


Health Equity in Music

For centuries, music has been the outlet through which communities have expressed and uplifted their culture.

Often, song and the poetry within it have amplified the voices of communities who face the most inequality and inequity. To celebrate **National Minority Health Month (NMHM)**, we explore instances of inequity in health highlighted by artists in their music.



What is Health Equity?

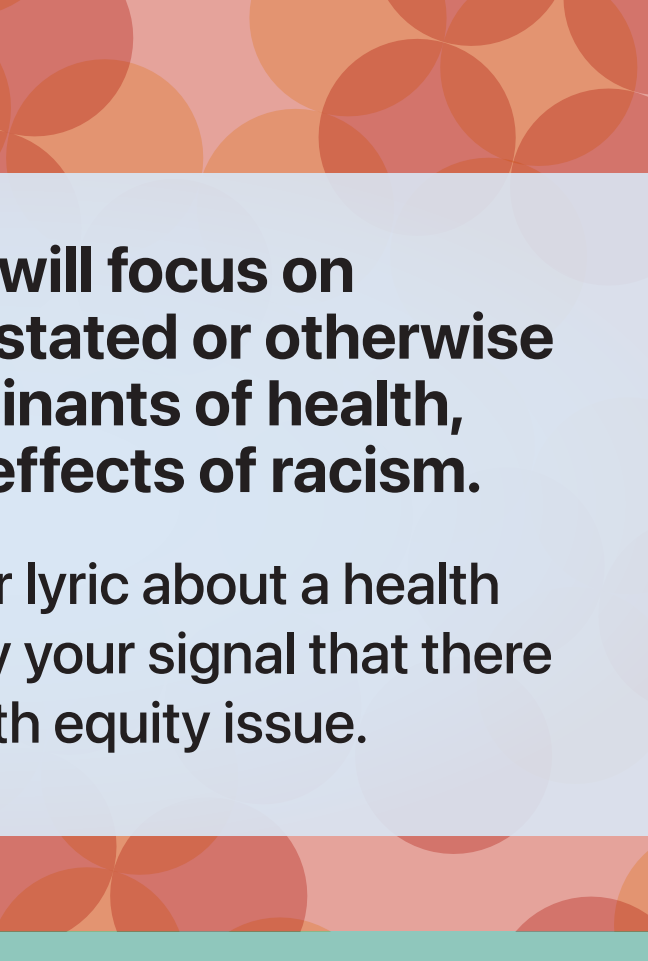
Health equity happens when everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.

Achieving Health Equity

Acknowledging and addressing historical and contemporary injustices

Overcoming economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare

Eliminating preventable health disparities



Societal Listening

Researchers often rely on insights and testimonials from patients, the public, and other advocates to better understand the factors that affect achieving health equity for those communities.

By analyzing instances of health inequity that artists draw attention to in their music, we can better understand how to acknowledge and address these complex issues, including non-medical factors that influence health outcomes.



In these exercises, you will focus on analyzing the issue for stated or otherwise apparent social determinants of health, health disparities, and effects of racism.

Keep in mind that a song or lyric about a health outcome or problem is only your signal that there may be an underlying health equity issue.

Social Determinants of Health

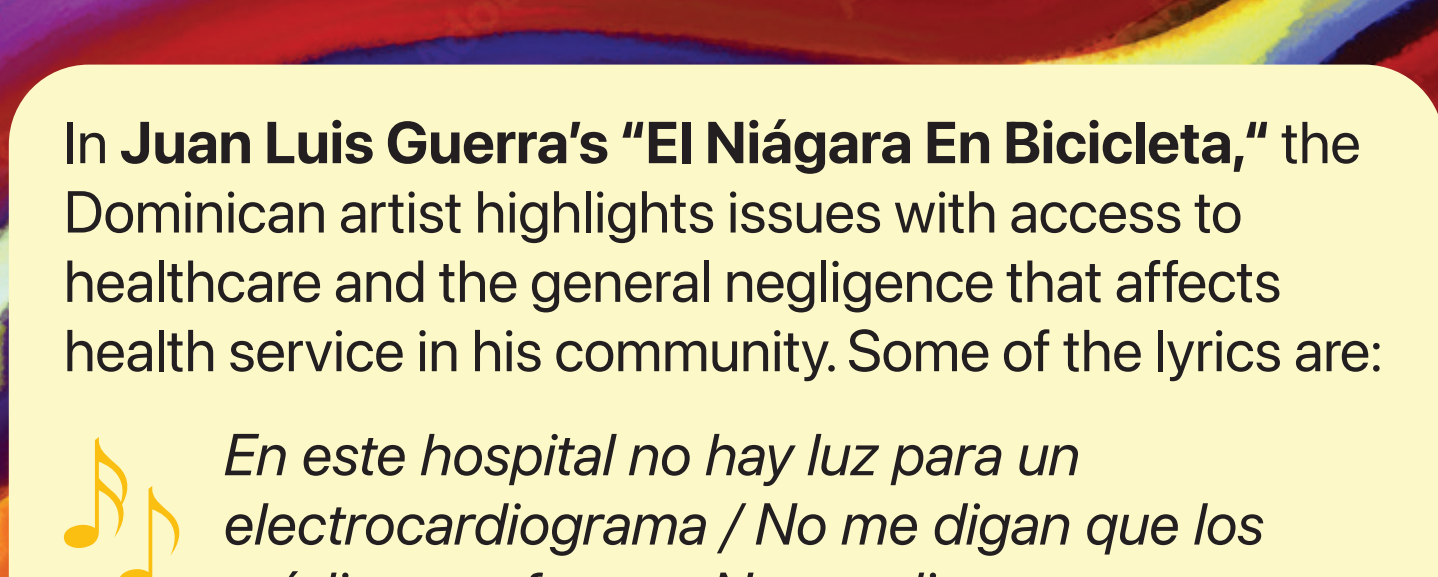


Social determinants of health (SDOH) are **non-medical factors that influence health outcomes**. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age.

SDOH include the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life, such as **racism, economic policies and systems, social norms, social policies, and political systems**. SDOH are linked to a lack of opportunity and resources to improve and maintain health, and include **past and ongoing injustices**, such as unethical practices.

- What SDOH affect the issue raised by the artist?
- What forces and systems may have contributed to the health inequity?
- Are there past and ongoing injustices that affect social norms or other forces?

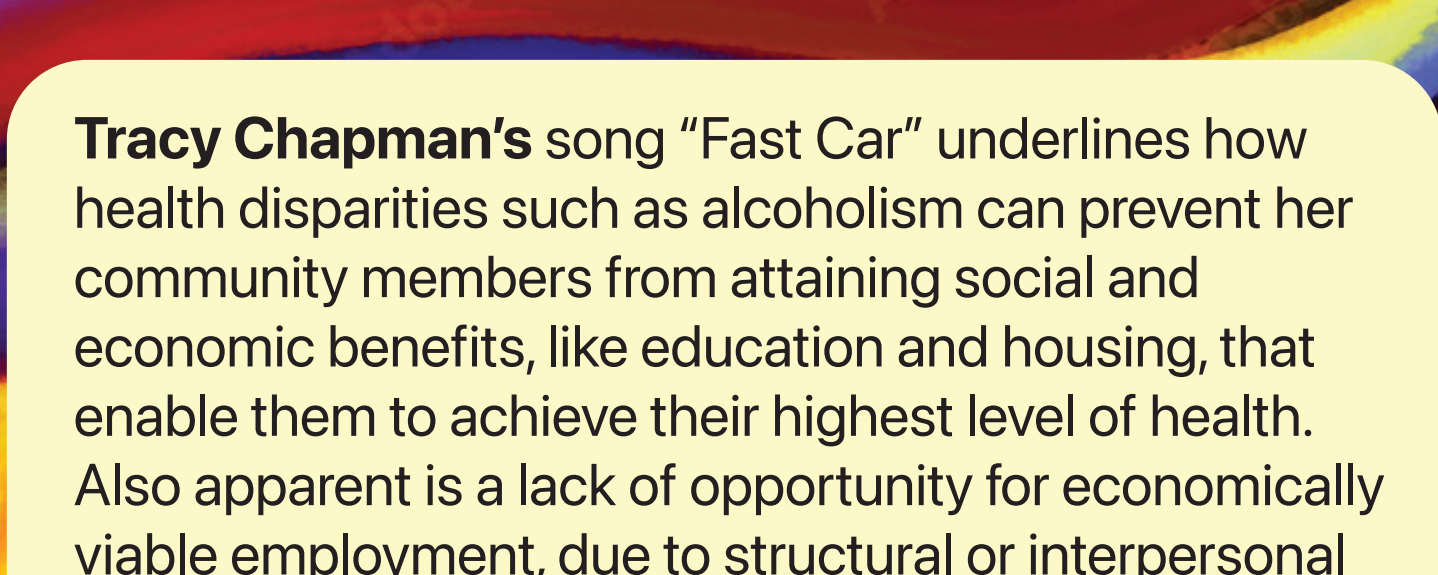
Health Disparities



Health disparity refers to a **greater occurrence of disease among certain populations** compared to others. Social determinants of health like poverty, unequal access to healthcare, lack of education, stigma, and racism are linked to health disparities.

- Does the artist refer to a health disparity, either directly or indirectly?
- What potential social determinants of the health disparity are stated?
- What other SDOH might impact the health disparity?

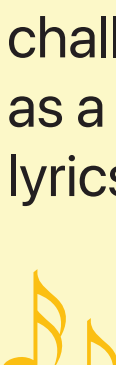
The Effects of Racism on Health Equity



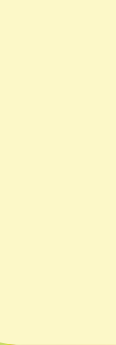
Racism negatively impacts mental and physical health. A long history of both interpersonal and structural racism has created inequity by **preventing access to a range of social and economic benefits**, such as housing, education, wealth, and employment. The ongoing lack of access to these benefits creates barriers to health.

- Is there a stated or otherwise apparent connection between racism and the health equity issue highlighted by the artist?
- How might racism both be a determinant of the health equity issue and perpetuate other negative social determinants of health?

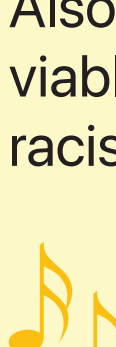
In **Juan Luis Guerra's "El Niágara En Bicicleta,"** the Dominican artist highlights issues with access to healthcare and the general negligence that affects health service in his community. Some of the lyrics are:

 *En este hospital no hay luz para un electrocardiograma / No me digan que los médicos se fueron, No me digan que no tienen anestesia*

English translation:

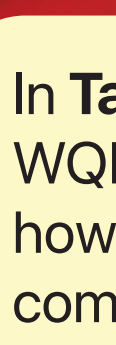
 *In this hospital there is no power for an electrocardiogram / Don't tell me that the doctors left, Don't tell me they don't have anesthesia*

Albert "Prodigy" Johnson's song "You Can Never Feel My Pain" details the Queens, New York artist's challenges and mistreatment in healthcare settings as a young man with sickle cell anemia. Some of the lyrics are:

 *Sedated / With morphine as a little kid / I built a tolerance for drugs, addicted to the medicine / Now hospital emergency treat me like a fiend*

My handicap took its toll on my sanity / My moms got me at the shrink at like 13 / And doctors called the cops on me / 'Cause I be throwin' IV poles and they ignore me

Tracy Chapman's song "Fast Car" underlines how health disparities such as alcoholism can prevent her community members from attaining social and economic benefits, like education and housing, that enable them to achieve their highest level of health. Also apparent is a lack of opportunity for economically viable employment, due to structural or interpersonal racism, or both. Some of the lyrics are:

 *See, my old man's got a problem / He live with the bottle, that's the way it is ... My mama went off and left him / She wanted more from life than he could give / I said somebody's got to take care of him / So I quit school and that's what I did*

You still ain't got a job / And I work in a market as a checkout girl / I know things will get better / You'll find work and I'll get promoted / We'll move out of the shelter

In **Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter's** freestyle rap on WQHT HOT 97 radio, the Philadelphia native laments how the direction of an individual's life within his community can change at a moment's notice. He highlights the underlying economic and justice system that measures people's value in terms of their record sales as artists or in filling prison population quotas. Also apparent is pervasive mistrust of research, where the use of Henrietta Lacks' "immortal cells" in perpetuity is likened to the community's unending incarceration in prison cells. The lyrics are:

 *A grain of salt'll tip the scales, It never fails, Walk on egg shells, Sleep on a bed of nails, Criminal records like record sales, Makin' heads or tails, We like Henrietta Lacks up in the cells*

The Beat Goes On...

If life imitates art, let us learn from the immensely enlightening cultural and social insights that artists offer through their music. Truly listening to the voices of communities who face inequities, whether through music or other media, better equips us all to positively affect change in our everyday and professional lives.

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