

Graffiti as an Agent for Effecting Sexual Behavioral Change among Female Students in Zimbabwe's High Schools

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Introduction

This chapter analyzes graffiti as a product of social constructionism in which members are actively involved in creating a reality to which only they can identify with. It also makes the argument that this social construction of reality is done within a framework in which power dynamics take centre stage. That is, members in graffiti aim to effect a change of sexual behavior. Graffiti, in this sense, is therefore not just a case whereby members, especially students, use the medium to write sexual nonsense. The chapter argues that Zimbabwean female high school students use graffiti as a way of checking the sexual behavior of their peers. Issues emerging from graffiti by female students include, among others, the discursive employment of the term *hure* ('bitch') and very strong positions on courtship initiation and breaking up another couple's relationship. It is from this that the writer argues that graffiti can play a very important discursive function in so far as the regulation of, especially, sexual behavior in a social context in which children's sexual behavior is already a cause of concern both nationally and internationally, and in a social context in which upright sexual morality is highly valued.

Jorgensen (2008) defines graffiti as a form of urban wall language typically painted or written on walls and various other public and private surfaces visible to the public. As a mode of expression with a very long history, graffiti is ubiquitous in late-modern urban areas. Othen-Price (2006) characterizes graffiti from a gendered perspective by defining it as an exclusively male adolescent social practice. In this chapter we argue that graffiti is by no means a gendered activity and that it is a manifestation of the multitudes of discourses contesting in the urban terrain.

Society in general is awash with a multitude of socializing discourses that are meant to formulate and maintain standards of good behavior. The role of discourse in the social construction of human behaviors and attitudes cannot be overemphasized. These discourses can be classified under what Fairclough (1992) refers to as 'orders of discourses' whereby superordinate or dominant discourses operate in more formal and institutionalized spaces. Such spaces include the family, health and educational institutions. There are, however, subordinate or less dominant discourses that are mostly constructed in and around less formal and institutionalized set-ups. Graffiti is an example of the less recognized discourses constructed in and around spaces associated with what is generally considered