

Subversive Doodling as a Cultural Catalyst:
A Reflexive Framework for Community-Based, Collaborative Art

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Flora Block

April 2022

On my honor, I have neither received
nor given unauthorized aid on this thesis
and all work is my own.

Flora Block
April 2022

Acknowledgements

No scholarship is created in a vacuum, and no accomplishment is made alone. Thus, I have several people I must thank for their consistent and critical support of this project.

I must first thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Kathy Giuffre. Without Dr. Giuffre's encouragement and meticulous revisions, I do not believe this thesis would have been entertained as legitimate research, much less completed as such. Thank you, Kathy, for your willingness to think radically and idealistically with me as I embarked on this process, and for pushing me to act critically and ethically within the fields of community-based research and cultural sociology.

Although I cannot thank individuals by name, I must thank Inside Out Youth Services—the community of young people as well as its staff members and volunteers—for their enthusiastic acceptance of this project, and for the care with which it was handled. I am so grateful for the mentorship I received at IOYS, both in regards to this project and related to my personal development as a student and young queer person. Thank you so much for your willingness to take a leap of faith and welcome me into your community, I feel so lucky to have found it.

Thank you also to the countless friends and loved ones who generously offered me emotional support as well as instrumental resources such as transportation and advice. Without you, this project would have been impossible.

Thank you to the Colorado College Sociology Department for funding and supporting this project, and to Professor Jane Hilberry for providing extra materials and instilling in me an unfaltering belief in the power of creativity.

Finally, I have to thank my family, and specifically, my parents. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your unwavering faith in me and my abilities. Without you, I have no doubt that I would not be where I currently am.

Subversive Doodling as a Cultural Catalyst:

A Reflexive Framework for Community-Based, Collaborative Art

Abstract

Through the facilitation of a collaborative mural-making project with Inside Out Youth Services in Colorado Springs, Colorado, this reflexive thesis proposes a new framework for organizing community-based arts initiatives that seek to visibilize and empower marginalized populations. By employing a reflexive strategy for this research, I assess the facets of my own capital possession which influence my access to this sort of project, and in doing so, I propose a new, critical framework for facilitating community-based arts projects which asserts joy and fun as essential elements in community building, and posits doodling as a powerful strategy for subverting hegemonic standards for artistic production. By valorizing personal experience and emotion through the facilitation of joy and the provision of a common goal which fostered easy, comfortable conversation, this project fostered open dialogue among participants, a pivotal component of collective knowledge creation and thus, community building and cultural solidification.

Keywords: community-based art; socially-engaged art; culture; reflexive sociology

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	3
Definitions of Art	3
<i>Power and Art: Inseparable Fields</i>	3
<i>The Issue of “Quality”: Hierarchized Definitions</i>	4
Artistic Potentials and Perils	6
<i>Advocacy for the Arts: Social Change and Community Art</i>	6
<i>Fallacies of Popular Opinion: Art as Inherently Revolutionary</i>	7
<i>Cultural Objects and Subcultural Re-Appropriation</i>	9
A New Framework for Community-Based Art	12
<i>Definitions of Community</i>	12
<i>Frameworks of Precedence</i>	13
<i>A New Collaborative Strategy: Considerations and Ideals</i>	16
METHODOLOGY	19
Initial Steps: Finding an Organization	19
<i>Social and Cultural Capital: Connections to Access</i>	19
Inside Out Youth Services: An Oasis in the Springs	22
<i>Site and Setting</i>	22
<i>Revelations: Process Over Product</i>	24
Applying Realizations	27
<i>Removing the Distance of Hierarchy</i>	27
<i>Avoiding Exploitation and Essentialization</i>	28

Framework in Praxis	30
<i>Experience and Emotion: Revalidating the Delegitimized</i>	31
<i>Facilitating Dialogue: Imagining New Realities</i>	34
<i>Fostering a Sense of Belonging: Ownership and Investment</i>	36
DISCUSSION	38
CONCLUSION	40
Bibliography	44
Appendix A — <i>A History of Oppressive Policies in Colorado Springs</i>	49
Appendix B — <i>“Brave/Safe Space Rules”</i>	52
Appendix C — <i>Resultant Images of the Doodle Mural</i>	54

Public art, and in particular, murals, occupy a long and well-documented historical role in social justice and community-based activism. Among marginalized populations, artists and social movement organizers have employed the use of public art, and specifically murals, in order to visibilize suppressed and erased experiences, and draw mass attention to invisible structures and histories of domination (Olsen 2019; National Building Museum 2021; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Prevention Institute 2015; Palmer 2018). Cecilie Olsen (2019:991) discusses the political potential of socially-engaged art (art that considers the social and political contexts of a given population and addresses “taken-for-granted spatial orderings of the world” [Olsen 2019:986]) to act as a potent strategy for raising critical questions by exposing organizing structures of power. Through the legible symbolism of art, communities, and particularly those that consist of dominated populations, have expanded the notion of muralism and public, or socially-engaged art from mere aesthetics, to hold social and political connotations. With this precedence in mind, I sought to facilitate a community-based arts project which would engage a local organization in Colorado Springs. With the intention of fostering non-hierarchized collaboration, I worked with Inside Out Youth Services to organize a mural-making event which, through play, joy, and fun, would foster comfortable, intimate dialogue among participants in the project. As a result of this dialogue, community is catalyzed, defined, and solidified, and through such collective knowledge production, community members are given the agency to reimagine social realities beyond the boundaries of hegemonically-prescribed standards and norms.

Drawing inspiration from Patricia Hill Collins’ (2021) “Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology,” I refuse to separate myself, as the academic, the organizer, and the writer, from this project and its analysis. Embodying Hill Collins’ belief in the inextricability of the scholar from the scholarship, I employ a reflexive sociological strategy, using first person narrative to

examine the structures of power and capital which allowed me, personally, to organize such a project. This thesis rejects the notion of objectivity, as it is defined and aspired to in empirical research and social science studies. Instead of falsely believing I can remove my bias from the literature and research I produce, I choose to acknowledge that my biases are fundamental influences on the knowledge I produce. Thus, following a Bourdieusian reflexive approach to community-based research, I intend to examine the structures of power which define our social class relations, and which thus also inherently impact the realm of community-based research, and also that of artistic production.

By facilitating a community-based arts project with a pivotal local organization, I intend to dissect the aspects of my own personal capital possession, and the ways that capital, and thus social class relations, inform the processes of community engagement and research. Through this analysis, I also confront the systems of domination which characterize the artistic realm, in an attempt to subvert the hegemonic definitions of “valid” or “quality” art and instead, assert an alternative mode for artistic production that does not answer to the bureaucratic and hierarchized evaluative criteria for hegemonically-accepted creative expression. I posit this mural project as a radical break from the hegemonic structures and institutions which organize society, and thus also the fields of cultural and artistic production. By emphasizing the power of the art-making *process* over the actual art *product*, as well as through the facilitation of joyful and meaningful interactions, I saw the potential for this collaborative mural project to act as a catalyst for community definition and solidification, and as such, act as a powerful tool for influencing cultural and social change.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definitions of “Art”

Power and Art: Inseparable Fields

The relations of power which characterize our social realm are inseparable from the production of art. Pierre Bourdieu explains this interdependence and inseparability by characterizing realms of different types of production and social activity as “fields,” which have specific boundaries, but which overlap and are all deducible to the larger field of class relations. The way that we operate within these fields is at all times a “struggle” for higher positionality within the hierarchy of power (Bourdieu 1983); we struggle for power through the exchange of different forms of capital (social, cultural, and economic), turning money into art, into status, into more money (Richardson and Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu’s analysis of the fields as homologous denotes that as our position changes (by way of exchanging capital [Richardson and Bourdieu 1986]) in the field of artistic or cultural production, our position in the field of social and class relations, and thus our level of relative power in society, also necessarily changes (Bourdieu 1983).

The hierarchy of power that characterizes our positions within the fields of social and class relations is informed, of course, through historical precedence, but importantly, this precedence is reinforced and reproduced through the activities of the dominant class, who, via their positions of power in society, have the authority to define the boundaries of different fields of production, i.e., to define what counts as “art” (Hall and Jefferson 1989; Bourdieu 1983; Marx and Engels 1932). Through the selective inclusion and exclusion of different types of art and artists, the dominant class—necessarily those people who own and operate galleries, museums, and other institutions which have historically decided what cultural products are suitable for

recognition and visibility—defines the parameters of the field, and thus, defines “art” itself (Bourdieu 1983). Marx understands this power to define as the power of the ruling class to impose their “ruling ideas” and thus impose their standards for life onto the dominated classes (Marx and Engels 1932). These standards are nearly always unattainable, and thus, trap us into the cycle of capital production which maintains our position of subversion to the ruling class.

The Issue of “Quality”: Hierarchized Definitions

The ruling class’ ability to impose ideologies, standards, and norms also denotes an ability to categorize and hierarchize different forms of art. Not only may the ruling class *impose* their ideas, but they may also *enforce* them, by selectively including certain types of art in the dominant canon for production, thereby characterizing such art that falls within the normalizing standards of the ruling class as “quality” art. “Quality” art is characterized as such by the ruling class, and this distinction is often employed as a means to serve the dominant class’ interests and thus maintain their hegemony: By selectively including and excluding forms of art from the dominant canon of production, the ruling class maintains control over the boundaries of the art field, and thus over the definition of art itself.

Pierre Bourdieu understands this power to define, but more importantly, to hierarchize those definitions, as the power of the ruling class to distinguish, or award distinction, to certain forms or pieces of art (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu explains that this mechanism of distinction can be executed via appropriation, through which one becomes the sole possessor of the object and “of the authentic taste for that object” (Bourdieu 1984:280). He clarifies that appropriation, either symbolically, through consumption, or literally, through purchase, allows the possessor of the art object to codify the mode for future consumption of the piece of art, while also denoting the personal taste of the possessor. One may assert their power (or in other words, their superior

cultural capital possession) through appropriation, by either adhering to or subverting the dominant standards for consumption, and thus, of taste. Adhering to the dominant standards of appropriation demonstrates the possession of cultural capital (knowledge) necessary to assimilate to these defining norms. Subverting the hegemonic standards for appropriation indicates a level of autonomous cultural capital which allows the appropriator to assert alternative defining or evaluating criteria which may not align with the hegemonically-imposed definitions of “quality.” In this way, distinction, or the definition of “quality,” has a clear potential to either liberate or oppress, depending on who has the power to distinguish. However, because the class with the power to define, appropriate, and legitimate on a wide scale sits in a higher position of power within the field of social class relations, this dominant class will necessarily enforce the definitions and hierarchized categorizations of art which reproduce their position of power, and thus, serve their own interests. The ruling class will likely distinguish (i.e., the dominant class will legitimate, or characterize as “quality”) those forms or pieces of art which reinforce the hegemony of their taste, and thus, of their power to define, categorize, and hierarchize.

The dominant class has historically and contemporarily employed the power to define, and more specifically, the power to define “quality,” in order to reproduce their position of power. This occurs through the monopolization of dominant taste and ideology, which results from the systemic erasure and silencing of marginalized or non-dominant populations who may define and categorize according to an alternative, non-dominant ideology (Collins 2021). Through the invisibilization and suppression of alternative ideologies, the ruling class first reinforces their exclusive power to define, and in doing so, also prevents dominated classes from proposing and enacting non-hegemonic ideologies and standards. By preventing alternative ideologies, which, in communities, are bred from collective knowledge production, the ruling

class also prevents dominated classes from realizing their intersectionally oppressed positions. Through the monopolization of the ruling ideas and the prevention of alternative ones, the dominant class prohibits a collective consciousness of intersectional and interdependent structures of oppression, and thereby invisibilizes the oppressive hegemonic forces which maintain the hierarchy of our social relations (Du Bois 1903; Marx and Engels 1932).

Despite the seemingly omnipotent nature of ruling class ideologies and the oppressive potential of hierarchized definitions, there are methods through which marginalized communities, groups, and individuals can cultivate alternative appropriative definitions, and through collective, open dialogue, non-dominant groups have the potential to subvert ruling ideologies and characterizations of distinction in favor of alternative, communal epistemologies (Collins 2021). In community sociology and psychology, there is a wide breadth of scholarship that supports the arts as a uniquely positioned strategy for this kind of dialogue facilitation and collective meaning-making.

Artistic Potentials and Perils

Advocacy for the Arts: Social Change and Community Art

Theoretical analyses, evaluative arts project reports, and qualitative studies on the impact of the arts can all contend that artistic expression has the capacity to benefit individuals and communities who engage in the practice. For the purposes of examining these precedents, I must first define the branch of art which will be discussed in this review of the literature. Cecilie Sachs Olsen (2019: 986) provides an inclusive definition for “socially-engaged art” which includes the subgenre branches of community-based, collaborative, and (socially-conscious) public art. Olsen describes this umbrella term, “socially engaged art,” as an art practice which “engage[s] not only with a specific group of people, but also with their social and cultural concerns.”

Scholars assert that the arts (and in these studies, specifically the socially-engaged arts as defined by Olsen [2019]) have the potential to (1) revitalize the value of emotion and personal experience (Collins 2021; Palmer 2018; Bublitz et al. 2019; Mulvey 2014; Stein and Faigin 2015; Fonseka 2021; Averett et al. 2015); (2) facilitate collective dialogue between diverse voices (Collins 2021; Fonseka et al. 2021; Asakura et al. 2019; Bublitz et al. 2019; Olsen 2019; Mulvey and Egan 2014; Lowe 2000; Staggenborg and Lang 2007); (3) foster intimacy and a sense of belonging (Nowak; Bublitz et al. 2019; Lowe 2000; Fonseka et al. 2021); and (4) have individual benefits such as increased confidence, exposure to art skills, and in some cases, increased emotional regulation via artistic expression as a trauma processing tool (Averett et al. 2015; Lowe 2000; Mulvey and Egan 2014; Fonseka et al. 2021). However, many of these studies subscribe to bureaucratic processes for art commissioning, empirical evaluations of arts programs, and/or the essentialization of city and community culture (Hall and Robertson 2001; Becker 2004; Nowak 2007; Prevention Institute 2015). Although the benefits of artistic expression are evidentially supported in studies across disciplines, the assimilation of scholars and artists to systems of evaluation and bureaucratic approval has the potential to affirm and thus reinforce the ruling ideas which divide the dominated classes, and define the dominant class's position of power (Hall and Robertson 2001; Stein and Faigin 2015:71-72).

Fallacies of Popular Opinion: Art as Inherently Revolutionary

Hall and Robertson (2001) offer an essential critique of the unequivocal advocacy for art, reiterating Bourdieu's analysis of the art field as inscribed and thus inseparable from the hegemonically-defined bureaucratic processes for evaluation and recognition. The authors question the assumed benefits of art—that it innately transforms spaces into community spheres, that it intervenes in the process of urban development, that it immediately forms communities in

the locality of an art initiative—arguing that public art (this critique may also expand to include socially-engaged art, community art, and collaborative art) may have the *potential* to be provocative, and thus foster dialogue and collective knowledge building, but it does not do so by nature of its being (Hall and Robertson 2001). Olsen echoes this critique, arguing that socially-engaged art “is not inherently communal and does not automatically make people part of a community” (Olsen 2019:992). Izumi Sakamoto contends, “there is nothing inherently liberating in art itself” (Reisch and Sakamoto 2014: 476). In fact, because socially-engaged art (like any other form of art) exists within the art world, it is prohibited from being provocative and community-catalytic due to the hegemonic prescription of, and collective submission to, bureaucratic processes for recognition and representation in the canon as “quality” art. Thus, artistic production cannot break free from the hegemonic structures which inform the art realm (Hall and Robertson 2001; Bourdieu 1983). Therefore, even with the intent of intervention and social change, socially-conscious or -motivated art, more often than not, perpetuates the hegemonic structures which characterize the art-approval and -recognition bureaucracies. Nowak (2007) furthers this critique, arguing that within the scholarship that advocates for the arts, culture, and the creative sector, these studies emphasize the economic benefits of artistic production (thus submitting to the hegmonically-prescribed goal of “production for profit”), rather than “in terms of the intrinsic value of creativity” (Nowak 2007:5).

Succumbing to the influence of the ruling class via submission to gallery or museum interests, an economic or empirical basis for evaluating arts programs, or merely attempting to succeed within the hegemonic art field (attempting to receive recognition from the dominant class as “quality”), all reinforce the institutions and structures which selectively validate art made by, or in the interest of, the ruling class. Despite these dangers, art holds significant social power

in its categorization as a form of cultural production, and thus, the appropriation of art products has the capacity to redefine, solidify, and sustain culture. In marginalized and oppressed populations, this powerful potential only increases as subcultures are able to redefine art, or more importantly, redefine “quality” art, in an alternative light.

Cultural Objects and Subcultural Re-Appropriation

The power to produce cultural objects and their ascribed meanings is underscored by Bourdieu’s field analysis which posits cultural production as a strategy for changing one’s position in the field of social class relations (Bourdieu 1983). Cultural objects and the ability to define their significance is thus an expression of power as much as they are an expression of culture. Hall and Jefferson (1989:10) define culture as “that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give expressive form to their social and material life-experience. Culture is the way, the forms, in which groups ‘handle’ the raw material of their social and material existence.” Cultural objects act as symbols of knowing how to “handle” raw materials, and thus denote our belonging to specific groups, ideologies, and epistemologies (Hall and Jefferson 1989). The production and appropriation of cultural objects is thereby an expression of culture which has the potential to either reinforce and validate dominant definitions and recognition of products, or, to allow non-dominant subcultures to create distinct definitions, which in their mere existence, subvert the monopoly of prescribed hegemonic meanings, and thus the power of the ruling class itself. Therefore, the struggle for power is also a struggle to define the symbol and facilitate its recognition as a sign of culture (Hebdige 2011).

Art is not to be separated from this category of significant cultural objects with the potential to symbolize, and thus define and solidify culture. In particular, in the case of public, collaborative, or otherwise socially-engaged art, the creation of a piece of art becomes a tangible

symbol as to what the community or the individual can accomplish (Bublitz et al. 2019:324, 325; Nowak 2007:5; Prevention Institute 2015). In the context of a community, this enduring symbol is visible to members of the community and reminds them of their belonging to the group.

In marginalized or dominated subcultures, these cultural symbols (ie. artistic products) become tools, through the use of which, subcultures may assert their existence within society, and thus subvert the hegemony of dominant culture (Hall and Jefferson 1989). By appropriating cultural objects according to an alternative, or non-dominant ideology, marginalized classes have the capacity to subvert hierarchized definitions imposed by the ruling class: Through an alternative appropriation of the object, the dominated class asserts its ability to award distinction (an ability that is often exclusive to the ruling class), and thereby destabilizes the monopoly of hegemonic taste, which includes the dominant standards for production and consumption. Once we recognize the power to redefine cultural symbols (or, the power to award distinction, and thus, to define “quality”) as a form of resistance against hegemony, the fields of artistic and cultural production become essential battlegrounds for subcultural solidification and resistance. In the art world, this belief in the power to redefine, solidify, and represent cultures through symbols (art) has led to branches of artistic production which seek to represent and visibilize marginalized populations, thereby subverting the hegemonic structures which maintain the erasure of those subcultural groups.

In the 1980’s, public, politically-motivated, community-based, and/or resistant art rose in prevalence in the field of cultural production (Dubin 1992; Hall and Robertson 2001). However, the fallacy that art, or any cultural production, is *inherently* resistant, or innately “good” (when speaking from a lens of social activism or community service), is one that has permeated across disciplines dealing with ideas of art, and particularly among scholars and activists attempting to

facilitate socially-engaged art. Research defending the merit of artistic, community-based practices is often rife with assumption, and therefore often lacks direct and explicit commentary on the intentions and power relations that inform artistic practices involving communities. Much of this research assumes that art is inherently beneficial to individuals or that it innately builds community, and in doing so, reproduces collective social capital (Hall and Robertson 2001; Stein and Faigin 2015). However, this assumption can have detrimental impacts for already marginalized communities.

Socially-conscious subgenres of art in the field of artistic or cultural production—those disciplines which seek to connect art with society, community, social change, and/or political mobilization, and which often employ the power of symbolic cultural objects to express subcultures—such as public art, community-based art, co-created or collaborative art, and socially engaged art, often operate under this hegemonically-prescribed fallacy that art is inherently beneficial. Necessarily, the dominant class has intentionally prescribed and enforced this fallacy with the intention of preventing truly socially-engaged, community-based, and collaborative public art from coming to fruition. All too often, art initiatives that seek to subvert dominant definitions and structures inadvertently reproduce and reinforce them by adhering to the standards, boundaries, and processes which characterize the field (and were initially prescribed by the dominant class).

Arts initiatives, particularly those which seek to serve the community, thus run the risk of doing exactly what they desire not to: Reinforce the systems of oppression which subvert the marginalized populations that these projects seek to visibilize and represent. However, when conducted with intentionality, context-specificity, and a truly collaborative framework for community engagement, socially-engaged art has the potential to facilitate diverse, meaningful,

and vulnerable dialogue, which necessarily develops subcultures (Collins 2021; Fonseka et al. 2021; Asakura et al. 2019; Bublitz et al. 2019; Olsen 2019; Mulvey and Egan 2014; Lowe 2000; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Hall and Jefferson 1989). Among marginalized populations, the allowance of this type of open, empathetic dialogue has the capacity to catalyze new ways of thinking, doing, and living, which in turn allows us to exit the hegemonically-endowed and -enforced cultural narrative in search of our own.

So, then, how do well-meaning community members, artists, activists, educators, and organizers facilitate arts initiatives that serve the community and not the interests of the dominant class? Within a bureaucratic and prescribed institution for art production and approval, how does a community or an individual create art that does not subscribe to the hegemonic definition of “quality” art? Or to the norm of “production for profit”? Drawing from and combining the scholarship of several community sociologists and psychologists, I propose an intentional framework that guides activists and organizers towards a collaborative process of art-making as a strategy for community building, self expression, and the revalorization of emotion as essential to the intimacy that characterizes community. In order to outline this framework, I must first understand what it is that the framework seeks to build: What constitutes a community?

A New Framework for Community-Based Art

Definitions of Community

There are countless definitions of community: Some stress locality and proximity, others emphasize a common identity or struggle, but all include an important discussion of social capital (Hagel 2000, cited in Bublitz et al. 2019:316). Within a community, members exchange social capital and in doing so, increase their overall collectively-owned capital (Bourdieu

1983:21). For the purpose of examining the ways that arts based projects can build community, and thus build social capital, I employ the definition of community provided by Bublitz et al. in their framework for transformational, collaborative art. Bublitz et al. (2019:316) define community as “a ‘heterogeneous’ group of people with shared needs and values who come together in a specific geographic location to participate either singly or jointly in face-to-face collaboration with others with the goal to create an art-based community initiative.” However, importantly, no community is static. Rather, it is a process of social relations that is constantly in flux, constantly being redefined (Richardson and Bourdieu 1986; Nowak 2007; Staggenborg and Lang 2007:191). Just as the fields of power are constantly changing to accommodate new members and ideas, a community, like any group, also necessarily adapts to each additional member as the definition of the community expands to permit their entry.

In order to build community under the outline of this definition, intuitively, we assume a process of increasing understanding and intimacy in order to elucidate those necessarily “shared needs and values” and facilitate “face-to-face collaboration with others” (Bublitz et al. 2019:316, 323). Inherent in these general aspects of community is the need for open, vulnerable dialogue between diverse parties. Scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds assert the arts as uniquely situated to offer a space in which these meaningful interactions occur (Reisch and Sakamoto 2014; Bublitz et al. 2019; Thomas et al. 2014; Mulvey and Egan 2014; Lowe 2000; Nowak 2007).

Frameworks of Precedence

There are two key frameworks that have conceived of pivotal scholarship from which I drew inspiration when composing my own. Izumi Sakamoto draws on Yael Harlap’s seven meanings of social change in her analysis of socially-engaged art, and these definitions were

helpful when determining the ideal goals for a community arts project. Harlap deduces the following meanings of social change from 46 interviews with arts organizations and artists committed to socially-engaged art. The meanings are as following: (1) “Working towards equity and justice”; (2) “raising consciousness and awareness”; (3) “fostering individual empowerment and participation”; (4) “bringing people together and building relationships among individuals and groups”; (5) “creating dialogue”; (6) “giving voice and telling stories”; (7) “creating new visions and opening new imaginations for what the world could be” (Harlap 2006:223; Reisch and Sakamoto 2014:464-5).

In the context of community art for social change, these concepts of visibilizing personal experience, vulnerable unbridled dialogue, and the distinct value of social interaction, are essential to the process of community building. As community members engage in dialogue, they are able to collectively produce knowledge and in doing so, imagine new social realities (Collins 2021; Fonseka et al. 2021; Asakura et al. 2019; Bublitz et al. 2019; Olsen 2019; Mulvey and Egan 2014; Lowe 2000; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Hall and Jefferson 1989). These new social imaginaries, by virtue of their existence, subvert the dominance of the ruling class by questioning the hierarchy of class relations (the current social reality) which ensures their power. Within subcultural groups, oppressed populations, and marginalized communities, these strategies for promoting free expression and communal knowledge-building are particularly impactful in allowing hegemonically-divided, and thus politically-stunted groups to develop consciousness of their shared position in the dominated class. This consciousness, in combination with imaginatory and mutual conversation, has the capacity to encourage the collective mobilization of these groups against the ruling class.

Bublitz et al. offer a distinct, but similar framework for developing successful collaborative arts initiatives. Their framework focuses on the process of organizing a community art project, and thus was incredibly informative to my planning process. The authors outline five key stages to the community-based art initiative process: “(1) Community need identification; (2) engaged ideation; (3) collaborative art making; (4) shared celebration; and (5) amplify impact” (Bublitz et al. 2019:318). These processual steps highlight the importance of including community members in developing the goals for any community-based, collaborative project: Maintaining community-based leadership is an essential aspect of truly collaborative work (Bublitz et al. 2019:325; Mulvey and Egan 2014:125). Importantly, this framework also explicitly mentions celebration of the project as a crucial part of sustaining the movement and maintaining joy and excitement throughout the process (Bublitz et al. 2019; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Thomas et al. 2014).

This final aspect, the celebration of the project, became incredibly informative for my proposed framework. Drawing upon Patricia Hill Collins’ understanding of the devaluation of emotion in favor of empirical objectivity (Collins 2021:205), I assert this framework for community-based, collaborative art as a resistant strategy for re-valorizing emotion within communities as a necessary step towards intimacy, vulnerability, and the community-catalytic dialogue that follows. In this framework, I stress the necessity for site- and context-specific planning, as well as the dissolution of hierarchy between organizer and community member. Through explicitly accessible materials and organization, this framework facilitates imaginary dialogue between community members via the expression of personal experience and emotion. By allowing experiences and feelings to qualify as knowledge, new ways of thinking, knowing,

and doing evolve from these conversations, creating stronger, more inclusive, and more intimate communities through collaborative art-making.

A New Collaborative Strategy: Considerations and Ideals

In order to conceptualize a framework for collaborative, community-based art that is truly catalytic of community knowledge building, rather than merely reproductive of hegemonic systems of domination, we must consider a plethora of dangers which stand in the path towards truly grassroots-, community-based action.

Organizers who are interested in facilitating truly collaborative, community-based art must first acknowledge their position of power within the community: As outsiders to the community and/or researchers within the academic field, there is a systemic privilege to our knowledge, and a structural devaluation and invisibilization of alternative, non-academic epistemologies, like those which may characterize the communities we seek to serve (Fonseka et al. 2021:52-53; Olsen 2019:996). Scholars that seek to move away from the hegemonically-imposed standards of empirical objectivity contend that the positionality and the intentions of the organizer, or the scholar, cannot be separated from their productive outputs, i.e., the collaborative art project (Collins 2021:215; Staggenborg and Lang 2007:182). As researchers, acknowledging this position of privilege, and our inseparability from it, is the first step towards dismantling its impact on others.

Socially-engaged art, through the provision of comfortable, intimate environments, and the belief in the power of personal experience and emotion, allows this line between participant and researcher, community member and outsider, “intellect” and “ignorant,” to blur (Olsen 2019:996; Mulvey and Egan 2014:126). Further, involving community members as leaders in the project acknowledges their role as valuable contributors to the initiative, and thus, helps to

extinguish some of the impacts of the hierarchy of knowledge (Bublitz et al. 2019:325; Palmer 2018:80; Asakura et al. 2019:1064; Mulvey and Egan 2014:125).

Facilitators of truly collaborative, community-based art must also be aware of the cultural, economic, and social contexts within the community that they seek to serve. Hall and Robertson assert that public art initiatives which attempt to serve entire cities often essentialize the myriad cultures which coexist at any one point in the locality of a city (Hall and Robertson 2001:21). Instead, socially-engaged art projects, by nature of their definition, must engage with the specific “social and cultural concerns” of the community they seek to visibilize (Olsen 2019: 986). Organizers must “know the site and its particular public” (Palmer 2018:73) when coordinating a community arts project, in order to avoid the trap of relativism and essentialization, and to ensure that their project (in product and process) speaks to the specific community engaged in its conception (Hall and Robertson 2001:14; Olsen 2019:996; Mulvey and Egan 2014:124; Thomas et al. 2014:75). The impact of this context- and site-specificity is that community members feel represented by the project, and thus valued in their contribution; their personal experience is thereby validated as legitimate knowledge to provide. In turn, the product of their labor and love reflects the community itself and can stand as a significant cultural symbol of civic engagement and belonging to a group.

The final consideration that I will mention in regards to community-based art is the issue of accessibility. Scholars concur that art is a relatively accessible medium for self expression. Although the interpretation and creation of art that will fit within the hegemonic canon of “quality” production requires a level of cultural capital, creating art at low stakes and without the parameters of the canon is incredibly accessible to communities of varying ages and language differences (Fonseka et al. 2021:49; Lowe 2000:375). However, this issue of accessibility is not

only relevant to the medium of expression (art), but also applies to the recruitment of participants to this sort of project. To this end, Doug McAdam (1968) offers an essential conceptualization of the varying levels of dangers and costs associated with lower-risk social action, such as creating a community mural. McAdam asserts that in order to recruit participants to certain social movements, particularly lower-cost, lower-risk activity, one may employ a strategy for recruitment which further lowers the costs (“expenditures of time, money, and energy”) and risks (“anticipated dangers”) of involvement (i.e. make it more accessible) to interested agents in order to encourage involvement (McAdam 1968:67). According to this strategy for recruitment, organizers can attract higher levels of participation if they intentionally make it less expensive—in time, money, and energy—as well as safer for community members to become involved in the project. By employing this strategy, collaborative arts initiatives have the potential to become more accessible to their communities, and thus encourage more diverse involvement from members.

Ideally, a framework for collaborative community art, particularly within marginalized communities, will seek to foster a warm, welcoming, and accessible environment that validates emotions and personal experience (Collins 2021:215; Bublitz et al. 2019:316; Mulvey and Egan 2014:125; Lowe 2000:374; Nowak 2007:14). Within this environment, open and vulnerable dialogue between community members is possible and will lead to collective knowledge-sharing, and subsequent redefinition and reimagination of current social relations (Collins 2021:212; Reisch and Sakamoto 2014:464; Harlap 2006:223; Fonseca et al. 2021:45-47; Asakura et al. 2019:1072; Olsen 2019:987,993; Mulvey and Egan 2014:115; Lowe 2000:371; Staggenborg and Lang 2007:178). With a growth of collective knowledge (via the exchange of personal stories), these processes will lead to stronger, more empathetic and inclusive communities, which will in

turn foster a long-standing, sustainable sense of belonging in and ownership over the community (Hall and Robertson 2001:12; Bublitz et al. 2019:324-325; Fonseka et al. 2019:55; Thomas et al. 2014:77). The hope is that this sense of belonging will encourage future involvement and care for the community (Averett et al. 2015:319; Palmer 2018:80), reproducing its social capital and thus, the impacts of the arts project.

By employing the strategies for process organization suggested by Bublitz et al., I propose a framework for community-based, collaborative, socially-engaged art which highlights the value of personal experience and emotion, and applies these alternative ways of knowing to inherently personal dialogues, which, through their validation of personal experience, also facilitate intimacy, vulnerability, and closeness within the community. This closeness, ideally, will lead to further action within the community, and thus, will enable the sustenance of the movement.

METHODOLOGY

Initial Steps: Finding an Organization

Social and Cultural Capital: Connections to Access

When I initially sought out to facilitate a collaborative, community-based arts initiative, I saw this project as an opportunity to fund and support local, underrepresented, and subsequently essential, community-based organizations in Colorado Springs. Colorado College (CC) is notorious in the Springs for its lack of connection to the larger community, and I saw this project as an opportunity to bridge that gap by redistributing some of the extensive resources of the College to the surrounding city. I considered a couple of organizations in the Springs when deciding whom to reach out to, and importantly, I maintained alternative options throughout the initial networking process, because I was unsure whether this project would ever come to

fruition—it seemed to be in flux for the first several months as I navigated the back-and-forth of digital communication that seemed to be inevitable in this type of formal collaboration. The mere act of picking up the phone was incredibly intimidating at first, and took months to initiate, but the fact that I was eventually able to do it indicated to me that I possess a form of invisible cultural capital which facilitated my ability to cold-call organizations and pitch my project concept. As a result of this capital possession and my subsequent ability to reach out to organizations with minimal anxiety, I ultimately sought out, and was able to find organizations that were particularly local, and which supported marginalized populations.

Of course, because I was seeking out organizations that represented marginalized groups, there was an important question of whether I should be granted access to the community. To allow an outsider, and particularly an academic outsider, to come into a community with a project such as this one held precedented risks for the community: What were my intentions? Would I exploit the personal experiences of the people I sought to serve? Was I thinking critically about the systems and structures of domination that often color community-based research? These questions were particularly present in the conversations I had with staff members at Inside Out Youth Services, the organization that eventually agreed to collaborate with me on the mural.

Inside Out Youth Services (IOYS) is an organization devoted to supporting LGBTQIA2+ youth in Colorado Springs. Through programmed events and drop in hours, Inside Out has cultivated a safe community for queer kids in a city that has historically and contemporarily marginalized LGBTQIA2+ citizens. (For a deeper analysis on the contextual precedence of oppression against queer folks in Colorado Springs, please see Appendix A.) In response to the hostile environment throughout much of Colorado Springs, IOYS offers resources to young

people that encourage identity exploration, safe sexual activity, a healthy transition to adulthood, and in cases such as those youth who rely on IOYS for access to a food pantry, sleeping bags, and tents, Inside Out supports the survival of young LGBTQIA2+ people in the Springs. Thus, in contrast to its surrounding community-context, Inside Out is an oasis for queer and questioning youth in the city.

Due to Inside Out's status as a community for LGBTQIA2+ youth in the Springs, the question of whether I was a safe person to allow into the space was particularly important to whether I would be given access to the community throughout this project. Fortunately, Colorado College has numerous connections to IOYS, making it a particularly approachable community to me, even as an academic outsider—the sociology department has done research on behalf of the organization for years, and many CC graduates have gone on to work with Inside Out following their academic career—these connections between Colorado College, Inside Out, and the sociology department specifically, made the organization relatively accessible to me as a CC sociology student, and I believe had some impact in fostering a sense of trust between myself and the staff members who assisted me in the beginning phases of the project. Further, because I identify as a bisexual woman, I immediately recognized and related to the beneficial services provided by Inside Out to queer youth in the Springs: I saw IOYS as an organization I would have benefitted greatly from as a young person questioning my sexuality. My possession of this cultural and social capital as it pertains to the subculture at Inside Out Youth Services (academic connections to the organization as well as my identity as a bisexual woman) allowed me faster and closer access to the community, and thereby allowed me to integrate myself more effectively into the group, permitting the facilitation of a more inclusive, collaborative, grassroots process.

In addition to the fact that I, personally, possess the cultural and social capital necessary to connect me to the organization, my project itself also held relevant cultural symbolism for Inside Out Youth Services; not only does Inside Out believe in the power of art (as is demonstrated by the various arts-based programs they offer, such as “Poetry is Healing” and “Doodle and Talk”), but in addition, one of the staff members assisting me with the project had a background in community-based art, which made the project both attractive and attainable to the organization by way of this educational commonality and shared belief in the power of collaborative creative expression.

Inside Out Youth Services: An Oasis in the Springs

Site and Setting

Regardless of my personal, relevant capital possession and the ways in which that allowed me to enter the community at IOYS, Inside Out was already an incredibly welcoming environment. When I walked into Inside Out for the first time, I was overwhelmed by the warmth and kindness that radiated from both the space and its staff members. I was attending drop in hours on a Friday: Twice a month, this time is specifically allotted for “Doodle and Talk,” a program centered around drawing and chatting, which the adult staff members I was working with thought was tailored to my project. I was given a name tag, like everyone else that entered the building, and asked to write my pronouns on the card along with what I’d like to be called. Everyone that I passed used my name, and asked me how I was: Conversation was not difficult to foster. Youth participants slowly trickled in, and were greeted at the door with equally enthusiastic “hello!”s. A myriad of styles were represented among these young people—some embodied a distinctly goth aesthetic, others wore punk-related accessories, some wore pajama pants—everyone was welcomed in exactly as they came.

A staff member gave me a tour of the space. The front of the building included offices for day-time staff activities, a meditation room adorned with floor pillows and a softly lit lamp, and “The Fishbowl,” a windowed room with an enormous projector on which the young participants displayed “Discord” (a chatting service that is common to video gamers and allows Inside Out community members to engage remotely with the space during programmed and drop-in hours). Many of the walls were covered in brightly colored murals. In the back of the space, there was a large room with couches and televisions, and along the wall, a full service kitchen including a stocked food pantry. There was a gender neutral bathroom, and in the corner, the “gender-affirming closet.” The staff member showing me the space told me that any young person could come into Inside Out and take whatever they needed from the closet, food pantry, or the lockers near the front door, which were stocked with tents and sleeping bags.

When I used the bathroom, there were written notes on the mirror encouraging confidence and a sense of belonging: One read “that outfit is fire!” Another said, “we notice when you’re gone.” Flyers demonstrating how to test yourself for HIV/AIDS were displayed on the wall, and there were test kits provided next to the sink, along with tampons and other menstrual products. On the far wall of the main space, next to the gender affirming closet, there was a sign with a list of agreements for the IOYS community, which is also denoted on the organization’s website. (For the full list of these agreements, please see Appendix B.) Some of the messages included in this list are “ask before assuming,” “sober up before you show up,” “respect each other’s boundaries and drivers,” and “in a world where you can be anything, be yourself” (Inside Out Youth Services).

Although I could not stay as long as I wished during this initial program, I was struck by the warmth and comfort that radiated from the space. I immediately felt as if I belonged, and

even as an academic outsider, I was welcomed in with open arms. However, it was not inevitable that I would be included into this tight-knit and somewhat vulnerable community. The initial conversations I had with staff members carried a palpable air of caution: They asked about not only the logistics of the project, but also its concept, and my intentions with the project as a whole. I was aware of the fact that I was being carefully vetted as a potentially harmful or exploitative outsider, so I assured them throughout those initial conversations, as well as demonstrated to them through my behavior in the space, that I sought to decenter myself throughout this project and employ a strategy for ethical and humanizing community-based engagement. Because I moved through the initial process of this project with such care and caution (for example, I emailed one of the staff members after my first visit to ensure that I would be welcome in the space in the future), staff members at Inside Out granted me access to the community by allowing me to continue attending programs at IOYS.

Revelations: Process over Product

The second time that I attended “Doodle and Talk,” after confirming that I would be welcomed back into the safe space at Inside Out, I was greeted by the same warmth and acceptance. In the face of new political initiatives aimed at destabilizing and delegitimizing transgender people’s experience in the U.S. (such as current discriminatory policies around trans youth in Texas schools), there was an air of sadness that hung over the initial conversations I had with staff members. However, although we began by discussing current events, we ended our conversation with gratitude for the space that Inside Out has cultivated—we agreed that IOYS is a necessary, albeit rare, community within the Springs, and shared how lucky we felt to have found it. Despite the very real circumstances that colored those initial conversations, they ended in positivity: We shared ideas of an imagined world without oppressive policies, one where

therapeutic practices and communities like the one fostered at Inside Out are widespread and accessible to all.

When I began doodling as part of the “Doodle and Talk” program, these conversations around current events did not carry into the activity. Instead, they were interrupted by the distinct joy that colored new, arts-based interactions. We were initially seated in The Fishbowl, but as more participants arrived and there were not enough seats, we immediately relocated to the back room where there was enough space for everyone who wanted to draw. We were given colored pencils, pens, markers, scissors, and large sheets of sketch paper, which we sat around in a circle. We all began doodling separately, working on individual visions for our artistic creations, but quickly, we became interested in one another’s work. The drawings grew sillier as we began interacting over the art, complimenting what we did well and offering suggestions for what to add. After a short period of independent drawing, we began working on one doodle together: One of the young participants suggested that we create one figure, passing around the pen to add limbs and accessories. The end products were not serious, they were playful, and they were tangible examples of what we had been able to complete through collaborative creation. The playfulness that rang through this activity struck me as pivotal to our enjoyment of the process, and to the collaborative turn that the activity took. Because the stakes were so low—we were just doodling!—we were able to truly enjoy the act of art-making without specific regard to the actual art product that emerged.

I began thinking about doodling as a powerful divergence from the hegemonically endowed standards for artistic production: Doodling does not end in “quality” art, in the sense of the ruling class’ distinction of “quality” or “legitimate” art, nor is it based around profit (which the capitalist dominant class necessarily values above all else [Marx and Engels 1932]), doodling

is instead centered around the activity itself. After seeing doodling's potential to allow truly free creative expression without consideration to the aesthetic "value" of the art ("value" denoting the hegemonic class' selective recognition and valorization of certain types of art), I began to consider doodling as a strategy for undermining the hegemonically prescribed "legitimate" definitions of art, and thereby, as a compelling subversive tool for non-dominant populations. As is clarified in the literature review, the ability to assert alternative ideologies, or standards for evaluation and legitimation, allows dominated populations to also assert alternative tastes, which inherently subvert the omnipotence of the dominant class' distinction of "quality." By asserting doodling as a valid form of art, even though, or perhaps *because*, it does not adhere to the norms of artistic production as are imposed by the ruling class, I saw the potential for doodling to subvert the hegemonic standards for "quality" art in favor of a new characterizing ideology: One that favors process over product, and community over profit. Further, the lighthearted nature of this low-stakes activity demonstrated to me that doodling had the potential to act as a tool for facilitating comfortable, joyful, and open interactions, and thus, as a powerful strategy for building community through the exchange of personal experience and knowledge.

This realization prompted a distinct turn in my project. Before, I considered myself an outside artist with the intention of bringing this community's vision to life: I imagined a process of focus groups, followed by my independent construction of our collaboratively-designed mural. After spending time at IOYS and beginning to feel like part of the community, I realized that my prescribed processual plan for the project was not nearly inclusive nor collaborative enough to radically depart from the structures of hierarchy which innately separated me from the youth participants at Inside Out. I was still adhering to, and thus reinforcing, ideas of what made "quality" art in the taste of the dominant class, and my initial plan for the project was informed

by those standards. However, I quickly realized through this collaborative doodling that the end product was largely unimportant to me, to the community, or to the intention of this project. In fact, to submit to the hegemonic standards of “quality art” would be an adherence to the power structures of domination that I intentionally sought to subvert and deny. If the ideal outcome was to build community and facilitate dialogue, the actual art *product* was irrelevant, and instead, what became essential to this project was the *process* of creation.

Applying Realizations

Removing the Distance of Hierarchy

This realization of the power of process turned my project on its head. Instead of creating a mural *for* Inside Out, I began to think about what it might look like to create one *together*. I updated the program coordinators who were supporting me at Inside Out, and informed them of my ideas about horizontal, non-hierarchized collaboration, the joy of art-making, and the power of process over product. They offered me an exciting opportunity, which, with regards to the hierarchization of knowledge production, allowed me to blur the boundaries between IOYS and myself even further: Inside Out staff members offered me the option to enroll as a young adult participant at the organization, a position which would allow me significantly more freedom in terms of when I came in to the space, what I did there, and the level at which I had to be supervised by a staff member. I saw this possibility of actually joining the IOYS community as an opportunity to further remove the hierarchy of knowledge which inherently distanced myself, as a student at Colorado College, from the LGBTQIA2+ youth participants at Inside Out. By becoming a peer leader and also a participant in the process of creating a piece of collaborative art, I would be able to remove some of the boundaries which privilege my knowledge and experience and delegitimize that of youth participants.

Avoiding Exploitation and Essentialization

With regards to the consideration of site- and context-specificity, I was intentional in choosing not to engage with the entire city of Colorado Springs through this project. Instead, I focused my energy on Inside Out Youth Services in order to more effectively and accurately serve their specific community. I had to be cognizant of avoiding the essentialization of Inside Out's space and public as a single unified community, but, choosing to focus on an organization means that the people involved in that organization follow the same agreements, rules for behavior, and overall cultural expectations, which, in practice, define the boundaries of a community. Further, following the definition of a community as prescribed by Bublitz et al., a community is any heterogenous group of people with shared needs and values who, in the context of an arts initiative, come together to create (Bublitz et al. 2019:316). By nature of its status as an organization specifically oriented towards supporting LGBTQIA2+ youth in the Springs, and thus, due to its common needs and values, IOYS can certainly be characterized as a heterogeneously-composed and loosely-defined community, which I felt I could more accurately and ethically represent in this project, as opposed to attempting to engage the entire city of Colorado Springs.

Although my initial plan for the project included a massive, public mural in the Springs, I quickly realized that the process for public art approval is incredibly bureaucratic, and adheres to many of the power structures for commissioning "quality" art which I intended to distance myself from throughout this project. In addition, visibilizing a marginalized population, especially in the Springs, an uncondusive and historically unaccepting environment, could be a dangerous initiative. The precedence of the Woodland Park High School mural informed my shift away from art that is public to all, to art that is public to its intended audience: In June of

2021, a Woodland Park High School senior took part in a tradition of students decorating the walls of the art wing with murals. This student chose to depict two women kissing, which was met with resistance and outrage from parents and other community members (Barnas 2021). Following the larger community's backlash against this depiction, Woodland Park High School painted over the mural. I imagined the frustration, anguish, and shock that must have clouded this student's emotions when they heard of the removal. Despite the fact that there were no media statements taken from this student, the trauma and pain that I could imagine accompanying this explicit act of silencing and erasure informed the continued process of my project. (See Appendix A for further discussion of this incident.) I began to consider the risks inherent in visibilizing a marginalized community, and how the removal, vandalism, or overall unacceptance of a mural created by youth participants at IOYS could be traumatic to those young people invested and involved in its creation.

In the larger Colorado Springs community, there was no guarantee that the same kind of silencing and erasure wouldn't occur if Inside Out chose to visibilize their community's experience. In conversation with one of the staff members assisting me, we decided it may be more impactful, and significantly less risky and costly, to create the mural in the IOYS building, rather than outside where it would be accessible to all. Because IOYS will most likely eventually move to a larger space, we also considered the idea of a portable, temporary mural, constructed on large boards or canvas, which could move with the organization and facilitate literal, as well as symbolic, ownership over the piece. This decision to create the mural within the IOYS building also speaks to the issue of accessibility for participation: By facilitating the creation of the mural within an already comfortable and easily-frequented location, this collaborative project

could be less expensive (in time, travel, resources) to the participants, as well as less risky (no threat of vandalism or potential removal of the mural) (McAdam 1968).

A final consideration, one that I did not explicitly include in my ideal framework for collaborative community-based art, is particularly important to address when working with marginalized populations. Often, social justice, artistic, and/or political initiatives that seek to visibilize and represent oppressed groups use the personal experience of the population with benign, if not good, intentions. However, as academics and outsiders to these marginalized groups, organizers of such initiatives run the risk of appropriating oppressed experience and exploiting it for personal gain. Organizers who engage in this work are likely to be recognized for their community-based activism, and in the context of academic research, as is the scope of this project, scholars often benefit through institutional and monetary benefits via publication. In order to avoid this potential exploitation of, and profit from, the experiences, emotions, and labor of a marginalized group such as the LGBTQIA2+ population in Colorado Springs, I wanted to ensure that this project was participant-led and, further, compensatory to those who chose to engage with the construction of the mural. I included the cost of stipends for participants in my budget proposal to Colorado College, allocating a significant portion of my budget for the project to reimburse those young people who spent their time and labor on the project.

Framework in Praxis

With consideration to the specific and contradicting contexts of Inside Out Youth Services vs. the surrounding Colorado Springs environment, as well as with the learned lessons of beneficiary play, and true, horizontal collaboration, I sought to facilitate an event for collaborative art-making at Inside Out with the intention of subverting hegemonic standards for artistic production. In turn, this project could allow for truly free creative expression and thus,

the development of a stronger and more empathetic community through mutual sharing of personal experience and collective knowledge production among participants.

Following the framework outlined in the literature review, I organized this collaborative project with the intentions of (1) revitalizing emotion and personal experience as valid forms of knowledge, (2) facilitating dialogue and collective knowledge production through the mutual sharing of experience, and (3) fostering a sense of belonging which would amplify the impact of this project. Beginning with the first intention, revitalizing emotion, I saw doodling as a unique and somewhat disguised strategy for facilitating open and mutual sharing of emotion and experience.

Experience and Emotion: Revalidating the Delegitimized

In the initial “Doodle and Talk” programs that I attended, I noticed that doodling carried a distinct joy which colored the interactions surrounding the activity. Doodling seemed to me to be uniquely positioned to foster comfortable, easy dialogue, often around lighthearted topics; there was so much laughter that accompanied the activity. In theory, to employ doodling in the construction of the mural could be a strategy for fostering the light-hearted, warm environment which seemed necessary, according to the literature, in building supportive and intimate communities. In the context of Inside Out, which supports LGBTQIA2+ youth in the Springs, and thus represents a marginalized population, I saw the facilitation of joy within this activity as not only a tool for building community, but also as a potent divergence from the oppressive realities that many young queer people face. By allowing *joy* to color interactions around the mural construction, doodling, and this project as a whole, could act as a strategy for these young people to heal from previous experiences of oppression, or otherwise traumatic realities resulting from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender. This mural project could serve as a

moment of relief, allowing young LGBTQIA2+ people to freely create in a way that is playful and fun.

With joy and play in mind, I planned to host an event at Inside Out Youth Services through which the doodle mural would be constructed collaboratively in the space. I worked with the organization to set a date for the event which was conducive to staff scheduling, and together, we decided to host the event during one of the weekly Recreation Nights held on Friday evenings. Recreation Nights at Inside Out generate a strong attendance from young IOYS community members (these programs are specifically meant for high schoolers, aged 13-18 years old), and thus, hosting the event during a Recreation Night was a convenient opportunity to lower the cost of participation in the project, as many young people would already be in the space. In addition, Recreation Nights usually offer a couple of different activities to the young participants who come into the space, allowing for people to opt in or out of any given activity. Further, by nature of its name, “recreation,” or fun, is a fundamental aspect of these evening programs. For these reasons, hosting the mural-making event during a Recreation Night would frame the activity in a lens and precedent of play and overall fun, which was essential to the conceptual and theoretical components of this project.

Before the event, I prepared the mural so that it would be conducive to joyful interaction, and also accessible to anyone at IOYS who wanted to participate. As an artist, I knew how intimidating a blank canvas could be, but also wanted to leave the mural as incomplete as possible, so as to allow for unique and unbridled contribution from participants. I painted a simple geometric background on each of the two three-by-six-foot wooden boards, color-blocking it into sections, and leaving ample space for additions. In one of the corners, I began some prompting doodles in order to exemplify ways that participants could engage with

the mural, drawing inspiration from Keith Haring and John Burgerman, two mural artists who employ incredibly legible doodle styles in their work. I was nondiscriminatory in terms of the materials I provided to participants so as not to hierarchize any form of artistic production over another: I offered magazine clippings and textured paper, as well as paint, felt-tip pens, markers, and other drawing supplies. The mural was left intentionally open-ended, and I did not prescribe any standards for its production with the hopes of enabling organic interactions between participants and with the piece.

During the actual construction of the mural, I saw the ways in which my facilitation of open-ended and uncensored doodling spurred playfulness, and in turn, joy, amongst participants. The program began with small-group introductions, led by IOYS staff members. There were 32 young people in attendance between the ages of 13 and 18 years old, and about seven staff members and volunteers who supported me in the process and also took part in the activity. In the initial check-in, participants were asked to share their name, pronouns, age, and whether they would like to be or own a dragon, if given the chance. Already, the evening began in a light of playfulness as we debated the benefits and costs that may accompany the ownership of a mythical beast.

After we were all familiar with one another, I briefly described the materials, and explained the purpose of my attendance and of the project itself. I clarified the open-ended nature of this activity and assured the participants that there was no “right” way to complete the mural. After a moment of apprehension, the room erupted in energy as nearly everyone began gathering supplies and standing around the large panels of wood. As participants began to engage with the mural, they also engaged as a community: Laughter and loud voices crossed the room with explanations of individual drawings and mutual encouragement of completed work. The volume

of laughter demonstrated to me that many, if not all, of the participants were enjoying themselves and the activity. Participants did not shy from making mistakes, and often colored over their initial creations with paint to try again on top. They expressed excitement around the freedom of materials: Many of them asked if they could take some of the collaging materials home, and added objects they found around the space to the mural (i.e., folded origami frogs, googly eyes). On the mural, there were clear thematic references to love, acceptance, and happiness: Many students drew hearts or wrote messages such as, “you are loved.” (For images of the completed mural, please see Appendix C). Beyond the clear laughter, excitement, and joy, however, I noticed that as the evening progressed, participants began chatting about things unrelated to their contributions to the mural.

Facilitating Dialogue: Imagining New Realities

Following the literature, I predicted that the facilitation of joy through doodling would also foster open dialogue, which is an essential aspect of collective knowledge production, and thus, of the definition and solidification of community. In theory, because doodling was conducive to talking (as was evident in the “Doodle and Talk” programs), I expected that this mural would foster the comfortable and intimate environment that the literature deemed necessary to building community through collective knowledge production. Throughout the mural program, this predicted dialogue was evident, as conversation shifted from lighthearted topics to more vulnerable communication between participants.

Initially, the mural program inspired laughter, excitement, and a common, but individualized, task which provided a topic of conversation for participants to relate around. However, as the evening continued, participants’ doodling became more collaborative. Staff members and myself were able to encourage more collaboration by adding large drawings with

which participants could creatively interact (via additions to or erasures of the initial doodle). These larger outlines and sketches inspired participants to make mistakes, draw over previously created works, and collaborate with one another's designs. As the doodling became more collaborative, I noticed that conversations between participants also became more open and vulnerable. I noticed one encounter between two participants in which one young person shared their sexual orientation, but the other youth was unaware of what the identifying term meant. Then, a beautiful example of peer education occurred: The first young person explained clearly and patiently how they identified, and the initial participant who asked for clarification was given the opportunity to learn about their peer and about different identities. From the other side of the table, a different youth participant expressed that they also identified as that sexual orientation. Both young people exclaimed in delight over the fact that they had found this commonality, and found that they also shared a common gender identity.

In another interaction, I heard a volunteer share with the group of young participants that, as a child, they had aversions to certain colors because of gendered connotations. The adult volunteer shared with the group that as they've aged and learned, they realized that this form of rebellion was actually a subconscious subversion of gender roles from a very early age. Many of the youth participants related to this sentiment, nodding their heads in agreement. I overheard another interaction in which one participant taught another how to blend colors using acrylic paint, while the other explained the correct technique for applying Mod-Podge glue.

There was a varying level of vulnerability characterizing the interactions I observed during this mural event: Some participants isolated their conversations to the mural task in front of them, others shared personal details about their lives, while still others did not speak at all, and merely listened to the cacophony of knowledge production occurring amongst their peers. In

each of their ways, however, participants contributed to the sense of comfort and acceptance which permitted such variable levels of vulnerability among community members.

Through this program, it became evident to me that arts projects such as this one, by offering a grounding activity (collaborative mural project) without the constraining parameters of commissioned or “quality” art, or in other words, by offering a common goal without prescriptions for its completion, this sort of open-ended task is particularly conducive to facilitating conversation which, in the right settings, has the potential to evolve into more vulnerable and intimate dialogues through which communities are built, and culture is created.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging: Ownership and Investment

Open-ended dialogue, in combination with the warmth and joy that characterizes collaborative doodling, has the potential to allow for new interpersonal connections to form between participants. With intentional facilitation (that acknowledges structures of power and the hierarchy of knowledge), and in a warm and comfortable environment such as Inside Out, these new connections can be incredibly positive, creating higher levels of comfort and closeness within the community. This feeling of belonging in the community, via the sense of closeness and comfort with other members, has the capacity to amplify the impact of the mural activity by inspiring future involvement and investment in the community. By inspiring ownership over the mural through truly horizontal collaboration, I hoped that the effect of this project would expand into sustained interactions within the community.

At the end of the program, I noticed that as participants trickled out of the space, there was still a considerable amount of chatting that occurred near the doors. Participants didn't seem ready to leave, and spent 10 to 30 minutes idling by the door, admiring the completed murals, and opening their “swag bags,” which were filled with art materials and other compensatory gifts

meant to reimburse participants for their labor on this project. The sustainability of this project's impact is largely immeasurable, but, if the dialogue that ensued during and continued after the activity is any indication, young participants built relationships through their construction of this mural—with their peers, with new art materials, with staff members, and with me.

Although the impact of the mural is somewhat isolated to the Friday evening on which the program took place, these murals, in their three dimensional permanence, may serve as an enduring reminder of the activity and the lessons learned through collaborative art-making. Each time that participants see the mural in Inside Out, they will remember the excitement and joy surrounding the activity, and will point out their individual contributions with pride. Like a community which shifts and expands to allow new individuals entry, each contribution to the mural changed its meaning and overall composition. Participants will be able to see clearly the ways that their personal labor gave rise to a larger product, but more importantly, they will remember the interactions that accompanied the mural's construction. In this way, creating something tangible together, like a mural, allows the finished product to act as a reminder of its process, and thus, also acts as a reminder of one's personal belonging to the community that created it.

Although it would be informative to attempt to assess the long-standing impact of this project on Inside Out Youth Services and the community members who participated, this type of evaluation is not only nearly impossible within the time constraints that characterize a thesis, but also denies one of the fundamental aspects of this analysis, which intends to subvert the hegemonic standards for "objective" or "empirical" research. By choosing not to quantify, evaluate, or track the impact of this project, I am choosing to leave it as a moment in this organization and in those individuals' lives. Undoubtedly, relationships were formed during that

program, however, the sustainability of these relationships (i.e., whether participants are able to reconnect, whether they have continued access to IOYS) is largely dependent on factors that are entirely personal and human, and thus, uncontrollable and innately subjective. However, one way that I was able to amplify the impact of this project was through the “swag bags” I provided to participants. These bags included general self-care and gender-affirming items such as warm socks and nail polish, but the bulk of items provided to participants through these bags were art-related supplies such as sketchbooks, pencils and collaging materials. By including these relevant compensatory gifts in the bags, I hoped that even though the programmed event would not continue past that Friday, the experience of creating it could expand to influence the everyday lives of those young people who participated by way of their continued access to the materials we used during the program.

DISCUSSION

Due to the careful procedure outlined in my proposed framework, I was able to facilitate a largely successful community art event at Inside Out Youth Services. By approaching the project with a critical mindset and a reflexive lens, I intended to engage the community at IOYS ethically and responsibly throughout this project. Their continued acceptance of me in their safe space demonstrates that I was able to conduct this process respectfully, and further, form meaningful relationships with youth and staff members at the organization. Not only did IOYS welcome me into the space repeatedly throughout this process, they also offered me additional opportunities for involvement, such as my initial enrollment as a young adult participant, as well as offering me the chance to continue assisting them with arts-based programs such as their “Queer Prom” decorating project. By thoughtfully attempting to integrate myself into the community, I was offered consistent support and enthusiasm from staff members, and I was able

to facilitate a project that was based around the culture of the IOYS community, and thus, more effectively engaged them in the construction of the mural.

Staff members agreed with my assessment of the event as successful. One staff member expressed to me at the end of the activity that the mural program had gone better than they'd ever expected. The laughter and conversations, as well as the overall air of joy and playfulness that accompanied the mural program indicates that this framework was successful in facilitating a warm and comfortable environment, which I assert as essential to community building. The varying levels of vulnerability within those interactions demonstrated the framework's potential to flexibly foster conversations that were more intimate, as well as those that remained lighthearted. I observed comfort increase over the course of the programmed evening, and as participants became more intimate with the mural, they also became more intimate with one another, collaborating more intentionally in the process of art-making, and sharing personal details of their identities, experiences, and lives. By providing a common goal over which to relate, but without parameters for the "right" way to accomplish this goal, participants were given the freedom to express themselves creatively. This creative expression expanded to encapsulate a freedom also of verbal expression, as participants became more open in their interactions, and thus, stronger as a community of individuals through the mutual sharing of experience and knowledge.

Ideally, for a project like this, I would have had more time to integrate myself responsibly into the Inside Out community. Although I was intentional in taking steps to ensure I did not appear as an implant in this safe and also relatively vulnerable community, I still did not have as much time as I would have ideally had to get to know the population and space at IOYS before beginning a project like this one. In addition, with more time, I would have been able to facilitate

multiple arts-based events in order to address different modes of creative expression and appeal to the myriad of strengths represented in this young community. With further research capacity, I also would have loved to develop an evaluative framework to assess the impact of this project in a way that does not reduce individual experiences to statistics. Further research should include qualitative evaluations, including interviews from staff members, participants, and third party observers (parents, teachers, etc.), which examine the longstanding impact of art-based projects on individuals and on communities, with specific consideration to the relationships which are formed during and withstand long after these events.

CONCLUSION

This reflexive, participatory research project asserts a new framework to inform the processes of organizing community-based arts initiatives. By intentionally taking into consideration obstacles such as context-specificity, accessibility, cultural essentialization, and the exploitation of marginalized populations, this framework seeks to build stronger, more intimate communities through the revitalization of experience and emotion, the subsequent facilitation of dialogue and collective knowledge building, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging within the community that sustains beyond the bounds of the specific project.

As is evident in this research, when community-based creative projects are conducted with intentionality, a belief in process over product, and a critical perspective which acknowledges structures of power and hierarchies of knowledge, arts-based initiatives have the distinct capacity to unite communities through the revitalization of joy and the facilitation of collective knowledge building. By interacting within a playful and accepting atmosphere which was specifically facilitated through the act of doodling, the interactions that occurred in this study between participants during collaborative art-making were incredibly positive. Through

these positive interactions, there is a palpable potential for community to be built and solidified as individuals see themselves as a part of a network of social connections.

Although my project was largely successful, there is so much potential for a project like this one, which engages a specific vulnerable community, to go terribly wrong: There is ample room for the organizer to take advantage of the labor and experience of the community and benefit individually without compensation to those laborers; there is the potential for the project to decay in impact and wither away into memory; there is a precedented risk of causing further harm to already marginalized populations by reinforcing the hierarchical structures which maintain their dominated positions in society. These risks are only mediated with intention and care. The framework I have proposed and implemented in this thesis offers a new precedent for this necessary level of care and intentionality. If community-based researchers employ this framework, or a similarly thoughtful one, when beginning their planning process, they will be pushed to consider the site and context of the specific population they seek to serve; to reflexively acknowledge the impact of their social class position on their research; they will actively avoid the exploitation of labor and the essentialization of experience. However, it is only through such intentionality that community-based research, as well as other forms of community engagement such as collaborative arts projects, can avoid reproducing cycles of harm and their ensuing oppressive social realities.

Although the framework I implemented in this study is distinct in some ways, it is bred from the same school of thought which informs a plethora of responsible research examining community engagement and the power of collaborative creative expression. However, this analysis stands apart in its refusal to submit to hegemonic standards for empirical research and the elusively impossible “objectivity.” Instead, this thesis gains its power from its subjectivity.

This analysis becomes more fruitful to future research when it is acknowledged as a direct, primary example of the grassroots-based, reflexive, context-specific, and ethical process for community building that the framework demands. By following this framework and precedence, future community-based research can be conducted with the community in mind, and ethically act as a catalyst for cultural development and solidification among the participatory population. By decentering the researcher, allocating resources from privileged institutions such as Colorado College, and considering the social contexts which inform the community involved, organizers of arts-based initiatives like this one have the capacity to empower, rather than appropriate, alternative subcultural knowledge production.

Communities are defined according to the collective knowledge produced in group dialogue—this dialogue may therefore be equated with the agency of the community to define themselves through the assertion of alternative epistemologies. Thus, by facilitating an event for collaborative art-making, this framework also facilitates an opportunity for individuals to converse, and thus, to build distinct definitions, standards, and imagined futures for their communities. However, as this new framework stipulates, this outcome may only be achieved through explicit intentionality to the structures of power which characterize the realm of social class relations, and thus, inform our actions in society and in the communities we seek to serve. Researchers and community organizers have the capacity to ethically and responsibly engage communities in research, but only when that research is conducted with the level of thoughtfulness, care, and caution that I model and precedent in this new framework for community-based arts initiatives.

Bibliography

- Asakura, Kenta, Jess Lundy, Dillon Black, and Cara Tierney. 2019. "Art as a Transformative Practice: A Participatory Action Research Project with Trans* Youth." *Qualitative Social Work* 19(5-6):1061–77.
- Averett, Paige, Allison Crowe, and Christina Hall. 2015. "The Youth Public Arts Program: Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Outcomes for at-Risk Youth." *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 10(3):306–23.
- Barnas, Lauren. 2021. "Woodland Park High School Paints over Student Mural of Two Women Kissing." *KRDO*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://krdo.com/news/2021/06/09/woodland-park-high-school-paints-over-student-mural-of-two-women-kissing/>).
- Bloom, Matt. 2019. "Colorado's Journey from the 'Hate State' to a Leader in LGBTQ Rights." *KUNC*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.kunc.org/politics/2019-06-14/colorados-journey-from-the-hate-state-to-a-leader-in-lgbtq-rights>).
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." *Poetics* 12(4-5):311–56.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. "Class Tastes and Life-Styles." Pp. 257–317 in *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brentzel, Chelsea. 2020. "Colorado Hate Crimes More than Double from 2018 to 2019." *KRDO*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://krdo.com/news/2020/08/07/colorado-hate-crimes-more-than-double-from-2018-to-2019/>).
- Bublitz, Melissa G. et al. 2019. "Collaborative Art: A Transformational Force within Communities." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 4(4):313–31.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2021. "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology." Pp. 201–19 in

- Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.*
London: Routledge.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches.* Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.
- Dubin, Steven C. 1992. Pp. 1–78 in *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions.* New York, NY: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Fonseka, Trehani M., Akin Taiwo, and Bharati Sethi. 2021. “Use of Arts-Based Research to Uncover Racism.” *Studies in Social Justice* 15(1):43–58.
- Hagel, John. 2000. “Net Gain: Expanding Markets through Virtual Communities.” *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 13(1):55–65.
- Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson. 1989. Pp. 1–153 in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain.* London: Unwin Hyman.
- Hall, Tim and Iain Robertson. 2001. “Public Art and Urban Regeneration: Advocacy, Claims and Critical Debates.” *Landscape Research* 26(1):5–26.
- Harlap, Yael. 2006. “Understanding the Domain of Arts and Social Change.” Pp. 223–26 in *Toward training: The meanings and practices of social change work in the Arts.* Vancouver: Canadian Council on Learning.
- Harner, John. 2021. “Amendment 2.” *CSPM*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.cspm.org/cos-150-story/amendment-2/>).
- Hebdige, Dick. 2011. *Subculture: the Meaning of Style.* London: Routledge.
- Human Rights Campaign. n.d. “Trump's Timeline of Hate - HRC.” *Human Rights Campaign.* Retrieved March 16, 2022 (<https://www.hrc.org/resources/trumps-timeline-of-hate>).

- Inside Out Youth Services. 2022. "Youth Programs." *Inside Out Youth Services*. Retrieved March 16, 2022 (<https://insideoutys.org/programs/>).
- Lowe, Seana S. 2000. "Creating Community." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 29(3):357–86.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1932. "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas." Pp. 61–67 in *The German Ideology*. New York, NY: International Publishers.
- McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1):64–90.
- Moreau, Julie. 2020. "Anti-LGBTQ Hate Groups on the Rise in U.S., Report Warns." *NBCNews.com*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/anti-lgbtq-hate-groups-rise-u-s-report-warns-n1171956>).
- Mulvey, Anne and Irene M. Egan. 2014. "Women Creating Public Art and Community, 2000-2014." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 55(1-2):115–27.
- National Building Museum. 2021. "Murals That Matter: Activism through Public Art." *National Building Museum*. Retrieved April 2, 2022 (<https://www.nbm.org/exhibition/murals-that-matter/>).
- Nowak, Jeremy. 2007. "Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Community Investment." *Culture and Community Revitalization: A SIAP/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration—2007-2009*. 2.
- Olsen, Cecilie Sachs. 2019. "Urban Space and the Politics of Socially Engaged Art." *Progress in Human Geography* 43(6):985–1000.
- Palmer, Joni M. 2018. "The Resonances of Public Art: Thoughts on the Notion of Co-Productive Acts and Public Art." *City & Society* 30(1):68–88.

- Politico. 2021. "Live Election Results: 2020 Colorado Results." *POLITICO*. Retrieved March 16, 2022 (<https://www.politico.com/2020-election/results/colorado/>).
- Prevention Institute. 2015. "Philadelphia Mural Arts Project." *Prevention Institute*. Retrieved February 24, 2022 (<https://www.preventioninstitute.org/profiles/philadelphia-mural-arts-project>).
- Reisch, Michael and Izumi Sakamoto. 2014. "The Use of the Arts in Promoting Social Justice." Pp. 463–79 in *Routledge International Handbook of Social Justice*. London: Routledge.
- Richardson, John G. and Pierre Bourdieu. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241–58 in *Handbook of theory and research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Pr.
- Schlatter, Evelyn. 2010. "18 Anti-Gay Groups and Their Propaganda." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2010/18-anti-gay-groups-and-their-propaganda>).
- Staggenborg, Suzanne and Amy Lang. 2007. "Culture and Ritual in the Montreal Women's Movement." *Social Movement Studies* 6(2):177–94.
- Stein, Catherine H. and David A. Faigin. 2015. "Community-Based Arts Initiatives: Exploring the Science of the Arts." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 55(1-2):70–73.
- Tabachnik, Sam. 2020. "Young Life Says It's for 'Every Kid, Everywhere.'" Ex-Participants in LGBTQ Community Say That's Never Been True." *The Denver Post*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.denverpost.com/2020/07/18/young-life-ministries-lgbtq-discrimination/>).
- The New York Times. 2017. "Colorado Election Results 2016." *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 16, 2022 (<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/colorado>).

- Thomas, Elizabeth, Sarah Pate, and Anna Ranson. 2014. "The Crosstown Initiative: Art, Community, and Placemaking in Memphis." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 55(1-2):74–88.
- Webber, Megan. 2020. "Southern Poverty Law Center Says Number of Anti-LGBTQ Groups Are Growing in U.S., with Four in Colorado." *The Denver Post*. Retrieved March 10, 2022 (<https://www.denverpost.com/2020/03/18/southern-poverty-law-center-hate-groups-colorado/>).
- Williamson, Vanessa and Isabella Gelfand. 2019. "Trump and Racism: What Do the Data Say?" *Brookings*. Retrieved March 16, 2022 (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/08/14/trump-and-racism-what-do-the-data-say/>).

APPENDIX A

A History of Oppressive Policies in Colorado Springs

Today, businesses and organizations that support LGBTQIA2+ rights have secured a place within the Colorado Springs community. However, the city, like the state of Colorado, has not always been friendly to marginalized populations such as the queer community; Colorado Springs, like the United States, has a long history of oppressive policies against LGBTQIA2+ citizens, and although it has evolved since its reputation as ground-zero for homophobia and transphobia, some populations within the city, as well as policies produced by it, continue to reproduce discriminatory realities. The following abridged index will chronicle some of the many national, state-based, and city-specific examples of oppressive policies in order to also demonstrate the cultural sentiments around LGBTQIA2+ citizens in Colorado Springs.

Although prejudice and discrimination against queer folks has been prevalent throughout the United States, Colorado gained its nickname as the “Hate State” (Bloom 2019) in 1992, when a group of Evangelical Christian fundamentalists from Colorado Springs proposed Amendment 2 to the Colorado Constitution. This measure sought to remove sexual orientation as an identity which should be protected from discrimination under the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution. To the surprise of queer Coloradans, the bill passed with a 53% majority. The Amendment was only annulled by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996, four years after its implementation (Harner 2021; Bloom 2019). Although the removal of Amendment 2 had some impact of delegitimizing Colorado’s reputation as the “Hate State,” Colorado, and in particular, Colorado Springs, continues to represent oppressive, anti-LGBTQIA2+ policy and practice.

Looking at more recent trends, in 2018, Colorado state law enforcement reported 127 hate crimes across the entire state, eleven of which occurred in Colorado Springs, and although

we can assume that these numbers are underestimated, the number of hate crimes in Colorado nearly doubled to 284 (with 17 in the Springs) in 2019. Seven (41%) of the seventeen hate crime victims in Colorado Springs were reportedly discriminated upon based on sexual orientation. In addition, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified 22 active hate groups in Colorado in 2019, two of which were based out of Colorado Springs and neighboring city, Pueblo, CO (Brentzel 2020; Webber 2020).

On a wider scale, across the United States as a whole, the SPLC saw a rise in the number of anti-gay hate groups from 49 in 2018 to 70 in 2019. This number increased dramatically from 2011, when the SPLC identified just 13 organizations across the United States as hate groups specifically intended to marginalize LGBTQIA2+ populations. One example of these hate groups, the Family Research Institute, is based out of Colorado Springs, and has published a myriad of pseudo-scientific studies related to the supposed dangers of homosexual men (Schlatter 2010). Although these studies are widely discredited, their existence demonstrates a cultural acceptance of homophobia within Colorado, and specifically within Colorado Springs.

The increased prevalence of hate groups across the United States coincides with Donald Trump's term as president, through which he inspired bigoted ideologies, and encouraged the resurgence of white supremacist, homophobic, and misogynistic groups. Data demonstrates that following the induction of Donald Trump as president of the U.S., hate crimes increased by their largest margin since September 11, 2001, and this higher rate of hate crimes continued through 2017 (Williamson and Gelfand 2019). With specific regards to LGBTQIA2+ rights, the Trump administration was instrumental in reversing democratic policies which protect trans youth in schools, beginning in 2017, when Trump reversed former President Barack Obama's Title IX Educational Amendment protecting trans youth from discrimination in educational institutions

(Human Rights Campaign). The reversal of protective policies and the increase in oppressive ones continued throughout Trump's presidency, and his legacy of normalized hate speech and violence against marginalized groups proliferates contemporarily. Voting data demonstrates that Colorado Springs is one of those cities which continued to support Donald Trump in the 2020 election, even after, or perhaps as a result of, witnessing his oppressive policies: In 2016, 56.2% of voters in El Paso County, where the Springs are located, voted for Trump (The New York Times). In 2020, this number stayed relatively constant, decreasing by only a slight margin to 53.5% (Politico).

One pivotal, and particularly relevant, modern example of anti-LGBTQIA2+ action in the Colorado Springs area occurred in June, 2021, when a Woodland Park High School student took part in the tradition of senior students painting murals in the art wing of the high school. This senior chose to depict two women kissing, but this subject matter was immediately met with resistance from the surrounding Woodland Park community, including parents of students at the high school, some of whom claimed this mural was indicative of inappropriate schooling topics, rather than free expression and creativity. As a result of this negative reception from the community, the student's mural was repainted and effectively erased (Barnas 2021).

Although there are countless examples of hate groups, policy actions, and cultural practices which have historically and continue to discriminate against LGBTQIA2+ populations, this exemplary, but abridged, index of Colorado Springs initiatives against queer folks indicates that there is still a widespread intolerance for LGBTQIA2+ citizens in Colorado Springs, and with the rise of Trumpism, across the United States as a whole.

APPENDIX B

“Brave/Safe Space Rules”

Below, please see Inside Out Youth Services’ “Brave/Safe Space Rules” as denoted on their website and posted in their space:

“Our brave and safe space rules help keep our community in healthy relationship to one another. All members of our community (youth, staff, and volunteers) are accountable to these, and we believe in a restorative/reparative justice approach to conflict resolution. Our rules ‘ouch, oops, educate’ and ‘respect other people’s personal boundaries’ center communication and the understanding that we are all in-process and capable of growth and change.

1. One mic, one diva
2. Ask before assuming
3. No haters, weapons, or violence
4. Sober up before you show up
5. Ask for consent before touching
6. Absolutely no bullying, harassing, or verbal abuse
7. Be a clean queen — clean up after yourself
8. What’s said here stays here, what’s learned here leaves here
9. Respect each other’s personal boundaries and drivers
10. Save the drama for your llama
11. Don’t do the humpty without protection
12. Be your selfie, not your cellphone (be present)
13. Don’t yuck my yum
14. In a world where you can be anything, be yourself

15. Pay it forward
16. Be radically inclusive
17. Hydrate before you die-drate
18. Ouch/oops/educate
19. Be kind to yourself' (Inside Out Youth Services).

APPENDIX C

Resultant Images of the Doodle Mural



Image 1. Completed Doodle Mural



Image 2. Left Panel



Image 4. Materials Provided to Participants

Link to Images: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KEYyAWeVusNFWWxMXMBMqjhi4EFLtcK1/view?usp=sharing>