



# A Critical Ethnography Through Poetic Representations of Social Justice Issues

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to examine how songs, lyrics, and poetry express emotional reactions to inequity of people with different backgrounds, SES, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, power differentials, lack of power, lifestyle choices, and physical/emotional bullying. This study examined how songs, lyrics, and poetry expressed emotions of inequity with three primary data collection sources:

- a. Poetry, spoken word, or lyrics;
- b. Lyric/poetry analysis; and
- c. Interviews. Findings were divided into three themes and numerous sub-themes.

The three main themes were: Racial Issues in the San Luis Valley, Systemic Issues in the San Luis Valley, and the Betterment of Adams State University. Findings demonstrate the importance of having dialogue on these important issues impacting society today. These findings have implications on how researchers and institutions can start and continue important conversations on issues of inequity.

**Keywords:** Culturally responsive teaching; Social justice; Inclusive excellence; Inequity; Research in recording studio

## INTRODUCTION

### A critical ethnography through poetic representations of inequity

People's reactions to various types of social inequity can take many different forms. Mass movements, political actions, disengagement, and the arts are but a few channels of response. The reactions to inequity can be collective or personal. Personal responses can sometimes instigate collective efforts. The focus of this research was to analyze the individual efforts of musicians and

poets in their struggle with personal experiences of social inequity in its many forms. More specifically, we examine through recorded songs, lyrics, and spoken word the performer's expressed reactions to various types of social inequity, whether the expressions are based on racism, sexism, socio-economic status, lifestyle choices, or simply differences in power based on status or force of will. Thompson et al. [1] have reported that the recording studio is an unusual location to conduct ethnographic work. Due to a dearth of ethnographic research located in recording studios, we concur.

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Although the recording studio can present challenges not found in other locations, the studio can foster creativity and collaboration.

Although it may be somewhat atypical to do critical ethnography in the arts, there have been some precedents. For example, Hanauer [2] analyzed the poetry of a veteran of the 2003 Iraq war. This critical poetic ethnography revealed the psychological challenges faced by the soldier as he tried to make sense of the incomprehensibly tragic events he experienced. The poetic narrative revealed the complexities of war, which are seldom exposed in mainstream media constructions. Another poetic ethnography was conducted by Fitzpatrick [3], who proposes that poetry provides a rich, emotive, and aesthetically pleasing channel of communication. This research assessed the poetry of marginalized New Zealand students. Fitzpatrick [3] reports that the deeply personal nature of poetry can bring together the political and the personal.

With a similar use of poetry, Travis Heath has conducted court-mandated therapy with inner city youth [4]. Heath's therapy connects with clients in a manner that many other approaches are unable to do so. He asks about his client's musical preferences and learns about their lives by having them write and share rap lyrics. Heath describes how rap can "serve as a voice for the voiceless". In one conversation, a client-Ray states "It's like when I rhyme. I spit truth from my soul." This therapeutic approach is an exemplary case of music addressing inequality and oppression [4].

In addition to poetry, drama has also been in the sights of ethnographic eyes. For example, Dennis [5] in her long-term project analyzes data from the Theater of the Oppressed. The Theater of the Oppressed was created by Augusto Boal in Brazil in the 1960's. This type of theater draws in the audience to explore and transform their own lives. This approach to theater promotes social and political change. Dennis in conjunction with teachers at a Midwestern high school used the Theater of the Oppressed to respond to the bullying behaviors of students toward English language learners. She warns researchers that the boundary between data collection and data analysis can be blurred in this context, creating special challenges.

Finally, music has not only drawn the attention of ethnographers, but cognitive scientists as well. To Cross [6], the neuroscience of music has shed light on the neural processing involved in the learning, processing, and emotional responses to music. Such research explores the effects of pitch, musical structure, loudness, timber, and the emotional potency of music. Per Cross, this work needs to be expanded by exploring the broader social and cultural functions of music. He proposes that music can be more than just complex patterns of sound. Music can be a form of social practices that are participatory and communicative. Music can play a role in maintaining social order and social cohesion or can be instrumental in social change. Music can be understood as a form of cognitive representation that influences thinking and behavior. Also, music can be an instigator of human interaction and transformation [6]. For example, the freedom songs of the African anti-apartheid and the U. S. civil rights movement played an important role in the psychological and emotional tenor of those movements [7]. Such songs helped to create, communicate, and maintain the collective identities needed to pursue long-term social struggle. In such circumstance's music, can be motivational, inspirational and arouse emotional reactions. Music can channel energy and help to give voice to the marginalized. Finally, Cohen [8] follows in this tradition of advocating the potential social importance of music in expressing cultural meanings, values, and ideas. She proposes that social anthropologists should shift their focus of attention

on to armature or grass-roots musicians instead of commercially successful performers, who have been vetted by corporate media conglomerates. In this way, the average person's concerns can be explored.

This research adds to the literature exploring the role that music and poetry can play in expressing the social concerns of the average person. These expressions convey important cultural understanding based on the lived experiences of amateur musicians and poets. The focus of this study is to explore how the performers recognize, understand, and react to various social inequalities. In the tradition of critical ethnography, the intention of this study is to analyze these expressions, communicate these expressions, and hopefully to play a role in overcoming the negative effects of various social inequities. The recording studio central to this research was financed, in part, by a Title V grant. One of the goals of the grant is to provide a "student-centered environment for Hispanic and low-income students to address issues of access, student success, and student retention [9]." Another relevant goal is to "improve Hispanic and low-income student access to technology." Included in these goals is the facilitation of cultural learning, the promotion of active learning pedagogical strategies, the improvement of access to audio/visual recording technology, and the enhancement of faculty development regarding having opportunities to include recording as an instructional mode.

## Purposes

The purpose of this study was twofold:

1. To examine how songs, lyrics, and poetry express emotional reactions to inequity of people with different backgrounds, SES, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, power differentials, lack of power, lifestyle choices, and physical/emotional bullying (these inequity issues will simply be labelled "inequity issues" in the rest of this paper);
2. To examine people's lived experiences in the San Luis Valley in order to understand their expression of emotional reactions to inequities.

## Research questions

**Research Question 1:** How do songs, lyrics, and poetry express emotional reactions to inequity issues?

**Research Question 2:** How do the people's lived experiences in the San Luis Valley impact their expression of emotional reactions to inequities?

## METHODS

To examine how songs, lyrics, and poetry express emotional reactions to inequity issues, a qualitative approach was used. The qualitative research paradigm requires a careful and thorough description of the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. It also requires reporting the basic underlying philosophical research assumptions [10,11]. Crotty suggests that researchers describe four conceptual elements of their research framework. These elements are the research epistemology stance, the theoretical perspective, the general methodology used, and the specific methodological procedures.

This research assumes a constructivist epistemological stance. Constructivism focuses on the meaning created in the individual's mind [11]. For this research, the constructed meaning of the lived

experience of inequity is revealed through the participant's song lyrics or poetry, the participant's analytical reflections on their work, and participant interviews conducted by the researchers.

Numerous scholars have previously addressed the idea of analyzing qualitative data using poetic representations [12-16]. Poetry is "an evocative way of communicating research findings" [16]. Research poetry allows one to express the inexpressible [13]. As Furman notes, "imagistic language allows the reader to enter a work and develop a personal relationship with it." Jeremy's representation of participant's data follows this lineage yet uses the medium of music as the avenue for poetic representation.

The interpretivist approach is used as the theoretical perspective of the research. According to Crotty, this perspective focuses on the personal interpretations of experienced oppression and inequity. The research method was designed to evoke the experiences, emotions, reactions, beliefs, and values of the participants. The ethnographic approach was the general methodology used in this research. Crotty reports that ethnography focuses on the study of culture. The song lyrics, poetry, participant reflections, and interviews are assumed to provide a window into the subset of culture dealing with specific inequities. Finally, the research method has three elements: participants and research context, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures [11]. These are described below.

### Participants and context

The work of 19 participants, reflected in 19 performances are reported in this study. The participant data sets were from 5 students, 6 employees, 4 faculty, and 4 community members of Alamosa, Colorado and Adams State University. All participants were 18 years of age or older. Some participants were local community members. After IRB approval, the participants were obtained through researcher email and word of mouth, and recruitment at local live music scenes. The lead researcher would use musical performances as an opportunity for sampling and spreading the word about this research project. The participants were asked if they had poetry, spoken word, or songs that explored inequity and oppression. Unless a separate release form was signed, pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to identify bands and participants that had relevant material for this study. Upon completion of the informed consent and release documents, performances were recorded, mixed, mastered, and produced. The location of the recordings and interviews was the campus music department recording studio (Ed Richmond Studio). Each interview took from 20 to 110 minutes.

### Data collection procedures

One of the goals of qualitative research is to share lived experiences. Sparkes [17] has argued that poetic representations may be better at revealing lived experiences compared to other texts. For example, Shapiro [18] has analyzed poetry and autobiographical materials in her research. More specifically, Blumenfeld-Jones [19] has suggested a method of triangulation to assure the trustworthiness, accuracy, consistency, and plausibility of qualitative research. Triangulation involves exploring the research question from a variety of angles. Accordingly, this study explored three different types of sources. Our participants wrote poetry or song lyrics, made recordings of recited poetry or songs, explained their work in analytical reflection papers, and were interviewed by one of the researchers. Aside from convenient and snowball

sampling, the lead researcher could gather more participants at live musical shows, as he announced the project and offered free recording to the community.

**Trustworthiness:** Qualitative research is usually assessed in terms of trustworthiness, accuracy, consistency and plausibility [19]. One method-triangulation addressed trustworthiness criteria by examining the research question from a variety of angles using different data collection tools. The data collection techniques employed in this study are active learning strategies, which are critical to culturally responsive pedagogical techniques. The techniques used in this study could and should be used by teachers in classrooms to explore diversity. The future is to train professors at our university to be able to use a Raging Studios type of assignment in their classrooms, which in turn will turn into a sampling technique for the continued research. Accordingly, this study examined how songs, lyrics, and poetry expressed emotion on inequity with three primary data collection sources:

- a. Poetry, spoken word, or lyrics;
- b. Lyric or poetry analysis; and
- c. Interviews.

**Poetry, spoken word or lyrics:** Recently, qualitative research has been using poetry and autobiographical poetry as data in research [18]. One of the goals of qualitative research is to share lived experiences. It has been argued that poetic representations are better at attaining "this goal than other forms of writing" [17].

**Lyric/poetry analysis:** A lyric or poetic analysis was completed by each participant to provide additional perspective and gain deeper insight into the underlying meaning of participants' song creation. For the analysis, participants were asked to give much more detail, background, and clarification on their work. Participants were given a lyric analysis example to follow. The example analysis showed how they could break down their analysis by stanzas.

**Interviews:** To gain understanding of the underlying structures of an individual's meaning, the ethnographical interview was used. This approach is a primary method of data collection [20]. Each interview lasted between 20 and 110 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to have the performer:

- i. Describe how songs, lyrics, and poetry express emotional reactions to inequity issues;
- ii. Describe people's lived experiences in the San Luis Valley to understand their expression of emotional reactions to inequities.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (with exception of pseudonyms to provide anonymity for the performers that did not sign the release form).

### Data analysis procedures

The information collected in this study was analyzed using two distinct yet overlapping processes commonly utilized in grounded theory. These analytical techniques are open coding and axial coding [21]. Open coding involves the process of conceptualizing, defining categories, and developing categories in terms of the information's properties and dimensions. Axial coding involves determining and building connections between the categories identified in the open coding stage. Along with this, Marshall et al. [22] suggest a process of testing emergent hypotheses. This entails searching the data for negative instances of patterns. In turn, the researcher seeks

credibility in the data by being skeptical and seeking alternative explanations or perspectives.

Three researchers independently identified the resulting open and axial coding meaning units within each participant's data set. To increase the reliability and validity of the analysis process, three researchers discussed their independent findings for each participant's data set. Three researchers were used to minimize bias and maximize trustworthiness. This collaborative process, involving the discussion of interpretations and meaning units, revealed a substantial degree of inter-reader reliability, as well as, the identification of meaning units not recognized by the other researcher. Once each data set was analyzed, the next step was to identify common categories and themes across the 19 participant's materials.

## Findings

The structure of the findings section followed Creswell's [10] framework for coding an ethnography. His recommendations are to create a cultural portrait of a culture-sharing group. In our case, the San Luis Valley was our culture-sharing group. To create this cultural portrait, the template dictates that researchers must code by including: a theoretical lens, descriptions of the culture, analysis of themes, field issues, and interpretation. The findings section is written in alignment with this coding structure.

## Theoretical lens

This research was conducted through a constructivist epistemological stance. Constructivism focuses on the meaning constructed in the individual's mind through experience [11]. This meaning or knowledge is actively constructed through the individual's experience and interactions with the surrounding world as well as their reflection on prior knowledge and new experiences. Through this study, the constructed meaning of the lived experience of inequity is revealed through the participant's song lyrics, poetry, or spoken word and the participant's analytical reflections on their work, as well as participant interviews conducted by the researchers. This active learning constructive process of data collection created more meaning for the participants.

The interpretivist approach was used as the theoretical perspective throughout this project. Based on qualitative analysis developed by Crotty [11], this perspective focuses on the personal interpretations of experienced oppression and inequity. The research method was designed to evoke the experiences, emotions, reactions, beliefs, and values of the participants. Take for instance Jerusalem, who wrote a song about his experience in a gay partnership where he and his partner had to keep their relationship a secret because his partner was afraid to reveal their sexual orientation. Jerusalem noted in his reflection that the attitudes towards "LGTBQI" people are evolving and the global conversation continues around equality and marriage. He reminds us all that it is important to remember that, "Love is LOVE." In the interview Jerusalem revealed that he hopes that through listening to this song, people "would be moved by it, and if they were straight or practicing intolerance, at some point they would listen to the song and they would change their mind a little." This data set clearly depicts how this research is interpretivist in nature.

## Description of the culture

Due to the tapestries of cultures of the San Luis Valley (SLV), interacting with each other and researching inequities was important. Specifically, research question 2 helped the researchers

understand how the performer's lived experiences in the San Luis Valley impacted their expression of emotional reactions to inequalities. The median incomes for counties within the SLV range from \$21,118-\$34,793 [23]. Although the hub of the SLV, Alamosa County, has a population breakdown of 7,667 Whites (Non-Hispanics) and 7,110 Hispanics, only 8 out of our 19 participants were believed to be from Hispanic decent, making this a limitation of the study. We had one participant from Guam (Chamorro decent) and the rest of the 11 participants were White. Despite not having a representative sample of the Alamosa community, this study did provide critical information on how peoples lived experiences in the SLV impacted their emotional reactions to inequity issues.

After analyzing the data for emotional reactions to inequities, themes and sub-themes were created. The three themes and their sub-themes are listed below:

- I. Racial issues in the San Luis Valley
  - a. Cultural insiders sharing their experience
  - b. Cultural outsiders increasing understanding
- II. Systemic issues in the San Luis Valley
  - a. Gender equity
  - b. Homophobia
  - c. Discrimination of drug users
  - d. Bullies and government
  - e. Unity, love, and hope
- III. Betterment of Adams State University

These themes and sub-themes were derived from the interview question: How does this song/poetry/or spoken word reflect the culture of the San Luis Valley (SLV). The participants then had emotions arise as they detailed their experience in the SLV that related in inequity. The next sections detail these themes and sub-themes further.

## Racial issues in the San Luis valley

The theme of participants addressing racial issues in the SLV was further broken down into two sub-themes. The first, "cultural insiders sharing their experiences," consisted of three participants of Hispanic decent detailing racism, Hispanic guilt, generational gaps, and subjugation by employers. The second sub-theme, "cultural outsiders increasing understanding, awareness, and helping to solve problems," were artists of Caucasian decent who shared their experiences with and understanding of other cultures in the valley, such as: Hispanics, Native Americans, and Blacks.

## Cultural insiders sharing their experiences

As a group, the emotions revealed in the analysis for artists who wrote on this topic included rage, vigilance, loathing, and ecstasy. These emotions were blended into the participants lived experiences in the San Luis Valley and impacted their reactions to inequity. For instance, Ricardo was full of rage and Hispanic guilt as he detailed his experiences with racism. In Ricardo's spoken word and interview, he knew racism "existed," but more than anything else he felt racially profiled based on how he looked. He was especially full of rage when he felt there wasn't any accountability for professors who told him, "I know you're a good kid because I know you, but if I were to see you outside of the school, you're probably the type

of fella I'd cross the street for." Not only has this type of treatment come from Caucasians, but Ricardo had other Hispanic people give him major guilt trips as well. Ricardo came from L.A. and he was used to anyone who spoke Spanish to help other Spanish speakers in times of need. His experience in the valley with other Hispanics was much different though. For example, he stated it feels "like they know that you're speaking a Spanish that's not from the valley." Ricardo felt that he was not a part of their "clique" and people that he worked with were "condescending" to him and they would "talk down to me." Although Ricardo was technically a Hispanic cultural insider, his treatment in the valley, from other Hispanics, was like he was from the "hood."

Antonio also felt rage and loathing when he performed and recorded "Self-Made Nothing." He felt subjugated by his employers, and since he is a janitor and his employer are the director, he felt subjugated. Antonio understood that maintaining personal security by belittling others and overly identifying with one's job title is the cause of this emotional reaction. Antonio also detailed how, because of pride, people in the valley don't speak of these injustices.

The lead singer of the reggae/rock band "Valley Marchers" (pseudonym) vigilantly gave light into the racism and stereotypes that exist in the valley, but he also was ecstatic while finding ways to lead the pursuit of change in our society. On racism, he believes the older generations (Hispanics) still have their ways of thinking and they are not seeing it integrated into the community as they think they should be. The lead singer stated that he sees this as a chance

To empower everybody. You should look at this song and listen to it like this is time for us to stand as people and see what we could do for our valley and what we're doing now and not so much for ourselves, because we're all in this together and everything. Shop local, do things local. We don't need to bring in all these other people into us, we're here, we're now, let's fix this and let's make this a great place to be."

This is a way to "move to a brand-new sun" like he sings in his song "Medicine Man." The feeling of ecstasy was transmitted as he addressed issues, helped others be knowledgeable, and called for people to fill their hearts with love.

Another reggae artist, Ryan, wasn't a cultural insider of the valley, but was able to apply his cultural insider experience as a Chamorro (someone from Guam) into the SLV situation. Due to the colonization of the Spaniards and the Japanese, the Chamorro people lost their language and their culture. As Ryan sings the lyrics "thinking as a young boy I wish I could speak my native tongue. Was lost with my ancestors like a bird lost at sea," the feelings of remorse and loss are very damaging to his cultural roots. Ryan used his experience in Raging Studios as a catalyst for change. Ryan continues to learn more Chamorro language today. Hopefully, when other members of the SLV community who have lost their language hear this song, they will be inspired to learn their language as well.

### Cultural outsiders increasing understanding

Another important way for equity issues to be addressed is having people who are cultural outsiders to understand what other cultures are going through so we as humans can seek empathy and common understanding. The artists that wrote works through this lens detailed feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and serenity within their active learning processes. Topics of white guilt and privilege surfaced with these participants. The consideration of making amends for terrible wrongdoings of people in the past was considered as well.

Julie suffered from white guilt as she carried a lot of shame with her as she recollected what had happened to Native Americans in our country. The transformation of Julie's perceptions and mood through the data collection process was astounding. She started to feel less guilt about the process, and in the interview explained,

I don't have to feel guilty somehow being the precedent to my advantageous life, but we must recognize how some of these conditions have affected African Americans, Native Americans, (and) other populations or migrant workers that we have amongst us in the valley.

Julie went on to speak about how some people believe that these oppressed people should "get over it," however, they fail to understand how the experience of a society impacts and "tears up" the people who come after them. She also mentions how humanity keeps doing horrible things to each other and there is no justification for it. She concludes with "we can't just say, oh, it's all good now, it's not all good now." Julie's poetry highlights some critical points of view from people with privilege. Her responses detail critical ways to not ignore the past, but to try to make amends. Also, by learning from our past, we can all make sure we don't recommit these atrocities in the future.

The singer/songwriter Stephen shared many sentiments with Julie, and through song, he also wrote about white guilt, but this time through the lens of a dysfunctional justice system. Stephen perceived the dysfunctional justice system to be centered on racism and discrimination and noted that many members of the police forces around the nation have a self-centered worldview. In his lyrics, he sings "equal rights this way, cause black lives matter." Even though Stephen has never felt racism or hatred personally, he wrote about racism and hatred taking place around the world today. Stephen talked about Michael Brown and Eric Garner being gunned down by law enforcement along with riots and discontent in Missouri and around the world. In his interview, Stephen his main message "should be applied to any kind of discriminatory situation." Through his data set, Stephen focuses on how we can be empathetic as humans and we all need to seek understanding and commonalities within our differences.

Within year one of Raging Studios, we also had the great pleasure of having the legendary singer/songwriter Don Richmond record some music, voice a reflection, and shed further light on his work in an interview. Richmond's song "A Lot in Common," first written in 1992, gives reflections on his experiences of growing up and living in the SLV with the Hispanic culture. He views the culture and history in the SLV being controlled by the interplay between the Hispanic culture and the Anglo culture. Don always had a lot of Hispanic friends, and even though he wasn't Hispanic, he could see the transition of their culture here in the valley. According to Don, the Hispanics Were surviving, they were doing ok as a culture, which was often very rooted in the ground, in the soil sustenance, farming, and the people were shop keepers.

Then another culture came in and. it was like an asphalt paving machine running across a meadow.

It is apparent that many cultural groups could agree that when the Anglo culture was "played on top" that it "negated the relevance of the older Hispanic culture that was here." Richmond's second verse of the song talks about how many of the Hispanics: Are lost, they fell in the cracks between these cultures, the old culture isn't operating in the same way that is used to be, they don't play the game of the new culture well, they haven't learned to play that game or they said I don't what to play that game.

Don is very conscious of how things were and how they relate to the current society. His lyrics describe how “we all have a lot in common, underneath our skin, it should be common knowledge, inside we’re all kin.” These lyrics promote the notion that we are all family and that at the end of the day, we might not understand each other, but “we do the best we can.” All of us, regardless of our life conditions are doing the best we can with what we have.

### Systemic issues in the San Luis valley

Not only were there important racial issues found in this study, but also there were many other specific examples of systemic oppression within the San Luis Valley. This theme was further broken down into 5 sub-themes: gender equity, homophobia, lifestyle choices, bullies and government, and unity, love, and hope. Some of these sub-themes had multiple participants addressing these issues; however, gender equity for example had one woman’s perspective. In the future, we hope to continue to find other people’s perceptions on these issues.

#### Gender equity

Of the four women to participate in this study, only one chose to write a song about gender equity. Karen Lemke was annoyed with the gender differences in communication. The linguistic differences stemmed from self-centered, passive aggressive, inauthentic way of reacting to a personal offense with the term “I’m sorry.” Karen gave an example of her learning to dance Salsa and Tango at a local restaurant/bar. She stated in an interview: I was literally stepping on people’s toes, and for me to get out of that headspace, of I’m sorry, I’m sorry I’m in the wrong place, I shouldn’t be doing this, I did this wrong, to just flowing with it and saying thank you, thank you for dancing with me. This is funny that um I’m learning this way and of course I’m going to make mistakes as I learn.

Instead of being sorry for making mistakes while learning, she found gratitude and wasn’t focused on a problem. Being solution-focused, Karen could “amplify the positive things the solutions that I see around me and I mean even right here.” She felt it was her duty to relay this message in her classes she taught and throughout the community, she even mentioned how this constructivist interview contributed to being others-centered and solution-focused.

#### Homophobia

Another singer/songwriter came into the studio to record a track entitled “It Makes No Difference.” This song carries sad undertones as the raw emotion of losing a relationship because of the fear of what people would think about homosexuality. These homophobic thoughts plaguing society is the essence of this heartbreaking song. The songwriter, Jerusalem, explains how the gay community in the SLV lives in secret. This is especially hard for him, because he came from an “open gay community.” When Jerusalem organizes dinners out with groups of other gay men “they’re very much in the closet and there’s a lot of fear.” He thinks the fear is based on potential rejection, poor treatment, and even violence against the gay couples. Within the reflections and the interview, Jerusalem is hopeful that the global conversation continues and attitudes towards LGBTQI change. Marriage equality and anyone being able to love anyone else and acceptance of all relationships permeates the hope within this data set.

The punk rock band Bled Out also wrote on how certain parts of society, in this case some Rastafarian sects, are very homophobic. In the reflection by Bled Out, they point out that they see some Rastas as the most homophobic people they know. They also give specific examples of Pato Banton “wanting to kill gays.”

This violence is uncalled for and creates potential hate crimes. Stephen also had lyrics in relation to homophobia. In his song he sings, “Squeeze yourself in to this white hetero-normative box.” In drawing similarities from racism and homophobia, Stephen reflects on judgment from the majority society where people are getting labeled and put into “boxes.” He goes on to explain how hetero-normative society views relationships as having a man and a woman, even though this isn’t always the case. Some of these individuals wonder, “which one is the man?” when looking at a same-sex relationship. With the comments and reflections on homophobia, there is still a lot of oppression directed towards the LGBTQI community.

#### Discrimination of drug users

Another form of oppression that arose in this study was discrimination based on people’s lifestyle choices. Specifically, people experienced discrimination and oppression based on if they chose to partake in marijuana or other drugs. Nicole, from the band Nicole and her Sacred Undergarments mentioned how unfair judgment of others based on their substance use creates hypocrisy, because those who desire to play the game can fit in. In her interview, Nicole went on to reflect how this song is about how even though marijuana is legal, it remains illegal federally, and you “can’t go and apply for jobs without having to worry about popping a pee test or having to lie on an application if you do drugs.” So even though it’s legal, it is still looked down upon in the SLV or anywhere else. Nicole says that the judgment must stop and suggests that we “need to increase awareness and education” on these matters. As she sings in her song “So go ahead and judge us, tell us we’re no good, because we’ll keep doing what we’re doing, until we’re understood.”

In the interview with the “Valley Marchers,” the lead singer also spoke about drug use within the SLV. His opening lyrics say, “Rising tide take me away, far from all my yesterdays.” He is singing about distancing from the impurities of the SLV valley and says, “There’s a lot of people who overdose and die.” He urges us not to focus on this, but we need to “wash ourselves and get rid of those impurities and say goodbye to yesterday and let’s go to a brand-new sun.” These are additional suggestions to empower and make change in the SLV.

#### Bullies and government

A student named Gabe recorded a hip-hop song called ‘Step Up’ in Raging Studios. This song detailed the incomprehensible injustices of bullies and government. Instead of government being unjust through racial profiling, as in Stephen’s song “Black Lives Matter#,” Gabe writes about lack of motivation, goal orientation, and the government hiding the truth from its citizens. Gabe raps, “It’s a cold dark world beyond these walls, our government lies just to hide their falls.” There is a strong connection between the problems of entering the “cold dark world” and the feeling of people being “trapped” in the SLV. In the interview, Gabe detailed the valley we live in, “The San Luis Valley is very poverty stricken, but kids just think that because they’re here that they can’t get out and go into a different place and grow and be a very successful person, they feel like they get trapped in the valley.” Although going into a different place means it could be a “cold dark world” created by media and government lives, Gabe ends his song with hope. He hopes that people can be original, use their voice, and help others to be activists like him.

A singer/songwriter named Howard from the band Alec and the Assholes also wrote about oppression through deception by the powerful. In his song “Dragons with Slippers” he presents a

metaphor for those in power deceptively brainwashing people. His loathing for government prevails throughout the data collection. Howard speaks about evil people running the government: "You get one bad evil person who has a passion to rule other human beings in their heart no matter what the cost, the shark telling the sheep what to do." When referring to the evil person, he also details how leaders come together as if they are from the "same cloth."

### Unity, love and hope

Many of the artists who participated in Raging Studios chose to reflect on positive ways to move forward against oppression. The typical structure of this came through once presenting sources of emotional actions towards oppression and understanding the causes, most participants then came up with ways to overcome these struggles. The ways that participants overcame, reacted to, and dealt with negative emotions were overwhelmingly positive. The themes of unity, love, and hope prevailed in the end. The musicians and poets wanted to: increase awareness and education (Nicole), to empower and make change in the SLV by filling our hearts with love (Valley Marchers), acceptance of all relationships (Jeru), others-centered and solution-focused (Karen), understanding and commonalities within our differences (Stephen and Don), make sure we don't recommit these atrocities (Julie), and a need to realize the connection between language and culture (Ryan). These tools to work through issues centered on discrimination, giving hope, and inspiring us to love and come together as people in a positive way.

Although most performances didn't appear to reach love, unity, and hope until the end of the reflections and interviews, the band Salty Pickle was positive and focused on love and unity throughout their data set. During the acoustic performance, the reflection reading, and the interview, the members of the band Salty Pickle focused on their hopeful message of unity, inclusivity of all, and the strong connections that show humans and nature are one. The overwhelming feeling of hope of unity and oneness also moved to feelings of love. The lead singer mentioned how, "first you have to love yourself, take care of yourself, then spread that to other people, think with your heart." This is the beginning of what she believes will fill the need for social change. This oneness is not only for organisms, but she speaks of "the ocean and all of the pollution, the pollution doesn't just blow over the mountain." She then describes how people in the SLV interact in a healthy way. This band's message is focused on Everyone Included (which is the title of their track). They see people in the SLV as being "really good at taking on the community and including everyone." Although many other participants in this project didn't see this portion of the SLV, it does exist, according to Salty Pickle.

### Betterment of Adams State university

As people described their emotional reactions to their experiences within the SLV, another common theme was participants recognizing and finding solutions for the inequities at Adams State University (ASU). Anger, loathing, dejection, and rage were the feelings of the participants as they shared the inequity they experienced at ASU. The students and the employees who shared these feelings experienced subjugation by their employers, racial discrimination, and unrest in their departments.

Ricardo, a Hispanic student, expressed rage against the structure of ASU. He felt that there was no "agency" that would support him in filing complaints against the institution. He states I feel like if I ever wanted to tell someone or report someone, what some of those psychology professors have said, those professors

out rank me a student that they don't even want to hear about a professor that.... they can barely get professors to stay here, so why are they going to go rock the boat and do a written write up for a professor, when I'm going to be gone maybe by next semester and this guy wants to be here till he retires.

Although he felt there was no current accountability in place for inappropriate comments and behaviors from professors, he did have some ideas on how the institution could solve some of these issues. Ricardo suggested that there should be some sort of "departmental oversight." He was aware of accreditation agencies having their role, but he is suggesting something else entirely. Ricardo is calling for quality control, starting at the upper echelons of the university. He would like to see mechanisms in place that would monitor chairs and departments more thoroughly.

Another pair of students (Corbin and Darryl) shared their perspectives on the unrest of the music department at ASU. Corbin and Darryl detailed the lack of "homeostasis" in their department due to many people using this school as a stepping-stone to "go somewhere better." They have had great players play music with them in their department, but some of them play "way better than our band does." At the time of this data collection, their department had gaping holes as well. Corbin thought it was "asinine" that they didn't have a true bassist and lacked jazz saxophone players. He also saw a lack of recruiting of students, except for one professor in the department. Corbin suggested, "you could have a reward system, if you have 50 kids in the studio, you're going to get a bonus." This way there could be some accountability for recruiting to achieve the goal of having a strong, full instrumentation ensemble. This, according to Corbin and Darryl, would help solve the inequalities and lack of institutional support they experienced at ASU.

An employee at ASU, Antonio, also experienced inequity in terms of subjugation from the employer. The biggest reason Antonio believes employers yell and belittle their employees is that they have, "too much identity in their job title; they are too insecure within themselves that they have to look to that title to give them a sense of entitlement and empowerment." Antonio sees the whole thing as a lose-lose situation. You "stick out a job" even if you get yelled at or belittled, but you also are missing out on time with your family who you love. Antonio suggests that people try to look within themselves to better understand our managers and find common ground with other oppressed individuals to overcome these inequities.

### Field issues

There are a few field issues that arise from conducting ethnographic research in a recording studio. Within the studio setting, it is best to have someone with many years of experience as a sound engineer. Learning the software and mixing, mastering, and recording techniques are very difficult and technical. Dr. Matt Schildt taught the two researchers in this study a very extensive computer music course before collecting data, but neither of us had at least 5 years of recording experience. The lack of experience inhibited the quality of the recordings in some instances. For example, we never used gates to take out sounds at certain frequencies. Also, studios are not the best place to build rapport with participants, as they can be intimidating to some people.

### Participant researcher data, analysis and interpretations

In addition to the participants' creation of music and interview, the researchers also completed these steps as participants as well.

The first song creation and interview were done by Rob, which more similarly followed the participants in their song creation and interview. The second participant researcher, Jeremy, created a song that sought to analyze and synthesize the themes and emotions of all participants. In this fashion, Jeremy's song was a research synthesis of all song creations, written and expressed as a poetic representation of the data.

Rob's song was titled "Up on Pine Ridge". His song describes his experience of working at Chadron State, and experiencing racial tension as a Caucasian amongst Native Americans. One experience is highlighted in Rob's song, in which he feels like a minority amongst Native Americans at a gas station. Rob's experience amongst ethnic minority students and community members in Nebraska led him to feel a deep compassion and desire to act to improve human rights. In fact, in his interview, Rob states "actually performing the song was an emotional release in a way." Rob's song is unique from many participants in the fact that Rob's experience with inequity is as a member of privilege. In Rob's interview, he states that he likely would have never recorded this song if it weren't for the Ragin' Studios recording studio at ASU.

The lead researcher was Jeremy. His song, "Ragin", compiles and synthesizes the ideas and messages of all participants. Some themes of oppression from participant lyrics which were represented in the song "Ragin" include classism ("humanity built our world, on top the helpless"), racism ("using slaves, pompous circumstance"), and sexism ("our mothers, daughters and sisters got no appreciation").

In addition, an underlying theme of inequity that emerges in Jeremy's reflection is the barrier to music recording that many musicians experience. The intent to overcome this obstacle is one motivation of this research. Upon reflection, an interesting paradox of the song "Ragin" is the idea that facing and expressing rage through music can be cathartic and provide a platform for dialogue about inequity. This idea is apparent in the lyric "ragin' for a cause, helps us unwind, diffusing madness". Emotions of joy and excitement for the ability to have participants create music and express experiences of inequity are evidenced in the lyric "voices lost from La Raza, highlight inequity. It is time now to write lyrics, write poetry." Another participant noted a loss of Chamorro culture and language, just as the voices lost from the Chicanos in the SLV. Another noteworthy theme which emerged in Jeremy's interview was living in Hawaii as an outsider who experienced prejudice and racism. Jeremy described rejection as locals told him, "no you can't surf here." In addition, Jeremy experienced acts of aggression. Jeremy experienced violence on "Haole days", when local Hawaiians would deliver "false cracks where people just swing at you for no reason at all, just punch you in the face."

## LIMITATIONS

As any study, there are a few limitations of this study worth mentioning. One of these limitations was of trustworthiness, which could have been increased by member checking. The researchers didn't return interview transcripts back to participants as some participants no longer are in our community and their contact information has changed. Another limitation is with methodology. The analysis procedures used was a critical ethnography, but a specific procedure for this method eluded researchers. Another limitation of the study was actual scope in which the participants could describe culture through an ethnographic lens. In future research, it would be important to provide a much more in-depth analysis of these issues, for example an entire album and series of

reflections and interviews from one artist would be transformative as well, and it would add to Raging Studios research.

## DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

Participants wrote, sang, and spoke about how racial profiling in the justice system, corporate misbehavior, systemic oppression by the powerful, understanding white guilt and privilege, and losing language and culture due to colonialism impact greatly how we function in our institutions and our communities we live in. Like other research on overcoming negative functions of higher education, the performers in this study detailed many important suggestions on how to overcome inequity within society. Williams [24] has indicated that an important way to boost diversity on campus is to implement changes in the structure that are holistic and make a real difference [25-36].

The findings, namely the themes and sub-themes, demonstrate how Raging Studios was a positive, holistic diversity change on our campus. The first theme, Racial Issues in the San Luis Valley, helps us understand sub-themes of issues of cultural insiders sharing their experiences and cultural outsiders increasing understanding, awareness, and helping to solve problems. Regarding cultural insiders, these three Hispanics emotively shared their experiences of racism directed from Caucasians to Hispanics, but also from one Hispanic group to another. Feelings of subjugation based on job titles, racism, and stereotypes also impacted these Hispanics in negative ways. The cultural outsiders helped create a better understanding, awareness, and began to share ideas that could help solve problems for Hispanic, Black, and Native American cultures they performed about. Within this sub-theme, it is evident that we need to: be empathetic and cognizant of privilege as humans, seek understanding within our differences, remember our pasts while making amends, and need to understand the interplay of the relevance and loss of relevance in cultural realms. Regardless of whether the participants were cultural insiders or outsiders, the participants expressed a myriad of emotional reactions to the racial issues in the San Luis Valley, including feelings of rage, vigilance, loathing, guilt, anger, shame, ecstasy and serenity. These emotions helped the artists in this study find ways to identify, understand, and find solutions to the racial problems addressing our society. The individuals represented in this theme attested to the importance of understanding that the Anglo/Western culture is now the culture as having the most relevance. Don gave us a specific example of this when describing the interplay between the Anglo and Hispanic cultures. When the Anglo culture gained more importance it "negated the relevance of the older Hispanic culture that was here." As described by the participants, Blacks and Native Americans also have found themselves in this conundrum of deciding whether to be a part of this culture, end up not being able to contribute to that kind of culture well, or have decided they don't want to be a part of the current mainstream culture at all.

In terms of systemic issues in the San Luis Valley, the sub-themes within this theme were much broader topically, however, they aligned with a systemic perspective. The data in this study revealed that society systematically oppresses females, the LGBTQI population, and drug users. Instead of using self-centered, passive aggressive communication towards women, Karen reminds us to be others-centered and solution focused. True marriage equality and challenging hetero-normative society will help the LGBTQI population from not living in the closet in fear of rejection, poor treatment, and violence. Participants also reminded us that homophobic religions and role models must not be tolerated.



Discrimination towards drug users was another sub-theme that was especially informative to our Colorado community. Even though recreational marijuana use is legal, employers can fire you, and many people in society still judge you negatively. Increasing awareness on these drug-related issues are important and further education can prevent overdoses and deaths. Other sub-themes of systemic issues in the San Luis Valley emerged as bullies/government and unity, love, and hope. As for bullies and government, participants would argue those not in politics are being manipulated and deceived by the media and the government, which creates a “cold, dark world.” These divisive politics, per Howard, brain wash people and people of the “same cloth” remain in charge. Unity, love, and hope was a common sub-theme as well, which revealed a lot of positivity and ideas for solutions for society. As the artists in this study understood, reacted to, and dealt with oppression, many gave ideas of how to overcome struggles in positive ways. Education, empowerment, loving all people and things, accepting other peoples’ loves, understanding differences, and recognizing connection between language and culture can help us avoid recommitting atrocities and continuing oppressive cycles. Consider the main message from the band Salty Pickle, unity, inclusivity of all, and the strong connections that show humans and nature are one is what is important.

The final theme that emerged has the potential to better Adams State University. In terms of the betterment of Adams State, inequity brought up feelings of anger, loathing, dejection, and rage as participants gave examples of their experiences in the San Luis Valley. An employee shared feeling of subjugation from his employer and suggests that we look within ourselves to better understand our managers as we find common ground with other oppressed people to help each other overcome these inequities. Students also had some great ideas on how to better the university in terms of racial discrimination and unrest within departments. Creating structures that could help file complaints, assess department chairs more effectively, higher quality recruiting, and potential rewards for well-enrolled programs were suggested as ways to better our institution.

This study begins the dialogue to unite people of our San Luis Valley community with the purpose of becoming free of oppression; and cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural action have been instrumental in this process (Freire, 1993). In alignment with Friere’s work, the participants in Raging Studios contributed to understand and eventually change their worlds. This cooperation was based on their poetry/lyrics, their reflections, and constructivist interviews that held dialogue as being pivotal to create humility and love with the “communion with the people” (Freire, 1993, p. 151). Unity for liberation is also an important finding for this study, as seen in the unity, love, and hope sub-theme of systemic issues in the San Luis Valley. Musicians and poets in this study wanted to increase education, fill our community with love, promote acceptance of all relationships, focus on others and solutions to problems, understand commonalities within our differences, make sure we don’t commit the same past mistakes, and realize connections between language and culture. These findings demonstrate a unification of moving beyond individuals being oppressed to a conscious group of the oppressed class working to inspire, love, and come together in our community, in a positive way.

Organization, Freire notes, is linked closely with unity. Although Raging Studios has begun to have researchers, community

members, faculty, and students organize, the purpose of this project is to have many more people organize with this cause. The musical leaders in our community, who have contributed, signed waivers of confidentiality, and who have donated their song/poetry to the Raging Studios Album are the ones organizing this dialogue on a bigger scale. The song that was written by the researchers as an educational ethnography data analysis was not written to say the words of the leaders of the project, but its purpose was to say the important messages learned in this study with the people and their words. The hope is that Raging Studios spurs additional cultural action, so lyricists and poets can share more about their experience of the culture of inequity, and people can come together not to transmit knowledge but “to learn, with the people, about the people’s world (Freire, 1993, p. 161).” This project is an example of how we can address inequity issues in higher education, and it can be an important addition to the curriculum at schools all over the world. Our relationships with people from all different backgrounds can evolve through love as we respect and welcome others as our own family. Given the alternative nature of the data within this project, a much deeper understanding can be gleaned from listening to the Raging Studios, Vol. 1 album, which is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-320636422/sets/raging-studios-volume-1>.

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