the gratification of the public. Like, I love, you know, my art like, my art is walking at 3am in the morning down train lines and seeing just piece after wicked piece and just sitting there and admiring just how beautiful that work is.*

It's important to note that this participant put emphasis on the context in which the piece is done, that is, along train lines. The interview participant's reference to graffiti as an 'underground art form' indicates the piece would not have the same level of meaning and attractiveness to the participant if it was done, for example, on a legal wall in broad daylight. For this graffitist, the art is contextual: part of the form of expression is the act of doing it illegally. This person may use legal graffiti walls on occasion but is unlikely to be completely diverted from practicing illegal graffiti.

In contrast, one person who was an art student who happened to do graffiti illegally a few times said:

*I guess, I look up to the artists and it is just like a heaps good form of art I think. Yeah, if you want like the public to see something like a controversial message or put your point of view out there, it's a good form of art to do that because it's in the public eye and stuff and you get reactions from it.*

This participant did stencil graffiti illegally to show off his art. For him, there was little or no 'graffiti culture' involved in the decision to do graffiti vandalism; he could be described as doing art illegally rather than practicing artistic graffiti.<sup>15</sup>

This raises an interesting policy issue: some graffitists would be happy to practice their 'art' on legal walls as long as it is visible. However, for other graffitists more tied up in the culture, the art form requires a degree of illegality to be considered legitimate amongst their fellow writers. These persons are less likely to be satisfied with only using legal walls and may continue to seek opportunities to do graffiti illegally.

#### **4.2.6. Other Motives**

A range of other motives was identified by the research. Several graffitists said that doing graffiti was fun or enjoyable. This was generally associated with 'illegal fame', 'emotional expression', 'art' or all three of the above. For example:

*I hope that writers on that train see it, know who I am, and I get respect for that. I also paint for myself, because it's something, it's me expressing who I am, and it's just a great way to spend half, like a couple of hours of that night, and it's enjoyable.*

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. the 'piecer' in section 4.3.1.

Some graffitiists appreciate the social side of doing graffiti. A few participants talked about doing graffiti to meet people or because it was an opportunity to hang out with friends. One person commented that "... most of my mates yeah I met 'em like you know like through graffiti, like either you met 'em at the wall, or they like see ya tag..."

Two participants described graffiti as a hobby: "It's just like a hobby; it's just like playing rugby or basketball. I mean it might be illegal but that doesn't stop me."

One participant who predominantly did graffiti for 'fame' said that he found the reactions of members of the general public amusing. This person was laughing as he said this:

*Nah, 'cause like it's sort of funny 'cause like your average person will be like – you know they're all up in arms about graffiti and stuff and they're like, 'You know, if I ever see someone doing (graffiti)' – you actually put people in that position and most people don't say anything.*

Another motivation for graffiti is political expression. Only one of participant said he did graffiti for this reason: "Sometimes you prove a point, like fear equals power." This participant was not championing a particular cause or associated with a movement, so might not be considered a 'political activist' as such.

### **4.3 The Modus Operandi of Graffiti Offenders**

This paper explores the *modus operandi* of graffiti offenders by explaining: types and styles of graffiti; graffiti instruments and their use; how an individual's graffiti behaviour changes over time; the logistics involved in doing graffiti; the risks involved in graffiti; impact of existing graffiti management strategies; and, other activities done by graffitiists.

#### **4.3.1. Types of Graffiti**

Graffiti comes in all shapes and sizes. There are a number of different types and styles of graffiti. This research identified a number of distinct types of graffiti as practised or witnessed by the interview participants: pieces, tags, stencils, throw ups, characters, panels, productions, short messages or pictures and sticker graffiti. These may be done in a number of different styles such as public, Los Angeles, New York, bubble writing or the graffitiist's own unique style. The graffiti may be done with a number of different materials ranging from spray paint cans to drill bits used for etching and encompasses everything in between such as stencil outlines, marker pens and stickers. Graffiti instruments are discussed in detail in the next section 4.3.2 'Graffiti Instruments'.

The styles and types of graffiti practised by the interview participants are discussed in decreasing order of prominence below.

## Tags

The most common form of graffiti done by the interview participants was *tagging*. A tag may be a particular word or name, an acronym, postcode or even a picture or symbol that represents the person or group. Typically tags take just seconds to write or put up. They may be done with a variety of graffiti implements including spray paint, marker pens, textas, etching implements such as drill bits or even pens, pencils and crayons. Some graffitiists even modify their marker pens or paints so that they scar or leave a permanent mark.

The very short time frame required to do graffiti vandalism such as tagging suggests that prevention strategies that require live surveillance or intervention are unlikely to work. Interventions such as CCTV or the *graffiti nose*<sup>16</sup> aim to prevent graffiti vandalism by enabling police or security intervention at the moment the offence is committed. It is unlikely that a response could be deployed within the seconds taken to commit the offence.

The most common instruments for tagging were spray paint and marker pens. Tags may also be etched into the glass of bus shelters, windows of public transport, shopfronts and other glass, Perspex or plastic surfaces.

A sub-group of tagging became apparent through the interviews. A number of graffitiists do not tag *per se*, but rather write their name or a message. This form of graffiti could be in the form 'x loves y' or something more emotionally expressive, 'RIP TJ' for example, or perhaps politically motivated.

## Pieces

The next most common form of graffiti reported by the interview participants was *piecing*. A *piece* is a painting, and is short for 'masterpiece'.<sup>17</sup> A piece requires considerably more stylistic input than a tag, will involve multiple colours and be completely filled in. Often a piece will be a more complicated version of the graffitiist's tag or crew tag, or it may be another word, a character or another picture altogether.

Interview participants who identified as 'piecers' were typically motivated by fame or artistic expression. These two motivations are intertwined for some graffitiists because a high quality piece that is in some way unique will bring its writer respect and fame. It should be noted that most piecers identified fame as a motivation and/or associated themselves with a graffiti sub-culture. Very few of the participants identified art as their primary motivation for doing graffiti. This is

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<sup>16</sup> The 'graffiti nose' is a paint detector that prompts an alert when it detects a paint smell.

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, M. & Chalfant, H. (1984).

not to say that graffiti does not provide an outlet for artistic expression, rather, 'piecers' may be described as 'doing graffiti artistically' rather than 'doing art illegally'.

There is a relationship between the type of graffiti done, where it is done and why it is done. One graffitiist commented that:

*If I piece an underground drain network that only other writers would ever visit, no one from the public would ever go down there, because it sucks, but I go down there to piece, then see, I'm putting up only for other writers.*

This participant was clearly interested in the respect of his fellow graffitiists, not the general public or even taggers. This manifests itself in piecing in underground drains, on canals or other places that the general public rarely visit. This behaviour is very different to the prolific tagging on buses and trains exhibited by many other graffitiists.

Some graffitiists take a great deal of artistic pride in their pieces and employ a number of instruments to achieve an effect:

*These days I might, not so much on a wall even really, because of all the nozzles and everything you can get really fine lines, you can cut back lines to get sharp edges with the colour that's under it. With canvases it's a little bit different. I do use a little bit of stencil with canvases for specially photo realism if I'm doing eyes or I'll cut out the eyes to get the final clarity of the eyes and that. Canvases I'll use mixed media sometimes where I'll use, sometimes I'll use acrylic paints, marker pens, paint pens and spray cans.*

This use of multiple nozzles, which enable different thicknesses and effects, suggests that restrictions on the sale or use of spray paint nozzles may make it more difficult for graffiti vandals to do pieces. Existing legislation requires persons under the age of 18 in possession of graffiti implements to demonstrate a legitimate purpose for carrying them. However, because of the length of time required to develop the skills required for piecing, many of these offenders may be over the age of 18. Extending the legislative requirements to persons over the age of 18 may be worth consideration.

Attitudes to how long a piece takes to do varied across interview participants. One person said that he could rush a piece in 15 or 20 minutes or take up to two to three hours to do one "putting a lot of effort in." Another said the longest he would spend on a piece would be 30 minutes, in contrast with another participant's comment that "Technical ones take usually two or three hours, four maybe." Evidently, the length of time taken to do a piece varies depending on the skill of the graffitiist and the level of complexity and detail.

## **Throw Ups**

Halsey and Young describe a *throw up* as being characterised by fat, bubble style lettering. Usually a variation of the graffitist's tag is 'thrown up'.

One interview participant noted, for example, "I use my throwie like most people use their tag." Most interview participants who did throw ups reported them taking just seconds to do. However, where a tag might take five seconds to do a throwie might take 30 seconds.

Very few of the participants reported doing throw ups as their main type of graffiti.

Similarly to piecing, the speed with which throw-ups are applied suggests that graffiti reduction and management strategies that rely on intervention during commission of the offence, like CCTV or *graffiti nose*,<sup>18</sup> are unlikely to be effective.

### **Characters**

A few interview participants reported drawing characters (such as cartoon-style characters) or pictures rather than pieces or tags:

*... I don't really tag very much, only when I'm really drunk and feel like wrecking stuff and all this. Otherwise, I'd rather just do kind of arty stuff, like characters and stuff that I mainly do now. I don't really write words, I just kind of do characters.*

Another participant reported that he was the main person in his crew for doing characters, while other crew members applied different types of graffiti.<sup>19</sup>

### **Other types of graffiti**

Less commonly reported types of graffiti included: productions, panels, stencils and stickers.

A *production* is a series of pieces that incorporate similar colours and themes and 'put up' by multiple graffitists. These are rare outside of legal walls or commissioned artworks because of the time and expense involved. Only one interview participant identified himself as having been involved in an illegal production; a second interview participant stated he had watched four graffitists applying a production to a legal wall.

A panel is described as a 'painting below the windows and between the doors of a subway car' in Cooper and Chalfant's *Subway Art*.<sup>20</sup> Only one of the participants explicitly reported doing panels.

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<sup>18</sup> The 'graffiti nose' is a paint detector that prompts an alert when it detects a paint smell.

<sup>19</sup> This research did not draw attention to this but it should be noted that characters may substitute for tags, throw ups or pieces. Some graffitists use a small character as their tag, more elaborate characters may be comparable with throw ups and detailed characters could be considered pieces.

<sup>20</sup> Cooper, M. & Chalfant, H. (1984).

A few participants mentioned doing *stencils*. *Stencilling* involves cutting out a design from a piece of paper or cardboard and spraying paint through the paper to create a pattern on the target surface. One participant mentioned doing stencils of his 'soccer hooligan' crew logo to support his football team.

Stencils may be used to replicate the exact same design many times over. More complicated stencils may incorporate multiple layers in different colours, however this is hard to do illegally because of the time involved in waiting for each layer to dry before applying another.

Another participant mentioned stencilling as a school project and later using the same and other stencils to do illegal graffiti. This use of a stencil designed as part of a school art project to do illegal graffiti highlights the need for appropriate education to accompany these projects. Several participants who did illegal graffiti reported attending graffiti workshops run by youth agencies or councils. It may be surmised that the skills learned at these workshops are not used solely for legal graffiti. This suggests that schools, youth agencies and councils that engage young persons in graffiti projects should ensure that appropriate messages reach these young persons including information on the costs of graffiti vandalism to the community and the penalties for doing graffiti illegally.

Stickers are applications of small, self-adhesive labels to walls or other surfaces where graffiti may usually be applied. Stickers, in the context of graffiti, may display an offender's tag or other message. While a small number of interview participants referred to stickers, none of the interview participants identified themselves as actually practising 'stickering'.

## **Styles of graffiti**

A number of different graffiti styles or influences were mentioned in the interviews. Many graffitiists write their tags or pieces in *public* style, which generally means large, bubble-shaped, and easy to read lettering. Others talked about *Los Angeles* style or *New York* style. Los Angeles graffiti was described as being "...heaps sharp and straight lines, not bubbly..." while New York was described as being more 'traditional' and having to do with 'the structure of letters'.<sup>21</sup> Further, each individual graffitiist will often attempt to infuse his/her tags or pieces with his/her own unique style.

### **4.3.2. Graffiti Instruments**

The most common graffiti implements reported by the interview participants were, in order of prevalence, spray paint, marker pens and etching implements. Most participants reported using more than one graffiti implement depending on the

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<sup>21</sup> *Subway Art*, referred to above, despite being published in 1984, continues to be an excellent source of information on New York style graffiti.

target and type of graffiti. These implements included: spray paint cans; textas and markers; etching implements such as keys, coins, rocks or drill bits; stencils; paint rollers and acrylic paints; chalk and crayons; pencils and pens; and, stickers.

### **Spray paint cans**

Spray paint cans were identified by over half of the interview participants as a graffiti instrument s/he uses. Participants ranged from those using just the one colour to multiple colours, “I like [brand]. Usually use just three colours” to those who employ a number of different paints and caps.

*It depends what cap you use as well. If you use like a fat cap or something, it depends how quickly you go and stuff. If you're going too slow then you're wasting heaps of paint but with a fat cap if you go really fast then you like maximise your amount of paint so you've got to know like what sort of caps to use in what situations sort of thing.*

Spray cans were also reported as varying in price and quality. The more expensive cans were reported as giving better coverage and more control.

Certain cans may be modified with different nozzles for different purposes:

*... it depends on what you want to do, there's a lot of different sorts of caps. If you want a really thick line to do a throwie,<sup>22</sup> a really thick line you have pink dot and there's black dots and then there's orange dots, there's all different caps.<sup>23</sup>*

One tagger reported “All the dots are sizes and (expletive), it's better with a fat cap with throwies. Skinny cap is good for outlines ...” Some graffitists who identified as artists saw themselves as distinguishable from taggers because of their knowledge of and ability to use different caps:

*It's not just a paint can; it comes with different lids to it so that you can do different thicknesses, less drips, different pressures. That's really what makes graffiti artists different from the general tagger.*

Interview participants also reported refilling spray paint cans with paint or other liquids to achieve certain effects. As there are very few legitimate reasons for refilling spray paint cans, design modifications which stop cans from being refilled or modified may make it harder for graffiti vandals to commit offences.

### **Markers, paint pens and textas**

Markers, paint pens and textas are particularly popular for tagging and writing short messages but may also be used for outlines and sharp edges on pieces.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Throwie' is another term for 'throw up'. See section 4.3.1.

<sup>23</sup> Researcher note: individual spray paint nozzles or caps retail for about \$10 apiece.

The 'advantages' of markers and textas were perceived to be ease of use and acquisition. Interview participants identified a few specific brands, which appear to be the most popular for graffiti vandalism. Markers and textas with 'fat' nibs were particularly valued.

A large number of the participants reported carrying markers or textas on their person the majority of the time: "Yes. I always carry a marker on me. Sometimes when I go to train yards maybe use black paint and that and – but always still carry a marker so I could like, if I get inside the carriages just hit up everywhere."

There appears to be a prevailing behaviour to carry markers or textas and 'get up' whenever a chance presents itself. Prolific taggers, some piecers and opportunistic graffitists reported this behaviour. However, some graffitists perceived markers and textas as being *toy*:<sup>24</sup> "(I'll use them) if there's nothing else, but they're toy. I hate them."

### **Etching instruments**

Several interview participants reported doing etching. The majority of participants who reported doing etching talked about using keys or rocks to do etching: "rock or money or something if you do glass." While these persons may be characterised as opportunistic, some participants reported being premeditated in their approach to doing etching. One commented:

*... sometimes you can get drill bits from like [unclear] whatever and they cost like four bucks and you can get like 12 that will last you, as long as you want to, like they'll never, they'll always last you and then if I'm getting on a bus and I see a rock I would just like use the rock to scratch it in and if I want to [unclear] I use it to scratch it in.*

A person who goes to a hardware store and buys drill bits with the intention to do etching is distinguishable from another who picks up a rock on a whim and etches. There is higher degree of thought and effort involved in the former case.

Etching ensures that a graffitist's tag is on display for a significant period of time:

*The only reason you do them – like I don't like 'em because they look ugly but like it's hard for people to understand. Like when you go on the train like every day and you're trying like to get up and then you go back and you know it's the exact same train and it's all gone you're like that didn't even go for a day and that's what annoys you and then you scratch into the windows because they can't get rid of the windows until they like – then they stay up forever.*

Graffiti vandals motivated by recognition or illegal fame want their tags on display. Removing tags written with spray paint or marker pens creates an incentive for vandals to etch instead. The State Transit Authority has raised the

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<sup>24</sup> 'Toy' is a word used to describe something that is amateur or not cool.

possibility of this diversion occurring, anecdotally,<sup>25</sup> and this research provides further evidence of the phenomenon.

### **Modified graffiti instruments**

A few participants reported making their own graffiti instruments or modifying commercially available instruments to suit their own purposes. One person talked about modifying marker pens so that his graffiti would be harder to remove:

*Get like chalk pens, do you know them? Like a texta but you screw the lid off and tip all the chalk out ... and then you go up to (the hardware store) and get wood stain and just put wood stain in it and it stains and they will never get it off.*

Another talked about using "... a texta about that big and you just empty it and then you fill it up with raven oil." Other graffitiists referred to this or similar modification as making a 'scarry', that is, the new implement scars the surface permanently so that normal cleaning or removal is ineffective "Usually just so they scar ... once you buff them they just stay there".

### **Stencils**

As described in section 4.3.1, in *stencilling*, a pattern is cut out of cardboard, paper, plastic or other material and then that *stencil* is held against a surface while paint or spray paint is applied. The result is a mark on the wall in the same pattern as that cut into the stencil. One participant reported stencilling using "Spray cans and like yeah, Stanley knives, cardboard, Blu Tack."

Stencil use was only reported by a handful of participants, and only one of these clearly reported having used stencils do illegal graffiti. One participant mentioned stencil use as part of a graffiti workshop, two others talked about using stencils but did not discuss the surface or target.

### **Other graffiti implements**

A number of other graffiti implements were reported but were not used as commonly as those already discussed. These were: paint rollers, crayons, pencils and pens, stickers, chalk and acrylic paint.

### **Implications for enforcement bodies**

Graffiti vandals use a variety of implements to perpetrate. Many of these instruments may appear innocuous. Section 5 of the [Graffiti Control Act 2008](#) makes it illegal for persons to possess graffiti implements with the intention to

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<sup>25</sup> Haynes, R. 'Grilles to scratch out graffiti vandals' *Daily Telegraph* 8 May 2008  
<http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,25445927-5001021,00.html> [accessed 27 May 2009]

commit graffiti vandalism. Police officers and other enforcement officers should be kept aware of the scope of graffiti implements used.

### 4.3.3. Graffiti Offender Pathways

#### Initial involvement in graffiti

Halsey and Young found that friends or acquaintances introduced the majority of graffiti artists to graffiti.<sup>26</sup> This research supports that finding. The vast majority of interview participants reported getting involved in graffiti through friends, family members or other graffiti artists.

Many participants got started in graffiti through friends. These participants mentioned doing graffiti with friends from school or going out to do graffiti with friends: “My friend just told me, ‘Do you want to come down to the canals?’ and then I went and then we, like used sprays and [unclear] in the canals.”

Several graffiti artists got into graffiti through family members: siblings, cousins, even parents “Well, my dad used to do it. So I kind of started sketching and (expletive). Like, he told me his tag and I started doing that. Yeah, just hanging with mates, they do it. It’s pretty cool.”

A similar number of participants reported getting started through another graffiti artist.

*He still writes, yeah, he did something on the weekend apparently. But he’s an amazing artist and he’s in a band called \*\*\* which have been around a long time. I got his number by accident from another friend and memorised it because I liked his stuff so much and I just rang him up and said, hey, I love your stuff. We became good friends and he kind of taught me pretty much the structure of letters and colours and if it wasn’t for \*\*\* I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing today. You know he was an amazing influence on me and a good friend. From there I just kind – you still over the years you still take little bits from other people. You might see something you like or a connection in a letter or something like that and you’ll make it your own.*

Another common response was self-motivation or self-taught, one individual was ‘inspired’ to do graffiti by viewing graffiti from trains: “Just train trips to Sydney and seeing it all and just like the scene around in Wollongong and that, just got interested in it and what it all says and stuff.” Another read graffiti books and magazines and picked it up from there: “I’ve got a few graffiti books on them and that and they are really good. I guess that’s why I picked it up.”

A couple of participants got started through youth centre or council run activities: The youth centre “...just called like a graffiti artist person and asked if we wanted to do it and he taught us how to like write and stuff and told us not to do illegal stuff.” One person got started on graffiti at school: “It was for my major art

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<sup>26</sup> Halsey and Young (2002).

work in Year 12.” This research suggests that some persons are learning to do graffiti at workshops but not restricting themselves to legal applications. Again, this highlights the need for appropriate educational interventions at these activities.

### **Has your graffiti changed over time?**

To test the hypothesis that graffiti artists start off doing tags and progress to throw ups and eventually to pieces, the interview participants were asked ‘Has your graffiti changed over time?’ Many of the participants had very little to contribute to this discourse, however the ones that did supported the progression from tagging to piecing, provided the individual was capable of doing the more detailed designs. It was common for graffiti artists to initially ‘bite’ or copy from other graffiti artists but over time develop their own style:

*Well, I started out, I was like really amateur, it was really block letters and all, but that's kind of gotten just everything – it starts to fit in. Like you add – you kind of get things from other people then you add your own stuff and also it's kind of changed a bit, better.*

One person started using “all the arrows and crowns and (expletive)” but progressed to doing more complicated underlines and flares. In contrast, another graffiti artist simplified his style over time from Los Angeles style graffiti that incorporated arrows and complicated calligraphy to public style, which has smoother lines and is easier to read.

The eldest graffiti artist in the sample elaborated much more than the others on how his graffiti had changed over time. Some extracts from his interview are included below because they cogently explain the ‘typical’ progression from tagging through to piecing:

*When I was 13 I saw a movie called The Warriors which is a kind of New York City gang movie. You'd have to watch it to really understand the full kind of reason for it. But I always loved trains as a kid, kind of going backwards and forwards to my grandparents in the west and that. I always loved train so this movie is spent mainly on the trains in New York City and they were just covered in graffiti. Nothing good just a lot of tags and scribbles and stuff like that. And I'd always had a bit of a dark personality growing up. I'd always liked the solitude and the quiet of the night so I kind of – this movie's based pretty much at night time.*

*So I just like that. The quietness of everything with the surroundings when no one else is around kind of always appealed to me. So I saw that and just kind of wondered why people wrote – why this stuff is on trains. Like yeah. So I just thought, wow, why would someone do that They'd obviously have to do it when no one else is around and that quietness, that kind of, I guess, me time, loneliness, I guess, appealed to me so I just started writing pretty much on my side fence outside my bedroom window was where I first started writing with a spray can. And I didn't ask my parents I just went and did it because I was so excited about this*

*movie and why people did it so I wanted to see what it was about, why – what it felt like. And I went round to the side fence and I kept getting a lot of trouble and got grounded. I thought it was fun and from there I just kind of was just writing around the local neighbourhood really. Menial stuff that – stuff that I saw in The Warriors, stuff that I saw in movies for probably a year. Then the kind of hip-hop movement started to show its face in Australia and movies like Beat Street and Breakdance came out where the graffiti that you kind of see today was getting done so I just kind of pretty much took it to the next level really. From tagging to doing actual pieces.*

*Yeah, yeah. There was a certain style to it I think we copied a lot of what America did in the early eighties definitely because there was only two movies to go by and also a book called Subway Art. And a lot of stuff – there was – you can see so many similarities with early Sydney graffiti and books and movies. But still we didn't take it fully on as far as – I mean if you look at the book Subway Art, the stuff is just so incredible for nineteen – like this is 1981, 1982, that these guys were doing what they were doing in Subway Art. And just amazing. Some of it beats some of the stuff that goes around today but we still never took on – we still had our own kind of way. But, yeah, very stylised. I just kind of looked at other tags and kind of worked my own (tag) out of what else was going around.*

*So until I moved to Sydney in 1991, a few more popped up on the Central Coast but I still was mainly the only one, so. Where I progressed, I – mainly just from books. There were two guys in Subway Art, two artists, one [Soon] and one Dondi that I really liked the most and I just kind of looked at a lot of their stuff and incorporated their style into mine but also just because of the way of your hand and your mind you kind of have your own kind of thing where people can tell that it's you. After that I moved to Sydney, I met another guy called \*\*\* who was incredible.*

*So yeah you just kind of progress through things that you see, you get advice, like someone might say to you, look, the way that you do this, do it this way it'll look better. So you then change what you've done into kind of what they're trying to tell you and you see that it looks better so you then just go on from there.*

Another interview participant also talked about progressing from tags to 'arty stuff':

*I used to go like almost every day on the bus and stuff. That was when I was at school, when I was at my old school. All the guys there, all the older guys, used to write a lot, so kind of it was like, yeah, let's wreck something. It was like me and my mate started writing on trains, which was pretty fun. But now I don't really bomb anymore and I don't really tag very much, only when I'm really drunk and feel like wrecking stuff and all this. Otherwise, I'd rather just do kind of arty stuff, like characters and stuff, that I mainly do now. I don't really write words, I just kind of do characters.*

There is substantial evidence from the interviews to suggest that prolific taggers do want to become piecers or artistic graffitiists. These persons will strive to do more complicated graffiti pieces until their peers accept them as a piecer.

However, many graffitiists simply do not have the skills to progress to piecing and may either continue tagging or cease doing graffiti.

### **Length of involvement**

Around half of the interview participants had been doing graffiti for three or more years, with one participant having a history of more than 20 years and another having only been doing graffiti for a couple of weeks. In comparison, Halsey and Young reported that the average length of participation in 'graffiti culture' for their South Australian sample was 3.92 years.

### **Practice**

Most interview participants stated that they practice their graffiti. Some participants were confused as to what constituted practice. The majority of interview participants practiced in sketchbooks while others attended workshops or legal wall sessions or school art classes to improve their graffiti. Halsey and Young also found that practice was common: "Here participants spoke of developing and practicing tags in their books or on scrap paper. On rare occasions this was done in art classes with the permission of the teacher."<sup>27</sup>

A number of interview participants reported learning or improving their graffiti through council, school or youth and community centre workshops or activities. It may be the case that these programs confuse graffitiists by sending mixed messages: graffiti is being encouraged and taught as a means of self expression by some of these agencies but if it is done in the wrong place it is illegal. Education programs that distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate uses of the skills developed in these workshops and explain the costs and penalties of graffiti vandalism may remove this confusion.

#### ***4.3.4. Offender Logistics***

### **Where did the participants report getting materials?**

When asked how they obtain their graffiti materials, interview participants reported that they bought their own materials, had someone else purchase them, stole or 'racked' them, or non-specifically reported getting materials from a shop. Hardware stores, discount department stores, newsagents and dedicated graffiti shops figured highly in the responses.

Most commonly, interview participants reported buying their own graffiti implements:<sup>28</sup> "You just go into newsagents and buy a few textas for \$5 you know." Several interview participants reported either having someone else buy implements for them or stealing implements for themselves. One person

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<sup>27</sup> Halsey and Young (2002)

<sup>28</sup> The next section discusses the income sources of the interview participants.

described stealing implements from newsagents and discount department stores as “Yeah. From the shop, you know, walk in, while the shop keeper’s looking away, I just put it in me pocket and walk out.”

Participants also reported getting other persons to buy their implements, particularly spray paints, for them: “... you’ve got to get someone else to buy (spray paint), if you’ve got a friend that’s 18, get them to get it for you, or your parents will... I just give them the money and they go get it.” Some participants used a variety of acquisition methods, for example one person bought and stole his marker pens but had friends buy his paint: “Usually, my mates buy the paint, because I’m underage, but I usually go to shops and get this big texta, you get them anywhere.”

Currently it is not an offence for adults to supply minors with spray paint cans. It is problematic to stop a parent, youth worker or schoolteacher from supplying young persons with spray paint for legitimate purposes. However, it may be possible to legislate to stop adults from supplying minors with spray paint cans. Issues to consider would be the adult’s relationship to the young person and the level of supervision under which the cans may be used.

### **How did the participants report being able to afford graffiti instruments?**

Graffiti can be a very expensive process and some of the interview participants commented on this: “... because when you are writing three times a week and you’re spending x amount of money on cans, I’d prefer to paint with like a two dollar fifty can than a seven to 10 dollar can.” A number of graffitiists mentioned using multiple colours, different caps, paint pens and markers: This raises the question ‘How do they afford these implements?’

The most common source of income reported was family. In most instances this was willingly given as an allowance or spending money but in some cases money was stolen from family members “Depends. Like if my mum’s being a (expletive) then I steal it off her.” The next most common source of income was work. Some participants worked several jobs: “I work three jobs and time is really limited,” while others reported working just the one shift a week. Centrelink was the next most common source of income, and was cited using a number of different terms including ‘the government’, ‘Youth Allowance’, ‘Abstudy’, ‘Newstart’ or simply ‘Centrelink’.

### **Transport to graffiti sites**

Interview participants mentioned transport in three separate contexts:

1. As a graffiti target itself, for example, buses and train carriages
2. As a means of travelling to a graffiti target, on which graffiti may be done opportunistically during the journey

3. As an unplanned graffiti target that may be targeted opportunistically during routine journeys (to work or school, for example)

Participants reported using a number of modes of transport to get to graffiti targets (or as targets themselves): trains, walking, buses, push bikes, cars and skateboarding were reported in descending numbers. There were various reasons for these choices. One person preferred walking as he thought it was less risky. Others chose to ride on trains because they could do graffiti on the way to and from the actual target site.

Most participants reported usually doing graffiti in the same area each time. Often this was their local area, surrounding suburbs, a train line or a particular park or shopping centre. The research suggest that where persons do graffiti depends on the motive and the type of graffiti. For instance, piecers spoke of travelling to canals or underground networks to do graffiti those only other graffitiists would go to, while taggers reported targeting high visibility locations. Piecers and prolific taggers differed from opportunistic taggers in that more heavily involved graffitiists reported travelling to particular sites specifically to do graffiti, while opportunistic graffitiists just tag on their usual routes.

To ascertain the geographic range of graffitiists, participants were asked, "What is the furthest you have travelled to do graffiti?" This question did not yield very useful results, as the participants tended to talk about doing graffiti overseas on family holidays rather than talking about the why, where and how of travelling a long distance specifically to do graffiti.

### **When is graffiti done?**

The research sought to identify likely periods for graffiti vandalism to occur. However, the most common response was 'whenever or anytime' reflecting the opportunistic nature of many graffitiists. Representative responses included "It depends if we have a texta" and "When nobody is seeing you." These participants are not necessarily going out of their way to do graffiti vandalism but if at some point on their usual routes or movements an opportunity to do graffiti arises, they will take that opportunity. This is consistent with *routine activity theory* and the convergence of targets, offenders and a lack of supervision.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Routine Activity Theory (RAT) is one of the main theories of "environmental criminology". It was developed by criminologists Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson, who have worked for a number of years on crime prevention theory. RAT states that for a predatory crime to occur, three elements must be present when any crime is committed: a suitable target; a motivated offender; and, a suitable guardian is lacking. RAT looks at crime from an offender's point of view. A crime will only be committed if a likely offender thinks that a target is suitable and a capable guardian is absent. It is the offender's assessment of a situation that determines whether a crime will take place [Source: <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/rat.htm>].

Several interview participants reported doing graffiti at night-time. A couple reported doing track sides after midnight, another mentioned doing graffiti as soon as it got dark, and a couple more did graffiti on Friday and Saturday nights when out with friends. A further three individuals mentioned doing graffiti of an afternoon, particularly between 3pm and 6pm. These are times typically associated with the gap in supervision between school finishing times and parents arriving home from work. A few preferred doing graffiti during the day “Because you... it’s that thing with the light, so if you do it at night you can’t see.”

A few participants reported doing different types of graffiti at different times of day. One participant said that he did pieces at night with his friends but that he did:

*... lots of insides like on the inside of the train you can bomb early in the morning because that’s going to get your best run all day like before they get rid of it. And also the people and stuff are too tired. They’re not going to – they all get on the train and they all sit down and go to sleep.*

Another reported doing the inside of trains and public bathrooms during the day but rail corridors at night.

It is evident that the time of day and day of week that graffiti is done is affected by the graffitist’s motive. Some participants reported doing graffiti opportunistically after school before their parents come home, others reported doing graffiti socially with their friends on Friday and Saturday nights or other times of the weekend, while a handful of participants reported going out in the early hours of morning, after midnight, to do graffiti on train corridors. Further, each graffitist may do different types of graffiti at different times of day.

### **How often is graffiti done?**

When asked how often they do graffiti, the participants identified a range of frequencies from daily to monthly, with two participants reporting that they no longer do graffiti. The majority of participants reported doing graffiti daily. In addition, there was a small group of graffitists who reported doing graffiti opportunistically or anytime/whenever. Comments included: “Oh, I guess every time I ride a train or every time I get off at a bus stop or if I see somewhere that’s a good hit, just hit up” and “Whenever I have a texta.”

The number of participants reporting doing graffiti on more infrequent occasions steadily decreased. The majority of participants reported doing graffiti daily, followed by multiple times a week, weekly, and only a couple of participants reported doing graffiti fortnightly or monthly.

Some graffitists reported doing different types of graffiti more often than others. One person reported doing two or three pieces each weekend but tagging everyday and another reported piecing monthly but tagging daily. This is probably

due to *tags* being quick and easy in comparison with more complicated and time-consuming *pieces*.

### **Communication and coordination between graffiti offenders**

This research sought to discover how graffiti offenders organise to meet, choose locations and coordinate their actions. This research indicates that the most common means of organisation is in person or face to face (sometimes spontaneously), followed by the Internet and mobile phone. Many participants reported using a variety of methods: "Sometimes you see them on the train or street, got their numbers, ring them, talk to them on the computer, stuff like that."

The persons who organised face to face expressed different reasons for doing this. For some it was the convenience of chatting to fellow graffitiists at school. Others would organise to meet as a group and then decide where to graffiti:

*Your mates sometimes know where a good place is. You all just sort of meet up and say, oh where do we want to go today. Everyone puts their own thing in and they just decide where would be the best place to do it.*

One participant thought it best to meet in person because police might be monitoring his phone:

*Usually we don't talk on the phone, if you've been caught before because it's like sometimes they tap the phone, they've done it to friends and that. Best off to talk face to face about it.*

Several participants coordinated their actions over the internet through real time chat or on social networking sites. The internet was used to speak to graffitiists from other areas, with whom the participant may or may not do graffiti:

*...also like MSN and stuff like that gives you like access to be able to talk to people from like different areas ... Like I talk to those guys in Sydney a lot on MSN ...*

Mobile phones were also used. Phone calls were more popular than texting "... we just ring them and ask what they're doing."

The majority of participants talked about showing their friends or other graffitiists their graffiti. This is consistent with the high proportion of graffitiists who reported fame, peer recognition or artistic expression as motives. These persons show their graffiti to others by taking pictures, most commonly on their mobile phones, taking other people to the target locations or even by making a movie, though only one participant reported doing this.

Some participants placed a great deal of importance on getting pictures of their graffiti:

*... like I only do graffiti for pictures, like I don't, like it's just I do, it looks good, take a picture and you can show people and that's why I do it, like I really every piece I do I wanna get a picture, if I don't I'm not happy.*

And it was common for graffitiists to take photographs and show their friends either in person:

*...like I wouldn't go around the school going look at this, look at this. But if the person that sits, say I was doing it in class, the person who was sitting next to me, I'd show my friends or whatever but I wouldn't show many people.*

Others would use their mobile phones or other devices to share their pictures with friends via data transfers.<sup>30</sup>

*... if it looks pretty good on the wall, we'll take it on our phones, send it. Like some people like if it looks good ... they'll screen save it, you know, they'll leave it on their screen ...*

The emergence of digital camera technology and the inclusion of cameras on mobile phones equipped with the means to transfer data has implications for policy, particularly rapid removal "...you get pictures and you show them the pictures and that. As long as you've got your picture it's fine." These graffitiists may not be deterred by rapid removal because they are happy to show their friends photographs and indeed digital photographs can have a wider distribution – global – for those seeking peer recognition and/or illegal fame.

This has implications for the effectiveness of rapid removal programs. A person may not be discouraged by rapid removal if s/he already has a photograph of the graffiti. However, as noted in section 4.3.2 regarding tags, one participant mentioned frustration at a tag that "Didn't even go for a day", though he changed his *modus operandi* to use a more lasting/damaging implement.

None of the graffitiists reported sharing photographs of their graffiti online and several commented on how stupid an action it would be because of the likelihood of detection. Nonetheless a simple Internet search yields a multitude of graffiti websites and chat forums.

### **Alone, with friends, and crews**

Interview participants reported doing graffiti with friends, as part of a crew or on their own. Around half of the participants did graffiti with friends, while around a third did so with a crew and a handful did graffiti on their own.

The participants who reported doing graffiti with friends cited safety, avoiding police and fun as reasons for doing graffiti in company. Most reported going with

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<sup>30</sup> Data transfer methods include Bluetooth, wireless (WAP), and infra-red.

one or two friends but groups of up to eight persons were reported. Safety was the most common reason for doing graffiti with friends: doing graffiti alone was described as 'sketchy' and scary; "You've got no one there to kind of back you up if something goes wrong..." while doing graffiti with friends was described as "... always safer." Some graffitiists who reported doing graffiti for the adrenaline rush also said they went with friends because it is safer. One participant said he would take more risks and have more fun if he was with a group. A few participants stressed the need for a look out to avoid the police or transit security guards:

*Usually there's about three or four of us. We have two – like if we're doing a piece, we'll have two that actually do the piece, one's a look out and if there's more of us, more lookouts will be watching. And we take turns, some will do an outline, somebody will do a fill, somebody will do an aura.*

A couple of participants simply said that graffiti was more fun to do with friends, "more of a laugh."

Around a third of those interviewed stated that they were a member of a 'crew' (or semi-organised group), however only a few elaborated on their crew experiences. Crews ranged in size from 10 members up to 40 members. The age of crew members could also vary within a crew "because there's the older generation which is like, you know we respect them and then there's my generation and then there's going to be a younger generation." The youngest members of this particular crew were reported to be 11 years old.

The process of joining a crew appears to be quite informal:

*Just started like hanging with 'em and then painting with 'em and then and they just – well they ask if you want to be in it or stuff like that.*

In some crews, a skill threshold has to be crossed before a person might be invited to join the crew "You have to be good, you have to be good at putting it up and you have to know 'em a bit I guess."

Another person talked about gaining respect for his crew from other crews:

*Yeah like he is also in our crew and so they sort of – they know us and then like I'm cool with them because I know him and then hopefully if we keep hanging out with them and stuff then we get put into their crew sort of... There's like – like it depends. There's all good crews from everywhere but yeah, they're better than – 'cause like if you're in Sydney you can be a – like a wack crew as well but you can have more like recognition than a really good crew down here just 'cause you're in the city... and in the limelight. Whereas like you've got to be really good down here to like stand out to Sydney.*

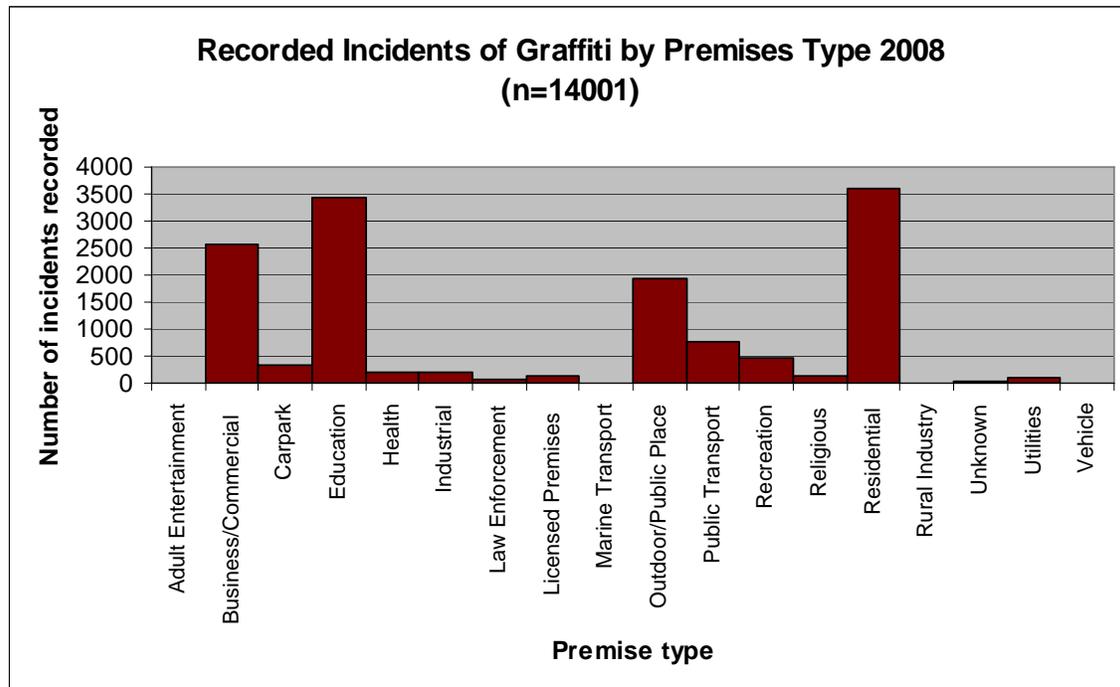
This comment suggests that one of the motivations for crewmembers is to earn *illegal fame* or recognition for the crew.

Only a handful of participants said they usually do graffiti alone. One person said that it was better to go alone because he would have “No one else to worry about if you need to get away fast and less chance of getting caught.” Another said he usually does graffiti alone because he “... goes more often than anyone else he knows.” A few participants reported doing graffiti alone in certain contexts: one reported doing the insides of trains alone but preferring to piece with a group of friends.

### **Targets and taboos**

Halsey and Young (2002) stated that graffiti writers often have strict rules about where they will and will not write, whether they will or will not steal paint, whether they will or will not engage in other types of crime, and whether they write alone or as part of a crew. Similarly, Fuller and colleagues (2003) reported that ‘graffiti writers’ paint at places where they have been ‘pushed into’ (often risk-laden locations), that are linked with the ‘graffiti’ culture (such as dangerous places that incur greater respect amongst fellow writers in particular, and locations in and around the Metro and rail systems), and places where the ‘victim’ is perceived to be ‘faceless’.

NSW Recorded Crime Statistics from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicate that 14,001 incidents of graffiti were reported to NSW Police in 2008 (see the graph below). Of the reported incidents, residential, educational and business/commercial premises were the most frequently targeted. Residential premises accounted for 26% (n=3,611), educational premises 25% (n=3,431). These statistics may be misleading as they only include *reported* incidents of graffiti and may be affected by reporting bias. Anecdotally, educational institutions such as high schools are very likely to report graffiti vandalism because funding is allocated to its removal.



The participants were asked what they do graffiti on. Their answers identified the following targets: billboards, bus stops, buses, businesses, canals, houses, police facilities,<sup>31</sup> road signs, skate parks, taxis, toilets or bathrooms, (train) track sides trains, train stations, trucks and under bridges and underpasses. A number of participants said they would graffiti 'wherever' or on anything, or offered a vague 'walls' response.

Some participants also identified a range of locations as being off-limits for graffiti writing. The participants identified cars, churches, flats, graveyards or cemeteries, houses, legal walls, memorials, monuments, police facilities,<sup>32</sup> private transport, public housing, schools, shops, skate parks, trucks, youth or community centres, and 'over other graffiti' as sites they would not graffiti on. The most common responses were private residences (houses, flats, public housing) and private transport (cars, trucks). In both cases, participants typically reasoned that they would not appreciate someone doing graffiti on their home or car. In contrast, NSW police recorded crime statistics for 2008 identified residential premises as the most common graffiti target. This may be due to reporting bias as persons may be more likely to report graffiti on a private residence. Interestingly, both recorded crime statistics and the participants identified private vehicles as unlikely or inappropriate graffiti targets.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Police facilities were identified as both targets and taboos for graffiti application.

<sup>32</sup> Police facilities were identified as both targets and taboos for graffiti application.

<sup>33</sup> Only 14 incidents of graffiti on private vehicles were recorded by NSW Police Force in 2008.

The evidence from this research indicates that graffiti targets are affected by the motivation of the graffitist. Those pursuing illegal fame typically choose highly visible, high risk or highly mobile targets such as public transport. However, several piecers reported doing graffiti on hard to reach locations that only other graffitists would go to such as canals or underground networks, seemingly to achieve recognition and credibility among other graffitists.

#### **4.3.5. Perceived Risks**

##### **Problems with graffiti**

Participants reported exposing themselves to a variety of risks by doing graffiti including: getting caught by police, vigilantes or 'public heroes', fights or threats from other graffitists and personal injury.

An individual caught by police or RailCorp security guards risks being charged with malicious damage under the *Crimes Act 1900* or defacing walls under the *Summary Offences Act 1988*. Very recently, offenders may have been charged under the *Graffiti Control Act 2008*.<sup>34</sup> Security guards may also issue fines. About half of the participants reported being caught doing graffiti at some stage, with outcomes including formal cautions, conferences, apology letters, being made to clean up the graffiti and fines. A few participants reported getting criminal records for graffiti offences and one respondent was doing community service at the time of the interview:

*I have to do community service now... We were about to do a spray and we were tacking it up and stuff and because we were next to my car, like while we were tacking it up, and it was early morning and the cops pulled up and asked what were we doing and then he asked me for ID and when I pulled it out I had paint on my hands.*

Others reported being caught by security guards or chased by police officers.

Participants' reactions to being caught by authorities varied. One graffitist currently doing community service reported "I don't do it anymore..." when asked if being caught had made him consider stopping. However, reactions varied. Another participant thought getting caught was funny: "That's hilarious, (expletive) yeah and why would you stop, that's just what they want you to do and then they win. It's not happening like that." Contradictorily, the interview participants who down played the seriousness of penalties also employed strategies to avoid being caught (see next section, *Evading police/avoiding being caught*). This suggests that comments regarding a lack of concern about being apprehended are bravado rather than a genuine lack of concern over the penalties.

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<sup>34</sup> It is unlikely that any of the participants were charged under this act given that it had only recently come into effect while the research was being undertaken.

Participants reported that graffitiists may be at risk of physical violence or threats from other graffitiists. In particular, violence may arise from the practice of *capping*<sup>35</sup> or going over another graffitiist's mark by tagging or putting a line through another graffitiist's tag or piece. The interview participants considered this a sign of gross disrespect that may lead to a verbal warning, reciprocal capping or physical violence from the original graffitiist or crew. Common reactions to capping included "Punch them", "Angry", and "You want to fight them." Other participants reported that they would not cap for fear of retribution. A number of participants did not consider the threat of, or actual physical violence an abnormal response to capping.

Several participants reported incidents with members of the public who intervene to stop graffiti incidents:

*Yeah, I've had problems there with heaps of public heroes and that.... They mouth off at you and some try to have a go and that, with you. I don't know. But if there is a heap of you they will say something and everyone arcs up and they walk off and ring the cops.*

Others reported members of the public taking photographs of them doing graffiti.

A few participants reported suffering personal injuries or witnessing friends get hurt while doing graffiti. Scratches from running through lantana or being caught in barbed wire were reported along with a broken leg suffered by a friend falling off a train onto the tracks. There is potential for much more serious injuries arising from collision with trains, inhalation of paint fumes, serious falls or fights with other graffitiists however while these were mentioned by some participants they were not elaborated on.

### **Evading police/avoiding being caught**

Participants reported a variety of methods to evade police or avoid getting caught doing graffiti vandalism. These ranged from simple methods such as wearing hats or 'hoodies' to cover their faces, having a friend keep 'look out' through to more sophisticated surveillance of target sites and obtaining information on the presence of plain-clothes police.

The simple evasion measures included: running away – "just run and don't stop"; being quiet while doing graffiti – "don't make heaps of noise when you're painting..."; having a friend keep a look out –

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<sup>35</sup> *Capping* is the act of writing over another person's graffiti. Typically capping involves drawing a target or a cross or another tag over the other person's graffiti. This is seen as a sign of disrespect.

*... usually there's about three or four of us. We have two – like if we're doing a piece, we'll have two that actually do the piece, one's a look out and if there's more of us, more lookouts will be watching ...;*

keeping graffiti instruments in easy-to-access locations – “keeping (markers) in different places. Like you don't have to keep them on you, you can keep them near you but not on you...”; dressing less conspicuously “Dress smart, not like the Lads<sup>36</sup> do with their stripy polos...”; doing graffiti when it is raining because there are less people about; doing graffiti on a particular train line because it was reported to be less heavily patrolled; doing legal graffiti; and taking less time to do graffiti.

One hardcore graffitist simply viewed detection as unlikely:

*They kind of forget that the thing the authorities forget is that the graffiti artist kind of controls everything. If they bust you for one name, the graffiti artist will have another one. Sometimes people have three or four aliases that they use, some use one for tagging, some use one for legal stuff, others use one for doing trains, so there's several ways of getting around it. So there's no real sure way of busting anyone for anything unless they actually bust you painting a train and get you there or in the vicinity...*

Another person claimed security personnel had warned him of the presence of plain-clothes police. This has policy implications for agencies that are frequent targets of graffiti vandals in terms of perception of softer targets and access to facilities.

#### **4.3.6. Offenders' responses to Graffiti Management Strategies**

##### **Legal walls**

Although several participants spoke positively about using legal walls:

*Yeah, illegal stuff is heaps rushy, you feel like if you get caught you have to go through all the court cases and stuff, but at a legal wall it's good, you can chill for the day, like have something to eat and drink, music and all that ...*

there is little evidence from this research that legal walls may reduce graffiti vandalism. This quote suggests that graffiti vandals may enjoy doing pieces on legal walls but illegal graffiti is still attractive to them. Further, as discussed, many participants were motivated by 'illegal fame', which implies that their graffiti is intrinsically illegal. Illegal "... spots are usually more visibility (sic) and you're getting more, like, respect and whatever."

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<sup>36</sup> Many of the participants talked about 'Lads' who do illegal graffiti, act aggressively and wear a particular brand of clothing. None of this subset participated in the study.

Many taggers or less-skilled participants regarded legal walls as off limits. A common reason was that it is wrong to write over another person's graffiti unless you can do something better:

*Yes it's like – for people like me and my friends down this way it's like on a half an hour, 45 minute bus ride just to go get a legal or it's usually all pieces and stuff already on it so it's kind of disrespectful to go over somebody that's like 50 times better than you.*

The unskilled graffitiists risk being disrespectful to the older, better writers by 'going over' them and may even be subject to threats of physical violence for doing so (see the discussion on *capping* in Section 4.3.5). This suggests that legal walls may not deter taggers from practising illegal graffiti if these taggers perceive themselves as not being skilled enough to use the legal walls. Legal walls may even lead to a higher incidence of graffiti vandalism by 'up skilling' offenders and councils have reported that areas surrounding and leading to legal walls are more heavily tagged.

### **Removal of graffiti**

Participants exhibited a mix of reactions to graffiti being removed or painted over by councils; overwhelmingly though the reported reaction was to do more graffiti "I do it again" or "Just do some more" and some even preferred to tag a clean wall "... once they've gone over it... that's like a whole fresh start... if they wipe it out it's like a new canvas." One participant, who earlier said he'd just do more graffiti after removal commented that on occasions he and his friends would not tag a clean wall: "Sometimes. If there is already writing on the wall. If it's painted then we won't bother. If there is writing on the wall then we will." One person was concerned that

*... some council workers now take photos of you... and they'll put it, you know, they'll see that tag, boom, they'll take a photo of it... and then like if they see your face, and if you're not looking, and they get a photo of you, you're gone.*

Further, there was some evidence that removal might discourage piecers: "There's no point going back there because you know it won't be up for long." Anecdotally, the Sutherland Shire Council graffiti reduction grant project manager has indicated that rapid removal of graffiti reduced the incidence of pieces. However, many of these persons target hard to reach locations and may be satisfied with taking a photograph of their piece before it is removed.

At least one participant in the research changed his graffiti behaviour because of the introduction of rapid removal (see section 4.3.2). This participant started to etch on train carriages out of frustration that his tags were not staying on display long enough. This demonstrates that rapid removal has potential to discourage or change the behaviour of graffiti offenders.

## **Restrictions on the supply of graffiti implements**

The NSW Government has introduced a number of restrictions on the sale and display of spray paint cans. In 2006, retailers were required to keep spray paint cans in locked cabinets or stored at least 2.1 metres above the ground and \$1,100 fines were introduced for the sale of spray paint to persons less than 18 years of age. This, and other graffiti related legislation, was consolidated into the [Graffiti Control Act 2008](#).

This legislation appears to be having an impact on the behaviour of graffitiists. Participants reported getting other persons to buy their implements, particularly spray paints, for them: "... my Mum pretty much, or my friends are 18, cause I'm only 15 so yeah, um, yeah I just get me mates and they just buy me stuff." Restrictions on the sale and display of spray paints have anecdotally reduced the theft of spray paint cans and forced under 18s to purchase cans through intermediaries. Legislation similar to that regulating the secondary supply of alcohol and cigarettes to minors may help to prevent graffiti vandalism. Many graffitiists use marker pens and paint pens instead of, or in addition to, spray cans. Restrictions on the sale of these graffiti implements may reduce the incidence of graffiti vandalism.

### ***4.3.7. Graffiti Offenders' Other Activities***

An interview question was included to explore the causes of and motivations behind graffiti vandalism in the context of what other activities the participants engaged in: "What do you do when you are not doing graffiti?" The interviews also explored participation in illegal activities other than graffiti vandalism.

#### **Legal activities**

The interview participants in this research reported doing graffiti because of illegal fame, peer recognition, adrenaline rush, emotional expression, malicious damage and artistic expression. Only two of the participants in this study explicitly reported doing graffiti out of boredom. This suggests that the interview participants do graffiti because they want to do graffiti rather than because they have nothing else to do. This is contrary to Halsey and Young's 2002 that found "the causes of graffiti are multiple but stem mainly from a lack of legitimate activities for young people to immerse themselves in."

Most of the participants in this research reported engaging in at least one legitimate activity when not doing graffiti. These included doing exercise (football, soccer, golf, gym, skating, fishing, boogie boarding, playing pool, riding bikes, long distance running), socialising (partying, social networking sites, hanging out with friends) or just watching TV or listening to music. While most participants reported doing graffiti for reasons other than boredom, and reported involvement in other activities, it is unclear how much time per week they spend doing these

other activities. Further, there were several participants who did not report doing other activities or who reported doing nothing other than graffiti.

### **Illegal activities**

Many participants reported involvement in other illegal activities, a range of which were identified: stealing, underage drinking and drug taking were the most common; assault or fighting, malicious damage and travelling on public transport without a ticket were also mentioned. Certain participants reported quite serious criminal behaviour: motor vehicle thefts, break and enter, assault police, drug dealing and armed robbery.

Several participants reported stealing or 'racking' items. The stealing may or may not be related to graffiti:

*Yeah but it's spawned into other things. Like at first – like before I did graffiti I used to – I like stole stuff but now that I do graffiti it's mostly paint, markers and things to do graffiti with like books and (colour charts) and stuff. But yeah - and like - but then clothes you know and whatever. Like it just becomes like easy sort of thing and you know you can just do it so you just do it.*

Some participants reported being caught for more serious stealing offences. One person reported stealing a motor vehicle and being apprehended by police. This person received a caution and participated in a program at the police stables. Another reported being locked up for an armed robbery when he was 11. A few participants reported involvement in assaults or fighting.

Several participants reported underage drinking. Some participants drank while doing graffiti, but most of those who reported drinking associated it with social situations. One person said she did nothing in her spare time except drink. Several participants reported drug taking, particularly marijuana:

*Oh, I guess smoking, weed and drugs, drinking. Before I did graffiti I wasn't a good person, but you know, I was better than I am now, you know.*

The drug use was mainly reported as not being associated with graffiti, although one person reported taking pills before doing graffiti with friends.

### **Comment**

Prior research suggests that boredom and a lack of other legitimate activities may be a cause of graffiti vandalism. The interview participants in this research reported other motivations for doing graffiti vandalism. Interview participants reported being involved in a range of other illegal and legal activities, however more research is needed to understand the extent to which graffiti offenders are engaged in other legitimate and illegal activities – this research does not indicate

how often participants engage in, or how much time participants spend doing, non-graffiti-related activities.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 *Future Directions for Graffiti Reduction and Management Policy*

The NSW Government's strategic framework for preventing graffiti vandalism is informed by a suite of graffiti research projects including:

- This research paper, 'The motivations and *modus operandi* of persons who do graffiti' (2009)
- The Graffiti Reduction Demonstration Projects Review, which tested a variety of graffiti prevention measures to see which, if any, were effective (2009)
- The Graffiti Legislative Review that culminated in *The Graffiti Control Act 2008* (2008)
- A review of how Development Control Plans may be used to ensure that new developments are resistant to graffiti (2007)
- Consultation with utilities, transport operators and local government to better understand how agencies currently manage graffiti, what works and does not work, and how agencies can work together better (2007)
- A survey of local government agencies to quantify the size and cost of the graffiti problem in New South Wales and develop a snapshot of how local government is managing graffiti vandalism (2006)

This paper has a number of implications for government policy. Persons who do graffiti are an heterogeneous group. Government policy must recognise and address this heterogeneity if it is to be effective.

#### 5.1.1. *Existing approaches to graffiti vandalism*

##### **Legal walls**

Legal walls were created to divert graffiti offenders from illegal graffiti targets to legitimate surfaces. Anecdotal evidence that these walls do not work and may even increase the level of graffiti vandalism in surrounding areas as offenders travel to and from legal walls has been supported by this research. The interview participants who predominantly wrote tags indicated that they felt unable to tag or otherwise write on a legal wall because the walls are generally covered in pieces of a much higher quality than what they are capable of themselves. These persons reported that they would consider it disrespectful and offensive to write over the work of someone more skilled than themselves and that it is

inappropriate to write over an item of graffiti if you cannot replace it with something better. Further, the persons who write pieces on legal walls may continue to do illegal graffiti because of motivations such as illegal fame, as discussed in Section 4.2.1.

## **Rapid removal**

Rapid removal seeks to discourage graffiti offenders by depriving them of the opportunity to display their work. This research indicates that rapid removal may discourage the writing of pieces because the effort to reward ratio for these offenders is significantly skewed. A person who spends over an hour to do a piece is likely to be discouraged if that piece is removed within a couple of days regardless of the growth of photo sharing via digital data transfers. Offenders motivated by illegal fame reported a compulsion to get as many tags up as possible. These persons may be diverted to other locations or methods but are likely to continue doing graffiti. For example, one individual reported changing his graffiti implement from a marker pen to an etching instrument due to frustration with tags on a train carriage being removed within a day of application (see Section 4.3.2 regarding etching implements). Offenders who tag opportunistically and who are motivated by recognition may regard a surface with all graffiti removed as a 'blank canvas' and proceed to graffiti on it. On the other hand, some participants reported that they would not tag on walls devoid of graffiti. In situations where resources are limited it may be beneficial to prioritise the removal of pieces over other graffiti, as this is the type of graffiti most likely to be discouraged. Anecdotally, some councils have already adopted this approach. Aside from its preventative capabilities rapid removal is an appropriate graffiti management policy because of its capacity to improve the aesthetic appearance of areas.

## **Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)**

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)<sup>37</sup> approaches may discourage or deprive graffitiists of the opportunity to do graffiti vandalism on a particular wall or space. Some participants indicated that better maintained buildings or surfaces that are free of graffiti vandalism might not be targeted. This suggests that space management may be successful in reducing, preventing and managing graffiti. Most of the interview participants reported behaviours consistent with avoiding detection while doing graffiti. This suggests that CPTED treatments that increase natural or formal surveillance could increase the effort required to do graffiti and might discourage those graffitiists who are afraid of detection. However, proposals to increase surveillance should recognise that graffiti offences often take just seconds to perpetrate. Treatments such as *green-*

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<sup>37</sup> CPTED is underpinned by four key principles: access control, space management, territorial reinforcement and surveillance. For more information refer to [http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/community\\_issues/crime\\_prevention/safer\\_by\\_design](http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/community_issues/crime_prevention/safer_by_design).

*screening*<sup>38</sup> walls are very likely to stop graffitiists from writing on walls by completely restricting access to the surface. However, to be successful these treatments should consider adjacent walls and surfaces and should consider those persons who do graffiti out of a desire to damage property maliciously. These persons may choose to damage the vines or trellises rather than vandalise the wall itself so vandal-resistant plants and trellises should be considered.

The findings of CPD's Graffiti Reduction Demonstration Projects conducted in 2007-2008 show that CPTED was the most effective of the three graffiti reduction strategies tested in those projects (that is, rapid removal and volunteer programs). The findings also suggest that the rapid removal of graffiti incidents in and around the intervention sites may contribute to the success of CPTED interventions.

### **Restriction of graffiti implements**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that restrictions on the sale of spray paint cans are having an impact. Young graffiti offenders are finding it more difficult to procure spray paint cans. Many participants reported that stores they used to be able to buy or steal from are no longer sources of cans either because the cans are locked up or because the store will not sell without proof of age. This has led to graffitiists recruiting adults to purchase the cans on their behalf. Secondary supply is a concern and is discussed in the next section, *Future directions for policy*. However, many participants reported using marker pens, paint pens and textas in the absence of spray paint cans. This suggests that restrictions on the sale of spray paint cans may need to be extended to other graffiti implements.

#### ***5.1.2. Future directions for policy***

Section 3 of the *Graffiti Control Act 2008* ('the Act') defines a graffiti implement as any of the following:

- Spray paint
- A marker pen
- Any implement designed or modified to produce a mark that is not readily removable by wiping or by the use of water or detergent

The Act restricts the sale of spray paint cans to persons under the age of 18 years and places restrictions on the way retailers display and store cans. However, there are no restrictions on the sale of marker pens, textas, paint pens, drill bits or a range of other graffiti implements identified in this research. The growth of tagging and other graffiti vandalism where instruments other than spray paint cans are used suggests that widening the scope of restricted items may be worthy of consideration. Police currently have powers to confiscate spray paint

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<sup>38</sup> For example, installing trellises and planting vines to grow over and cover walls targeted by graffiti vandals

cans from persons under the age of 18 in certain circumstances. Consideration may be given to extending these powers to other graffiti implements.

Secondary supply of graffiti implements to under 18s was reported by a number of the interview participants. A number of participants reported recruiting adults to purchase spray paint cans on their behalf. Currently it is not an offence for adults to supply minors with spray paint cans because of a range of legitimate uses. It is problematic to prevent a parent, youth worker or schoolteacher from supplying a young person with spray paint for a legitimate purpose. However, it may be possible to legislate to restrict adults from supplying minors with spray paint cans. Issues to consider would be the adult's relationship with the young person and the level of supervision under which the cans may be used.

There are few legitimate purposes for mixing paint between spray paint cans or refilling paint pens, and changes to the design and manufacture of graffiti implements such as spray cans and paint pens, which stop them from being refilled or modified, may make it harder for graffiti vandals to commit offences. The practice of 'scarring' walls using modified paints may be curtailed by changes to the manufacture of graffiti implements. The *Graffiti Control Act 2008* recognises modified implements but does not place any special restriction on the sale or manufacture of implements that may be easily modified.

The current penalties for graffiti vandalism and malicious damage are significant; the *Crimes Act 1900* provides for a penalty of up to 5 years gaol for malicious damage offences. While this research did not include persons under the age of 14, there is evidence to suggest that graffiti offenders begin to offend from a young age.<sup>39</sup> There is a role for schools and youth services in educating young people about the potential penalties for these offences, implications of criminal records and the likelihood of facing a youth conference, fine or being made to remove graffiti as a punishment. Further, given that penalties do not appear to be a deterrent to some graffiti offenders, government policy should place emphasis on preventing the crime from occurring in the first instance, for example, through Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.

Graffiti workshops are run by a number of councils, youth agencies and community centres to engage with young persons. Very few participants stated that they became involved in graffiti through schools or workshops however a significant number reported *practicing* their graffiti at workshops. Graffiti workshops and activities that specifically aim to divert graffiti offenders should be re-evaluated in light of this research to consider how participants are using the skills they develop during these activities.

Strategies that rely on intervention during the commission of the offence are unlikely to succeed. Tags and throw ups take just seconds to do. While this research suggests that police operations and security patrols act as a deterrent,

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<sup>39</sup> Halsey and Young (2002), Martin et al (2003)

participants reported going to great lengths to avoid being caught, it is likely that these, and other interventions such as the *graffiti nose* and CCTV, will only apprehend an offender in a small fraction of offences. Emphasis might better be placed on other preventative measures such as access control and education. Management strategies that ensure rapid removal after the commission of the offence are important for maintaining the aesthetics of targeted areas and may also discourage reapplication of graffiti, as discussed in Section 4.3.6.

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## 7. APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

**Graffito:** The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a *graffito* as an inscription or drawing made on some public surface.

**Graffiti:** This document erroneously but conveniently uses the verb *graffiti* as a noun that may refer to graffiti vandalism, aerosol art or sketches of tags or pieces depending on context.

**Graffiti vandalism:** Section 4 of *The Graffiti Control Act 2008* defines 'Damaging or defacing property by means of graffiti implement' as an offence. A person must not, without reasonable excuse (proof of which lies on the person), intentionally damage or deface any premises or other property by means of any graffiti implement.

**Aerosol art:** Legal graffiti using spray paints. Sometimes used in other literature to describe illegal pieces.

**Graffitiist:** A term coined by Geason and Wilson (1990). Geason and Wilson substituted this term for graffiti vandals. It is used in this document to describe both vandals and legal artists.

**Tag:** A tag may be a particular word or name, an acronym, postcode or even a picture or symbol that represents the person or group

**Bomb:** Prolific tagging or marking in one location or target e.g. to bomb a train carriage would be to cover the inside of the carriage with tags.

**Cap:** To *cap* – to write over another person's graffiti. This is generally seen as a sign of disrespect.

**Cap or nozzle:** Spray paint cans are aerosols, they force paint through a cap or nozzle under pressure. Different nozzles, denoted by the colour of dot on them, the angle of spray coming from the nozzle i.e. wider or narrower.

**Toy:** Amateur or not cool.

**Buff:** Graffiti is said to have been 'buffed' when it is cleaned up or removed.

**Scarry:** Markers and spray paint cans can be modified so that they scar a surface. Often this is done by adding wood resin, raven oil or another substance to the can or marker. The marker or can may then be called a 'scarry', the same term is used to describe the resultant graffiti.

**Mop:** A paint pen with runny ink. Sometimes a mop may be modified into a scarry but still called a mop.

**Rack:** Steal or thief.

## 8. APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### 8.1.1. Graffiti History

1. Can we start with you telling me how old you are and how long you have been doing graffiti?
2. How did you get started? How did you learn?
3. How often do you do graffiti?

daily	1
weekly	2
monthly	3
Etc??	

### 8.1.2. Types of graffiti

4. I have some photos here of different types of graffiti. Can you have a look at them and tell me first, what type of graffiti they are:

(a) Picture A (tagging) Do you think this is good graffiti? Yes/no why?

Who would do this type of graffiti/ where would you see it?

(b) Picture B (character) Do you think this is good graffiti? Yes/no why?

Who would do this type of graffiti/ where would you see it?

(c) Picture C (piece) Do you think this is good graffiti? Yes/no why?

Who would do this type of graffiti/ where would you see it?

(d) Picture D (stencil) Do you think this is good graffiti? Yes/no why?

Who would do this type of graffiti/ where would you see it?

(e) Picture E (etching) Do you think this is good graffiti? Yes/no why?

Who would do this type of graffiti/ where would you see it?

### 8.1.3. Your graffiti

5. What style of graff do you do?
6. *If multiple* – Which is your favourite? Why?  
*If single* – Why do you do this style and not the others?

7. Do you practice? (Sketch, freestyle..) When? Where?
8. How long does it take to do your graf? (Distinguish practice from actual public graf)
9. Has the style of graf you do changed over time? If yes, from what to what? Why?
10. Why do you graf?
11. What do you use to graf?

Markers	1
Spray paint	2
Stencils	3
Other (specify)	4

12. Where do you get it from? How?
13. Are there any special equipment you use? What are they? How do you get them?

#### ***8.1.4. The graffiti process***

14. When do you like to graf?

Day of week – why?

On weekends	1
On weekdays	2
During school holidays	3
Etc	

Time of day – why?

During the day?	
- would that be typically between 6-12 in the morning or	1
- between 12-6 in the afternoon	2
At night?	
- between 6-9pm	3
- between 9-12pm	4
-between 12-3am	5
- between 3-6am	6

15. What do you like to graf on? Why?

Public walls	1
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Train carriages	2
Houses	3
Buildings	4
Highway barriers	5
Private walls	6
Underpasses	7
Shop front etc	8

16. Are there certain places or things you would never graf? What are they and why?

17. Where do you usually go to graf? Do you stay in your local area/ go elsewhere, has where you go changed over time?

18. What is the furthest you have travelled to do graffiti?

19. Why did you travel that far on that occasion?

20. How do you usually travel to and from a graffiti site?

Walk	1
Skate	2
Cycle	3
Bus	4
Train	5
Car	6
Other (specify)	7

21. You usually do graffiti by yourself or with friends? Why?

22. What is different about doing graffiti on your own or in a crew (type of graffiti / location)? Which do you prefer?

23. How do you communicate with your friends when planning to do graffiti? (eg: mobile phone etc)

24. How do you pick a place/ time?

25. Who usually decides on the place / time?

26. Do you all go in a crew, or do you meet there?

27. What method/s do you use to contact other members of the crew?

Mobile phone calls	1
Calls from landline	2
SMS	3
e-mail	4

Social networking sites (MySpace, face book)	5
Face-to-face	6
Other (specify)	

28. What else do you do when doing graffiti – do you listen to music? Do you drink alcohol? Anything else?
29. Do you know of any legal walls? Do you use them? What do you like / don't you like about them?
30. Do you know of any graffiti/spray workshops? Do you go to them? What do you / don't you like about them?
31. Do you prefer to graffiti areas that are legal / illegal? Both? What do you like about each location?

### ***8.1.5. Why graffiti?***

32. Can you explain why you do graf? (Prompt if necessary eg: just for fun; nothing else to do; its exciting; it's a way to make a statement)
33. How do you feel when you do graf?
34. Do you like to show your graf to other people? If yes: do you:

Take people to the site	1
Take photos/video (how are these circulated)	2
- e-mail	3
- MySpace	4
You-Tube	5
Personal blog??	6

35. Why do you like to show other people?
36. How do you feel when your graffiti is:
- Written over by other writers? Why, what do you do about it?
  - Painted over by council? Why, what do you do about it?
  - Do you think that painting over graffiti is an effective way of getting rid of it? Why/why not?
37. Is there such a thing as "graffiti culture"? Do you think only a certain type of people do graffiti? If yes: Can you describe them?

### *8.1.6. Problems with graffiti*

38. Have you ever run into any trouble while doing graffiti? Describe what happened – what was the outcome.
39. Have you ever been caught doing graffiti?
- If yes: by who? When, where, what happened? (formal caution, parents informed etc.
  - What do you think about what happened? Has it changed where when you do graffiti now?
  - If parents informed: what did your parents do/say?
  - If never caught: what do you think would happen if you get caught?
40. Did you consider stopping when you were caught? Why / why not? (Prompt: Penalties are serious, rebelling against authorities, 'addicted' to doing graffiti, friends pressure you to do it).
41. In your experience, are some areas more heavily policed than others? Yes/no
- Do you consider this when choosing a place to graffiti?
42. How do you avoid getting caught by police or other authorities?
43. Other than getting caught, are there any risks associated with doing graffiti?  
Yes / No
- If yes:** what are they?
  - If no:** Statistics indicate that a number of graffitiists are hurt doing graffiti each year. For example, doing graffiti on train carriages can be very dangerous. Have you got any comments to make about this?
44. Some people find graffiti offensive and are bothered by the damage it causes – what do you think? Does this influence where you decide to do graffiti?
45. Some people also think that people who do graffiti get involved in other illegal activities – do you think this is true? If yes: what else do they do? (vandalism/mal damage; drugs; theft)
46. Have you been involved in any to other illegal activities? If yes: what type/s of activities:
47. Have you even been caught by the police for any other illegal activities? If yes:  
what where they, what was the outcome?

**8.1.7. Final general questions**

- 48. Why do you think people do graffiti?
- 49. What would make you stop doing it?
- 50. How would you go about stopping graffiti?
- 51. Where do you see yourself in 5 years – will you still be doing graffiti?

Yes: why No: why not? What do you see yourself doing?

**8.1.8. Demographics**

Ok. We are going to end with a few questions about you.

- 63. What do you do when you are not doing graffiti?

Examples of activities:

	regularly	sometimes	hardly ever
Do Sport (what type)			
Play Computer games			
The internet			
Playstation/ X-box etc.			
Skateboarding			
Surfing???			
Other (specify)			
Don't do anything			

- 64. If no computer activities – do you have access to a computer?
- 65. Why do you choose to do graffiti instead of another type of activity?  
(prompt if necessary: does it make you feel good; is it the social element, the recognition from others, or do you just enjoy doing it?)
- 66. Can you tell me the postcode of the suburb you live in?

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- 67. Can you tell me who you live with?

Family (whose in your family?)	1
Friends	2
Other (specify)	3

68. Do you go to school? Year?

- a. Do you go to school every day or do you skip days?
- b. If skip: how often do you skip school?
- c. If finished school – what year (grade) did you leave in?

69. Do you work? Where? How often?

70. Where (else) do you get your spending money?

Parents	1
Student benefit	2
Unemployment benefit	3
Disability allowance	4
Family benefit	5
Other (specify)	6

That is the last of our questions. Do you have any questions?

Thank you for participating in our research.

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Conclusion of Interview