Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art

Jeffrey Ian Ross

Something for the boys?

Publication details

Nancy Macdonald
Published online on: 08 Mar 2016

How to cite: - Nancy Macdonald. 08 Mar 2016, Something for the boys? from: Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art Routledge
Accessed on: 18 Aug 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Something for the boys?
Exploring the changing gender dynamics of the graffiti subculture

Nancy Macdonald

Introduction
It has been fifteen years since I researched and wrote my ethnography exploring the illegal graffiti subculture in London and New York (The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). In this, I focused largely on understanding the subculture’s unmistakable male dominance. As a feature which had long been overlooked by other studies of subcultural groups generally, I chose to problematise graffiti’s masculine bias. Why were young men so drawn to this? What did they get out of it, and what features of the subculture enabled this gratification? Exploring the interplay between graffiti’s illegality and risk, and the warrior style meanings writers attach to their activities, I presented graffiti as a resource which young men can use to construct and validate youthful masculine identity. I also looked at how male writers marginalise and exclude women writers and, with this, their emasculating threat.

In this chapter, I want to take a look back and evaluate whether this argument in understanding the activities of this subculture’s members is still relevant or indeed valid. A great deal has changed over the years since my research. First, the Internet, especially the World Wide Web, is now accessible to the masses, and has taken hold as a major influence within the graffiti subculture and its practices today. The proliferation of smart phones that allow graffiti writers to share their work almost immediately, and the development of social media are also important catalysts. Second, a new arm to the graffiti scene has emerged in the form of street art. This adopts the practice of writing in public places, mainly illegally. However, it is far less prescriptive than graffiti, enabling its artists to use different tools such as stencils, stickers and posters to create works which deviate from graffiti’s more traditional sprayed or written tag name. So have these major developments changed anything regarding the makeup of graffiti writers? Have they softened the boundaries of the subculture and invited more women to enter and participate? And has this, in turn, impacted its observed use as a site for the construction of masculine identity? In order to address these questions, I want to first revisit my original thesis, and understand how illegal graffiti can function as a constructive identity resource.
Using illegality and danger to create “men’s” work

For the graffiti writer quoted below, the rewards of involvement in this illegal subculture are clear and unambiguous: “It was wanting to belong to something that I thought was creative and dangerous. It helped me build my masculinity” (Iz, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 133). The vast majority of graffiti (that is found on the streets and transport system) is illegal, and a multitude of deterrent measures, both physical and judicial, have been implemented by the authorities to discourage individuals from participating. Those who persist therefore have to confront a multitude of hazards in their quest to earn fame and respect from their peers. These include the threat of arrest, falling from vast heights as they scale buildings or bridges to write their tags or construct their pieces, the dangers of oncoming trains and, perhaps most importantly, dodging the electrified third rail which powers these on the subway and underground system. To most outsiders just the thought of spending hours out on the cold, wet, dark streets doing graffiti would be enough to truncate a budding graffiti career. To a dedicated graffiti writer with something to prove, however, these risks and dangers are all important: “If it was legal, there’d be no threat; graffiti would be a waste of time. I do graffiti for the excitement, it’s like I get a big adrenalin rush out there” (Col, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 126). Illegality introduces threat and this, in turn, provides the “buzz” that, as any illegal graffiti writer will tell you, transforms a writer’s artistic quest into an important test of their bravery and resolve:

It comes down to keeping grace under pressure. You know, you have trains burrowing down on you, cops chasing you, you have different gangs in there, you don’t know what’s going to happen and when you finish and you come up . . . you’re walking through some ghetto, which makes you feel kind of manly anyway, and you’re thinking, “Yeah I did it”. So there’s a certain sense to the illegality.

(Freedom, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 103)

This illegal graffiti subculture embraces a doctrine of confrontation and achievement (Gilmore, 1990) and defining elements of graffiti writers’ masculine identities; resilience, bravery and fortitude are all achieved by confronting and overcoming these associated risks.

As Freedom, the writer mentioned later recognises, the nature of this challenge and the masculine qualities which enabled it to be completed are authorised by the adopted tag or signature a graffiti writer uses. This forms the basis of all that they write and paint and its prominence is all important:

If your name rode by on a train . . . that implies that you ran up a train tunnel, probably late at night, left your parents, faced the gangs and everything else and wrote your name on it. So that’s what it was about and the better you did it then the more it implied, like, you stayed there longer, you did it better, you know.

(Freedom, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 104)

By writing his name on a train or in an illegal area, the graffiti writer effectively says, “I was there and it was my courage and resilience which got me there”. In this context masculinity is very much a homosocial enactment. Writers write graffiti, not only for themselves, but, most importantly, for their subcultural audience – other men. The respect and acknowledgment graffiti writers gain from others for “proving themselves” in this way completes the final and, perhaps,
most significant part of this process. Indeed, writers will usually cite earning respect as their main reason for doing graffiti. Its centrality is also evidenced in the subculture’s hierarchy which positions writers very much in these terms; the greater the danger and risk and thus associated daring and bravery, the greater the respect, the greater the status, the greater the man.

From writing to warfare

It is not just graffiti’s physical and legal risks which serve as an identity resource. The antagonistic relationship graffiti writers share with their “enemy”; for example the British Transport Police in the UK or the Vandal Squad in New York City’s Police Department (NYPD), remains a significant feature of this subculture, and another means of constructing a masculine narrative. The many militaristic metaphors which abound, testify to the symbolic significance of this conflict, as well as its desired presence: “The crew or platoon I currently paint for is KIA, Killed In Action, a crew consisting of various artists and vandals from the city who come together to form an understanding. We shall overcome” (Popz – Londonz Burning 1, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 112). Graffiti writers’ terminology is drenched in combative imagery, tone and meaning, and this, in turn, transforms the writer, his/her quest and, indeed, their spray can into a symbolic weapon of war:

Through this, the writer fires “hits” (tags) like bullets. Unlike the “tag” (writer’s written name) which declares “I’m here”, “hits” proclaim, “I’m here and I have the power to wreak havoc and destroy”. Although “bombing” involves the same action as “tagging”, the emphasis on the name is overshadowed by destructive intentions . . . In the same way, pieces are “dropped”, like missiles, to “burn”, “kill” and “destroy” the trains and walls they land upon.

(Macdonald, 2001: p. 109)

This is warfare in writers’ minds. Accordingly, the fences, laser beams, cameras, security guards, patrol dogs and multitude of other obstructions imposed by their enemy cease being deterrent measures and are reconstructed, instead, into an overt invitation to do battle:

We have just recently come through a huge onslaught of action by the British Transport Police graffiti squad, one, it must be said, we didn’t even see coming. Admit it, we lost that battle, […] So wake up Britain, the war is on again after the recent heavy defeat at the hands of the graffiti squad in our last battle. Don’t deny it, face the facts, learn the relevant lessons, re-arm, re-group and analyse strategy, for this war is far from over.

(Drax – Londonz Burning 2, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 122)

Indeed, the authorities have not always worked to dampen this fervour. As Cavs, a writer in New York, explained to me:

Cavs: See this piece here, it got crossed out. See the “V”, the cops crossed it out. They do “VS” for the vandal squad. They do that “V” and then they circle it. By crossing my piece out, that’s like a warning, you know.
Nancy: Does that say toy [incompetent writer] there?

Cavs: Yeah, the cops did that. Yeah, they know all about it, they know everything, that’s their job, you know . . . See all the V’s, they ragged [messed up] our whole car. Look at this beautiful whole car and the cops crossed it out. You know why? Because that’s disrespecting us.

(Cavs, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 120)

By using writers’ own adopted terminology, creating their own distinctive tag or marking and crossing out writers’ work to disrespect them in their own terms, the New York Vandal Squad remove their “official” mask and effectively escalate the fervour of this conflict. Their fight becomes less an official body opposing a group of writers – and rather a battle between two rivals of equal status.

In rewriting the script in this way, graffiti writers have transformed their subculture into a militaristic world of machismo. And, as Morgan (1994) attests, “of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct . . . the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity” (Morgan, 1994: p. 165). Here, a graffiti writer dodging the beam of police headlights and fighting for control of the transport system is no longer merely a tough and courageous writer. Rather, he becomes an intrepid and valiant soldier; potentially even a war hero. Illegality and the militaristic relationship this has engendered between writers and the police injects a huge measure of perceived machismo into writers’ already “masculine” actions. Importantly, it also works to amplify the exhilaration and fun that can be had in the process: “It’s a lot more exciting . . . for the sake of playing the old cops and robbers kind of thing. You get to run and hide and the rush of getting away with it, so it’s more like a game” (Pink, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 115).

Viewed from this angle, graffiti ceases to be a helpless gesture of frustration or alienation. Likewise, graffiti writers cannot be seen as propelled into this crime through forces beyond their control. Rather, my research in the 1990s presented these individuals as coming together to create and collectively celebrate the construction of a very much desired “outlaw” identity:

It’s against the law, you know at that time when you’re growing up it’s like you’re just an outlaw, you know. You don’t have a horse, but you can be like an outlaw, you’re out in the Wild West . . . The whole thing about graffiti is being an outlaw.

(Sae 6, as quoted by Macdonald, 2001: p. 127)

One of the boys? Graffiti writing as a woman

Traditionally, outlaws have been men. Not many books or films depict women as the type of outlaw Sae 6 alludes to above. So how then do the women who enter and participate in this subculture (as it stood back in the 1990s) impact this construction? To understand this we need to appreciate just how important “maleness” actually is to this exercise. As Prime, as quoted in Macdonald (2001: p. 101), explains it:

Nancy: Why do you think blokes are so into it?

Prime: It’s part of the image. There’s the macho thing to it, the Superman, superhero thing is very much prominent, “No one can do what I can do, no one can go through what I’ve gone through”.

186
If Superman status depends on no one being able to “do what you can do”, then other men, let alone women, plausibly have the capacity to diminish its potency.

Academics have been slow in recognising the “subculture”, graffiti or otherwise, as a site of masculine formation. Consequently, they have been slow to observe the related implications of the female member’s absence or indeed the inferior role she usually occupies when she is present in male dominated subcultures such as these. I started my research for my book in the early 1990s and at that time female writers were extremely hard to find. There were a few well-known names, but nothing like the numbers of men writing. That is not to say women were not present. They were many within the periphery of the scene, but they tended to be graffiti writers’ girlfriends, as opposed to writers in their own right. I quickly got the sense that this is the role male writers expected of women generally.

I did finally manage to find and talk to three women – all highly active within the illegal graffiti scene. Despite living in different cities and being involved in the subculture for different lengths of time, all of them shared very similar experiences. I summarise these here to illustrate two things: the apparent threat they represent as women, and the different ways male writers deal with and try to deflect this.

Lady Pink, a long time graffiti writer from New York, recalls the response she would usually get when she asked to go with other male writers to paint subway trains:

They didn’t take me seriously, some little girl like, “Take me to the train yard, take me to the train yard”, and they wouldn’t have anything to do with it . . . I got the things, “Oh you’ll scream, we’ll have to protect you” . . . I couldn’t go off and cry and scream and carry on like a girl because that’s what they expected. I had to prove myself too, that I wasn’t a wimp.

(Pink, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 129)

Women who start writing graffiti appear to be attributed an automatic and tainted set of stereotypical feminine qualities by their male counterparts. These present her as a trembling, timid little thing with no capacity to confront the rigours underpinning her craft. Accordingly, while male writers work to prove they are “men” using the constructive processes outlined above, female writers must first strive to demonstrate that they are not “women” – that is indicate that they have the same stamina and resilience as their male peers:

Guys can’t lose face by wimping out in front of a girl, I couldn’t do that either. I couldn’t go off and cry and scream and carry on like a girl because that’s what they expected, so I can’t do that. I had to prove myself too, that I wasn’t a wimp and I could carry my own paint thank you.

(Pink, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 130)

Unfortunately, the female writer’s ability to demonstrate this is obstructed by a number of strategies designed to prevent her from fully realising her competitive force. The first centers on the issue of accountability. Male writers, whether inexperienced or not, are generally expected to prove themselves by their own merits alone. They are rarely helped, and must stand on their own two feet as “men”. In contrast, female writers claim that they frequently experience other male writers’ attempts to support or aid them – either physically while out painting, or technically in terms of their writing skills. While this chivalrous gesture might be just that, accordingly to the women writers I spoke to it is also commonly used as a way to attribute her
achievements to whoever helped her. Both Lady Pink and Claw work hard, deflect such measures and position themselves as responsible for her own work and associated credit: “I went piecing deliberately with different groups so that everyone could see I could actually paint this stuff and I’m not having some guy do it for me” (Pink, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 144).

“When people try to help me do my piece, I get really, ‘No, no, no, I have to do it, don’t, I’m doing it’, because I don’t want anybody to, you know, say, ‘Oh, I saw Divo do her piece’” (Claw, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 144).

The sexual rumours that typically circulate about women within graffiti can serve to distract from her achievements in a similar way. While male writers are recognised for what they do with their spray can, greater interest is often shown in what the female writer does (or not as the case may be) with her body:

I’ve heard the maddest stories I’m supposed to have done. I’m supposed to have fucked this writer and that writer I don’t even know. I’m supposed to give any writer a blow job, give me a can of hammerite and I’ll do anything and all this kind of stuff, just the maddest things. And it’s just been like this constant battle where I’ve got to try and prove myself that I’m not a slag, I’m not out to fuck writers, you know what I mean?

(Akit, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 147)

Unlike a girl, a male writer’s reputation or identity rests upon his writing, not his sexual activities, his demonstrations of masculinity, not his passive physicality.

Female writers who battle on through this adversity still have one more sizable challenge to confront – that is proving she is dedicated to graffiti and, thus, an “authentic” writer who is loyal and “true”. This is where life as a female graffiti writer probably gets its hardest. Through no fault of her own, a woman’s unusual subcultural status means her journey to prominence is both quicker and easier than her male counterpart’s. Because she is a novelty, her actions are more likely to be noticed, spot lit and discussed, and her journey to fame is fast tracked as a result. While this short cut may look like a bonus, in reality it is a severe impediment. Writers are legitimised by the hard work and effort they put in, and the female writer’s quicker rise to fame removes her ability to satisfy this. She does not benefit from her greater profile, she suffers. She gets fame without having to put in equivalent effort and this stops her from enjoying “true authenticity” in other writers’ eyes.

As these obstructive measures serve to illustrate, this subculture’s values and standards make it very difficult for women to be fully recognised. The male writer occupies a sphere which grants him a presence and, thus, competitive force. All he has to do is work hard and prove himself. In contrast, a woman’s contribution is often minimised by focusing instead on her sexual exploits and/or questioning her dedication and accountability. In effect, attention is shifted away from her achievements and the challenge she may represent, and her emasculating potential is diminished as a result. In the past, the inferior position women have tended to occupy in other subcultures has been understood as a reproduction of the subordinate status women occupy in wider society (Brake, 1985; McRobbie and Garber, 1991). However, located within a setting centered on the construction of masculine identity, it is perhaps better understood as a position that has been pushed upon her by men who are trying to protect their masculine credibility. “If women can do what ‘real men’ do, the value of the practice for accommodating masculinity is effectively challenged” (Messerschmidt, 1993: p. 132). A woman achieving in the same way as her male peers has the power to silence their masculine commentary. Unless, that is, she is
consigned to a place where her actions have no volume; a woman on the subcultural sidelines is going to have very much less to say than a woman on the pitch.

The influence of the Internet on women’s participation and experience

The first major development since I conducted my research was the birth of the internet. In the early 1990s, online access and the communication advantages it afforded were not accessible to most people, including those writing graffiti. To communicate and share news and events, graffiti writers depended largely on their own generated print media. Photographs were taken and then sent off to individuals publishing fanzine style magazines for dissemination. This lack of instant and immediate access made the different graffiti scenes around the world more insular. And, while many writers travelled, day to day awareness of who was doing what in other cities or, indeed, countries, was often absent. Today, the internet has dissolved such boundaries.

Writers from all corners of the globe can communicate, share, debate and even fight. Likewise, writers’ crews (an allied band of writers) are now being formed between like-minded peers regardless of where they reside.

Jessica Pabon’s recent work on female graffiti writers seeks to understand how technology and the internet has impacted how women approach and participate in this subculture. As she recognises, prior to 2000 women writers were all but invisible. In the last decade, however, we have seen a dramatic increase in female representation here. Whether this is due to their numbers swelling or their previously shadowed visibility being enhanced – either way Pabon (2013) puts this firmly down to the role of the internet:

The shift to the Internet is definitively reordering the dynamic of participation and visibility for female graffiti writers. With the availability of the Internet, female graffiti writers are not only performing their countercultural identities and demonstrating their belonging, but they are also building and sustaining their communities and crews through the openness enabled precisely by the technology itself.

(Pabon, 2013)

As Pabon (2013) suggests, the impact of the Internet on women’s involvement is multi-faceted. The exposure of her graffiti work and activities online does not just afford the female writer greater profile, presence and visibility. Most importantly, it affects how she orientates herself; enabling her to derive community, support and encouragement from other women who are also writing. Pabon (2013) elaborates on this in reference to SUG, an all-female global graffiti crew:

By building an all-female crew in a manner which makes the individual writers and the crew as a whole visible to the public, SUG is proclaiming something about the potentiality of familial ties between female writers that is, to this day, a unique phenomenon.

(Pabon, 2013)

The power of these “familial ties” to a woman writing graffiti cannot be underestimated. Their experience within this subculture is both harsh and isolating, and banding together with those facing similar difficulties can lend succour and an encouraging rally cry to others to persevere. Interestingly, the increased visibility of her work may also be inspiring other women to
compete. Initiating the challenge and competitive dialogue which was previously lacking, could the internet, as Pabon (2012) suggests in her TED Women lecture, be inciting more women to get involved and get competitive with each other?

However the internet has benefited women writing, it is ultimately going to benefit male writers too. By showcasing women’s capacity and dedication, eventually, Pabon (2013) asserts, men will be forced to reappraise their collectively shared sexist beliefs regarding women’s lack of courage, dedication and ability. In this way, the internet may not just be working to address the subculture’s gender membership, but ultimately its values and principles too: “The reordering of habits, routines and relations because of graffiti culture’s online presence manifests itself by challenging the patriarchal order, breaking down sexist boundaries and building new relationships among those formerly marginalized writers” (Pabon, 2013).

The rise of street art and the increase in women’s participation

Born around 2000, the street art scene, a new arm to the urban art movement, has been developing steadily. With the likes of Banksy and other notable street artists selling works at auction and displaying their art in museums, street art is now a high profile global movement. It sits alongside graffiti, sharing in its motives the use of the street as a canvas. Its work is illegal (mainly), but unlike graffiti, this is more a consequence of its placement, rather than its central focus. Street artists may enjoy the mystique and, often humour which accompanies the placement of their work in public and proscribed locations, but the motivation to overtly fight the Transport Police or Vandal Squad through this act is comparatively lessened.

Perhaps its’ most important deviation from traditional graffiti lies in its subject matter and the materials street artists use to create their work:

Over the past few years, graffiti artists have been using a wider scope of expression. Personal style is free to develop without any constraints, and stickers, posters, stencils, airbrush, oil-based chalk, all varieties of paint and even sculpture are used. Most artists have been liberated from relying solely on the spray can.

(Ganz, 2009: p. 7)

Street art frees its artists from graffiti’s more prescriptive lean towards the written tag name and the use of the spray can. And many see this to be a key reason for the much greater representation of women within its boundaries. Mad C, a female street artist, upholds this creative freedom as the main reason for her involvement within this arm of the subculture: “It broadens the realms of possibility. There isn’t the restriction of letters and added characters . . . there are simply so many more techniques and materials than in the graffiti field” (Mad C, as quoted in Ganz, 2006: p. 11).

Perhaps female street artists have less to earn from the written name and thus gravitate to the wider creative realms of street art instead? In my original thesis I presented the tag name as not just a creative product but, importantly, an authorisation of the actions which underpin that creation; actions which, within illegal graffiti certainly, generally involve risk, danger and, with this, the display of perceived masculine qualities. While street art can also place its artists at risk and in danger, less emphasis on the name would suggest less need to be immediately recognised and validated for this commentary on “masculine” endeavour. Focus is more
commonly placed on the art or the statement it makes, rather than physical and legal risks the, often unnamed street artist, took to complete it.

These wider creative boundaries also provide female street artists much greater opportunity to perform and explore femininity through her craft – not something that was apparently permissible in the traditional graffiti subculture back in the 1980s and 1990s. Freedom, an American graffiti writer, recounts the reaction that followed Lady Pink’s foray into more stereotypical feminine subject matter back in the day:

*Freedom:* It’s unfortunate that Pink’s earlier work was as feminine as it was because I think that turned off guys. Guys wanted to paint guy stuff.

*Nancy:* Right, and if she was going to be part of this then she would have to paint like a guy?

*Freedom:* Yeah, and she wanted to paint flowers.

(Freedom, as quoted in Macdonald, 2001: p. 130)

With a male majority dictating what is “graffiti” and what is not, female graffiti writers have far less permission than female street artists to take their art down alternative avenues. And this, ultimately, makes the street art scene an easier place for women artists to reside. With less emphasis on performing masculinity, male street artists appear to be more supportive and embracing of the contributions women make here and the community feels more balanced and bonded across gender lines as a result (Ganz, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The last fifteen years have seen an enormous degree of change occur within the graffiti subculture. We have moved from a pre to a post internet world and, for graffiti at least, this development has substantially transformed its community’s practices. Writers are able to make greater and broader connections with each other, and their activities now enjoy immediate global exposure. Likewise, and possibly because of this, we have seen much greater experimentation and development to the art form itself in the guise of street art. Using the streets as their canvas, street artists are expanding their subject matter beyond the more traditional tags and name focussed pieces and a much more open and permissive arm to this subculture is developing as a result.

The upshot of both of these events is that women are finally making a more significant appearance on this subcultural stage. The “familial ties”, support and competition needed to spur greater numbers of women to participate and persevere in graffiti is being enhanced by female writers’ online visibility (Pabon, 2013). Likewise, the creative freedom and comparatively greater acceptance that the street art scene offers its members also appears to be swelling the numbers of women looking to get involved. On both counts, then, this subculture and its offshoots do appear to be moving towards more balanced gender membership – albeit one where men do still represent the overwhelming majority.

The question then remains, has this increase in female participation (or visibility) impacted this subculture’s role as a site for the construction of masculine identity? Is a masculinity thesis still relevant in understanding the dynamics of this subculture fifteen years on? Given the fact that most recent scholarship has swung, quite rightly, towards bolstering our understanding of the experiences of women and other neglected aspects of our subcultural understanding, this is hard question to answer definitively. However, one recent article, “Boys Doing Art”
(Monto et al., 2012), provides us with a clear sense of the continued relevance of this analytic angle. Presenting its interpretation along exactly these lines, this ethnographic study of an illegal American graffiti crew in Portland, Oregon in 2012 argues that the “outlaw” status of graffiti, alongside other aspects of the lifestyle, serve as resources for constructing masculinity. Furthermore, recognising the subculture’s additional female membership, they go on to state that “this does not necessarily undercut the argument for the connection between graffiti and outlaw masculinity” (ibid.: p. 285). Indeed, despite these changes or developments, the authors claim the “graffiti scene of today has been and continues to be shaped by its outlaw status” (ibid.: p. 286), and thus continues to provide powerful opportunities for masculine construction.

It would seem that boys will be boys, and the need for accessible resources with which to build gender identity at a time in life when such options may be lacking, is abiding. For male writers, at least, masculine construction would appear to continue to define graffiti’s deeper role regardless of any gender related changes that may be occurring. In light of this, it would be interesting to explore how this apparent gender co-existence continues to develop in the future. As the subculture adapts to greater female representation within its boundaries, will we begin to see male writers actually appreciate and celebrate the endeavours of their female counterparts without feeling the need to exclude or tear them down? Can masculinity be constructed alongside women writers without the need to physically and symbolically exclude their presence? Conversely, perhaps things will swing entirely the other way. As more women start to participate, could we see male writers work even harder to salvage their male only “retreat” and the masculine narratives which are supported by this? As opposed to coming together, will we begin to see even greater resistance and attempts to foreclose women’s place and legitimacy within graffiti moving forward? In many ways, such responses could be mediated by the age of the subculture’s respective scenes. With the birth of the internet, graffiti has travelled and embedded in an increasing number of locations, with more recent graffiti scenes emerging and developing. Studies exploring how gender relations develop within these more nascent and potentially balanced scenes could provide us with an interesting comparison to the dynamics which shape those where women have traditionally been a distinct minority.

References


