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UNOBTRUSIVE RESEARCH METHODS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: USING GRAFFITI IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES

JOHN KLOFAS
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The analysis of graffiti can provide insight into the structure of inmate societies and the process of socialization in correctional communities. Although institutional cultures have been studied using a variety of methods, researchers have neglected the use of unobtrusive measures that can provide independent sources of data to test theories or challenge existing findings. This study uses content analysis of graffiti collected from the walls of an abandoned juvenile correctional facility. Informant interviews and newspaper accounts provide supplemental data. Drawing on studies of graffiti from other settings, this research attempts to reconstruct, historically, aspects of confinement at the Institute for Juvenile Guidance in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. The research focuses on dimensions that include the formation of informal groups and changes in the experiences of inmates during the course of their commitment.

In their discussion of unobtrusive research methods, Webb et al. (1966) lament the overreliance on interviews and questionnaires in social science research. They suggest that much of this research may suffer from a variety of methodological weaknesses brought about by subjects' awareness of being studied. The authors present a strong argument for the use of "oddball measures" that examine the same variables as other research methods but offer different methodological shortcomings. They go on to describe a wide variety of nonreactive measures ranging from assessing the wear on floor tiles as an indicator of museum exhibit popularity to more ethically suspect methods including the use of hidden mi-

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crophones to record the number of times a call girl's telephone rings in an evening.

In criminal justice, researchers have often relied on a limited number of unobtrusive techniques when the use of other methods has been either problematic or impossible. Considerable knowledge about the nature and distribution of crime and the history of criminal justice has been acquired through the analysis of official documents and archival data. Some other research questions, however, have been investigated almost exclusively with the use of reactive research methods.

Among the volumes of research on correctional subcultures, unobtrusive methods have been largely ignored in favor of observation (Sykes, 1958; Irwin, 1973; Giallombardo, 1966), interviews (Toch, 1977), and questionnaires (Wheeler, 1961), or a combination of these methods (Bartollas et al., 1976). Official data have been utilized in investigations of institutional violence but have been criticized for their potential lack of validity (Bowker, 1980: 197). There exists only a small number of studies that have used the kinds of oddball methods referred to in the literature on unobtrusive research. McCarthy (1979), for example, analyzed the content of prison kites (that is, notes passed between prisoners) in her study of prison furloughs among female inmates. Other researchers have also applied the method of content analysis to inmate prose and poetry to achieve a more humanistic understanding of the effects of imprisonment (Boudaris and Brady, 1980). Moreover, female inmates have been broadly characterized through an analysis of their tattoos (Fox, 1976), and several studies have examined the symbolic functions of prisoner argot (Hargan, 1935; Clemmer, 1940; Kantrowitz, 1969).

One nonreactive measure that has been profitable in the study of cultures has been ignored in the research on correctional institutions. Scattered in journals crossing disciplines from folklore to clinical psychology are reports of research employing the analysis of graffiti in the investigation of social and cultural phenomena. Cryptic inscriptions on the walls of the public marketplace, for example, assisted archaeologists in reconstructing the thoughts and petty concerns of the early Athenians. Handwriting historians used the same data to conclude that "one of the earliest uses to which the art of handwriting was put, along with alphabetic exercises and marks of ownership, was sexual insult and obscenity" (American School of Classical Studies, 1974). Through the rubble from the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D., epigraphologists have also reconstructed life in Pompeii with the help of graffiti from the walls of the ancient city (Tanzer, 1939; Lindsay, 1960; D'Avino, 1964).

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The analysis of graffiti, however, has not been the exclusive province of historians and archaeologists. More contemporary cultural concerns have also been studied through the inscriptions deposited on walls of public places. Humphries (1970) found a strong relationship between the type of graffiti in public restrooms and the use of the location for homosexual rendezvous. In a cross-cultural study, graffiti were used as a measure of attitudes toward homosexuality in the United States and the Philippines (Sechrest and Flores, 1969). Graffiti have also been used to study gender differences (Stocker et al., 1972), the adolescent personality (Peretti et al., 1977), and the subordination of women by men (Bruner and Kelso, 1980). A large body of research has also examined the functions of urban graffiti as a means of gang indentification and territorial marking (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974).

This research extends the use of graffiti as an unobtrusive measure to the study of institutional cultures. Inscriptions left behind in a correctional facility for juveniles will be used to reconstruct the context and content of incarceration at the institution. These expressive cultural artifacts will be examined for their potential contribution to understanding unique aspects of the culture of incarcerated delinquents, the influence of the extrainstitutional world, and the often subtle individual and group changes that are part and parcel of the incarceration process.

THE RESEARCH SITE

Data for this study were transcribed from the walls of an institution for juvenile delinquents that was closed in 1970 at the beginning of the wave of reforms under which Dr. Jerome Miller dismantled the training-school-based juvenile corrections system in Massachusetts. The facility, known as the Institute for Juvenile Guidance at Bridgewater, is currently slated for demolition to make room for a new prison for adult offenders. The institution was originally opened shortly after the Civil War and housed defective delinquent girls until 1954 when it was converted for use as the highest security facility for male juveniles in the state.

During the later years of its operation the Institute for Juvenile Guidance was the subject of frequent public criticism over the facility's decrepit physical conditions. A special report of the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, commissioned in 1966 by the governor of Massachusetts to investigate conditions at the facility, concluded that the institution should be immediately closed and

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more appropriate facilities constructed. A state-level review of that report concluded simply that "the physical plant . . . is archaic and totally unsuited for the purpose for which it was designed."

Prior to its closing, conditions at the Institute for Juvenile Guidance were exposed following a series of controversies brought to light in court proceedings and press reports. In testimony during a suit against the superintendent for an alleged assault that fractured a boy's jaw, the nurse at the institution characterized the facility as "terribly unclean, infested with vermin and rodents and with rooms so cold that, at night, boys' false teeth freeze in their water glasses" (Harvey, 1968). Within a period of one week, three suicide attempts were reported at the facility and accounts of fighting and alleged staff beatings were commonplace as were reports of boys being disciplined in solitary confinement for periods of over thirty days. A string of governmental reports and newspaper investigations presented a litany of indictments against the facility and its administrators during the years prior to the closing of the IJG.

The physical structure of the Institute for Juvenile Guidance is made up of one main building, a separate staff residence, and recreation yards all surrounded by a concrete wall. The main building consists of 95 rooms located on six corridors, 2 day rooms, a school, other program space, and dining facilities. In the basement there is a separate block of 10 cells used for disciplinary isolation. The 95 cells are all rectangular in shape and each contain approximately 95 square feet of space. The front wall of the cell contains a door and a small screened window leading into the corridor. The side walls, where the beds were placed, are uninterrupted and the rear wall contained a window overlooking the yard and hillsides surrounding the institution.

The average population at the Institute for Juvenile Guidance is reported to have ranged from 60 to 90 boys but to have occasionally gone as high as 127. As the most secure facility in the state for juvenile delinquents, its population was a combination of boys whose charges were very serious and those who had failed at other institutions, either through repeated disciplinary problems or escapes. The HEW report describes the population as "selected from the following categories: character disorders, psychoneurotics, prepsychotics, sexual deviates, habitual delinquents and custodial problems." The average age of the boys at the IJG was 15, although some were as young as 12 and a small number were kept passed the age of 21 on court orders. The average stay at the institution was nine months; however, those boys with very serious charges stayed

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much longer. Approximately 60% of the boys at the IJG were white; almost all of the remainder were black.

The program at the institution revolved around a system of steps built into the six corridors of housing. New commitments started out on the orientation corridor and remained there for 5 to 7 days until medical examinations and other processing was completed. In the orientation rooms the boys were allowed virtually no possessions other than their clothing. After orientation the boys moved through the remaining corridors, usually in two- or three-month intervals, gaining privileges and personal possessions as they progressed. Reading and writing material was permitted on the second corridor and two packs of cigarettes per week and personal radios were allowed on the third. Moving to the fourth level brought access to increased furnishings and day room privileges. The boys were paroled after successful adjustment in the sixth corridor. Several boys would be paroled at a time and mass movement in the facility would fill in the spaces that were left behind.

The daily schedule at the institution included a substantial amount of time in which the boys were locked into their rooms. School attendance was reported at about 25% in the HEW report; the remaining boys maintained minimal job assignments or spent time in the day room. Evenings were split between lockups and the day rooms. On the weekends boys were permitted out of their cells for an hour each day.

METHODS

The graffiti analyzed in this study were transcribed from the walls of the 95 general population rooms of this abandoned juvenile institution. The isolation cells, where graffiti were etched into the walls with sharp objects, were not included in the data collection because of the problem of obtaining the data with reliability. Two teams of recorders collected the information on data sheets that required verbatim transcription of the graffiti as well as identifying the location of the data as to corridor, room, and wall within each cell. Discrete units of graffiti were determined by handwriting, subject matter, and writing tool. Occasionally there were chained responses by multiple authors. These were treated as discrete units of data.

After the collection of data, the graffiti were transferred to 3 × 5 cards and content analysis was used to form categories. The graffiti were origi-

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nally grouped into 38 categories. In later analysis, this number was reduced to 13. Interrater reliability for the 38 categories averaged .76 with 3 judges and a random sample of 200 graffiti using Scott's pi (Scott, 1955). For the 13 categories Scott's pi averages .87 with 3 judges and a sample of 150 graffiti.

Vacancy of 13 years had helped preserve the graffiti for analysis but the sometimes harsh New England seasons had taken their toll. In 20 of the 95 rooms, portions of the wall space had been destroyed by the chipping of paint to a point where graffiti could not be collected. In three rooms, 25% of the wall space was destroyed. In the remaining 17 rooms, destroyed space did not exceed 15%. Of the total wall space in the rooms, only 1.3% was not available for analysis.

After the collection of graffiti, supplementary sources of data were also examined. Official reports from the last years of the Institute for Juvenile guidance were collected and a search was conducted for newspaper articles published in the Boston Globe during the three years prior to the closing of the IJG. Additionally, informant interviews were conducted with former staff and inmates of the facility. The former superintendent and a security master and two former inmates were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews and the examination of documents was to obtain basic information regarding the program at the IJG that would help to interpret the graffiti. Among the useful information gained in the interviews was the fact that during the last five years of facility operation, rooms were painted only on rare occasions and not according to any systematic schedule or grouping. Thus we would argue that our data are not fragmented for the period but rather constitute a continuous record for the institutional setting being examined. Such continuity has obvious advantages for the generalizability of our content analysis.

RESULTS

A total of 2,765 graffiti were transcribed from the walls of the facility. Graffiti were found in all of the rooms, although 2 of the 95 contained only a single graffito and 20 rooms contained 10 or fewer examples. At the other end of the spectrum, 3 rooms contained over 100 graffiti. The average number per room is 29.1 (S.D. = 23.9). The inscriptions contained dates ranging from 1966 to 1970.

Analysis of graffiti in other settings suggests that two modal categories exist (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 16). The first type, public graffiti, are

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found in places easily viewed by the general public. On such outdoor places as the sides of buildings or subway cars adolescent graffiti artists may proclaim their own identity or mark the boundaries of their "turf." In more private settings, such as public washrooms, the content of latrinalia is typically different and frequently deals with sexual intercourse or excretion.

Content analysis indicates that this dichotomy may be of little value in describing the markings etched in the habitat of incarcerated delinquents. The juvenile's cell is neither public as a subway car is nor restricted as a restroom is. Instead, on the walls of the cells are displayed a mixture of markings, some meant for public display, some for more restricted audiences, and some are clearly personal messages intended only for the author. The uniqueness of the setting is also reflected in the wide variety of inscriptions recovered. Whereas much of the research using graffiti has concentrated on a few categories in washrooms or on subway cars, the walls of the IJG reveal a rich diversity of content categories.

The most common category of cell markings serves to identify the inhabitants. Some form of personal identification is found in 987 or 35.7% of all the graffiti. This provides a reasonable indicator of the number of boys depositing graffiti on the walls. A total of 425 separate names are represented. In light of the five-year span from which our inscriptions date, the graffiti probably represent 75% of all juveniles housed at Bridgewater during the time period.[1] Within the category of personal identifiers, however, the largest number of inscriptions identify not only the author but also the city or town from which he hails. Nearly 50% of the identifying marks also note the identity of the scribe's province. (See Table 1.)

Far less frequent are other markings that might identify the author with a group of individuals. Fewer than 1.2% of the total number of graffiti serve to identify specific groups within the facility. This includes a few references to groups like the "Dare Devils" and the "Orde Squad" as well as groupings of individual names. The dearth of group names is suggestive about the basis for affiliation within the institution. Interview data as well as existing research suggest that comradeship is often based on common hometowns (Giallombardo, 1966: 118) rather than on bonds achieved within an institution.

Apart from being frequently linked to names, hometown identifiers also are found alone 127 times. Examination of the names of the communities found on the walls is also suggestive of divisions within the social structure of the institution. On the walls of the facility, 57 different

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TABLE 1: Types of Graffiti at the Institute for Juvenile Guidance

Percentage	*Category*	*Description*
35.7%	Personal identifier	Names, names and places, initials
4.6	Group identifier	Group names, places, name strings
1.9	Slurs and insults	With names or place names
21.8	Teen romance	Girls names, hearts, and initials
7.8	Criminal justice rel.	Police, crime and IJG, biography
6.6	Activism	Contemporary political slogans
1.3	Race	Praise, slurs, other references
1.5	Outlaws	Swastika, iron cross, etc.
1.1	Drugs	Drug names, slang, pictures
1.0	Sex	Sexual references, drawings
2.5	Religion	Religious symbols, references
2.0	Obscenity	Unconnected obscenities
12.3	Miscellaneous	Cartoons, song titles, doodles
100		
(2765)		

towns are named. In many cases the inscription is an obvious proclamation of status. Braggadocio inscriptions like "Leominster is Boss" and "JP rules all" may highlight the lines of conflict within the institution. "Fitchburg kicks Leominster's Ass" is still more direct whereas "Dracut Swings" seems less threatening. Only a small number of graffiti contain what could be considered direct insults or slurs. Although some of these attribute negative qualities to specific locales, most appear to be aimed at isolated individuals.

The frequency with which some of the locales is named probably provides clues to the major social divisions within the facility. Urban locales are overrepresented on the walls of the facility and probably represented dominant forces within. The names of communities such as Cambridge and Jamaica Plain were scribbled over 60 times on the cell walls. Although these communities certainly accounted for the largest number of boys at the institution, the most frequently identified communities also correspond to the powerful groups mentioned in the informant interviews. The institution appears to have been dominated by boys from Jamaica Plain, Somerville, Cambridge, and Worcester. Boys from more rural areas were at a distinct disadvantage. Interviews suggest that these boys were the likely targets of strong-arming and sexual abuse.

Only 35 graffiti deal with race. This finding is surprising in light of informant interviews that suggested that racially based cohesiveness was important within the facility. In fact, our initial analysis of the data had

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led us to believe that the racial distribution was much more lopsided, in favor of whites, than actually was the case. We believe that one reason for our misinterpretation can be found in the fact that the racial distribution within the institution was coincidental to the distribution of hometowns. This appears to be consistent with the racial distribution of communities in the Boston area and those whose names frequently appear on the cell walls. Groups within the facility appear to have been labeled by locale rather than race.

Within the category of racial graffiti, fewer than one-third are of a militant or combative tone. Among those with aggressive content, the authors in almost all cases were likely to be white. Among writings most likely attributable to black authors, the most common include "Black is beautiful" and references to Martin Luther King.

Whereas groupings by hometown may provide insight into institutional social structure, a third category of graffiti is a reminder of the adolescent status of the facility inhabitants. Of the graffiti, 22% fall under the heading of teen romance. Frequently written in the balloon letters common in school yards of the sixties, these inscriptions proclaim the undying love recurrently experienced in adolescence. They range from simply naming one's true love to elaborate hearts surrounding couples' names or initials and hermetically sealed with a hopeful "forever" or T.L.A. A few echo Tristan's lament of unrequited love:

Night after Night[2]
Day after Day
I just sit on my bed thinking about good
times had with her "Paula Cauley"

And some are clearly optimistic predictions of the future.

P—is for the part of her love she gave me
A—is all the kind words she only said
T—is for the two of us
T—the other t is for the twins we wanted
Y—is for the yes I do

Analysis of graffiti in other settings has focused on the strong sexual content of some inscriptions (Bruner and Kelso, 1980). Restroom researchers have often noted differences between male and female latrinalia. Whereas the content of scribblings of females often concentrates on the tender side of love relationships or seeks advice, in men's rooms baser

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sexual fantasies are often portrayed (Wales and Brewer, 1976). Where the research has focused on adolescents, sexual content has dominated both boys' and girls' washroom writings, although an erotic versus romantic difference is still evident (Peretti et al., 1977).

The rooms of the Institute for Juvenile Guidance contain surprisingly few graffiti with a sexual content. Only 29 of the nearly 3000 writings relate to sex. This finding is again striking evidence of juvenile innocence where we might expect it to be in short supply. Those graffiti that do deal with sex include ten drawings of well-endowed, naked women but also nearly the same number of women modestly wearing foundation garments but otherwise similarly suited. One developing delinquent proclaims simply that "Sex is Beautiful," while several others, like Dave, testify as to their prowess.

> D—is *did* it all
> A—is *all* in love
> V—is *very* much in love
> E—is *every* time I look at her I get a big "one"

Another category of graffiti reflects the boys' experiences with the criminal justice system. Many of these are autobiographical accounts that range from prisoners' calendars logging each day passed to elaborate recountings of the boy's capture by the police and processing through the courts. Several writers limit their biographies to experiences within the Institute for Juvenile Guidance and add color to the newspaper accounts of security problems:

> Ronnie Peltzer
> ran Feb. 23rd, me and Jackie
> ran June 6, me and Roy
> ran June 24th, Roy and Goodyear
> I did 10 days in lockup 1
> I did 10 days more in lockup 2
> I did 20 more in lockup 3
> this place
> sucks a big Dick

Other boys chronicle their experiences in other institutions. One personal history includes nine separate commitments to different facilities over a four-year period. Some graffiti look to the future with varying degrees of optimism: "I'm running and not staying long," "I will never

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come back here," "Here I lay broken hearted, before I leave I'll be retarded." One prophetic inscription reads simply, "My last sit down" and contains a picture of an electrical switch.

The other criminal-justice-related graffiti range from belated realizations that "crime does not pay, jail stinks" to frequent calls for prison reform. Some are cryptic indictments of the police or conditions at the IJG. Only three graffiti contain any reference to institutional staff. Although none of these is complimentary, the relative lack of hostility toward staff members is surprising but consistent with the informant interviews and other research suggesting that incarcerated delinquents may have a jaundiced view of the justice system but regard most staff as benign (Giordano, 1976).

The content of a small number of graffiti deals with illicit drugs. These include simple listings of common names of street drugs as well as graphic displays of forearms invaded by oversized hypodermic needles. The near absence of such depictions is consistent with interviews that indicated that there were few such problems at the institution during the sixties. These inscriptions probably reflect emerging concerns in the larger culture rather than the reality of day-to-day life in this facility.

Other categories of graffiti also mirror popular themes of the times. One such type calls for political activism with antiwar slogans, peace symbols, and clenched fists. Another contains symbols of the contemporary outlaw including iron crosses and swastikas and another small group is simply a collection of disconnected obscenities of the time. An additional category of wall inscription, containing 12.3% of all the graffiti, is a collection of miscellanea including cartoon drawings, doodles, song titles, and the names of cars.

Another perennial theme in institutions is also represented on the walls of the IJG. Of the graffiti, 2.5% have religious content. Among these, Christian symbols and references to God dominate. Only one depiction of the Star of David was found.

Locations of the Graffiti

Descriptions of the categories of graffiti recovered from the walls of the IJG provide insight into some aspects of life among confined delinquents. Examination of the location of inscriptions within the rooms and across the corridors can also help illuminate the daily routine of the facility as well as adjustments juveniles make during the course of internment.

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Table 2 indicates that there are significant differences in the graffiti found in various locations about the cells. The most obvious differences relate to the number of inscriptions found on the four cell walls. Nearly 40% of the graffiti are found on the inside wall, where the screened window looked out into the corridors. One-fourth of the graffiti are located on each of the side walls where the bed was to be found and only 10% were found around the windows that overlooked the yard and the outside of the institution. The distribution of the graffiti may help reconstruct activity in the institution during the frequent periods of lock up the boys experienced. During these hours a substantial portion of time must have been spent in conversation across the corridors of the facility. Less of the waking time may have been spent in the solitude found on one's bed in the room or peering out the window into the yard.

Apart from suggestions about the manner in which time was spent in the cells at the IJG, the differences in the categories of graffiti may provide clues to the nature of conversations and concerns of the institution's inhabitants. On the front wall of the cells, where the largest number of graffiti were found, the inscription categories of group and individual identifiers, sex, and obscenity are overrepresented. Time spent peering out of one's cell window or conversing with peers appears to have been dominated by subcultural concerns consistent with research highlighting the aggressive and often exploitive nature of many relationships among incarcerated delinquent males (Polsky, 1962).

Graffiti engraved on the side walls of the cells probably correspond with time spent in relative solace, lying in bed or working at one's desk. On these walls the content of graffiti differs form the aggressive themes found on the front walls. Contemplative themes dealing with religion and reflections on experiences in the criminal justice system are overrepresented. Exceptions to this pattern are found in the categories of slurs and insults and drugs where the number of inscriptions on the two side walls are inconsistent. Graffiti on the rear walls of the cells also appear consistent with the isolation of this location. Among the relatively few writings found there, no particular content categories are predominant.

As mentioned above, the Institute for Juvenile Guidance was managed with the use of a step system of classification that provided increasing privileges as the juveniles moved between corridors. The decreasing severity of confinement is demonstrated by the number of graffiti in each corridor. The average number of graffiti found in the rooms decreases monotonically from a high of 48.2 in corridor 1 through 27.5 in corridor 4 and to a low of 8.9 in the last corridor. Examination of changes in the

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TABLE 2: Locations of Graffiti by Cell Wall in Percentages (number of graffiti in parentheses)

			Category											
	Personal ID	*Group ID*	*Romance*	*Slurs*	*Criminal Justice*	*Activism*	*Misc.*	*Race*	*Outlaw*	*Drugs*	*Sex*	*Religion*	*Obscenity*	*Total*
Wall														
Front wall	41.3	44.2	39.2	32.2	29.0	39.1	34.8	28.5	30.3	35.5	41.5	27.2	46.3	38.7
Side wall A	24.4	29.9	22.5	33.9	30.5	29.6	27.3	22.8	27.9	12.9	27.5	38.6	25.2	25.4
Back wall	11.7	7.8	11.5	3.7	10.3	7.8	11.9	17.2	6.9	3.2	3.5	5.7	7.1	10.6
Side wall B	22.6	18.1	25.9	30.2	29.2	23.5	28.0	31.4	34.9	48.4	27.5	28.5	21.4	25.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(987)	(127)	(600)	(53)	(216)	(179)	(339)	(35)	(43)	(31)	(29)	(70)	(56)	(2765)

Chi-square = 63.48
df = 36
p < .01

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TABLE 3: Locations of Graffiti Types Across the Corridors (in percentages)

	Corridor						
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*Totals*
Personal identifier	51.7	27.5	36.0	30.5	32.4	31.2	35.7
Group identifier	5.2	5.3	3.1	3.2	6.6	4.0	4.6
Teen romance	13.3	18.8	22.5	25.4	33.7	24.0	21.7
Criminal justice rel.	8.5	12.2	4.4	6.0	5.5	6.4	7.8
Activism	1.7	8.2	5.6	11.6	5.8	4.8	6.6
Miscellaneous	8.8	11.3	18.6	12.4	8.3	19.2	12.3
All other*	10.8	16.6	10.0	10.9	7.6	10.4	11.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	(578)	(716)	(516)	(468)	(362)	(125)	(2765)

NOTE: Number of graffiti in parentheses.
Chi-square = 249.63
df = 30
$p < .001$
*Collapse of all categories containing less than 3% of the total number of graffiti.

content of cell inscriptions across the corridors can provide some subtle clues about the social psychological adjustments that may have accompanied the changes in status within the facility.

Table 3 indicates that significant differences in the distribution of graffiti exist across the six corridors. On the orientation corridor, where inmates are stripped of nearly all possessions, marks of personal identification are found in unexpectedly large numbers. Whereas only 35.7% of all graffiti fall into this category, personal identifiers account for nearly 52% of the markings in the first corridor. This overrepresentation may reflect efforts to preserve identity during an early and important phase in the moral career (Goffman, 1961) of the incarcerated and at a time when the deprivations of the institutional environment are most severe (Sykes, 1958).

Reflections on the criminal-justice-related experiences of the institutions' residents are also overrepresented in the early stages of incarceration. Inscriptions dealing with the criminal justice system are most frequent on the second corridor and are underrepresented on the last four corridors of the facility. A different pattern emerges with reference to the categories of romance and activism. The percentage of inscriptions dealing with romance increases monotonically from the first through the fifth corridor and decreases only slightly in the last corridor. As visiting privileges were highly restricted, this pattern may reflect an increasing preoccupation with romance as a means of coping with incarceration as

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the juveniles' sentences progressed. The distribution of graffiti in the activism category presents a slightly different pattern. Concern with the political conflicts of the day appears to increase to the middle corridors and then drop off. Reminiscent of Wheeler's U-shaped curve (1961), this may be taken as a suggestion that conflicts between inmates and authority figures, including staff, is greatest during the middle stages of incarceration.

DISCUSSION

As Webb et al. (1966) indicate, the potential contribution of unobtrusive research measures is in their offering of independent sources of data with which to test theories or challenge existing research. The inscriptions collected from the walls of the Institute for Juvenile Guidance, combined with informant interviews and newspaper accounts, have been useful in a partial reconstruction of life at that facility but also have wider implications.

The data support current theoretical approaches that seek to incorporate both indigeneous original and importation variables in explanations of institutional culture (See, for example, Feld, 1977). A large number of graffiti demonstrate the significance of group affiliations and peer support at the facility. The basis for these affiliations, however, is carried into the institution by the boys. The city and town names scrawled on the walls may help elaborate the particular social structure of this institution, but they also demonstrate the significance of hometown influences and provide general support for the importance of urban-rural background (Lockwood, 1980) and race (Jacobs, 1979) in explaining correctional cultures and adjustment.

Changes in the content of graffiti across the corridors also support process approaches to the correctional adjustment that suggest the importance of time served (Wheeler, 1961; Garabedian, 1963; Wellford, 1967) and the severity of deprivations (Street, 1970). Although the data do not permit separation of the effects of phases of incarceration from the impact of reductions in the austerity of the environment, they do identify important changes. Early concerns with identity and individuality appear to give way to peer influences. Antagonism toward authority figures seems to be greatest in the middle phases of incarceration.

The graffiti may also contribute to critical appraisals of the research on prison subcultures. Many of the early studies have been criticized for

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their lack of appreciation of the social and historical context of the research. Early studies nearly ignored race as a relevant variable (Jacobs, 1979: 3) and a monolithic convict code and inmate solidarity are no longer seen as enduring features of all correctional cultures (Feld, 1981: 337). Research methods of observation and interview, however, make it difficult for even contemporary studies to sort out the influences of total institutions from their temporal contexts. This research, utilizing data preserved for over ten years, clearly indicates the significance of historical context as an importation variable. Themes of power and protest, of racial strife and of an emerging drug culture cannot be appreciated apart from their links to the turbulent period of the 1960s.

Finally, the graffiti may help us to understand the kinds of conflict that have often infused juvenile corrections and were played out in the media during the final years of operation of the Institute for Juvenile Guidance. Liberal reformers focused on the impact of brutalizing conditions on naive juveniles whereas conservative staff portrayed their charges as sophisticated and often dangerous criminals (Richard, 1968). Graffiti categories that range from the common romantic concerns of all juveniles to aggressive intergroup challenges and predictions of future criminality reveal the complexity of this conflict.

Despite the benefits discussed above, the use of graffiti as a means to investigate correctional cultures clearly has some severe limitations. These involve a variety of methodological assumptions that are difficult to test because little can be known about the inscriptions' authors. Although some research suggests a base rate for graffiti depositors of one in fifteen males (Rhyne and Ullman, 1972), this probably does not generalize beyond the public toilets used in the study. More troublesome still is the fact that we cannot assess the representativeness of those who leave behind wall writings. The large number of names found in the IJG may suggest a variety of authors but the same methodological leap of faith implicit in the reconstruction of civilization in ancient Athens and Pompeii is required in this study.

There are also substantive limitations to graffiti as a means of assessing institutional cultures. These adolescent scribblings provide none of the rich detail with which Polsky (1962) describes the roles of bushboys or scapegoats in *Cottage Six*. Nor do they provide the breadth of information supplied in inmate and staff responses to questionnaires (Bartollas et al., 1976). In a high security environment where subcultural adaptations are likely to dominate (Feld, 1981), the graffiti provide few clues to their strength.

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Methodological and substantive concerns highlight limitations in the research use of graffiti. The virtue of unobtrusive measures, however, is in their use as independent measures of phenomena that have been or are simultaneously studied using other methods. A foundation in existing theory and research and the use of a variety of measurement processes can mitigate the severity of limitations. Even the modest efforts at triangulation in this study suggest the contribution of this method to the study of institutional cultures.

NOTES

1. This is based on an assumption of an average of 80 inmates at any time and the usual sentence of nine months. This suggests that approximately 533 boys would have been at the IJG over the five-year period. Some writers are obviously more prolific than others but the graffiti do not appear to be the work of a handful of authors. While a few names do appear more than 50 times, the vast majority appear only 1 to 3 times.

2. To protect the identity of the former residents of the IJG and their acquaintances, pseudonyms are used in all graffiti appearing in the text.

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