

**VANCOUVER'S RESTORATIVE ART (RESTART)
ANTI-GRAFFITI PROJECT:**

**AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF THE
GENERAL AND SPECIFIC BENEFITS AND
CHALLENGES**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores and evaluates Vancouver's RestArt project. RestArt uses an innovative, holistic approach in dealing with illegal hip-hop graffiti. Grounded in the principles of restorative justice, RestArt works directly with graffiti writers in helping them find legal, alternative avenues for their artistic talents. As RestArt is a relatively new program, this research examines the general and specific benefits and challenges that this holistic approach faces. Qualitative analysis suggests that RestArt is a process that works to address the needs of the victim, community, and offender. However, the evidence suggests that RestArt lacks a fully developed theoretical framework that explains a causal mechanism for why it works. Implications are reviewed and future considerations are discussed.

To Byron and all the other writers that haven't made it out yet.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What do you think about getting paid to paint murals? Is that still graffiti?

If someone does that sort of thing and is paid for it and does it well, in my opinion that's still graffiti. It doesn't interest me. I'm a tagger. I'm a vandal. – *A conversation between Paul 107 and Mister Earl* (Paul 107, 2003).

1.1 Graffiti as Art?

According to the former executive director of the Surrey Crime Prevention Society, Peter Maarsman, graffiti is no longer art but becomes vandalism when the artist applies their artistic abilities to a surface without the consent of the owner (personal communication, 2001). Throughout the many different forms of graffiti that exist today, “hip-hop” graffiti, which falls into the hip-hop subculture, is arguably the most prominent in Vancouver, BC. Hip-hop graffiti can be identified through more sophisticated, often pre-planned cartooned type murals that will usually incorporate a “tag”. Hip-hop graffiti generally ranges from high-volume simple tags to complex street art (Weisel, 2002, p. 3). The lettering is commonly done in a bubble or three-dimensional form with multiple illuminating colours. But depending on who you ask, either a graffiti writer, police officer, or politician, this form of expression will vary by opinion as to whether hip-hop graffiti is art or vandalism. Overbearingly though, most graffiti “is considered vandalism or social crime rather than artistic expression although in many cases, artistic skill is involved in aerosol art, stylized pictorial images, and tags” (Craw, Leland Jr., Bussell, Munday, & Walsh, 2006, p. 423). However, where defacement of private property is viewed as vandalism by

governments, and by-laws become enacted to restrict such activity, graffiti moves into the realm of law and under the study of criminology (Jenion, 2003, p. 5). This thesis focuses specifically on an intervention project in Vancouver, BC, that has its basis in restorative justice and aims to re-orient graffiti offenders toward legal, alternative avenues for their artistic skills as a means to prevent illegal graffiti.

1.2 Graffiti Prevention

While the costs of cleaning up hip-hop graffiti, to municipalities or private businesses, can be expensive, preventative measures do exist. One such preventative measure, which this thesis will focus on, is wall murals. Wall murals are being seen more prevalently in cities, often with community-oriented themes. The themes may relate to the environment itself, such as a mural of a whale on a wall in an ocean-side city or a painting of popular sports figures on a recreation centre. Also fitting with a community-oriented approach is the involvement of the mural artists themselves. The murals are often done by local youth who show particular artistic talent. In turn, while showcasing the local artistic talent, the aim is to empower the youth by motivating them to take active responsibility for their community. Their artistic work acts as a demonstration of their involvement and their positive contributions as a member of the community. This in itself helps deter graffiti. Not only do murals eliminate tempting blank canvases (Hilderman, 2010), but where youth take responsibility and ownership for their community by contributing to it they become less likely to vandalise it (Weisel, 2002, p. 33). While “murals do not necessarily extinguish... graffiti from occurring, there is evidence that they can help to discourage graffiti attacks” (Craw et al., 2006, p. 432).

1.3 Thesis Overview

This thesis investigates the general and specific benefits and challenges of Vancouver's RestArt (Restorative Art) project as it relates to the long-term deterrence and abatement of illegal hip-hop graffiti. In an effort to gauge the general and specific benefits and challenges, qualitative interviews with project developers, coordinators, and facilitators are conducted for a comprehensive analysis of the project. The discussion and exploration of RestArt may be used for program improvements and further research considerations in the area of graffiti deterrence and abatement.

There has been very little qualitative research conducted on Vancouver's RestArt anti-graffiti program since it began in 2004. This thesis aims to report the findings of RestArt with the intent of providing independent analyses and evaluations of the project. In turn, if necessary, improvements or changes to the program may be applied which can hopefully help prevent further municipal graffiti and contribute to the improvement of society.

Chapter 2 first discusses different approaches to dealing with hip-hop graffiti, and then reviews some of the problematic concerns that result from its presence. This chapter concludes with applied literature and theoretical reviews of hip-hop graffiti as a crime, and considers the possible theoretical bases for Vancouver's RestArt project. Chapter 3 identifies the financial costs and social implications of hip-hop graffiti. It then reviews RestArt, and explores its holistic, restorative justice, approach to graffiti prevention. This chapter concludes by considering the potential outcomes of graffiti writers who do not experience an intervention program for their illegal graffiti practice. Chapter 4 reviews the research questions driving this thesis,

and describes the qualitative method used in this study. Chapter 5 describes the research findings from this study. The findings are broken down into seven main themes. Respectively, these themes address if and how the RestArt project functions to abate illegal graffiti, the theoretical basis for RestArt, measurability of the project, its credibility from street and social standpoints, the ownership of RestArt, entrance criteria for graffiti writers to participate in RestArt, and the transformative effects that RestArt can have on those who participate in it. Chapter 6 presents analysis and discussion of key findings from the study. It focuses on why RestArt works as well as it does, and on a current impediment to its improvement. Chapter 6 also considers limitations experienced in the current study, and future research possibilities on RestArt. Finally, chapter 7 ends with an overview of RestArt and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: WHO CARES ABOUT GRAFFITI?

2.1 Why do I Care?

When speaking to a local graffiti writer one day about some of the popular graffiti hot spots, I was directed to the corner of King George Boulevard and 64th Avenue in Surrey, B.C. I pictured it in my head. The graffiti writer was referring to the Surrey Public Market. It was once a friendly, lively market with a wide variety of shops including a fish market, deli's, clothing stores, flower shops, and a toy store. It had a unique and friendly atmosphere. After speaking with the local graffiti writer I journeyed to the now abandoned market and found nothing but a shell of an abandoned building, plywood boards over some windows, some torn-away chain-link fences, and a plethora of graffiti. Making my way to the back of the building, which cannot be seen from the street, I found more graffiti. The semi-below ground parkade also contained graffiti. The sheer amount of graffiti on the building was amazing especially considering this building is located on a major road intersection surrounded by a residential zone on one side, and a commercial district on the other. Not only were the walls covered in graffiti, but the floors and ceilings contained graffiti too. To find a spot on the walls, that did not contain graffiti, seemed impossible. This building was a major hub for graffiti writers from all around the city and beyond.

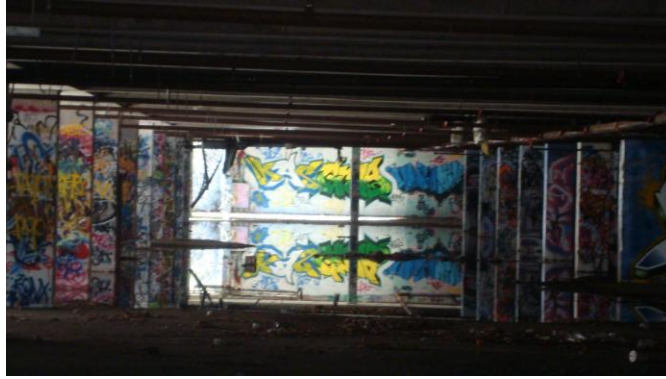


Figure 2.1. King George Blvd. & 64 Ave., Surrey

I found the discovery of this graffiti hub fascinating. Not only did I love the richness of the hip-hop subculture that emanated from the walls, but as the anti-graffiti coordinator in Surrey at the time, this was a major addition to my record-keeping of graffiti writers in the regional graffiti network.

In 2000, I launched the first full-time anti-graffiti program for Surrey. Employed at the Surrey Crime Prevention Society, I was the first anti-graffiti coordinator for Surrey. Originally funded by the City of Surrey, I started an anti-graffiti hotline for Surrey residents and businesses to call to have graffiti cleaned-up. With a theoretical basis in Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows, the objective of the graffiti clean-up project was to remove graffiti as soon as possible so as to not attract further graffiti or vandalism.

Through the anti-graffiti program's graffiti removal project, I coordinated with the RCMP's Youth Intervention Program (YIP)¹. I worked with youth who had been caught or arrested for doing graffiti. In conjunction with a youth councillor who assisted them in understanding how their graffiti vandalism related-behaviour affects their family, themselves, the victim and the community, I aimed to operationalize this

¹ The main focus of the of the Youth Intervention Program is to encourage youth to take personal responsibility and accountability for their actions (RCMP, 2009).

by taking the youth out into the community to have them clean-up the graffiti damage they had caused. Through this process, the objective was for the youth, hip-hop graffiti writers to develop a different perspective through a gained sense of empathy. My role in having them clean-up graffiti focused on them gaining empathy for the victims of graffiti by learning how their graffiti affected others in the community. Additionally, in having them clean up graffiti, the aim was also to have the youth develop understanding and an appreciation for the trouble that goes into cleaning it up. The intention was that the youth graffiti writers would take responsibility for their actions and learn to re-direct their artistic abilities into other outlets other than graffiti vandalism.

In my role as anti-graffiti coordinator, I have also liaised with the various regional police forces throughout Metro Vancouver on graffiti issues. A network was in place to keep track of regional graffiti writers. I also focused on delivering public education on graffiti, for both police and the public. I worked with various committees at the Municipal level to coordinate and deliver information and education on graffiti concerns, as well as to provincial public organizations such as the BC Crime Prevention Association².

The anti-graffiti program that I coordinated also functioned in conjunction with Surrey Crime Prevention Society's Spirit of Youth Mural Project. This project involves artistically talented youth painting murals in the city during the summer break from school. These high school students are usually remunerated for their mural works through the provision of college scholarships. Therefore, this program

² The BC Crime Prevention Association is an integrated team of citizens and police. It is dedicated to preventing crime, and provides ongoing province-wide education through community partnerships (BC Crime Prevention Association, 2010).

functions not only to beautify the city, but also provides an incentive for students to attend college or university. Additionally, by having youth contribute to the beautification and long-term improvement of the city, they are gaining a sense of ownership of their community. This functions as a way for youth to integrate into their community in a meaningful way. They feel like they now have a stake in their community, which helps them gain a sense of responsibility for it. And where proprietary feelings of ownership of a community are instilled by its members and contributors, defensible space is being created and crime is actively being prevented (Newman, 1996, p .42). Furthermore, murals themselves are believed to act as graffiti deterrents. Wallace and Whitehead (as cited in Craw et al., 2006) note that murals accumulate less graffiti because the graffiti writing is harder to see on a mural (p. 427), and because graffiti writers are more likely to respect the artwork of other artists (Callinan, 2002, p. 13). Therefore, I participated in the coordination of this program in conjunction with the anti-graffiti program that I operated.

One of the things that may qualify me to me study graffiti and hip-hop graffiti writers in the first place is my own knowledge and personal experience with the hip-hop subculture. Throughout my high school aged years, first few years in college, and right up into my mid-twenties, I lived the full-out hip-hop sub-cultural lifestyle. As described by Maxwell (1997), “[t]he writers, rappers, and breakers from the [hip-hop] scene consistently define their community in terms of these three key artistic practices. In their own terms, to rap, to write (graffiti), and to break (dance) is to ‘represent’ this ‘community’” (1997). These three elements, in addition to a fourth, dj’ing (disc jockeying), are regularly practiced and have come to be seen as a way of life for these hip-hop sub-cultural members. Not every member practices all four

elements, but all remain involved with each at some level, even if it is simply at an observer capacity. For me, I loved all of these elements and observed each one closely. However, I only actively practised one – graffiti.

Graffiti is a vehicle for popularity and the recognition it provides is attractive to young people who may be perceived as having limited opportunities (Spicer, 2005, p. 8). As early as fourteen years old, even before a full-out identification with the hip-hop subculture and all of its elements, I sought a mischievous sense of fame and recognition. As a result, I started writing the name of a popular rap group, and my loyalty to it, on the back seats of buses. Not long after I started scribbling this homage on the buses, other students from my school started mentioning to me that they were able to recognize that I had been on that bus. This indicated to me that I was starting to be recognized, although my original intent was merely to show my loyalty to the rap group. However, due to that sense of recognition, my approach to writing on the back seats of buses started to change. Through my non-descript style graffiti³, I started developing it into a distinct style with my own artistic flare which made that graffiti homage distinctly mine. Not long after that, the recognition I was receiving soon resulted in me developing my own, new, hip-hop graffiti tag which my peers even started referring to me by. At the same time, I also started writing my graffiti tags on space beyond that of just the back seat of buses. My desire for recognition had developed into a stronger addiction for sub-cultural fame.

³ Non-descript, meaningless graffiti in terms of the writer, e.g. Music band name or sports team (Hawthorne, 2000).



Figure 2.2. My tag: “RedOne?” on the left with my crew name below: “ACC”. On the right, an earlier throw-up by me: “SP”, and my tag “Red” below



Figure 2.3. An incomplete throw-up by me. “Red”, with my tag, “RedOne” above it. To the right is a complete piece by me – “BC RED”.

By my early to mid-twenties, I was in a graffiti crew and was writing hip-hop graffiti with my crew throughout the city on a regular basis. And through my years of experience writing graffiti, I had also been caught writing it many times as well. Police often came across as too busy to follow through with charging me, so they usually wound up taking my paint and sending me on my way. Charges were never laid, except for one time in Surrey. It was probably this event that opened up opportunities for me which eventually led to my employment in graffiti, and my overall continued interest in it today.

The mischief charges against me from that night never made it to court. Instead, and since I did not have a criminal record, I was diverted to an adult secondary measures process which eventually led me to participate in a restorative

justice, victim offender reconciliation. During the restorative process, I met with several of the people whose businesses I had once victimized with my graffiti, representatives from the municipalities, police members, members of the community, and restorative justice facilitators. Being given an opportunity to see graffiti from a victim's perspective not only broadened my mind and heightened my sense of empathy for the community's sense of being victimized by graffiti, but the restorative justice process also facilitated the development of new relationships for me. I was able to stay in contact with several of the people I had met the evening of my victim offender reconciliation, and a few years later one of them informed me that funding from the City had been put into place for an anti-graffiti pilot project.

References on my behalf were offered, and it was suggested that I apply for the position given my background practical experience with graffiti. I had taken responsibility for my past graffiti-writing endeavours, applied for the job, and was soon-after the first anti-graffiti coordinator in Surrey. I was given the broad responsibility of finding a way to deal with graffiti in the city.

2.2 Why do We Care?

It would appear that many graffiti writers in our community display a lack of social conscience or understanding that writing their tag on someone else's property is a violation not only of the criminal code but of the victims themselves. The small business owner who has to clean up graffiti every morning, public transit system that has to replace etched windows, a school board that cannot buy new computer equipment or sports supplies because they must pay to clean up graffiti vandalism... who is the real victim? The community is, and we must make our active taggers understand that they are part of the community and therefore, they are victimizing themselves (Hawthorne, 2000).

There are social costs to graffiti. Unfortunately, many people think graffiti is not a police or 'real crime' problem, or that the police can do little about it. Since

graffiti is not regularly reported to police or the appropriate agencies, its true scope is unknown (Weisel, 2002, p. 1). And due to the rising prevalence in many areas, and the costs associated with graffiti cleanup, graffiti is often viewed as a persistent or intractable problem (Weisel, 2002, p. 1). The intensity of graffiti also varies between different locations. While a single incident of graffiti may not seem serious, graffiti has a serious cumulative effect (Weisel, 2002, p. 1). Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows theory argues that defaced walls and communities leads to further vandalism and devalued property. Unsightly graffiti also negatively impacts residential neighbourhoods and can diminish the general enjoyment of a community.

Such an environment can also lead to fear of crime. Fear of crime is a concern or anxiety relating to the possibility of criminal victimization (Sacco & Kennedy, 2002, p. 203). "For many people, graffiti's presence suggests the government's failure to protect and control lawbreakers" (Weisel, 2002, p. 2), in turn invoking increased public fear. One explanation for this is the association sometimes made between gangs and graffiti. However, even where gangs are not associated directly with graffiti, the symbolic loss of control over an area may cause increased fear (Jenion, 2003, p. 92). Physical incivilities such as graffiti intensify the levels of fear that are based on the local crime rate (Sacco & Kennedy, 2002, p. 208). Where graffiti generates the perception of blight and heightens the fear of gang activity or crime, businesses in the area experience lost revenue due to reduced retail sales (Weisel, 2002, p. 2).

Community members of residential neighbourhoods also experience a decrease in quality of life due to increased fear of crime (White, 2001, p. 258). They feel graffiti is a quality of life crime that affects not only local residents but residents

of other municipalities as well. “[Residents] observe that graffiti decays and destroys the urban landscape causing fewer people to frequent neighbourhoods where graffiti is rampant, which inextricably links it to other, more serious crimes” (Kahn, 2004, Appendix B). However, graffiti can also go:

beyond a quality of life issue, because it’s no different than a break and enter. We don’t call a break and enter a quality of life issue, it’s even bigger than that, but this is someone who feels just as victimized by their property being tagged as if they were a victim of a break and enter. They get agitated. You can see their eyes fill up with tears, like this, all tensed up. They’re very, very affected.

Constable Valerie Spicer (as cited in Noble, 2003, p. 6)

In my personal experience working with the public as an anti-graffiti coordinator, one elderly resident whose rear-ally fence was tagged with graffiti took the graffiti attack as a personal threat against her. She thought she had somehow offended someone and as a result had become the target of an up-coming retaliatory attack against her. Such examples demonstrate how graffiti can lead to fear of crime, as well as a decreased sense of enjoyment within one’s neighbourhood due to that fear.

2.3 Why others might care

2.3.1 Learning Graffiti

Other considerations surrounding the presence and effects of hip-hop graffiti can be viewed from theoretical standpoints. Hip-hop graffiti, as a practiced and learned sub-cultural activity, is an evolving process for graffiti writers. However, there is variability where the interest in writing graffiti among individuals develops.

Through the media, with attention on an anti-graffiti campaign, graffiti writer Z13 notes:

the more the campaign clamps down on graffiti, 'the more attention it gets. And therefore, the more people want to do it, too. Some new kid says, o.k., yeah, I can do that, too; I'll get in on that, too' (Ferrell, 1993, p. 147).

Thus, a graffiti writer may develop their interest in graffiti because of media attention. However, pre-existing graffiti throughout the city done by peers and models can be an influence as well. As Cooper (2005) notes, kids at early ages begin observing graffiti throughout the city and become "thoroughly familiar with the names and styles of the 'up-writers' long before they attempt writing themselves" (p. 23). Furthermore, once young aspiring graffiti writers develop relationships with active graffiti writers, those active writers become mentors or teachers for the young new writers. Spicer (2005) notes that "[g]raffiti is intrinsically a group activity" (p. 34), therefore there is a basis for understanding the graffiti sub-culture and how the process of doing graffiti can be a learned process. In turn, "differential association theory says that criminal behavior is learned in association with intimate others by interacting and communicating with those others" (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 85). In the case of graffiti writers, those intimate others are other graffiti writer peers and graffiti crew members. Thus, graffiti as crime in the graffiti sub-culture is often learned through exposure.

2.3.2 Graffiti and the Environment

Environmental influences, and preventative measures against graffiti, are also considered from a theoretical standpoint. Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows theory serves as a theoretical basis for one of the objectives that

Vancouver's Restorative Art (RestArt) project aims to do: prevent more graffiti from occurring. The basis of the broken windows theory is "that serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked" (Wilson & Kelling, 1982, p. 34). In other words, businesses with over-grown weeds or un-tidy aesthetics that present an overall ill-cared-for appearance create an environment that is conducive to further disorder such as graffiti. And where graffiti appears, left un-removed it becomes likely to breed more graffiti (Wilson & Kelling, 1982, p. 32). This is because "graffiti represents the visible signs of disorder and unruliness [which is] a threat to the 'quality of life' of residents and the private property of businesses" (White, 2001, p. 258). More graffiti leads to broken windows on businesses or storefronts. Such an increased amount of disorder and crime occurs because the impression is given that no one cares about the area and that no one is in control of it. Ultimately, an area that is uncared for creates an environment that is conducive to more severe crime, such as breaking and entering or assault (Wilson & Kelling, 1982, p. 32).

Beautification and aesthetic improvement of an area can function to prevent broken windows and further crime. One of the outcomes of the RestArt project is the creation of wall murals. On the final day of a RestArt process, the group of participants design and paint a community mural. Often the murals are painted in areas that are crime-friendly or where graffiti has been particularly problematic (Weisel, 2002, p. 33). In turn, not only do the murals display a sense of community spirit and cohesion that transform a crime friendly environment into one that shows that someone cares about it, but they also help discourage graffiti itself (Craw et al.,

2006, p. 432). Graffiti offenders often appear to respect the work of other mural artists which functions to reduce incentives to vandalize (Weisel, 2002, p. 33)

Craw et al. (2006) studied this phenomenon. They investigated whether the use of a mural could significantly reduce new graffiti attacks in an area already prone to graffiti. The experiment involved painting over graffiti with a base colour, then with a mural design (Craw et al., 2006, p. 428). Craw et al. (2006) also note that the additional involvement of community groups in such a mural process further adds to the preventative effect against graffiti returning upon completion of the mural project (p. 427). At the end of the experimental follow-up period, graffiti was observed on the mural; however, the results revealed that the mural had proportionally less graffiti than the comparison wall sections that had no mural (Craw et al., 2006, p. 431). Furthermore, Craw et al.'s (2006) study explains that the graffiti that did appear on the mural was not hip-hop graffiti, but rather was non-descript graffiti consisting of facial features and sexual characters depicted in the mural's scene (p. 431). This is of less significance as non-descript graffiti is less intrusive to the mural itself, does not necessarily breed further graffiti, and does not have the same sub-cultural connotations as hip-hop graffiti. Overall, the mural proved to be a successful graffiti deterrent as graffiti writers did not attack the mural until 3 months after it was painted. Furthermore, it attracted only minimally obtrusive graffiti after that, and was far less in quantity than the comparison walls that had no murals (Craw et al., 2006, p. 431).

2.3.3 Life, Society, and Graffiti

Another theoretical perspective relating to graffiti writers is Moffitt's analysis on life-course-persistent (LCP) and adolescence-limited (AL) offenders (Moffitt,

1993). Moffitt (as cited in Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002) defines LCP offenders as those who demonstrate antisocial behaviour that “begins in childhood and continues worsening thereafter, versus adolescence-limited... offenders, whose antisocial behavior begins in adolescence and desists in young adulthood” (p. 179). As for LCP offenders, Moffitt et. al. (2002) suggest that LCP behaviour originates early in life and is found among a relatively small number of males, wherein high-risk behaviour is exacerbated by high-risk social environments such as the rush that is gained from graffiti writing (Moffitt, 1997, p. 11; Moffitt et al., 2002, p. 180). Paul (2003) explains that part of the rush from graffiti writing is “about missions at four in the morning, stealing paint, hitting rooftops, subway stations, and getting chased by police” (p. 07). AL’s also enjoy the same rush, but are of lesser concern given their expectation for desistence by young adulthood. LCP offenders “miss out on opportunities to acquire and practice pro-social alternatives at each stage of development. Children with poor self-control and aggressive behaviour are often rejected by peers and adults” (Moffitt, 1997, p. 22). It is therefore conceivable that graffiti, and peers within the graffiti sub-culture, may offer the level of acceptance that a youth with such pathology may seek. Jenion (2003) notes that graffiti writers usually range between the age of eleven and 25 years (p. 37). Those who start at an early age and do not change their life course trajectories will potentially involve themselves with graffiti crew members. Those who join a graffiti crew may go on to commit more serious crimes, together as a crew, as they age into adulthood. Spicer (2005) supports this view and adds that graffiti writers eventually “become completely entrenched in a criminal lifestyle and their formative years of criminal associations can negatively influence their adult development” (p. 34).

Sampson and Laub's (1993) turning point theory is also worthy of note. It is argued "that desistance from crime is due to salient life events at key points in the life course...[and such] events engender social bonds which exert informal social controls on criminals and help them reform" (Moffitt et al., 2002, p. 198). Therefore, in the case of RestArt one of its functions may be to act as a salient point in a graffiti writer's life course. Furthermore, RestArt should help to alter the life course of either adolescent-limited or life-course-persistent offenders before they become too deeply entrenched in a criminal lifestyle they cannot escape. According to Lupick (2010), one Vancouver graffiti writer with poor future prospects was able to "escape a life of crime and illegal graffiti [by] finding an alternative, legitimate outlet for his artwork. That was RestArt". Through a restorative justice Circle process, RestArt provides an opportunity to bring graffiti writers together with members of the community who are affected by graffiti. These members can include business owners, police, or City employees. This is done in an effort to make the graffiti writers understand what effects their graffiti can have on the community and community members. At the same time, trusting relationships between RestArt facilitators, community members, and graffiti writers are developed. This provides graffiti writers with an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives on graffiti, and enable them to speak openly in a safe environment about their particular circumstances (Lupick, 2010). Where new relationships are created with people who have social bonds to conventional society, and healthy alternatives to illegal graffiti are created, life course trajectories may be altered.

Such criminological theory echoes the basis of social control theory (Hirschi & Selvin, 1967), and in particular, Hirschi's theory of the social bond (Sacco &

Kennedy, 2002, p. 140). Hirschi's social bond theory is characterized as having four main elements. These four elements are attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief. Attachment refers to the ties that an individual has to others such as parents, friends, teachers, or institutions like schools (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 200). Involvement refers to the degree of activity available for conventional or unconventional behaviour. "Those most occupied by conventional activities simply have less time to be involved in deviance" (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 200). In turn, involvement with recreational activities, clubs, and other extracurricular activity serve to increase conformity in individuals. Commitment represents the investment an individual has built up in conventional society (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 200). Such investment refers to level of education, good reputation, or the establishment of a business. In turn, individuals with such forms of commitment to conventional society have that much more to lose if they are caught engaging in deviant behaviour. Hirschi's final element in social bond theory is belief. Belief refers to an individual's acknowledgement of society's rules, and their respect and moral obligation to obey them. In turn, "the more one believes in 'behaving properly' the more likely one is to be conforming" (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 201). Overall, these four elements affect the bond between an individual and society. Since all individuals exhibit some degree of bonding to society, the variable becomes how much these bonds need to be weakened before an individual engages in deviance (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 201).

Spicer (2005) notes that due to the subculture of graffiti, young people can become indoctrinated into that sub-culture and in turn "lose their ethical attachment to societal values" (p. 65). Where graffiti writers begin to lose social bonds with

prosocial members of society, such as parents, teachers, or mainstream institutions, they begin to develop new norms within the graffiti subculture. Hirschi would argue that these individuals lack socialization (as cited in Spicer, 2005, p. 29). “Attachment is important in creating conformity even when those others are deviant themselves” (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 200). Therefore, one aim is to re-orient graffiti writers away from the graffiti sub-culture, and toward a social network that offers social bonds with those community members who conform to acceptable norms in society. While every graffiti writer needs to be treated as an individual, with their own particular sets of needs and circumstances, where social bonds are created each individual may find a new conventional role in society that they can attach to. Through the RestArt restorative justice Circle process, opportunities to create relationships with socially acceptable members of society are facilitated. Thus, the potential for new attachments and social bonds is created.

2.3.4 Considering a Restorative Approach to Graffiti

Restorative Justice addresses the harmful effects of offenders’ actions and actively involves victims and offenders in the process of reparation and rehabilitation (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 27). Through this process, crime is viewed as a violation of individuals, relationships, and communities that create obligations to make things right (Zehr, 1990, p. 181) wherein justice is more than just punishing lawbreakers. (Bazemore & Schiff, 2011, p. 84). Rather, restorative justice is:

a restorative response to crime, harm, and/or conflict [that] seeks to “do justice” by repairing harm caused to victims, offenders, and community and, to the greatest extent possible, rebuild... relationships damaged by these crimes and other conflicts (Bazemore & Schiff, 2011, p. 84).

In this way, restoratively achieving justice invites stakeholders to hold offenders or rule-violators accountable. This is done, not by asking them to ‘take the punishment’, but rather by ensuring that they take responsibility for their actions by making amends to their victims and the community (Bazemore & Schiff, 2011, p. 85).

Circles

One way of achieving justice restoratively is through a model known as Peace-making Circles, or sometimes simply ‘Circles’. Peace-making Circles developed primarily from First Nation communities in Canada (Zehr, 2002, p. 50). Peace-making Circles do not focus solely on the crime, or the victim or offender. Therefore, participation in Circles is not restricted to the immediate parties to the crime and those closest to them. “Circles can include any community members who choose to participate” (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 65). In turn, every participant is heard from; both in expressing their perspectives and feelings about the crime, and in proposing and committing to solutions (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 65). When Peace-making Circles were first introduced into the justice system, they were originally used for sentencing and known as Sentencing Circles (Liebmann, 2007, p. 95). However, the Circle process does not focus exclusively on sentencing but can often lead participants to discover and address issues beyond the immediate issue of a particular crime (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 64). For example, “[p]articipants may address situations in the community that are giving rise to the offense, the support needs of victims and offenders, the obligations that the community might have, community norms, or other community related issues” (Zehr, 2002, p. 51). However, when sentencing is involved, the Circle plan outlines the commitments required of the offender and may also include commitments by others such as family

and community members (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 64). According to Kay Pranis (2006), a traditional objective in a circle process is to:

create a respectful space in which all interested community members, victim, victim supporters, offender, offender supporters, judge, prosecutor, defence counsel, police and court workers can speak from the heart in a shared search for understanding of the event and to identify the steps necessary to assist in healing all affected parties and prevent future occurrences.

Circles are now also used for private or public issues and are usually referred to as Peace-making Circles, or simply, Circles as is the case in the RestArt project. A Circle process commonly involves the use of a 'talking piece' which reflects the influence of traditional Aboriginal practice (Liebmann, 2007, p. 95-96). The talking piece ensures that each person has an opportunity to speak, one at a time, and in the order that each person is seated in the Circle (Zehr, 2002, p. 51). Throughout the Circle process, Van Ness (2002) describes it as:

allow[ing] for expression of its members' norms and expectations, leading to shared affirmation by the circle – not just for the offender, but for the community at large. The context offers renewed community identity and strengthens community life for its members through their participation (p. 65).

Although Circles originally developed out of small homogenous communities, today they are used in a variety of communities, including large urban areas, and for various situations beyond just criminal cases (Zehr, 2002, p. 51). Circles offer a structured form of dialogue that facilitates the engagement of difficult conversations in a fruitful manner while emphasizing shared values (Ball, Caldwell, Pranis, & Forester, 2010, p. 14). This helps bring a group closer together through the affirmation process, rather than highlighting differences that often act to push people or communities apart. "Circles create a safe place for participants to express

different viewpoints and strong emotions as they discuss difficult issues” (Ball et al., 2010, p. 14). In turn, such a process is useful in a wide range of areas including communicating, learning, support, healing, celebration and honouring, decision-making, community planning, youth development, work-place conflict, preparation for sentencing (often referred to as a Healing Circle), sentencing, reintegration, conflict-resolution, or being able to make an amends (Ball et al., 2010, p. 54-55; Zehr, 2002, p. 50). This is all enabled because a Circle process structures dialogue in a way that is inclusive and respectful, engages all members, and builds an overall stronger community (Ball et al., 2010, p. 15).

Mediation

Another restorative justice model that has a presence, but is not necessarily the model used in a RestArt process, is mediation (Lupick, 2010). Victim Offender Mediation programs (VOMs), formerly referred to as Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORPs), have been used in restorative capacities since the 1970's, and are a direct contributor to the restorative justice movement (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 57). “VOMs offer victims and offenders the opportunity to meet together with the assistance of a trained mediator to talk about the crime and to agree on steps toward justice” (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 57). Unlike with a traditional criminal justice process, VOMs seek to empower the participants to resolve their conflict on their own in an informally structured atmosphere. There is no third party to make judgement or decisions on the process, but rather a VOM process relies on the victim and offender to own and resolve their dispute together. “The mediator imposes no specific outcome; the goal is to empower participants, promote dialogue, and encourage mutual problem solving” (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 58).

2.4 Summary

Graffiti is a contemporary concern, one more commonly seen in larger urban cities. Politically, it can be a football for politicians who treat graffiti as en vogue one year, and of little concern the next. "A community-level response to graffiti maywell be influenced by the perceived costs of the problem" (Jenion, 2003, p. 89). When funding goes into cleaning up graffiti, graffiti disappears for a while. But once politicians allocate funds somewhere else, graffiti tends to reappear (O'Connor, 2008, p .15). Thus, graffiti is never really eradicated; it is merely hidden from the public eye for a while. In turn, the same criminological concerns with graffiti always exist. For instance, the presence of graffiti has the effect of creating fear of crime while graffiti itself tends to breed more graffiti. It occurs, either, where graffiti is left un-removed and attracts more graffiti, or where its sensational presence provokes new graffiti writers to join the graffiti sub-culture. The graffiti sub-culture also presents other criminological concerns. The sub-culture can have the effect of drawing some individuals further into lives of crime by moving them farther away from social bonds with conventional society. However, potential in preventing the deterioration of social bonds between graffiti writers and conventional society may come at the hands of restorative justice. Through Vancouver's RestArt project, a circle process offers a hand to graffiti writers willing to accept it, and provides them with the opportunity to reconnect with conventional members of society while also providing new, legitimate avenues for their artistic abilities. Thus, Vancouver's RestArt project takes a somewhat subjective approach that looks to re-orient the offender. As a result, it has theoretical bases in social control, differential association, and life-course persistent and adolescence-limited perspectives.

RestArt also has solid grounding in principles of restorative justice. This is explored further in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT'S BEHIND THE SPRAY CAN?

3.1 Graffiti: How Big of a Problem is it?

Often organizations, either governmental or private, that keep track of monetary loss associated with graffiti do not separate out the cost of graffiti cleanup from other forms of vandalism repair. However, estimated costs of graffiti removal have reached as high as \$15 billion annually in the United States alone (Jenion, 2003, p. 89). Jeff Farrell (1995) found that the Los Angeles Rapid Transit District has spent \$13 million a year on graffiti cleanup (p. 78). Const. Wendy Hawthorne, of the Metro Vancouver Transit Police Service, notes that the average bus window vandalised by acid etching graffiti⁴ costs \$350 to replace (Lau, 2006, p. 12).



Figure 3.1. Acid Etch Graffiti
Source: Wikimedia

Craw et. al. (2006) note several other agencies' graffiti cleanup costs ranging from \$5,000 to as much as \$7 million annually (p. 425). In Vancouver, the City has contracted private graffiti removal companies that charge \$250,000 annually (Kahn,

⁴ Acid etching is a form of graffiti that is marked on glass or Plexiglas with an acid containing craft etching product. The acid etched graffiti does not appear immediately but will burn into the glass after a short period of time (Hawthorne, 2000).

2004, p .42). However, this merely covers public property. Removal of a one piece of graffiti from a single, private building can cost thousands of dollars which is especially problematic for “smaller ‘mom-and-pop style’ businesses common to many commercial areas throughout the City” (Kahn, 2004, p. 8). In Surrey, the City alone spent \$93,000 cleaning up graffiti in 2000 (Holmes, 2001, p. A6), while as recently as 2006, the City of Surrey and the school district together spent \$500,000 cleaning up vandalism (Luymes, 2007, p. A.11).

In comparison to theft from auto, graffiti taggers who acid etch a window for example, can be significantly more costly and tend to commit their offence at a higher rate (Spicer, 2005, p. 55). Spicer (2005) notes:

[A] theft from auto suspect may commit 10 offenses on a busy day. Whereas a graffiti offender can easily damage 50 business windows in a few hours, will tag the bus on the way there, every other dumpster, mail box, and street sign between these businesses (p. 55).

In the case of the business owner victimized by acid etching graffiti, if the acid attack is not attended to quickly with a neutralizing formula, the acid will become a permanent graffiti mark in the glass. In some cases it may be possible for the acid etch to be buffed out if attended to early enough. However, if not, the whole pane of glass will require replacement. According to Etch Busters (Etch Busters, 2007), the replacement cost of an average storefront window pane is between \$425 to \$1,100. “[Overall], Graffiti contributes to lost revenue associated with reduced ridership of transit systems, reduced retail sales and declines in property value” (Weisel, 2002, p. 2). For a city like Vancouver, that prides its reputation on being clean and beautiful, its image is therefore essential to the city’s economic prosperity and growth (Noble, 2003, p. 1). Those who are not directly affected by graffiti in a financial way tend to ignore or remain apathetic to its costs (Kahn, 2004, p. 10).

However, those who are not directly confronted with graffiti still remain subject to its costs. This occurs indirectly; either through increased taxes that fund graffiti removal from public property, or through cutbacks to social programs that offset the costs of cleanup.

Other financial costs of graffiti can include associated health costs as occupational health and safety can be a concern in many workplaces. Langworth et. al. (2001, as cited in Jenion, 2003) studied the effects of graffiti cleaning solvents on city workers and found significant health effects including an increased incidence of headaches and difficulty in breathing (p. 93). While it would seem some of these effects can be eliminated with the use of proper safety equipment, accidents still occur. Nevertheless, the health costs associated with graffiti due to the chemicals used to clean it up can lead to financial costs in terms of medical treatment (Jenion, 2003, p. 94).

3.2 Restorative Justice: An innovative approach to graffiti

While restorative justice has many tributaries behind its philosophy, one model that has a direct presence in a Restorative Art (RestArt) process is Circles. The RestArt Circle process is led by group facilitators and is oriented around restorative justice principles. The use of restorative justice principles is one of the workshop's major objectives. Through this objective, in a restorative manner the RestArt process collaborates a number of perspectives including illegal graffiti writers, the art community, victims of graffiti, police, local business representatives, community and social service resources, ex-offenders, legal graffiti artists, and

restorative justice practitioners (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 4). However, since RestArt is a dynamic restorative justice process, it is not restricted to these participants as other perspectives are always welcome. In RestArt, police representatives have always included police officers that have had, or are in the process of, developing relationships with the graffiti writers present in the Circle. Often the relationship between these two began with the police officer arresting the graffiti writer for doing illegal graffiti. The Circle facilitator is a community member, and often a representative from a local restorative justice association, whose role is primarily to keep the process orderly and periodically to summarize for the benefit of the group (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 64).

Circle participants speak one at a time, and may discuss and address a wide range of issues regarding the graffiti offence, including community conditions or other concerns that are important in understanding what happened and what should be done. A common question used to stimulate discussion in a Circle at a RestArt process that each participant speaks to is: what is graffiti, and what does it mean to you? This provides an understanding of graffiti for the group, and from the different perspectives of the other group members such as victims, offenders, police, city representatives, families and friends, and facilitator.

RestArt Circle processes also provide graffiti writers with an opportunity to “hear from the communities where they were tagging and are made to understand that vandalism has victims” (Lupick, 2010). This process also provides business owners and community members with a chance to meet and get to know the individuals who tagged their property. This can serve as an opportunity for the owners or residents to learn that the graffiti writers are rarely dangerous gang

members, but are often aspiring artists simply in need of some guidance (Lupick, 2010). Furthermore, an opportunity for relationships to be built is enabled, and a chance to share experiences with graffiti, both from victim and offender perspectives, is provided in an open and safe environment. Such an atmosphere sets the tone for participants to be empowered so they can engage in problem solving and conflict resolution together and in a meaningful way.

The Circle process also aims to remove all hierarchies of authority which in turn creates an environment where all participants feel safe, equal, and respected (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 4). This provides an environment that enables awareness of graffiti to be raised while creating a sense of connection that facilitates reintegration and acceptance into the community (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 4). The process also “promote[s] collective responsibility in finding solutions to the current situation of illegal graffiti” (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 4). Through this RestArt process, it then aims to help increase youth’s skills and channel their artistic abilities and talents toward legal opportunities (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 4).

Overall, the objective of the Circle members is to find a path that leads to a constructive outcome. This includes ensuring that the needs of the victims and community are mutually understood and addressed along with the needs and obligations of the offenders (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 64). In the context of the Circle, the process moves toward consensus on a plan to be followed and how it will be monitored (Van Ness & Strong, 2002, p. 64). In RestArt, one consensual plan is always the outcome of a community mural that includes contributions from every member of the Circle. The mural is created on the fourth and final day of a RestArt process. As a collective group, the mural is painted by all participants of the RestArt

Circle process. It can include issues discussed by the group, and themes meaningful and relevant to the local community.



**Figure 3.2. A RestArt Mural.
1000 Terminal Ave., Vancouver**

3.3 What is RestArt?

RestArt began as a mere concept between several diverse graduate students⁵ in a restorative justice class in Vancouver. These students did not always see eye to eye, but a common desire to better understand the graffiti sub-culture in Vancouver led them to explore a new way of considering illegal graffiti. Realizing that constantly arresting graffiti offenders was proving to be fruitless, they decided to consider the needs of the offenders instead. As these students had very diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, several different perspectives were contributed in their approach. Two of the major perspectives which each differed somewhat from the other, both took trilateral approaches. One of these approaches favoured the broad inclusion of a restorative justice component, a counselling component, and an art component. In contrast, but somewhat of a micro-approach to the restorative justice component of the previous perspective, was the view to focus specifically on the victim, the offender, and the community. The individuals eventually merged their various perspectives into a collaborative effort that seeks an outcome which creates

⁵ These former students are participants in the sample from the current study.

art in a holistic, restorative manner. From this came what is known as the Restorative Art project, or for short, RestArt; a proactive program where individuals involved in illegal graffiti are guided toward alternative, legal avenues.

RestArt is neither owned by anyone, nor does it belong to anybody. It is not a society, and it is not a government-run program. While it has received government funding, it is a true collaboration of victims, offenders, and the community. RestArt reflects the values and principles of restorative justice and brings together a diverse group of participants from the community. Participants include graffiti writers, service providers such as the John Howard Society, addictions counsellors, youth workers, police officers, legal graffiti artists (who function as mentors), victims such as business owners or representatives of the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA), and community volunteers (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 5). For graffiti writers specifically, a flexible entrance criteria was originally devised. However, as RestArt evolved, the criterion changed somewhat as well. Overall though, the selection criterions include that the graffiti writer be either caught by the police for doing illegal graffiti or be identified as an active graffiti writer; be interviewed by the Anti-Graffiti Unit⁶ (AGU) with the individual and parent; be in full consent of participating in RestArt by both parent and individual; be referred to other rehabilitative programs such as drug and alcohol counselling, psychological testing, or art therapy; and, be willing to complete various tasks prior to attending RestArt such as writing apology letters, participating in victim reconciliation, or other forms of volunteer work (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 5).

⁶ The Anti-Graffiti Unit (AGU) was formed in 2002 by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). Its mandate was to track and prosecute serial graffiti offenders, and was responsible for developing appropriate alternative measures for these graffiti writers (Spicer, 2005, p. 53). At the time this thesis was written, the AGU had been defunct due to staff shortages for 3 years (Vancouver Courier, 2008).

RestArt is a four-day process and has an average of 20 to 25 participants per workshop. The amount of graffiti writers in the group is roughly half, with the rest being the various other members of the community. The group explores the topic of graffiti, and works toward the production of a collaborative community mural. In the first three days the group is facilitated by restorative justice practitioners and functions in a Circle. The Circle often breaks out into smaller, more focused Circles. Throughout this process, numerous exercises and discussions take place that focus on various concepts including victimization, addiction, defining and conceptualizing graffiti, self-esteem building, cooperation, mural planning, legal graffiti opportunities, mural production and skill development, communication, empathy, and community-building (Abramson & Chauhan, 2005, p. 6). On the fourth day, the community mural is collaboratively painted with contributions from all members of the group.

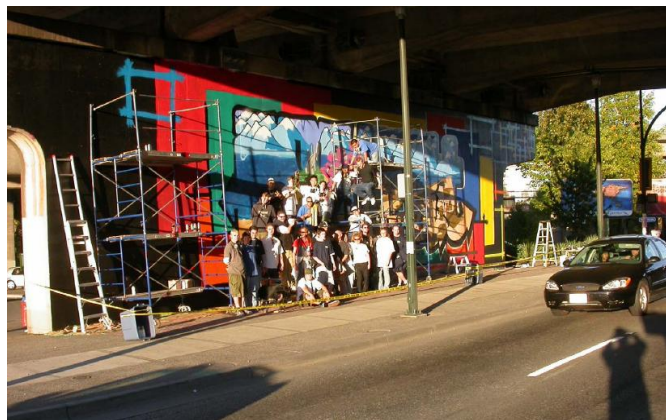


Figure 3.3. A RestArt Group and Mural

A lack of social programs designed to address the needs of the young graffiti writers, and provide an educational component on the negative impacts of graffiti, further contributed to the development of RestArt. Abramson and Chauhan (2005) note:

Art programs in schools do not include the medium of spray paint. Furthermore, young writers hold the highest respect for established graffiti artists. The involvement of these [established] artists in this program is crucial to its success. Young graffiti writers will gain insight into some of the negative impacts of illegal graffiti from these artists and at the same time develop skills needed to enter the realm of legal graffiti art (p. 5).

Graffiti is considered to be addictive (B.C. Vandalism Prevention Network, 2006) (a controversial argument, though one I can personally qualify), therefore RestArt works on an offending continuum (Spicer, 2005, p. 93). Despite repeated attempts to stop graffiti writers from doing illegal graffiti, the goal still aims to stop it. With restorative justice principles as a basis, RestArt takes a proactive approach at steering individuals caught up in illegal graffiti toward other legal avenues.

According to Abramson and Chauhan (2005) one artist mentor RestArt participant:

was previously extremely active in [another province]. He came to Vancouver, jumping illegally on trains, tagging and stealing his way across [Canada]. His contact with... the RestArt program has lead him to become fully legalized. He said at the end of RestArt, that this program was one of the most thrilling things he has done in his life (p. 9)

Each graffiti writer has his or her own individual set of needs. And each one requires something different. RestArt does not necessarily try blanket a set of graffiti writers into one Circle with the expectation that the taggers will simply learn empathy for their victims, and in turn find a new avenue to outlet their graffiti compulsion. Rather, RestArt provides a foundation for graffiti writers to start developing new relationships. And through a dynamic process with the graffiti writer, victim, and community, RestArt aims to seek out what the needs of the individual are, and in turn provide a foundation of relationships and social supports to start addressing those needs. With self-reflectivity, understanding those needs can help the graffiti

writer understand the harms his graffiti is causing to his community. And once those individual needs are addressed, the new social supports can facilitate the individual in channelling their energies into more positive and productive goals in their lives.

3.4 Trajectories: How do they find their way to RestArt?

When RestArt first began in 2004, graffiti writers were primarily referred to RestArt either by police who were in contact with the graffiti writers, or referred to RestArt through the courts. This functioned as the original means of bringing participants to RestArt. Entrance to RestArt, for graffiti writers, further required that they genuinely take responsibility for their actions and find some way of making amends for the harm their graffiti had caused to their victims or the community. This requirement fit within the principles of restorative justice. The intake process, done by the Vancouver Police Department's AGU, screened out participants that were potentially dangerous or un-willing to participate. Participation in RestArt had to be entirely voluntary wherein one study participant discusses the entrance process to RestArt and states:

We would bring them in and say "you don't have to be here, you understand that? I will go personally talk to the judge. If you don't want to participate in RestArt, we don't want you there, even though you are court appointed".

As RestArt evolved, it gained recognition among Vancouver graffiti writers. Its reputation, and opportunity for graffiti writers to meet graffiti mentors, grew in popularity among the members of Vancouver's graffiti sub-culture. As a result, many graffiti writers were requesting to be part of a RestArt process.

In addition to self-selecting, as of 2008, "Referrals to RestArt can come from anyone in the criminal justice system, youth workers, concerned parents, school

counselors or community agencies” (Grandview Woodland Community Policing Centre, 2008). Some graffiti writer participants also request to return to RestArt for subsequent workshops, to which those genuinely accountable for their actions are welcomed back. The total number of graffiti writers to have participated in RestArt is unclear. However, between 2004 and 2008, 100 graffiti writers had gone through the process (Grandview Woodland Community Policing Centre, 2008). Then, between 2008 and 2010, several more workshops ran before RestArt was defunct due to funding concerns. An exact count of participants at this latter point is unclear.

3.5 Trajectories: What happens if they don't find their way to RestArt?

Graffiti writers initially start their graffiti writing activity seeking sub-cultural fame, and the admiration and recognition of their peers. Cooper and Chalfant (2005) note:

“Getting fame” is the repeatedly stated goal of graffiti writers. Because there are so many thousands of writers in the city, to get fame an individual must stand out from the others. The competition is very intense (p. 28).

“A writer is judged by his mastery of painting and by the number of times he ‘gets up’”⁷ (Cooper & Chalfant, 2005, p. 28). However, once a graffiti writer gets ‘up’, he may find that it becomes an addiction⁸. In turn, he must continue writing his tag to maintain his sense of sub-cultural recognition. And in order to get fame and rise to the top of a multitude of other graffiti writers in the city, he must ‘get up’ over and over again. However, he is eventually rewarded by prestige and the admiration

⁷ To “get up” is to write your graffiti name or tag prolifically in an effort to gain sub-cultural recognition and fame.

⁸ The word addiction is used in relation to graffiti because that is the term used by graffiti writers to describe how difficult it can be stop doing graffiti (Spicer, 2005, p. 91)

of his peers and the graffiti sub-culture. This is a sense of satisfaction a graffiti writer finds difficult to part with (Cooper & Chalfant, 2005, p. 28).

The more time a graffiti writer spends writing his graffiti on walls and getting up, the more he entrenches himself into the graffiti sub-culture. Furthermore, “[a] writer who has been involved in graffiti for an extended time knows many others in the subculture” (Spicer, 2005, p. 63). The more prominent graffiti writers also come to involve themselves with graffiti crews⁹. It is these connections, and connections to the sub-culture itself, that has authorities concerned about these entrenched individuals. They are considered to be at-risk for further, more severe, criminal offending. These are the individuals that Moffitt et. al. (2002) describe as life-course-persistent (LCP) offenders. They are individuals who begin offending in childhood and continue worsening thereafter (Moffitt et al., 2002, p. 179). Moffitt’s (Moffitt, 1993) developmental study and taxonomy of LCP offenders parallel the typology of graffiti writers that begin tagging in childhood. An association is believed to exist between LCP graffiti writers and future criminal involvement that is linked to the graffiti sub-culture. According to Spicer (2005), the development of the young person motivated by the graffiti sub-culture is negatively impacted by the sub-culture’s criminal undertones (p. 63). As a result, the more connections an individual has to the graffiti sub-culture, the more connections they will accrue to other criminal activities. According to Becker (as cited in Spicer, 2005):

the deviant who enters an organized and institutional deviant group is more likely than ever to continue in his ways. He has learned, on the one hand, how to avoid trouble, and on the other hand, a rationale for continuing (p. 64)

⁹ A graffiti crew is a group of active taggers who identify themselves as a crew that actively tag as part of a team. A graffiti tagger who is in a crew will often write a crew designation next to their tag. See figure 2.1.

Graffiti writers can fall into multiple different criminal paths. However, some of the crimes that LCP graffiti offenders may become involved in start with shoplifting of items such as paint, alcohol, and clothes. They may further enter into low-end drug dealing to help finance their lifestyle while also having a propensity toward violence (Spicer, 2005, p. 39). One study participant noted that drug dealing can simply be part of the graffiti sub-culture. They are already out there running around in the middle of the night, so it is just convenient to run drugs at the same time.

3.6 Summary

Hip-hop graffiti has been shown to have many costs associated with it. It negatively impact's businesses who are on the hook to paint over graffiti or replace windows destroyed by acid etching. Municipalities are burdened by the hundreds of thousands of dollars they must pay to keep publicly owned property tidy of tags. Residential areas experience degradation of the urban landscape, while some residents experience increased fear in their neighbourhood due to the presence of graffiti tags. Those doing the tagging often fail to see the implications of their actions. Not only does graffiti writing cause financial and social harm to others, but it can also cause harm to the taggers themselves. Through the graffiti sub-culture, writers often spiral into unforeseen lives of crime as they disengage themselves from conventional and productive relationships with society. However, with RestArt, graffiti writers are extended an opportunity to see their actions through a new, restorative lens. Through new relationships and with the guidance of influential mentors, RestArt provides graffiti writers with an opportunity to re-orient their life trajectories away from potential spiralling lives of crime. Furthermore, graffiti writers with true art aspirations who seek legal avenues for their artistic skills are enabled by

the new relationships created through the restorative process of RestArt. RestArt aims to re-orient the life-course trajectory of, often misguided, graffiti writers toward new positive directives in life through a lens of restorative justice.

CHAPTER 4: FRESH CONSIDERATIONS – RESTART

4.1 Research Questions

The literature has shown that whether graffiti is quickly and regularly cleaned-up as a form of deterrent, under the philosophy of the Broken Windows theory, or if a general Crime Prevention through Environmental Design initiative is used, such as applying wall murals, illegal graffiti still returns in some degree or other (Craw et. al., 2006, p. 431). What these initiatives fail to address is the re-orientation of the actual offender. What might be the next step in addressing concerns involving illegal graffiti writers is a holistic approach that considers the perspectives of everyone involved including victim, offender, and community. This form of offender re-orientation should take into account, and help to facilitate, the needs of the offender in providing an alternate, legal outlet, to the desire, or often addiction (B.C. Vandalism Prevention Network, 2006), to write illegal graffiti. The Restorative Art (RestArt) project aims to provide a dynamic and diverse series of support mechanisms, that not only help a graffiti writer understand how his crime harms others, but also channel a graffiti writers' artistic talents into a legal medium.

RestArt is a relatively new graffiti prevention initiative that was established in 2004. It has recently lost its funding and has consequently been out of commission for the past year¹⁰. While there are prospects of RestArt starting up again (V. Spicer, personal communication, March 5, 2011), this study, in the meantime, investigates RestArt and asks: *what are the benefits that RestArt provides as a graffiti prevention*

¹⁰ RestArt lost its funding in 2010.

project, and, what are the challenges that RestArt faces in functioning to prevent graffiti? This study takes a qualitative, exploratory approach to finding answers to these questions.

4.2 Method

In attempting to assess the benefits and challenges of an autonomous project that is not owned by any particular organization, one that is also temporarily defunct, locating study participants was somewhat of a challenge. However, the project participants that were involved in this study were sought out from various other organizations throughout the Vancouver area through a snowballing method. Some participants and project originators were unable to be accessed due to time constraints on this project. Other project originators were unable to be contacted as they had relocated outside the province.

Seven semi-structured interviews were undertaken to conduct this research. One, second, follow-up interview was conducted with one of the seven participants. Several follow-up questions were also asked of participants via email. All follow-up questions received a response from the participants. Interviews provided the best medium to explore this dynamic approach at facilitating graffiti writers in finding alternate outlets to their illegal graffiti. Semi-structured interviews allowed for elaboration and additional questions in areas of concern and areas of expertise for participants. All participants were sourced through referrals. Participants had a variety of professional backgrounds, mostly in either restorative or criminal justice, and were all participants in RestArt at some capacity. Participants' professional backgrounds included police agencies, an offender-services organization, a

restorative justice society, and an employee of a municipality. In their professional positions, all participants were located within the Metro Vancouver area.

Participants were not expected to speak on behalf of their organization. However, the presence of varying ideological viewpoints was sensed and came through in the interview process. This was a positive contribution as the varying perspectives engendered a broader sense of diversity on the study. It also gave the effect of being more representative. The varying perspectives and ideologies were welcomed and encouraged as is the case in restorative justice in general.

Each participant was contacted directly by the researcher. An initial contact by the researcher was made with a program developer. The program developer, who was also a participant, provided referrals to four other participants. Names of the other two participants emerged through previously known contacts and personal referrals. Each participant received a short, 3-page Study Information and Informed Consent form outlining the research topic, objectives, and potential risks and benefits of participation in the study. Each participant was provided adequate time to review the study details before agreeing to participate. Interviews were then set up according to participants' schedules. An ethics application to speak with the participants was sought by the researcher, and was approved by the institutional research ethics board.

Interviews ranged from one and a half hours to three hours in length. With the consent of participants, all interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. Handwritten notes were also taken during the interviews but were used primarily by the researcher to keep the interview focused and to return to the relevant topic areas. At the beginning of each interview, participants were again

provided with a copy of the Study Information and Informed Consent form before the interview began. Participants were given adequate time to read and sign the Informed Consent form. A copy was provided for participants, while the researcher also kept a copy. The Study Information and Informed Consent form outlined the voluntary nature of the research and participants' rights to confidentiality, and their right to discontinue participation at any time. All interviews were initially conducted in-person on a one-to-one basis. Two follow-up interviews took place with two of the participants. One was done in-person, and one was done via telephone.

An interview schedule¹¹ was used to guide each interview, and contained a basic outline of questions divided into three primary sections. The first section addressed participants' backgrounds and professional experiences in relation to RestArt. The second section inquired about the background processes of RestArt. This reviewed how a RestArt process works, how many people are involved, and the different roles of participants. The third section focused on the theoretical bases for RestArt starting with what the underlying theories and philosophies are for the program. This included what role restorative justice plays in RestArt. Section three also inquired about how the program functions to prevent graffiti writers from continuing to do illegal graffiti, how it helps to develop social supports, how it creates positive influences for adult life, and how it can alter the life-course. Finally, section three addressed other residual effects that RestArt has on its participants and the community, and its overall main effect. Concluding questions in the interview schedule asked what other benefits and challenges RestArt experiences beyond those implicitly addressed in the previous sections.

¹¹ See Appendix A.

As the intent of this study was to explore RestArt, and its potential benefits and challenges, the exploratory and evaluation aspects of the research were left intentionally broad. While the same interview schedule was used as a guide for each interview, participants were encouraged to explore aspects of RestArt that were of interest to them. This allowed for flexibility to explore multiple areas of interest, while also acting as a probe for the researcher to discover possible challenges and benefits. Due to the semi-structured nature of this research, each interview ended differently, while some common themes also manifested themselves between participants. Unplanned questions also emerged throughout each interview. However, this often resulted in data that was rich with each participants' unique contributions.

Prior to the individual interview process, it was suggested to the researcher that participants in the study, who were also all participants in RestArt, could possibly be defensive about providing information about RestArt. However, the researcher found that generally all participants were willing to share their perspectives about RestArt, and their understandings of it as a program that aims to facilitate alternatives to illegal graffiti. However, due to each participant's professional role and, in turn, their relationship to RestArt, it was necessary to anonymize each participant to ensure they felt comfortable speaking freely and critically about the topic matter. It may be difficult for participants to be critically honest about any aspect of RestArt if they felt their public responses could negatively impact their professional reputations. In contrast however, the disclosure of the ownership of some data could have also brought more credibility to certain aspects of the study due to the professional reputation of participants. Overall

though, it was concluded that consistently anonymizing all participants was the safest and most ethical approach at the sacrifice of study credibility. In turn, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality with all individually identifying information being removed.

4.3 Summary

This research investigates Vancouver's RestArt project, an innovative, restorative approach to confronting illegal graffiti in Vancouver. To do this, the research takes an exploratory approach to investigating the RestArt project, and seeks to answer at least two broad, main questions. These two questions are: *what are the benefits of RestArt in confronting illegal graffiti in Vancouver?* and, *what are the challenges that RestArt faces in doing so?* The research uses a qualitative approach and conducts interviews with seven participants from the RestArt project.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study takes a broad exploratory approach to discovering and understanding the benefits and challenges of the Restorative Art (RestArt) project. Through this broad exploratory study of RestArt, by means of interviewing¹² the coordinators, facilitators, and developers of the project, various themes emerged. The themes are broken down into seven main themes while reflecting the study's two guiding questions¹³. Respectively, the themes that emerged are as follows: does RestArt work?;, theoretical basis for RestArt; measurability of RestArt in terms of its effectiveness; credibility of RestArt; ownership of RestArt; entrance criteria to RestArt; and the potential transformative effects of RestArt. These themes are analysed and the results show that there are various opinions and viewpoints on RestArt as they relate to its benefits and challenges. While some participants had similar opinions on certain aspects of RestArt, other participants displayed divergent points of view. These varying points of view made for a rich source for discussion on the current state of RestArt, and future considerations for it as a dynamic and evolving process. The results are described throughout seven themes as the themes are reviewed below.

¹² See Appendix A.

¹³ (1) What are the benefits of RestArt in confronting illegal graffiti in Vancouver? (2) What are the challenges that RestArt faces in confronting illegal graffiti in Vancouver?

5.1 Does RestArt prevent graffiti? If so, how?

The results find that it is not RestArt itself that prevents graffiti. Rather, it is the experiences gained from participating in RestArt that can facilitate a graffiti writer in desisting from illegal graffiti writing. Each graffiti writer has their own reasons for doing graffiti, and each individual graffiti writer is affected differently by the experiences gained from a RestArt process. Therefore, the variable, or set of variables, that influence one graffiti writer to desist writing graffiti is unlikely to be the same as the variables that influence the next graffiti writer to desist. According to the sample of participants in this study, many variables in a graffiti writers experience at RestArt influence their desistance.

5.1.1 Specific deterrence

According to Shawn¹⁴, RestArt can function as a means of making the act of graffiti less anonymous. Hip-hop graffiti is commonly done in the shadows of society; it is done, at night, in the dark, when few other people are present. The legal identity of the tagger remains known to very few people, while the graffiti name is the one that gains street fame and recognition. However, through relationships developed at RestArt, the true identity of the graffiti writer becomes less anonymous. When he or she goes to put up their tag, they are more likely to consider the consequences as they are now aware that others know who they are. Those that know who the tagger is are now also people that the graffiti writer has a relationship with. This has a two-fold deterrent effect.

¹⁴ A community police station program coordinator, and RestArt coordinator.

The first is accountability. Julie¹⁵ states that after RestArt, “[the taggers] felt more accountable. They couldn’t be anonymous anymore”. Shawn who suggested that they now “know they are being watched” further supported this point. Where the graffiti writers no longer feel anonymous, they become deterred from further committing their crime. Through RestArt, graffiti writers developed direct relationships with police. Therefore, the first deterrent effect is that an anonymous crime like graffiti is no longer possible to commit in secrecy when that graffiti writer is engaged in relationships with the police; relationships that are based around that taggers graffiti.

It is not just the police that graffiti writers are accountable to, they are also accountable to the community. This is the second element in the two-fold deterrent effect. In RestArt, graffiti writers will often have developed relationships, not only with the police, but with their victims as well. Therefore, a crime like graffiti now becomes a personalized one with a human face attached to it, usually the face of a victim. In one instance, there was a graffiti writer who himself was a victim. Sofia¹⁶ describes an incident where a taggers mothers’ car was vandalized by graffiti. In turn, the tagger was very angry and felt victimized by the attack. Through this the graffiti writer experienced the sensation of being a victim wherein he was possibly able to understand what it is like when a crime is personalized against him. Residents and business owners often feel the same sense of victimization. What this shows is that personalizing a supposedly victimless and anonymous crime like

¹⁵ A developer of RestArt and restorative justice practitioner.

¹⁶ A municipal mural coordinator working with youth and adults, and coordinator for RestArt.

graffiti can have preventative effects. Brian¹⁷ explains that:

the act itself now becomes an act against the victim. That's what we try to create through the [RestArt] process. This does have an effect on the community and now there is a face to that person in the community this affects. It makes the crime less anonymous. It personalizes it and then it creates a relationship between the two. It creates a relationship between the very route between the victim and the offender. Once the offender realizes this affects a victim they are less likely to commit the same crime.

Together, these two elements function as a specific deterrent to doing graffiti. Removing the sense of anonymity can have the effect that a crime is harder to get away with when it is no longer hidden. And secondly, for a graffiti writer to have a sense of accountability for their actions, by putting a face to their victim by means of having a relationship with them, functions as a specific deterrent to continuing to commit graffiti offences.

5.1.2 Addressing needs

Another prominent theme that arose among participants was the role of needs. Needs based restorative justice focuses not only on the victim, but on the needs of the offender as well. Zehr (2002) notes, offenders need to heal from the harms that contributed to their offending behaviour as well as being provided with treatment for addictions or other problems they may experience (p. 17). Therefore, RestArt addresses what needs might exist for a graffiti writer that can help them desist from writing graffiti.

In the RestArt setting, one of the most basic things a graffiti writer, often a youth, needs is to feel safe. This is so that they can feel comfortable enough with

¹⁷ A restorative justice practitioner and facilitator for RestArt.

the RestArt group to be able to open up and share their honest feelings and perspectives. Julie explains that:

The role of the facilitation team is to make sure th[e] conversations are helpful, healthy, and respectful, and seek to balance power. There is a tremendous power imbalance in the room. Young people constantly feel shutdown so our job is to try manage the adults in the room.... Young people feel they have no voice and are disempowered. They're not listened to in terms of what they think could be a creative solution so they need to be supported and feel safe enough to offer up those things, and the impacts, and their needs.

Therefore, in a RestArt process of 20 to 25 participants, there is between three to five facilitators. Julie explains that this is needed in order for the youth to feel respected and for them to have an equal voice. Feeling respected is required in order to have a good, wholesome dialogue between all participants. A sense of equality is necessary in order to reach creative, fair solutions between all participants including victim, offender, and community. Thus, a sense of safety is a fundamental need for the graffiti writer offender in the RestArt setting.

Once a graffiti offender's safety needs are addressed, other needs can be explored. Sherri¹⁸ notes that it is important to understand why the taggers do graffiti in the first place in order to uncover what their needs are. According to Spicer (2005), our society overlooks the needs of some of our young males, so many of them struggle to find where they fit in in this world (p. 101). Some feel lost and as though they lack a voice. Not being heard further affects a young person's self-esteem. Therefore, they turn to writing graffiti as their means of being heard. However, the graffiti sub-culture is what RestArt aims to orient young people out of, so the process seeks to find what it is a young person needs in order to get out of

¹⁸ A police officer in the Metro Vancouver area. Sherri has studied Vancouver graffiti for over 20 years in her role with the police, and has participated in many RestArt workshops.

the sub-culture. Sherri explains that uncovering the young graffiti writers' needs is often done:

through the dialogue, through the circle process. It allows you to focus more attention on [why they do] it. It's not me versus you - don't do it again. It's me saying why are you doing this [graffiti] and what can we do to help you not do it? Do you feel you have to do it and how can we do it in a way that will help you pursue what you want and still [do it legally]?

RestArt attempts to help the youth find their voice and gain a greater sense of self-esteem. RestArt helps the graffiti writers to feel they truly fit into society, and have a voice within it. This should alleviate the need to write illegal graffiti in order to be heard. Therefore, empowering the taggers is an important cornerstone as well. RestArt aims to, not only provide the graffiti writers with a voice, but also help them gain a sense of accomplishment. This is so they can feel they have a place in society, and that their actions can have an impact - an impact that contributes to society in a positive manner, rather than through destructive means such as illegal graffiti. Through the RestArt process, graffiti writers learn to take responsibility for their community. Where they feel empowered and have a sense of responsibility for their community, they become less likely to commit destructive acts, such as graffiti, against it. When asked if the graffiti writers become empowered and how it translates into taking responsibility for their community, Sofia explains:

Absolutely! When I'm working with a youth in RestArt and many people come by and praise the mural, the [graffiti writers] get a sense of, "yeah, I live in this community, and yeah, this is my art, I do this and this is me". They bring their families by, and they walk by with their friends, and they post photos of it. It becomes their contribution, it becomes their stamp....There's a recognition there that they get through graffiti in a very clandestine way, but it's an immediate feedback when you're standing there in the daytime painting. It's an incredible feeling to be appreciated like that. Generally, they are not feeling that appreciation in their world, aside from their graffiti world.

Sofia went on to further note that being empowered and feeling connected with the community was more than just being given a wall and some paint. Rather, being empowered changes the lives of the graffiti writers, and the lives of the other RestArt participants too. The graffiti writers are building relationships with the police, the city, the victims, the restorative justice facilitators, and the community members of whom all participate in the RestArt process. Therefore, according to Sofia, the mural is more than just paint on a wall. It is a symbolic and emotional connection to the community – the community that the graffiti writers can feel they now play a relevant role and have a voice in. Young males today often do not have enough real-world challenges Hillary¹⁹ points out, “so to complete a huge 30 foot mural is a big accomplishment. [RestArt is] providing youth with a needed, positive challenge”. Joann²⁰ concludes that RestArt helps graffiti writers find a new sense of self-esteem by accomplishing something positive in the community.

RestArt also provides for service-based needs. Addictions counsellors are usually present in a RestArt process. This is because graffiti writers heavily entrenched in the graffiti sub-culture can have substance abuse issues. Providing counselling for substance addictions is also addressing the needs of a graffiti offender. In order to be able to properly reintegrate into conventional society as a contributing member, addictions issues must be addressed. Addictions counsellors can also provide support for graffiti as an addiction.

Other general needs that RestArt addresses includes providing continued support for the graffiti writers. Julie explains that RestArt is not expected to cause a graffiti writer to suddenly quit doing graffiti after participating in one work shop.

¹⁹ A police officer in Metro Vancouver and developer of RestArt.

²⁰ A police officer in Metro Vancouver and developer of RestArt.

Therefore, since RestArt operates on an offending continuum, graffiti writers are always welcomed back to RestArt as much as needed. Coordinators and facilitators also provide support to parents of graffiti writers. Julie explains that some parents are aware that their son's are involved in graffiti, and are off running around in the middle of the night. However, the parents often feel helpless as they genuinely believe they have tried everything to get their son to stop, but no matter what they do they just cannot get through to them. RestArt facilitators and coordinators provide support for these parents where they can. Providing support for parents and families can help address family or parental needs that a younger graffiti writer may need.

5.1.3 Social supports

Another variable that may lead a graffiti writer to desist from graffiti is the influence of new relationships established through RestArt. New relationships with dedicated, positive influencing adults support a graffiti writer in finding new, legal, avenues for their graffiti outlet. The essence of RestArt, and restorative justice in general, is building relationships. Sherri explains that one of the more spiritual dynamics in building the relationships in RestArt occurs during the mural painting stage. Some of the strongest bonds develop here. There is no explicit explanation why. However, the tight bonds that develop in RestArt provide the foundation for new avenues to grow out of. Where relationships of a trusting nature are established with either the coordinators, facilitators, or mentors at RestArt, graffiti writers will have a resource available to them when they decide to use it or when they need it. Depending on the graffiti writer's needs, the members from RestArt can offer several different avenues of support.

One area of support comes as an emotional bond. One youth graffiti writer, who seemed to be slipping further and further into criminal activity, found emotional and social support at the hand of Sofia and a police officer. The youth had been stabbed four times in an altercation. Sofia explains:

The night it happened, when he got stabbed and the police were called and the ambulance was there, they asked “who did this, what happened?” The kid said “I want to talk to Detective [Moore]²¹”. They said no, we need to know who did this – we need to go look for the guy”. But he only wanted to talk to Detective [Moore].... The cop that dragged him in and caused all these problems for him. The reason the kid would only talk to him is because he knows he cares, because there’s follow-up, there’s relationship.

Between the police, the mentors, the facilitators and the coordinators of RestArt, a network of social supports and people that care is created. The network of people that demonstrate genuine care and concern for the graffiti writer has a meaningful impact on them. The graffiti writers and caring adults do not always agree on all issues, but the genuine concern has an impact on the graffiti writers that lets them know that someone does care for them, and about what happens to them. In the short term, knowing that someone cares might not cause the graffiti writer to stop doing graffiti right away. But when they do decide that they are ready, or need to make changes in their life, they know they have a positive and supportive network of people that can help them implement those changes. Sherri points out that “not all accept your hand, but they always remember you’re there”.

Another avenue of support is of a commercial nature. Both Shawn and Sofia are program coordinators for RestArt and have access to the municipality that has access to the various businesses throughout the city. Therefore, one avenue of

²¹ Actual name withheld to help protect the identity of the study participant.

social support exists for graffiti writers who decide they want to turn their graffiti into legitimate works of art, either commercially or artistically. The graffiti writer can contact either Shawn or Sofia. For commercial purposes, Shawn or Sofia can put the graffiti writer who wants to become legit, in contact with business owners. Together, a business owner and the graffiti writer can establish a plan for a mural on the business. This can have several positive possible outcomes. In one instance, and the literature has shown, murals have the effect of beautifying an area while also preventing further graffiti and other crime. In another instance, the graffiti writer now has a legitimate canvas for his work. This canvas becomes part of his portfolio of legitimate artwork, which in turn also functions to advertise his works. Such an opportunity can establish the graffiti writer as a legitimate commercial artist. Once established down a legitimate pathway, the need to do illegal graffiti becomes less motivating.

5.1.4 Black book sessions

Since it is unrealistic to expect a graffiti writer entrenched in the graffiti sub-culture to quit doing graffiti suddenly after attending RestArt, another program is in place as a support piece to accompany the efforts of RestArt. It is a support session referred to as black book sessions. As the RestArt workshops run on average once a month, the support provided may not be frequent enough, even where a graffiti writer attends RestArt more than once. That is, lessons and principles learned through RestArt may not remain in the mind of a graffiti writer after a few weeks. Therefore, black book sessions are weekly get-togethers between several graffiti writers, a RestArt coordinator, and one or two RestArt artist mentors. Usually held at a community centre, these sessions offer a legal, artistic outlet for the graffiti writer

participants from RestArt. They also provide a safe environment where dialogue between the graffiti writers, mentors, and coordinator can take place. Here an opportunity is provided for follow-ups or refreshers on the principles and lessons learned at the RestArt workshop. Sofia, a black book session and RestArt coordinator, describes the black book sessions herself:

We would all have our sketchbooks and paper on the tables. We would sit in circle again, but we were around tables. We would have topics for discussion, somebody came in and asked if we could design a logo for their basketball event. We did murals, we did stencil art, collage, aerosol, paint pens.... We did collaborative pieces, we hung our stuff at the roundhouse and sold it, and put the money back into black book, and half the money went to the artist.

Black book sessions facilitate the continued development of the key, healthy relationships that RestArt builds. Julie explains that they are in place as a support piece where the graffiti writers can remain connected, not only to each other, but also to the artist mentors and adult coordinators like Sofia. Furthermore, as Julie notes, it is one more support piece that ensures “they’re not out tagging that night or drawing on an illegal canvas”.

Incentives for the graffiti writers to participate in black book sessions include the attendance of the artist mentors who the younger graffiti writers genuinely look up to. Sofia has also developed good rapport with the graffiti writers, and therefore provides an incentive for the graffiti writers to attend. Food and snacks are also provided. However, the most important and potentially influential incentive to attend is the opportunity to be part of the cohesive, positive relationships that the black book sessions offer.

Like RestArt, black book sessions are presently defunct. Also like RestArt, black book sessions have not run since 2010 due to lack of funding.

5.2 Theoretical bases

5.2.1 Restorative justice

When questioning participants about the theoretical bases²² for RestArt, the only consistent response surrounded restorative justice. RestArt developers explained that there are no theoretical bases for RestArt, only a foundation in the principles of restorative justice. Coordinators admitted to being unaware of any theoretical bases, while only being familiar with restorative justice as a practiced concept. That is, many were only aware on restorative justice to the extent of its usage within RestArt. As for the facilitators, Julie explained that the theoretical basis for RestArt is restorative justice theory itself. She explained that RestArt's theoretical basis is:

RJ theory, and also the theory of experiential learning when it comes to the workshops. We want to break down the hierarchy; we wanted to be inclusive which is the RJ component. All acknowledged that the jail and court system are not working for these youth, so the theory was about building empathy, sense of community, being inclusive, giving voice – all those things that are RJ values.

5.2.2 Adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour

A theoretical consideration that arose throughout the interview process related to Moffitt's theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour. Study participants did not explicitly state adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour as being a theoretical foundation for RestArt. However, some general similarities between the make-up of graffiti writers from RestArt and the make-up of the sample population from Moffitt's study of life-course-persistent (LCP) and adolescence-limited (AL) offenders were discovered. Through discussion with Hillary, it was explained that

²² See Appendix A for section C on the interview schedule.

after 100 graffiti writers went through the RestArt process, the recidivism rate was found to be 30 percent. Furthermore, this number was generally consistent with the other study participants who were aware of the recidivism statistics for RestArt. When questioning participants about RestArt working to prevent graffiti, participants had a general consensus that a small number of RestArt graffiti participants were ill-suited for RestArt. They generally felt that that small percent was unlikely to be deterred from long-term graffiti offending by participating in RestArt. While a relative term like 'small percent' or 'small number' may not be consistent with a statistic like 30 percent (referring to the RestArt recidivism rate), a 'small number' is consistent with Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour (p. 674).

As the literature has shown, an LCP offender demonstrates "[p]ersistent, stable antisocial behavior [that] is found among a relatively small number of males whose behavior problems are also quite extreme" (Moffitt, 1993, p. 674). The small number of participants in RestArt that are not suited for the program and unlikely to benefit from it, may possibly be of the same typology as the small number of people that Moffitt (1993) describes as being LCP offenders. Joann describes the population of a RestArt group and notes that "a small percent of RestArt participants were extreme, while the rest, a large remaining percent, were the graffiti addicts who still had potential for change". Sofia also notes that in RestArt "we have some of those career persistent's, and they are extremely dangerous and they're doing ... worse things than graffiti. [But] we don't see many career persistent's in the RestArt program". The finding here shows that the make-up of the average RestArt group of participants is similar to the make-up of the population sample from Moffitt's theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour.

Furthermore, the age range from Moffitt's theory of adolescence limited anti-social behaviour is similar to the age range of graffiti writers in Vancouver. In Moffitt's (2002) theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour, LCP offenders (those offenders who make up a relatively small number of the sample), begin in childhood and continue worsening thereafter, versus the adolescent-limited offender whose antisocial behaviour begins in adolescence and desists in young adulthood (p. 179). In terms of graffiti writers in Vancouver, the majority are between the ages of 16 and 21, while the range is between twelve and 37 (Spicer, 2005, p. 2). There appears to be a connection between the typology of those represented in Moffitt's theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour and graffiti writers in Vancouver, and more specifically, participants from RestArt. The relatively 'small number' of LCP offenders may be of the same typology as the relatively 'small number' of RestArt participants that are extreme and unlikely to benefit from RestArt. These relatively few are likely LCP offenders who start doing graffiti at an especially young age, will not benefit from RestArt, will not desist out of graffiti in their early 20's, and will go on to become more involved in other more serious crimes throughout their life.

5.2.3 Broken windows

As mentioned above, few participants saw explicit theoretical bases for RestArt when questioned. However, when probed for whether participants felt there was a role for Wilson and Kellings' (1982) theory of broken windows in RestArt, most tended to agree. Using murals is important in preventing graffiti which helps deter further disorder. However, beyond simply using murals to prevent that future disorder, Sherri elaborates and puts the theory of broken windows into its own

metaphorical theory for at-risk youth, and those from RestArt in particular. Sherri discusses the at-risk youth graffiti writers and the key importance of RestArt in working with them before they spiral into more severe crime. Sherri explains that the:

Broken windows theory hits the nail on this one. Not only broken windows, but broken youth. How do we fix broken youth before the problem festers?... If you deal with the small stuff, the big stuff takes care of itself. Stop kids from doing the petty crap, and get them through RestArt, get them through other programs, get them involved in sports, whatever, and they won't go the criminal direction. But instead of broken windows in theory in terms of community, I'm talking about the broken windows theory in terms of youth themselves. If we deal with the kids doing the small stuff, hopefully they won't carry on to become the career criminals. We won't get them all, but we'll narrow down the scope of those becoming career criminals.... This is done through compassion, understanding, and dialogue.

Therefore, RestArt plays a key role, not only in preventing elevated levels of community disorder and crime, but as an early intervention process for youth at-risk. RestArt helps identify those at-risk as well as provide guidance to alternative, legal, avenues.

5.3 Measurability

One of RestArt's primary aims is to prevent graffiti. Therefore, it addresses the offenders to promote change within them. However, when speaking with Julie, one question that arose was "how do we measure prevention?" Prevention cannot be measured by the number of times a graffiti writer did not do graffiti after participating in RestArt. Nor would it be accurate if it were measured as the length of time between participating in RestArt and the next time the graffiti writer did graffiti. Therefore, Julie and I briefly discussed this challenge. One measure of success could be if participants returned to RestArt, and continued to participate in the black

book support sessions. This would be an indicator that the participants are enjoying the process and are embracing it as an effective preventative measure. Returning to RestArt and the black book sessions would further be a demonstration of a holistic, supportive response to the offending continuum of illegal graffiti. However, and on the other hand, returning to RestArt and the black book sessions could also indicate that the process is not working for the graffiti writers, and they are returning to seek further support.

In turn, the recidivism rate was considered as a potential indicator of success or failure. And where Hillary notes that the recidivism rate is 30 percent, this then indicates that RestArt enjoys a 70 percent success rate. However, the next question that arises is why is the process failing for 30 percent of the participants? Something needs to be changed to increase the success rate to above 70 percent. To figure out what must be changed makes way for the next challenge for RestArt. Since RestArt lacks an explicit theoretical framework, relying primarily on restorative justice as a practice renders the intervention unreliable (Eck, 2005, p. 701). If we do not know why the recidivism rate is 30 percent, rather than higher or lower, and if there is no theoretical framework as a basis for the intervention, it becomes difficult to figure what must be changed to make RestArt more effective in terms of increasing the success rate (Eck, 2005, p. 702).

5.4 Credibility: Street versus social

One key piece to RestArt being effective in helping graffiti writers desist from illegal graffiti is the role of the artist mentors. The artist mentors are ex-graffiti writers, most of whom have had a big impact on the local graffiti sub-culture. Within the sub-culture, they had been prolific graffiti writers whom have gained a high

degree of street fame and recognition. Therefore, within the context of RestArt, they are very important in getting the graffiti writers to come to the program. Young, aspiring graffiti writers look up to older, developed graffiti writers that have made a reputation for themselves. Therefore, by having 'big name' graffiti writers as mentors in RestArt, young graffiti writers are influenced to participate.

However, this study has found a discrepancy of opinions among study participants relating to the legitimacy of the artist mentors. The disagreement lies along the lines of whether it is acceptable for the artist mentors to participate in RestArt as mentors if they are still doing illegal street graffiti.

The first perspective²³ is that graffiti writing mentors should not be banned from RestArt as artist mentors if they still engage in illegal graffiti. Being a full-out, regular graffiti writer is unacceptable. However, given the addictive nature of graffiti, where a mentor artist makes a genuine effort to reframe from illegal graffiti but happens to slip-up one night, they should not be banned from RestArt as a mentor artist. This is because, firstly, the mentor artists influence younger graffiti writers to come participate in RestArt because of the street credibility they have as graffiti writers. Therefore, to prohibit them from graffiti altogether not only discredits them as well-known graffiti writers, but it also minimizes the street credibility of RestArt. And second, to remove artist mentors from RestArt for slipping-up one night is contradictory to the principles of restorative justice. Restorative justice is about extending a hand to those in need, including graffiti-writing artist mentors. It is not about alienating and shunning them away. Thus, it is hypocritical to have a

²³ Perspective provided by Julie.

restorative justice based project that does not support the very principles of its own basis.

The competing perspective is that mentor artists in RestArt must be legal and successfully abstain from illegal graffiti entirely. From a social stand-point, it is irresponsible on the part of RestArt to have illegal graffiti writers mentoring younger graffiti writers who are the population that RestArt aims to help desist from illegal graffiti. In one instance, to have artist mentors who still engage in illegal graffiti tell younger graffiti writers why it is wrong and to stop sends a contradictory message. If the mentors are still doing illegal graffiti, then there is little incentive for the younger, impressionable graffiti writers to stop. In a second instance, the mentor artists are paid to participate as mentors in RestArt. Funding for mentors to participate in RestArt comes from the municipal government. It is therefore socially irresponsible on the part of RestArt to pay artists to mentor in an anti-graffiti project when the artists themselves are engaging in illegal graffiti.

This further led to a new challenge of its own: retaining an adequate number of mentors. According to Sofia: “we have a very small pool of mentors because they are very hard to find...[but] they really are the cornerstone of the program”. Sofia also notes “that in total there is about 20, however a few have gone back to graffiti”. Julie explains the importance of the mentor role and notes the dilemma arising out of the requirement for the mentors to remain graffiti free:

Without strong mentors the youth aren't going to come. That's because they wanna see the big-name legends. But if they are not 100 percent clean all round, you can't be a mentor. That was the beginning of the end from my perspective. The mentors were crucial. They are what made the young people wanna be there. Mentors were able to say: “This lifestyle isn't what you really want. Dirty. Violence.”

With the stringent requirements for mentors to be entirely legal while also commanding a great deal of street respect, and having charisma and leadership abilities, RestArt can find itself struggling to keep up with the demand for credible, trained, mentors.

5.5 Nobody owns RestArt

RestArt is not owned by anybody. It is not a government program, non-profit society, or commercial business. Legally, it does not exist. It is simply a collaboration of victim, offender, and community. As a result, this can have its advantages and disadvantages.

Because RestArt is not officially operated by any particular organization, it becomes a true collaboration of victim, offender, and community. In this case, the participants are able to take ownership of the program and truly embrace it. In this way, its intents hold more meaning for those involved. It is mouldable and adaptable to each individual's own needs. Furthermore, because it is a collaboration, there are no arbitrary rules. The rules of RestArt are collaboratively set out by those participating thereby giving every participant their own voice and personal meaning in the process.

However, without formal ownership, the first issues to arise are ones of liability – what happens if somebody gets hurt? Therefore, RestArt negotiates this by partnering with community organizations when it runs. RestArt has partnered with community centres and community police stations where liability is able to be accepted by them. RestArt is liquid and can partner with anyone. In turn, it can go

anywhere to coordinate a workshop, such as to other cities, providing those cities have a community organization that RestArt can partner with.

An impediment RestArt has encountered by not being a legal organization has been around funding. RestArt does cost money. Mentor artists are paid for their role during RestArt. Facilitators are also paid for participating. Paint and supplies cost money, as well as food and beverages. Funding has come from the community organizations that RestArt has partnered with, or other applied grants such as gaming. The problem is that when these funds from community organizations such as the community centres, or gaming grants are cut off, both of which funds come from the government, RestArt and the black book sessions are then shut down. Due to a lack of funding, RestArt has been shut down since 2010²⁴. Sofia points out:

Police centres have lost 50% of their funding this year. And RestArt is not an expensive program, but that's because we've underpaid everybody for so long. We used to do it for pennies. Volunteers, mentors, facilitators, used to get anywhere around \$250 for their 25 hours, plus planning, plus prep., plus debrief, everything.

Other coordinators from RestArt have been paid by their organizations of employment such as the municipality or police agency.

The problem with RestArt and black book sessions shutting down is that the networks built, and relationships established, all tend to crumble. This is problematic. By taking away the social supports that the graffiti writers establish, they are likely to lapse back into graffiti full-time. This is because the outlets developed for illegal graffiti, and the new alternative avenues are gone. In Sofia's experience:

²⁴ RestArt had been shut down since 2010. When this thesis was written in the first quarter of 2011, there were plans for RestArt to start up again in the summer of the same year.

You have the eleven year-old who's ready to die for [graffiti]. He hasn't touched it since our black book sessions, but now he's turned to drugs because he doesn't have the graffiti programs to turn to. The drugs became an overdose. He's been hit by a car. He's now deeply in trouble and falling through the cracks fast. We have no programs to offer him.

Furthermore, when funding was taken away, the Vancouver Police Department's Anti-Graffiti Unit (AGU), a key link to RestArt, was also shut down. Then, from the perspective of other graffiti writers, such as the older, prolific ones, it was open season for graffiti writing again. The police lost their relationships and regular contacts with the city's graffiti writers, so with a lack of dedicated enforcement and no support programs in place, graffiti writers again felt they no longer had to be accountable to anyone resulting in increased graffiti in the city. Sherri concludes by discussing the important link that RestArt played before its funding was removed.

She explains:

[one prolific tagger in particular]²⁵, who was a part of RestArt years ago, was controlled by that knowledge and presence of the whole program – there was that relationship through the graffiti unit constable, and the people at the city. Once they weren't there [anymore], nobody cared, and it was a free-for-all.

5.6 Entrance criteria

When RestArt first started in 2004, the original means for graffiti writers to get into the program was primarily by referral from the police or the courts. The graffiti writers also had to genuinely take responsibility for their actions and find a way of making amends for the harm their graffiti had caused to their victims or the community. However, as RestArt evolved and developed a reputation among local graffiti writers for working with artist mentors who were well-known ex-graffiti writers,

²⁵ Tagger name intentionally withheld for privacy and ethical purposes.

and for its reputation for doing legal murals, some participants began requesting entrance to participate in RestArt. This seemed to be a positive development for RestArt. Not only did this show that RestArt was developing credibility among local graffiti writers, but those requesting entrance would have to earn their way into the project. This provided a means for many of the potential graffiti writer participants to take genuine responsibility for the harm they had caused. In turn, upon acceptance to RestArt, participants were showing that they were being accountable for their actions by doing such things as writing apology letters, doing community clean-up work, and some even participating in Victim Offender Mediations (VOM's).

However, at the other end of the spectrum, this increase in enthusiasm among graffiti writers wanting to participate in RestArt also had a downside. One of the principles of restorative justice is that it does not refuse entrance to anyone with a genuine interest in participating in a restorative process. As a result, some participants were getting in, or being diverted to RestArt, but were not being genuinely accountable for their actions. Julie notes:

As [RestArt] evolved, the guidelines for those who got accepted became much looser and that's where the restorative aspect started to lose out. We were having first time people come in, people who'd say "ya, I'm a graffiti writer and I actually don't care". And not that those people should be screened out, but they were being sort of forced to come or put on probation and told that they had to come, and all those things jeopardized the integrity of the process.

Therefore, in the first instance graffiti writers were wanting to come to RestArt simply because it had become desirable for what it offered. This was the opportunity to meet the mentors, and was access to free paint and a canvas. However, in this way, it is questionable whether some self-selecting participants were at RestArt for the right reasons. It is uncertain whether they were genuinely taking responsibility

for the past harms their graffiti had caused. In the second instance, the reputation of RestArt was catching on with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) as well. This was potentially amounting to a case of net-widening. Graffiti writers, who may not have been genuinely accepting responsibility for their actions, were being diverted from the CJS to RestArt simply because there was nowhere else to send them.

5.7 Social and emotional transformative effects

Some responses expressed by participants displayed signs of emotion and real passion for RestArt. In turn, it was a challenge for participants to describe what they experienced going through RestArt, and was an even bigger challenge for them to describe the experiences of the graffiti writers. This section first reviews potential transformative effects experienced by the graffiti writers as described by the participants in this study. It then reviews the possible transformative effects experienced by the coordinators and developers.

Julie explained that the effects of RestArt are intended to have long-term transformational effects on the graffiti writer participants. It is over time that the graffiti writers may understand the harms they cause with their graffiti and in turn truly take responsibility for their actions. Hillary explains: “the program [is] something that means something to them. [It’s more] than going and cleaning floors”. Being able to identify with the process makes it more meaningful. When it is meaningful, it is more likely to have positive transformative effects. The first key instance where RestArt aims to help transform the graffiti writers is to help them understand the harm their actions cause. Speaking with their victims and hearing their experience aims to evoke a sense of empathy on the part of the graffiti writer.

Shawn explained that the graffiti writer participants also experience a sense of pride that aims to promote a transformative experience. He notes: “the taggers feel pride doing the mural in front of the community”, and follows up by comparing that feeling to tagging in the middle of the night. Shawn explained that the feelings the taggers have doing a mural in front of the community, where they are being cheered on, is very different from the feelings evoked from tagging in the middle of the night where the community will oppose them. Joann noted that RestArt provides the graffiti writer participants with positive reinforcement. Having the community cheer them on provides the positive reinforcement that can lead to transformative effects. Graffiti writers may learn to enjoy the affect of having the community cheer for them for a change, while diverging from the sense of opposition they receive from doing illegal graffiti.

RestArt also has the potential for the coordinators to experience transformative effects. Hillary explains that RestArt provides a way for these participants to engage with the process in a meaningful way. She states that unlike corporate succession planning, participant coordinators of RestArt are truly able to engage with the program. She adds: “people come to it as participants or facilitators, and they just take ownership of it. It’s weird. Maybe they like the process”. As a truly collaborative project, participants have a chance to connect with the process in a way that works for them. Joann mentioned a transformative effect that it had on her. She explained that prior to RestArt, she figured graffiti writers were just teenagers causing trouble. However, since RestArt she has discovered that many young graffiti writers are youth at-risk of more severe criminality and in need of guidance. Thus, Joann’s perception of graffiti writers, and the implications of

their trajectories, was transformed. Sofia mentioned that through the RestArt process, she is sometimes able to recognize the point when some of the graffiti writers all of sudden gain a sense of understanding for the harm they have caused. She said that RestArt has provided her with a new sense of optimism for the potential that at-risk graffiti writers have for positive change. Overall, these words demonstrate that RestArt can have a possible emotional or transformative effect on the coordinators of RestArt as well.

5.8 Summary

The research findings from this broad, exploratory study have presented many benefits and challenges to RestArt. RestArt's main goal is to abate graffiti in Vancouver. The research findings highlight that with a basis in restorative justice, RestArt provides graffiti writers, willing to take responsibility for their actions, with a platform of support systems that can help them re-orient their life trajectories. These trajectories may be changed where graffiti writers are given a chance to be accountable for their actions, where their own individual needs are addressed and in turn supported, and where a network of social supports are provided for graffiti writers who want to make use of them. The main basis for this potential change is in the principles of restorative justice. RestArt also shows traces of criminological theory. Certain typologies of RestArt graffiti writer participants have shown to be similar to the make-up of LCP offenders according to Moffitt's theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour. Broken windows theory is also shown as relevant toward the prevention of community deterioration with the use of murals that come out of RestArt, as well as being used as a metaphor for graffiti writers themselves. The research findings also highlight measurability impediments due to a lack of a

solid theoretical framework, conflicting concerns relating to mentor credibility, challenges surrounding RestArt's non-legal status, and RestArt's potential for transformative effects on participants.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSIONS ON THE WALL

6.1 Increasing harm vs. fixing harm

In October 2009, graffiti writer, Rez, “agreed to pay Langford \$6,400 in damages and complete 30 hours of community service. Langford became the first community in B.C. to receive a judicial order to recover funds used to clean graffiti vandalism from the vandal” (Hill, 2011). Then, in 2011, in a precedent setting case for Canada, the B.C. Supreme Court held a Langford couple²⁶ partly responsible for their son’s graffiti (Cleverly, 2011, p. A2) wherein the graffiti writer:

agreed to pay Langford \$1,800 in damages over 18 months and commit to 100 hours of community service, which the court deems to be worth \$7,500 total. He also has to pay Cedric Steele Realty \$885 and Pacific Coast Floor Covering \$269 for damages. His parents have agreed to pay \$2,000 to the Goldstream Food Bank (Hill, 2011).

These news articles demonstrate that the justice system in Canada still maintains a definition of justice that narrowly focuses on sanctions. It is possible that such a punishment is the necessary cure to get this particular offender to stop doing illegal graffiti. However, he is quoted as saying “I cannot stop” and that “he will continue to do graffiti” (Times Colonist, 2011). Thus, “[t]he order also says the man must seek counselling for his ‘graffiti addiction,’ and can’t possess spray paint or instruments used in graffiti vandalism” (Hill, 2011). While this may sound like the community and businesses will gain a sense of satisfaction by seeing this young man punished financially and coerced into counselling, his needs tend to be

²⁶ These are not the parents of tagger “Rez”. They are the parents of tagger “Block 642”. Block 642 is from the same graffiti crew as Rez.

neglected. Furthermore, due to the financial sanctions, he and his family are now less able to help him afford college to get an education, while he is also left stigmatized by the punishment itself. If this young man is entrenched in the graffiti sub-culture, the legal punishments may have the effect of pushing him to embrace the sub-culture even more (Sherman, 1993, p. 435). The literature has argued that further embracing the graffiti sub-culture will have the effect of pushing him further away from conventional bonds with society. In turn, it is possible that he will then engage in further, more severe criminal activities.

The research findings in this study have shown that it is possible to apply a restorative, holistic approach to the issue of illegal graffiti; one that considers the perspectives and needs of all parties affected by the graffiti including the victim, police, municipality, community, and offender. The Restorative Art (RestArt) project allows for a collaborative approach with all those who have been effected by a graffiti offense to work together to turn the harms caused into new, healthy relationships while supporting the graffiti writer in finding alternative, legal avenues for their art. In the news story above, the graffiti writer is not being supported by the community to heal, nor is he learning alternative avenues that can reorient and support him as an artist. Furthermore, his parents are being punished instead of receiving support in dealing with their son's graffiti lifestyle, while also being made an example of. The Lawyer for Langford states: "For parents this is a caution,... If the police come knocking on your door for something your kid did, take it seriously" (Hill, 2011). Based on this statement, parents are now being threatened with sanctions. These sanctions could evoke feelings of defensiveness toward the law and for their child rather than being able to engage in a support system that helps their son get out of

the sub-cultural graffiti lifestyle. In turn, by defending their son the parents may be further enabling his graffiti habit. Moreover, no one is being given the opportunity to take responsibility and ownership for their actions. The graffiti writer and the parents are merely being forced to be accountable financially.

In my experience as an anti-graffiti coordinator, I was once directed to the rear fence of a single dwelling private residence that bordered a large public park. The fence had a large amount of graffiti on it where none of the neighbouring fences had any. It was terribly un-slightly and seemed quite out of place. In speaking with the property owner, who happened to be a lawyer, I was told that his son was the one that did the graffiti on his rear fence. Furthermore, I was told to leave it alone as the father was actively giving his son permission to use their fence as his own graffiti canvas. The graffiti was in violation of the City of Surrey's graffiti by-law (City of Surrey, 1998) and had to be removed. However, the disconcerting aspect came on the part of the father's defensiveness and apathy toward his son's involvement with graffiti. He was passionate that graffiti was a petty and victimless crime, and was just a silly, harmless side hobby that his son was involved in. To no extent was he willing to be convinced of the implications of his son being involved with graffiti and the sub-culture of it. This highlights a new point. Having fingers pointed at graffiti writers, or the parents of graffiti writers in an accusatory way, creates defensiveness about graffiti. That defensiveness, in turn, facilitates apathy around graffiti and its effects. People may ignore it or minimize the significance of its potential effects, whether it is the parents, the politicians, or the police. Apathy detracts from the community approach of collaboratively confronting the issue. In speaking with

Sherri²⁷, she noted that apathy is one of the biggest challenges we face in confronting illegal graffiti in Metro Vancouver. Therefore, imposing sanctions on the parents, in addition to the offender, instead of offering support is likely not the best solution. Providing support instead of blame offers both parents and offender an opportunity to understand the harmful effects graffiti can have. In turn, understanding the harm can also help change the life trajectory of the offender. RestArt functions as the vehicle to provide this support.

In this study, the findings in section 5.1.2 note that some parents are aware of their son's graffiti habits, are in opposition to their behaviour, but cannot get their child to stop. It was further noted that RestArt facilitators have provided support to parents in this area, where the parents have sought it. In discussion with Sherri, one idea that arose between us was to have the participation of a parent in Circle at RestArt. The idea is general but the vision is to have participation from a parent who has previously struggled with a child that was caught-up with illegal graffiti. To have a graffiti writer who is presently in Circle with his own parent might be too much pressure for the child. However, the vision is to include the participation of a past parent. One who will offer their perspective on the struggles they have faced with their son or daughters involvement with illegal graffiti. Sherri explained that in her experience at RestArt, a parent has not participated in such a role.

Restorative justice has many different approaches for applying its philosophy. In turn, restorative justice has the potential to affect every individual that participates in a restorative process in his or her own unique way. With RestArt having its central basis in restorative justice, RestArt too affects all participants differently and in

²⁷ A police officer in the Metro Vancouver area. Sherri has studied Vancouver graffiti for over 20 years in her role with the police, and has participated in many RestArt workshops.

unique ways. As has been shown, in RestArt there are many different roles for participants in the four-day process. In turn, all participants will gain unique experiences from participating. These unique experiences work to address individual needs. This is one of the foundations that makes RestArt so potentially effective. In conjunction with RestArt not having any overarching formal rules resulting from it not being owned by any individual organization, and with no specific outcome driven motivation, RestArt is extremely mouldable to fit and address each individual's own set of needs. It enables participants to use the program in a way that works for them, and in a way that addresses their own specific needs. The key driving force to facilitate this is RestArt's relationship building potential. RestArt provides the platform for building the pertinent relationships that enable the social supports that facilitate change. The options and requirements to make a change, through RestArt, are different for every individual. Furthermore, the change comes as an option for the graffiti writers where they previously may not have had the choice²⁸. Through RestArt, graffiti writers are provided with the relationships, the information, and the options to choose to take other avenues in their lives rather than ones grounded in the graffiti sub-culture. Hillary²⁹ explains:

RestArt is a process to build community, to provide deterrence, to provide pro-social avenues, to provide [graffiti writers] with a sense of belonging. I don't think the goal of RestArt is to get them to stop, but the goal of RestArt is to be an option where there were no options.

Also key in the relationship building process for the RestArt graffiti writers is the role of the artist mentors. The artist mentors provide a significant, added incentive for the graffiti writers to come to RestArt. However, once the graffiti writers

²⁸ There is an emphasis on choice. RestArt, and restorative justice as a whole, does not force change on participants. It is entirely voluntary.

²⁹ A police officer in Metro Vancouver and developer of RestArt.

are at RestArt, the mentors must still provide charismatic leadership in showing the graffiti writers the negative side of the graffiti sub-culture and compelling reasons to desist from it.

To provide these important leadership roles, it is necessary for the mentors to develop a solid relationship with the graffiti writers. This may prove to be a tough challenge considering RestArt is a mere four-day process. Therefore, in order to have a positive influence on the younger graffiti writers, they must work quickly and establish a meaningful relationship with the graffiti writers early on. However, considering the mentors' backgrounds with the graffiti sub-culture, it can be tough for these mentors to act as youth councillors. Julie³⁰ explained in the interview process that the stress has led mentors to become burnt out from the demand of the role. For this, the RestArt facilitators have established a mentor-training outline. However, what can further add stress to the role of the mentors is the requirement to remain legal and graffiti-free, while still having credibility within the graffiti sub-culture. The discrepancy over whether mentors should be required to be entirely graffiti free was shown in section 5.4 of the research findings of this thesis. Since the current requirement is that the mentors remain entirely free of illegal graffiti, it is one more obstacle RestArt must tackle. Sofia³¹ recognized the dilemma of being graffiti free and still maintaining sub-cultural credibility with the graffiti writer participants. She addresses this issue and explains that:

Those mentors, when they understand the objective of RestArt they are incredibly valuable because they are saying in my world I've made the transition. I used to hit everything that moved and everything that didn't. I've made these choices and now this is my life, this is what I

³⁰ A restorative justice practitioner and facilitator for RestArt.

³¹ A municipal mural coordinator working with youth and adults, and coordinator for RestArt.

do with my spare time, this is where I make my money, I work for the City, I do murals, I work with youth.

Where the mentor successfully overcomes the issue of sub-cultural credibility, the mentor role provides one of the most effective methods of drawing the youth into RestArt while connecting and building meaningful relationships with them.

RestArt provides graffiti writers with an alternative to harm. This includes stigmatized harm incurred by sanctions, as well as the potential harm resulting from participation in the graffiti sub-culture. Graffiti writers are offered an alternative measure to the criminal justice system that can minimize stigmatization or family grief such as in the news story described above. Furthermore, through the relationships developed with the positive influences at RestArt, graffiti writers can also learn alternatives to harm potentially incurred from criminal involvement within the graffiti sub-culture.

6.2 A guiding theory

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the recidivism rate for graffiti writers after they participate in RestArt is 30 percent. This means RestArt enjoys a 70 percent success rate. However, where there is no guiding theoretical framework for RestArt, it becomes difficult to determine how the success rate can be improved. The same is true should the success rate happen to drop. The results of this qualitative study have indicated that there is no explicit theory guiding RestArt, only a basis in restorative justice. While “restorative justice has also linked theory and practice through the building of rigorous empirical evidence... there is no causal theory that describes the exact mechanisms by which restorative justice is intended to work” (Morrison, 2006, p. 85). In turn, restorative justice is not the theoretical

basis for why the RestArt process works, and therefore does not function as the adjustable intervention. It is the foundation for the intervention for change in the participants, but as Eck (2005) notes, “[m]ost interventions attempt to establish a causal connection between an intervention and some outcome” (p. 702). However, since restorative justice does not establish the causal connection between the intervention and outcome in a RestArt process, and since RestArt does not have a guiding theoretical framework, we cannot establish why RestArt works, or does not work. Furthermore, where we cannot establish exactly why RestArt is working (or achieving a 70 percent success rate) we cannot causally improve its outcome to a higher success rate.

The research findings in this study have shown a possible similarity between the make-up of the average RestArt group of graffiti writers and the make-up of the population sample from Moffitt’s (Moffitt, 1993) theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour. Specifically, in Moffitt’s cohort, a relative few were life-course-persistent (LCP) offenders (Moffitt, 1993, p. 674), while several study participants from the current study agreed that RestArt had a small percent of extreme participants that generally fit the make-up of LCP offenders. The results also showed that this relative few is unlikely to benefit from RestArt and will go on to become involved in other more serious crimes. The RestArt recidivism rate has shown to be 30 percent. Does this then mean that the ‘relative few’ in RestArt makeup the 30 percent recidivism rate? It is hard to say if the ‘relative few’ are LCP offenders, or does ‘relative few’ constitute much less than 30 percent. To speculate if ‘relative few’ means closer to between five and ten percent, then there would still be a margin of 20 to 25 percent who recidivated but do not necessarily fall into the

category of LCP offenders. Given Moffitt's theory of adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour and LCP offenders, it may be understandable why RestArt does not work for a 'relative few' who participate in RestArt – because they are LCP offenders. However, this begs a new question: why does RestArt not work for the other remaining percent of participants that are not LCP offenders, but still recidivate?

One hypothetical consideration, if we could figure out ahead of time who the LCP offenders are, would be to disallow them from participation in RestArt. However, even if the 'relative few' LCP offenders constitute five percent of the population of RestArt participants, there is still the remaining 25 percent that RestArt is not working for. Do we then disallow them from RestArt as well, simply for purposes of arbitrarily, non-causally increasing the success rate? No. Not only would this be avoiding the problem, but it would be unethical given the principles of restorative justice that allows for any participant to participate in the process who has a genuine interest in doing so. Therefore, how do we adjust RestArt to work for the remaining percent of participants that the program is not working for? This question brings us back to the previous problem of RestArt not having a guiding theoretical framework. Without this theoretical basis, we cannot causally implement changes that address the 30 percent recidivism rate to increase the success rate.

6.3 Future considerations for RestArt

Despite the current effectiveness of RestArt, this study has found that RestArt is only as effective as its empirical means. While RestArt enjoys a relatively high success rate, it has no causal theory that describes the exact mechanisms by which this process works. An area worthy of further exploration is around the remaining 30 percent of RestArt's participants that do recidivate. This study has addressed

RestArt's 30 percent recidivism rate, and has considered the possibility that a certain percent of the recidivists are LCP offenders. The first objective should apply an appropriate theoretical framework³² that RestArt can be evaluated against to determine why the recidivism rate is 30 percent. Next, the application of a theoretical framework should aim to determine what could be changed in the RestArt process that may improve its success rate. A possible secondary, or separate study, may consider the presence of LCP offenders in RestArt, and what effect, if any, the RestArt process has on them.

This study did not perform a quantitative assessment of the success rate of RestArt. Through its qualitative approach, this study relied on the success rate statistics provided to the researcher by the study participants. It is understood that developers of RestArt assessed RestArt's statistical success rate. Therefore, another area for consideration should be to perform an independent, quantitative measure of RestArt's success rate. This can be done in conjunction with the application of a theoretical framework in its aim to understand the causal mechanisms by which RestArt works. Furthermore, this may be useful where the project is dependent on outside sources as its primary means of funding, such as municipalities. RestArt would be subject to the scrutiny of administrations that require concrete, quantitative measures of its effectiveness and success.

6.4 Limitations

This study was limited to seven participants. While these seven participants, whom consisted of developers, coordinators, and facilitators, added a diverse set of

³² Frameworks may consider normative or explanatory theoretical bases for restorative justice.

views and opinions to this study, what lacked were viewpoints of artist mentors and the graffiti writers themselves. These seven participants, whom did contribute their knowledge and experience of RestArt, have helped build a solid base for understanding RestArt's benefits and challenges. This has provided a solid, objective basis for understanding how RestArt currently works, what its ideal outcomes are, and in turn, areas for improvement. However, with this research being limited to coordinators, developers, and facilitators, future research should consider including the points of view of the mentors and graffiti writers.

The perspectives of the mentors should contribute to better understanding the struggles RestArt has in attaining new mentors, as well as adding their perspective on how RestArt can be improved. The graffiti writers themselves should also add diverse and important perspectives on the effectiveness, benefits, and challenges of RestArt. Their voices should provide rich, new perspectives on how RestArt effects them and whether it truly influences them to re-orient their current life-trajectories. Many of the graffiti writers in RestArt are youths, often in the process of attaining criminal records. Therefore, the level of institutional research ethics approval will be more rigid than it was for the current study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study set out to explore the benefits that the Restorative Art (RestArt) project provides and challenges it faces in its process of addressing and abating illegal hip-hop graffiti in Vancouver. Illegal graffiti has been shown to negatively affect people and the environment in many different ways. Graffiti deteriorates the urban landscape, it invokes fear in local residents, it has negative financial impacts on businesses, and it can breed further crime. Graffiti itself is most often done by males in their mid-teens to early adulthood, however the age range can be as wide as pre-teens to late-30's. There is a wide-range of reasons for these individuals to become involved with graffiti and the graffiti sub-culture. However, the biggest concern for police, criminologists, and community in general, are those graffiti writers who become thoroughly entrenched in the graffiti sub-culture. Through graffiti crews and the sub-cultural networks, entrenched individuals become at-risk for spiralling into lives of more severe crime and adapting criminal lifestyles. RestArt aims to address these individuals and re-orient their life trajectories before they become too deeply entrenched in a criminal lifestyle they cannot escape.

With restorative justice as the foundation, RestArt provides a safe environment that promotes dialogue around the issue of graffiti which seeks the input of all those affected by graffiti. With a collaborative and holistic approach, the RestArt process provides a means to orient graffiti writers out of the illegal sub-culture, and re-direct their talents into legal avenues and opportunities. With an exploratory approach, this study has uncovered several key themes that contribute

to making RestArt effective in this goal, while also showing potential for quantitatively expanding its reach to other areas, and qualitatively working with people who are affected by illegal graffiti.

In a Quantitative capacity, RestArt is effective because it can work with and help many graffiti writers, victims, and community members. Since it is liquid and not owned by anyone, it is free to function as a process in different areas of the city as needed, or in other cities all together. RestArt can therefore work with and help many people throughout many different areas. The troubling aspect with this liquid design is that RestArt can struggle to find funding to run the workshops. However, this impediment is overcome by moving to the area or city with the demand for RestArt, and partnering with local community organizations such as community police stations or community centres.

Qualitatively, RestArt has its foundation in restorative justice. This facilitates participants in building deep relationships with others who have been affected by graffiti. This includes relationships between offender, victim, community, and police. Through RestArt's facilitated process, offenders, victims, and affected community members are assisted in mending the harm caused by graffiti. This process addresses the needs of everyone who is affected, beyond just the victim and offender.

In spite of the progress that RestArt has made toward graffiti abatement in Vancouver, and the positive contributions that it has made toward the betterment of the community, it still has theoretical shortcomings. RestArt lacks an explicit theory describing the exact mechanisms by which it is intended to work. However, since RestArt is a relatively new project, it has potential for more growth.

In RestArt's short lifetime, it has already affected many people in positive ways. RestArt provides a valuable service to many different people affected by graffiti in ways that have never been available in the past. It provides victims with a voice, and enables them to get to know their offender, and often learn that graffiti writers are not out to personally and maliciously harm them. It gives the victim a chance to understand that the graffiti writer is often a lost individual in need of guidance and self-esteem. And possibly of most importance for the victim; they are provided with a voice and given an opportunity to talk honestly about how the graffiti has impacted their lives, either financially, emotionally, or both.

Thanks to RestArt, the criminal justice system is provided with a new, holistic, option in addressing pre-charge youth graffiti writers, graffiti writers suited for diversion programs, and generally those graffiti writers at-risk of future offending. These graffiti writers are offenders who would otherwise not benefit from punitive sanctions or irrelevant community service. For those willing to accept responsibility for their graffiti harm, RestArt provides the criminal justice system with a program that these graffiti writers can be sent to. RestArt is a program that can address the graffiti writers' individual sets of needs.

The most significant impact that RestArt has on individuals may be the impact that it has on the graffiti writers themselves. For graffiti writers who feel they do not have a voice or are getting caught-up in crime, RestArt provides a foundation for these individuals in need. The restorative platform of RestArt helps at-risk graffiti writers build relationships with conventional members of society. These relationships help re-orient the life trajectory of the graffiti writers before they become too entrenched in a criminal lifestyle they cannot escape. Furthermore, through

these relationships, graffiti writers gain social supports that help them pursue their interests in legal ways.

When looking back I recall the same graffiti writer that told me about the graffiti hub at the former Surrey Public Market. I wonder to myself how RestArt could help him. I still see his throw-ups and tags around Surrey and Vancouver regularly. When I used to spend time with him, talking to him about the trouble graffiti leads to and having him clean up his mess, I only now begin to realize the dangerous path he is on. It has been ten years since I last spoke to him, and back then, he was a handful. As a young teen, he was smoking pot, skipping school, and once tagged the dashboard of my crime prevention van. What is he doing now? With tears in her eyes, his mother used to say to me: we keep telling him no, but he's out doing graffiti all night long. I know he's getting into worse and worse trouble. What can we possibly do to get him to stop? Today, I would suggest a holistic approach to her; one that aims to address her son's particular set of needs, and the needs of the people affected by her son's illegal graffiti practices. This effective, holistic response may be found through RestArt.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

A) Professional Information

- 1) What is your Professional role, and or how does it relate to your role at RestArt?
- 2) How long have you been involved with the RestArt project?

B) RestArt Background

- 1) How does a RestArt process work?
- 2) Generally, how many people are involved in a RestArt process?
- 3) What is the role of:
 - a) Participants
 - b) Facilitators
 - c) developers
- 4) Is there a role for other external participants, such as Municipal Employees or Politicians in RestArt or a RestArt process? Funding – Visionary – Contributions?

C) Theoretical Basis

- 1) What are the theoretical bases for RestArt?
- 2) Is there a specific role that RestArt performs as a restorative justice process?
- 3) How does the project function to prevent participants from continuing to do un-sanction graffiti?
- 4) In what way, if at all, does RestArt help or facilitate participants in:
 - a) developing social supports?
 - b) gaining positive influences for adult life?
 - c) altering the life-course?
- 5) What else do participants learn or take-away from a RestArt process?
- 6) What is the main effect of RestArt on participants?
- 7) What other residual effect does RestArt have on:
 - a) participants?
 - b) facilitators or coordinators?
 - c) the community?
 - d) anyone else involved in a RestArt process?

D) Other Challenges or Benefits to RestArt?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you have any questions for me?
Can you recommend anyone else for me to speak with?

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